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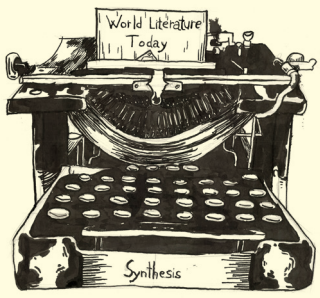

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Editor's Note

For the 2024 issue *Synthesis* proposed a major topic for scholars abroad and in Romania: World Literature Today. The field of comparative studies has changed a lot over the last decades; we are interested in how these shifts are perceived and addressed nowadays by academics from different cultures and countries, how world literature as discipline is practised nowadays.

We received proposals from all over the world, especially from young scholars affiliated with universities in the United States, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Portugal, Turkey and Romania. We may say the issue on World Literature Today covers the world in terms of gender, race, geography and topics: from Chinese novel to Portuguese poetry, from older Oriental travelogue to contemporary Latin-American literature by women writers, from Balkan literature to immigrant writing in London. Despite this variety, reflected also linguistically (quotations or references to sources in Chinese, Portuguese etc.), all articles offer intricate questions and perspectives on World Literature. Their bold or delicate criticism is committed to an understanding and practice of world literature *against* the *mechanics* of power and trade. The Literary Machine as well as the equally powerful image of burning are central metaphors, and not only for the first three papers.

The articles responded to our call on WLT directly, but also indirectly, and many have turned our initial questions into particular answers concerning *translation* and *worlding*. The papers written in French complete the canvas with the Romanian "case" of Emil Cioran and with a portrait of French Professor Yves Chevrel, well-known for his generous openness towards alterity and foreign cultures. In a separate section, meant to be the final stroke to our painting of WLT, we publish Professor Mircea Martin's *On Translating and Worlding*, first part of a larger essay. He invites to reflection on how we translate the Other and ourselves and how our discipline may posit fundamental questions not only for literature studies, but for the world we live in.

We shaped the structure of the journal in order to accommodate various perspectives and formats of discussion. In a separate section, *Post- and Pre-views*, we host two important texts on seminal work of Pascale Casanova. They look at her *Republic of Letters* from a contemporary (Matei Calinescu) and a historicized point of view (Franco Moretti). The bi-focal temporal perspective conveyed by the reunion of two texts on same subject, printed for the first time in 2005, in the US, and respectively, in 2023, in Italy, meets a travelling in space performed by young Romanian scholar Roxana Eichel. A translator of David Damrosch into Romanian, she explores Damrosch's work and concepts in Romanian translation and considers his contribution on WLT from a translational point of view.

The *Reviews* section offers complex and accurate descriptions of major volumes, published in Romania and abroad. Most reviews exceed, in quality and size, the ordinary format of a review and account for up-to-date, notable contributions to world literature and comparative literature.

The *Interviews* switched to a dialogic, more lively format for scholarly discussion. We republish a French conversation of Pascale Casanova and Tiphaine Samoyault, an English conversation with Professor David Damrosch and our interview, in Italian, to Professor Franco Moretti.

Synthesis

I. Articles

"THE LITERARY MACHINE". THE VICTORIAN CASE FOR WORLD LITERATURE

A. R. Tello

Abstract: Victorian Literature as World (building) Literature grants a privileged view of the often-violent linkages across space and time characteristic of empire and its aftermath, as well as the struggle to create new worlds out of it. Expanding Pheng Cheah's conception of World Literature, I argue that Victorian Literature not only world-ed extractive capitalism, which came to dominate the globe, but simultaneously attempted to re-world alternatives through characterization and the realist mode. Indeed, many Victorian characters were themselves deeply critical of and unsatisfied with the world-system of capitalist extraction being created. The novels I choose to focus on, George Gissing's *New Grub Street* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, support this claim by demonstrating critiques and resonances in their attempts to expose and break free from the extractive capitalist constraints of the imperial and neo-imperial period, making both an archive to study the conflicts entailed in the ongoing process of worlding extractive capitalism. Thus, I will claim a space for the study of the 19th Century as mid-wife to globalized extractive capitalism that links, rather than compartmentalizes, life on the planet into a violent system of wealth generation and exploitation, which has culminated in the present moment's many crises in climate, politics, economics and so many other arenas.
Keywords: Victorian novel, Extractive Capitalism, Postcolonial, De-Humanization, G. R. Gissing, early-Large Language Model.

Introduction

As early as Austen, literature in the realist mode of the Victorian Era dealt with the revaluation of values and the changes to society occasioned by the often-violent shifts to liberal, market-oriented socioeconomic policies. Likewise, Postcolonial literature in the realist mode charts a similar shift to free market dominated capitalist society in the former colonies. Archived within both then is the transition away from the predominantly agricultural and hereditary means of wealth valuation and

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creation, which had already long been undergoing dismantling in parts of Western Europe but reached its greatest decline in the era of the steam engine and rapid industrialization. Furthermore, during the Victorian Era, alongside these economic shifts, came new conceptions of humans as individuals and the new forms of agency attributed to the individual as such, vis-à-vis the public, the body politic and the state, which culminated in a relatively new political actor based in individual rights and privileges. This liberalization of the economy (Liberal Market Orientation) and society (Liberalism in politics) – which peaked by the end of the 19th Century – has gone by many names: disenchantment, modernization, development, and most benignly ambiguous, progress. In the era of postcolonial independence, what came to be known as modern, market-based liberal economies and politics took hold too, albeit much more rapidly as seemingly overnight, on the scale of historical time, former colonies went from political-satellites of production and exploitation linked to the metropole to localized, nationalist (nationalizing) sites of both. Therefore, a scramble to define humanity within the liberal paradigms of nationalism and market freedom was accelerated to an unparalleled scale.

Given these parallels, both Victorian and PoCo literatures enable scholars to trace the effects of the liberalizing transition on human and planetary – as in the planet and the life it hosts beyond the human species – existences by evidencing the conflicts that these shifts precipitated in the realms of social and political organization, such as between the family and the wider community, and even the revaluation of what constitutes a worthwhile "living," or existence as such. In other words, as human existence took on economic valuations and traditional values were subjected to the pressures of free enterprise and individualism, mass violence often followed. Indeed, a constant theme of this transition was the poor taking on the burden of being bankrupt in wealth as well as moral character, because a failure to succeed became a personal, not a social, drawback and dehumanization occurred. Furthermore, Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Literature in the realist mode become, in Pheng Cheah's sense, World Literature because (1) they possess a global audience, (2) act as normative forces shaping what is possible and impossible in the world(s) and actions of their readers, (3) thus, traffic in the power to world and re-world human existence.[1] World literature, in my reading and Cheah's, is then literature that transcends its textual spaces by (trans) forming human actions and existences, or worlding. Such a worlding and (trans) formation of human existence is possible because of temporalization, or the creation and continued maintenance of worlds by creating and tying them to temporalities (such as Greenwich Mean Time; the standard for the world of Euro-domination),

[1] Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World?: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 3.

a process that creates a normative basis from which to mold the world in a desired image. These temporally grounded worlds are then inhabited by life on the planet.[2] According to Cheah, "In giving rise to existence, temporalization worlds a world.[3]"

Following Cheah's appraisal of Postcolonial literature as World Literature, I show Victorian Literature as World Literature through reading the socioeconomic resonances between George Gissing's *New Grub Street* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, a postcolonial counterpart. I thus make both novels World Literature as theorized by Cheah. In short, Gissing's novel charts the market-orientation of the literary world in late 19th century London through the lives of authors, critics, their spouses, and their patrons, by crafting an early anti-hero, Jasper, as the consummate man of the new market-oriented literary world and setting him in binary opposition to the more traditional hero, his friend Edwin, as well as Jasper's one-time fiancée Marian. The latter two attempt, in their own ways to re-world the extractive world of literary commodification. On the other hand, Adiga's novel explores the market-orientation of the self as such, since his anti-hero Balram will do anything to succeed in a *strong* economy that determines the values for all and forces them upon everyone else. Both novels then chart the changes wrought by the transition to market-oriented societies on human actors which can be summarized in Mukti Mangharam's formulation "Freedom Inc." Mangharam conceptualizes the construction of the very same liberal, freedom-oriented and market-dictated subject within the context of the Indian subcontinent, as one that adopts the discourse of market-based capitalism and believes themselves free "when they can: (1) compete in a free market shorn of any regulations; (2) sell their labor for a wage and consume whatever they desire with those wages; (3) choose, with choice reduced to consumer choice; and (4) freely make and remake themselves endlessly in an entrepreneurial pursuit of profit."[4] Both anti-heroes Balram and Jasper embody these principles. Finally, and most importantly, in reading two seemingly very unlike novels, each with their own disciplines, side-by-side, I am following the work of Lisa Lowe, Michael Valdez Moses, Pheng Cheah, Mukti Mangharam, and Priya Gopal[5] in building-out what Valdez describes as "a truly global culture, in

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[2] Pheng Cheah, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[3] Pheng Cheah, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[4] Mukti Lakhi Mangharam, *Freedom Inc.: Gendered Capitalism in New Indian Literature and Culture*, London, Bloomsbury Academic London, 2023, p. 2.

[5] Each of these critics approaches a global framework that upsets traditional national and disciplinary boundaries through their own intellectual trajectories. In short, they follow the constitutive violence of liberalism, capitalist modernization, worlding, freedom-oriented capitalism, and co-constitutive dialogism respectively, and this paper is indebted to their work of conceptualizing overlaps and relations instead of differences.

which the customary boundaries between different national literatures and distinct literary traditions are being steadily eroded."[6] Such an all-encompassing genealogical view of the present can then offer scholars of literature and the humanities, often looking closely at and for difference, a way to theorize the contiguities of modern, global life by insisting on the points of solidarity between otherwise ontologically, historically, socially, racially and liberally differentiated people.

Realist Victorian "Worlding" and Postcolonial Literature

Pearl S. Brilmyer writes in her study of the Victorian Realist novel that the literary device of character, "because it tracked across fields as various as natural history, metaphysics, ethics, and nascent genetics, became the vehicle for the investigation of something *beyond* the pages of fiction."[7] According to Brilmyer, late-century realist Victorian novelists offered character as a way to transcend textuality by teaching and also learning through character development in the face of realistic social and worldly antagonisms, or about what it meant to be human in a shifting world. Matthew Arnold, the consummate Victorian pedagogue and *homme de lettres*, believed that literature and its study, of all the products of the human imagination, are best able to answer "the question: how to live."[8] Additionally, this apex European era's global reach meant these novels would become primary texts in schools around the imperialist world of colonies and metropoles, spreading the values and mores of European liberal capitalism. Indeed, in another link between Victorian world-making and Postcoloniality, from its founding as a discipline Postcolonial scholars have referenced the place of Victorian novels from their childhood education in their work. They would describe how the novels depicted European worlds that existed only in their imagination. So far from their reality were the worlds in the schoolbooks they read as children that Frantz Fanon[9] (1925–1961) worked tirelessly to theorize and overcome this brand of psychic alienation from the African reality and the African self, and the epistemic violence it entailed. His attempts to recover a sense of selfhood and value despite the indoctrination of his childhood would become fiery

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[6] Michael Moses Valdez, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. X.

[7] Pearl S. Brilmyer, *The Science of Character: Human Objecthood and the Ends of Victorian Realism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2022, p. 5. (Emphasis added)

[8] Pearl S. Brilmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[9] Frantz Fanon, born in the French colony of Martinique, political philosopher, psychiatrist, member in the Algerian Liberation Front, author of seminal books *Peau noires, masques blancs* (1952, first French edition; *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967, first English edition) and *Les damnés de la terre* (1961, first French edition, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963, first English edition).

protests and canonical texts of Postcolonialism. Kenyan novelist and theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o also devoted his life and work to similar ends, and in his seminal work *De-colonizing the Mind: Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) he sought a return to African language as a means to return to an African self and value.[10] Their riposte and the character-shaping and world-building place granted to literature in the Victorian Era, in themselves, are evidence for the fact that, over and above mere market circulation, sales charts, reprintings, and globalized reach, Victorian Literature played a fundamental role in crafting human psyches, experiences, cultures, and ideologies, in both the European peripheries as well as the metropoles. In other words, Victorian Literature helped to create the world of both the colonized and colonizer, and as Brilmyer has argued, the strength of the Victorian novel's characterizations and introspective, dialogized motivations were all a means to understand and shape the world through the page. The culmination of this global reach and imposition of European values and mores can be seen in the fact that most life on the planet remains tied to Greenwich Mean Time and its imperialist dictates.[11] For instance, the racist, colonialist world that Postcolonialism from its founding sought to expose and dismantle is the product of that worlding power implicit in this definition of World Literature, which Victorian Literature tapped into.[12]

Furthermore, this process was inherently violent with clashes between the expanding and powerful European elite and the lower classes both within and outside the metropoles. Victorian Literature records these clashes in characterological detail, as it places characters in the midst of the clashes in values, such as art, the family, and the human itself. Indeed, the ubiquity and monopolized use of violence in myriad forms becomes evidence for a strong link between the 19th Century and the present, no matter the specific locale. As recent work by Lisa Lowe and Nathan K. Hensley has shown, violence is in fact a founding principle of the liberal extractive capitalist world which Victorian Literature helped instill. Hensley writes that it was "with hands stained in blood" that the world was brought to what the Victorians called law and order in his book *Forms of Empire*.[13] For her part, Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents* is premised on dehumanizing violence as a constitutive link between the worlds of empire, both metropole and periphery. She considers the connection between the colonial archive and the archive of metropolitan liberalism as "intrinsic"

[10] A 2019 interview on this issue is available on YouTube at Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: "Europe and the West must also be decolonised" (youtube.com).

[11] Pheng Cheah, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[12] Aamir R. Mufti, "Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures", *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3, March 2010, pp. 465–466.

[13] Nathan K. Hensley, *Forms of Empire: The Poetics of Victorian Sovereignty*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 5.

to one another and as the place to "understand that as modern liberalism defined the 'human' and universalized its attributes to European man, it simultaneously differentiated populations in the colonies as less than human."[14] The dehumanization of the latter is the founding act of violence upon which so many others have proceeded. Finally, tracing the logical conclusions of Victorian Literature as World Literature, the extractive capitalist world of today bears deep impressions from that apex era of European domination, and its echoes go beyond Postcolonialism and the violence of colonization to encompass the violence of class, minoritization, and political and economic subjugation within the metropoles themselves.

The Victorian Case: Worlding Extractive Capitalism

As Pheng Cheah argues in *What is a World? Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, World Literature becomes such only when it is an active participant in the process of worlding – or the creation and continued maintenance of worlds by creating and tying them to temporalities The always ongoing process of worlding "refers to how a world is held together and given unity by the force of time."[15] In other words, temporality is the foundation of the world; therefore, Greenwich Mean Time, which was inherited from the European past, is the foundation of the world of extractive capitalism. I am arguing for Victorian Literature's place as an active agent in that process of worlding through spreading but also interrogating Greenwich Mean Time and its dictates. Cheah writes further that "Imperialism inscribed worlds that were inhabited prior to European conquest as the uninhabited space of terra nullius."[16] Such an erasure, a use of worlding to *a priori* wipe out the many worlds and alternate temporalities of pre-European contact societies enabled (and continues to enable) some of the grossest acts of violence and echoes Lowe's "less than human" categorization of non-European peoples and temporalities. Thus, Cheah's concept of worlding enables an understanding of the ubiquity of violence, because worlding can be used to both create and exterminate. Summarily, Cheah argues that Postcolonial Literature becomes World Literature when it attempts to open new worlds out of the currently dominant Eurocentric world. Victorian Literature was, and is already, World(building) Literature because it helped to instill and expand the world of extractive capitalism, and, in the most important piece of Cheah's definition of Postcolonial Literature as World Literature, some of Victorian Literature was also attempting to open *new* or *alternate* worlds and temporalities outside of the dominant world of abject extraction.

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[14] Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2015, p. 6.
[15] Pheng Cheah, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
[16] Idem, ibidem.

For example, *New Grub Street*'s Edwin Reardon, the novel's most tragic protagonist, struggles with attempting to live within a quickly disappearing artistic temporality, waiting on the muses or inspiration to strike before doing great work on great works of literature. As his friend Jasper Milvain says of him in a classically liberal tirade that is characteristic of Jasper's character and begins the process of setting the two in a rich binary opposition:

> He (Edwin) is the old type of unpractical artist; I (Jasper) am the literary man of 1882. He won't make concessions, or rather, he can't make them; he can't supply the market. I--well, you may say that at present I do nothing; but that's a great mistake, I am learning my business. Literature nowadays is a trade.[17]

An artistic temporality would allow Edwin to live a life outside of extractive capitalism with its minute-by-minute ticking away of productivity counting, and its concomitant assumption of revenues and losses. Yet, readers are introduced to Edwin and his wife Amy at one of the most striking moments of his waning literary career, and his banishment from artistic temporality and into the temporality of extractive capitalism.

Considered one of his best works, *New Grub Street* depicts a cast of literary types navigating the very personal clash, for Gissing, of growing market-orientation in publishing during the late-nineteenth century. The novel follows the aforementioned Edwin, his friend Jasper Milvain, and Marian Yule, as well as their families, friends, and professional relationships as they negotiate the shifting literary market. Both Edwin and Jasper have chosen to "live by the pen"; to reach financial and personal success in the literary market of 1890's London.[18] Marian, however, is forced to live by the pen because of family circumstances and, because of this lack of volition, offers some of the strongest and sharpest critiques of literature as capitalist production and commodity. In this reading, Marian's reflections become forceful examples of Victorian Literature attempting to open alternative temporalities. Characteristic of World Literature as an archive of the violence of worlding and re-worlding, while the novel's focus is ostensibly the literary industry, a great deal about the more general liberalization of the Victorian world can be found in the clashes between values that it stages, making the literary industry more like a setting for much larger forces to play out. As Bernard Bergonzi, author of the Penguin edition preface writes:

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[17] George Robert Gissing, *New Grub Street* (1st ed., 1891), ed., intr. by Bernard Bergonzi, Penguin Classics, 1976; reprinted, Harmondsworth (Middx), Penguin Books, 1985, p. 39. There is an online edition available at New Grub Street, by George Gissing (gutenberg.org).

[18] George Gissing, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

> In Gissing's novel all natural human relations are affected by the claims of 'literature', which forms a thin disguise for basic economic pressures, since literature is itself no more than a commodity.[19]

Thus, Edwin's life in an alternate, romantically-artistic temporality is coming to a close when readers meet him. The literary world has already begun to shift to the rough and tumble model of economic pressures and gross commodification, and Edwin is failing to negotiate the terms of that clash, which plays out between the romantically-artistic and the extractive-capitalist temporality. Indeed, Edwin's case for breaking out of the extractive capitalist temporality of minute-by-minute productivity is minutely depicted here at its point of failure. Having achieved moderate success, he is able to live by his own time and work at his own pace, yet the money has trickled away and his family is "nearer and nearer to miserable, hateful poverty," which has transformed his formally open-ended, artistic work into the tedium of hour-by-hour production quotas; in other words, away from the very spirit of his romanticized ideals of artistic temporality.[20] As Gissing details it:

> He wrote a very small hand; sixty written slips of the kind of paper he habitually used. [...] On an average he could write four such slips a day; so here we have fifteen days for a volume, and forty-five for the completed book.[21]

Thus, writing has become a minutely quantified accounting of production akin to the number of screws turned in a day or the number of panels shaped, instead of the play of the muses. In consequence, Edwin begins to darkly and satirically romanticize the predictability and financial stability that comes with the life of wage labor:

> How I envy those clerks who go by to their offices in the morning! There's the day's work cut out for them; no question of mood and feeling; they have just to work *at* something, and when the evening comes, they have earned their wages, they are free to rest and enjoy themselves.[22]

The doors to an alternate temporality have begun to close for Edwin because of money, or lack thereof, which he has come to learn, because of his present state, is "the most powerful thing in the world."[23] So powerful, in fact, that it can create worlds by

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[19] Bernard Bergonzi, preface to George Gissing, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[20] George Gissing, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
[21] Idem, p. 151.
[22] Idem, p. 81.
[23] Idem, p. 83.

offering a kind of freedom in temporality. Yet, Edwin bet on his continued fortune, gambling on fate by marrying Amy Reardon (né Yule and cousin to Marian); the two of them are depicted in the novel as settled into a modest but attractive flat and having a ten-month-old son. As Gissing writes again and again, only chance and fate matter in a world of free-wheeling market-orientation and if Edwin is unable to play to those whims, he will not succeed. In a harshly accurate depiction of writer's block and a striking representation of conflict in marital relationships, Edwin says to Amy:

> I write twenty pages, perhaps, and then my courage fails. I am disgusted with the thing, and *can't* go on with it--*can't*! My fingers refuse to hold the pen. In mere writing, I have done enough to make much more than three volumes; but it's all destroyed.[24]

Amy's response introduces the market and the question of Edwin's fitness for liberal market-orientation in his work. She responds: "Because of your morbid conscientiousness. There was no need to destroy what you had written. It was all good enough for the market."[25] The ongoing conversation slips into a psychologically rich and revealing dialogue during which Edwin appears as a desperate, depressed, and disastrously self-pitying person, all because he is unable to meet the demands of the literary market which, as Amy insists to him, treats "art as a trade" and by extension the demands of his era, "the age of trade."[26] Edwin's clash, here somewhat benign and marital, between the values and temporality of the artistic and the extractive is merely one of many that *New Grub Street,* and *The White Tiger* later, will demonstrate, and they are depicted in a similar fashion.

Normative Force and the Re-valuation of Values

Every world, including the world of extractive capitalism and the attempts to break out of it, are buttressed by what Cheah calls "normative forces," or the world instilling and sustaining values and mores that motivate and shape human actions; acting as a norm-enforcing and regulating force in said world.[27] Edwin's case is evidence of this clash between normative forces and their concomitant temporalities, and *New Grub Street* is the record of that conflict, making it a strong example of Victorian Literature as World Literature. However, while on the individual-level Edwin is depressed and forced to yearn for the stability of wage labor, at the social-

[24] Idem, p. 79.
[25] Idem, ibidem.
[26] Idem, p. 81.
[27] Pheng Cheah, *op. cit.*, pp. 5–6.

level he also participates in the alternative world building that Cheah names "worldly ethics," or the "ethos or practice of inhabiting a world with others in a conjuncture where the world is constantly being eroded by global processes and revolutionary transformation is no longer a plausible alternative."[28] For instance, Edwin's alternate artistic temporality reaches into worldly ethics through his close and supportive relationship with his friend Harold Biffen. They share the romantically-tinged view of artistic temporality, production, as well as the burdens of poverty.

> Their tastes (Edwin's and Biffen's) were found to be in many respects sympathetic, and after returning to London they saw each other frequently. Biffen was always in dire poverty, and lived in the oddest places; he had seen harder trials than even Reardon himself.[29]

Biffen's idealist brand of realist literature, which he imagines as "an absolute realism in the sphere of the ignobly decent", can be read as yet another satirical take on the literary world from an embittered Gissing.[30] Yet, the unmarketability of the two men and their work, and their closeness and opening of a worldly ethics, reveals the violence that is symptomatic of the clash of normative forces, as well as the satirical edge of Gissing's novel. The clash between the romantic artistic temporality and the extractive capitalist temporality, in fact, brings both men to their deaths. Edwin suffers a prolonged illness by the end of the novel, even though he is right at the cusp of redemption and the easy life due to a ten-thousand-pound inheritance that his wife had earlier received. This episode prompts Gissing, who has carried a thread of the dreadfulness and inevitableness of the effects of poverty throughout the novel to write:

> He (Edwin) had the strange sensation of knowing that whatever was needful could be paid for; it relieved his mind immensely. To the rich, illness has none of the worst horrors only understood by the poor.[31]

Yet, poverty's effects persist because the illness had gone untreated for so long that it takes his life. Biffen, the truly romantic artist throughout the novel, commits suicide after suffering dreadfully the privations of poverty and seeing no way out of his predicament. His complete commitment to the artistic and his own originality in the realm of the artistic are no salve against the harsh dictates of an extractive-capitalist world, in the end. Consequently, both Edwin and Biffen become fatal

[28] Idem, p. 13.
[29] George Gissing, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
[30] Idem, ibidem.
[31] Idem, p. 483.

victims of the clash of values and temporalities brought on by the shift to extractive capitalism, and that conflict is narrativized in the novel, making *New Grub Street* an outstanding piece of Victorian Literature and World Literature.

Beyond the artistic, *New Grub Street* records the clash of older, more substantial values. In fact, the family and the human itself are re-valued by the end of *New Grub Street* and *The White Tiger* according to extractive capitalism and, here too, violence is a core theme. Indeed, in *The White Tiger* family even takes on the characteristics of cannibalism in its inevitable extraction of the individual's wealth and success: "There was red, curried bone and flesh in front of me--and it seemed to me that they had served me flesh from Kishan's own body on that plate."[32] In *New Grub Street*, Jasper Milvain is the perfect foil to Edwin's romantic unfitness for the capitalist world becoming in fact the mouthpiece of market-orientation and liberalization. He is the anti-hero to Edwin's romantic, tragic hero, and Jasper even gets the girl (Amy, Edwin's widow) in the end. Consequently, Jasper's market-orientation influences his family relationships too, making his family a means to an end for him. Because of his inability to provide financially for himself early in his "study" of his "trade", Jasper extracts for himself a large sum of his mother's annuity, the only income she and his sisters have.[33] The fact that the annuity ceases at his mother's death means that Jasper's constant draw on their annual income will leave his sisters in dire straits after her passing. This is a large gamble akin to Edwin marrying Amy at the slightest uptick in his career, but for Jasper it pays off. By the time his mother passes away, he has been fortunate enough to see his literary career take off and is able to settle his sisters in an apartment and care for their well-being. Jasper credits his success, echoing Gissing's narrator, in large part to chance, but the myriad streams for success in this world of commodification are so endless to his eyes that it is difficult for reader's to not attribute at least part of his success to his sober embrace of market values. Unlike for Edwin, who ends up separating and losing both wife and son, along with his own life, Jasper's heavy draw on his family's future financial well-being succeeds by setting up his ascent in the literary marketplace. This is a narrative move that, while it seemingly reinforces Jasper's adoption of Freedom Inc., actually reinforces Gissing's satire and the instability of chance and fate within extractive capitalism.

In *The White Tiger*, the clash of family and extractive capitalism aligns more closely with Edwin's tragedy in outcome, but with more violence, and a thoroughly unapologetic and unsympathetic embrace of extraction for one's own gain. Balram Halwai, the anti-hero of *The White Tiger*[34] one of India's greatest entrepreneurs

[32] Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (2008, 1st edition), New York, Free Press, 2020, p. 74.
[33] G. Gissing, *op. cit*., p. 42.
[34] Aravind Adiga, *op. cit.* The novel won The Booker Prize in 2008. Indian Ramin Bahrani, who

(self-professed) and murderer of his master (also self-professed), can be read as a contemporary and globalized twin to Jasper's sharp analyses of the implicit and often violent values of Victorian Era extractive capitalism, linking the Victorian past and the Postcolonial present. From his beginnings in a rural Indian village to his entrepreneurial success as CEO of a Bangalore taxi company, Balram's path is fraught with, for lack of a better word, a-moralism or, more bombastically, the total embrace of the values of the capitalist world-system. To the point of satire, Balram's Jasper-like monologues about how the world works and doing what is most profitable and entrepreneurial regardless of the consequences, reveal the core of violence in the world of extractive capitalism, a trait that Jasper shares wholeheartedly. Following Mangharam's third piece of Freedom Inc., both Jasper and Balram remake themselves according to the dictates of the market. Jasper began his foray into life by the pen as a novelist and found that he lacked the talent for it.[35] Therefore, when readers meet him in the first chapter of *New Grub Street*, he is in the process of remaking himself for his new trade as an essayist and has a solid and well-conceived target market for his work. Balram begins life as a teashop waiter, then chauffeur, then murderer-cum-CEO of a taxi company. Thus, Freedom Inc. applies to both characters equally well and their drive to become sources of the greatest value of extraction for the capitalist economy. Indeed, in his letters to the Premier of China upon the premier's visit to India, Balram hopes to educate the premier on the true India and true Indian entrepreneurship, both of which mean to Balram completely conforming to the values of extractive capitalism in the style of Freedom Inc. no matter the cost, just as Jasper adapts his literary career to its normative forces in contradistinction to Edwin and Harold. Yet, Balram even commits murder, perhaps mass murder, the victims of the latter being, probably, his own family, to open his path toward success. Furthermore, in a weighty metaphor *The White Tiger* depicts the extractive capitalist world as a Rooster Coop, keeping everyone trapped and in a hierarchy of cages. In answering why the coop is so successful in maintaining its hold on millions, Balram directly implicates the family:

> Why does the rooster coop work? How does it trap so many millions of men and women so effectively?... [T]he pride and glory of our nation, the repository of all our love and sacrifice, the subject of no doubt considerable space in the pamphlet that the prime minister will hand over to you, *the Indian family*, is the reason we are trapped and tied to the coop.[36]

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also wrote the screenplay, adapted it into a film. *The White Tiger* was released in 2021.

[35] George Gissing, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

[36] Aravind Adiga, *op. cit.*, p. 150. (Emphasis original)

Indeed, the exploitative function of the family is sharply expressed in the ratio of Balram's earnings that are destined for his extended family's consumption. After he begins his first position as a driver, he is required to give a full ninety-four percent of his monthly earnings – one-thousand four-hundred ten rupees – to his brother:

> Kishan came once a month to see me. Kusum (his grandmother and the matriarch of the family) had decided that I could keep ninety rupees a month for myself: the rest would go straight to Kishan – who would send it straight to her, in the village. I gave him the money every month through the black bars of the rear gate, and we would talk for a few minutes before the Nepali shouted, 'That's enough – the boy has work to do now!'[37]

Ultimately, Balram stops sending his family money. During one of his return trips to home, they attempt to flatter him and re-instill his obligations to them and the many children and dependents in the family:

> I was shown the children that had been born in the family since I had left, and forced to kiss them on the forehead. [...] The family was larger. The needs were more. I was chastised by all for not sending money each month.[38]

Yet, couched in this short reflection's matter of fact tone and lack of emotional or guilt-ridden language is Balram's ultimate, capitalist-driven contempt for traditional family obligations which he maintains even in the face of his grandmother serving him chicken curry, a delicacy reserved for holidays and special occasions. All Balram can see in the bones and flesh of the meal are the bones and flesh of his brother, both being wasted away to provide for the ever-expanding family unit and served to him in a futile attempt to bring him back into the fold. Ultimately, the family unit symbolizes cannibalism for Balram, and he is disgusted enough to throw the plate at the wall. In a last-ditch effort to tie him down to the family unit, his grandmother proposes to marry him off to a village girl, which escalates into his disavowal of the family unit altogether and their eventual consignment to death. Both Jasper and Balram then demonstrate the clash between the family and the individual, which extractive capitalism privileges above the former. The family is merely a means to success or deadweight to be cast off for success based on the individualistic values of extractive capitalism, nothing more.

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[37] Idem, pp. 57–58.
[38] Idem, p. 72.

"The Literary Machine"

Furthermore, these novels trace the revaluation (read de-valuation) of the human as such, and it is shown to be null and void. In a striking resonance with *New Grub Street*, *The White Tiger* depicts the devaluation of the human, or dehumanization, through the extensive use of attributing animal morphology to human bodies. Attributions whose causes are then traced back to the values and logics of extraction. For instance, Balram writes to the Chinese Premier:

> go to a tea shop anywhere along the Ganga, sir, and look at the men working in that tea shop – *men, I say, but better to call them human spiders* that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still 'boys.' But that is your fate if you do your job well – with honesty, dedication, and sincerity, the way Gandhi would have done it, no doubt. I did my job with near total dishonesty, lack of dedication, and insincerity – and so the tea shop was a profoundly enriching experience.[39]

Marian Yule, the last leg of the literary triad that centers *New Grub Street* and the reluctant inheritor of literary production as work, during one of her despondent moments doing research at the British Museum for her father, imagines that she and all the literary types around her are like "hapless flies caught in a huge web, its nucleus the great circle of the Catalogue? Darker, darker."[40] Where Balram sees wage labor itself and the subservient nature that it instills in laborers, in characteristic *New Grub Street* fashion, Marian reads the Museum catalogue, the productive nucleus of all of the work that she and the others are doing, as the source of her despair, the coop in which she is trapped. However, *New Grub Street*, through Marian, accesses an even more resonant metaphor, this time with the contemporary moment of Large Language Models. Building on the animal metaphor in a more industrialized and contemporary fashion, Marian introduces the metaphor of a machine. She begins, "He was a machine for earning so much money a week, and would at least give faithful work for his wages until the day of final breakdown."[41] This simple statement perfectly encapsulates the devaluation of the human. The human is merely a site of value extraction, and their death (due to breakdown or illness) is experienced not as a human phenomenon, but merely an economic loss. Thus, the final valuation of the human is starkly seen as a mere machine from which to extract value; indeed, as both

[39] Idem, p. 43.
[40] George Gissing, *op. cit.*, p. 389.
[41] Idem, ibidem.

novels show, one's ability to survive, if not thrive, in the world of extractive capitalism depends on their value to extractive capitalism, which is why Balram and Jasper are constantly refashioning themselves. Indeed, *New Grub Street* waxes prophetic in places, such as the observation on the relation between poverty and illness quoted above, which for any American without health insurance feels contemporary, and may sometimes read as even more contemporary than *The White Tiger* in this regard.

In its most prophetic instance, *New Grub Street* foreshadows the 21st Century's obsession with automation and the economic and productive promise of Artificial Intelligence. Marian's reflection on an advertisement she saw for a "Literary Machine" opens a bridge between the worlds:

> A few days ago her (Marian's) startled eye had caught an advertisement in the newspaper, headed 'Literary Machine'; had it then been invented at last, some automaton to supply the place of such poor creatures as herself, to turn out books and articles? Alas! The machine was only one for holding volumes conveniently. But surely before long some Edison would make the true automaton; the problem must be comparatively such a simple one. Only to throw in a given number of old books and have them reduced, blended, modernized into a single one for today's consumption.[42]

In the year 2024, it is impossible not to see the resonances with OpenAI's ChatGPT and the myriad other Large Language Models that perform the very function Marian is imagining as freeing her from her work. Although the description bears the marks of the physical, machine modes of production dominant in the 19th Century, only a slight modernization is required to shift from a physical machinery to an aggregating and recombining algorithm, which is a suitable shorthand for the type of work ChatGPT accomplishes. Indeed, the Machine Learning algorithms behind it work by encoding "human input as training data so that the AI mimics humans more closely when completing complex tasks."[43] The training data for ChatGPT, Marian's "old books" is, according to OpenAI's website, truly "(1) information that is publicly available on the internet, (2) information that we license from third parties, and (3) information that our users or our human trainers provide."[44] Therefore, inclusive in the training data is far more than just old books, it is the entirety of the publicly

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[42] Idem, p. 138.

[43] "What is RHLF?" Amazon Web Services, accessed January 12, 2024, https://aws.amazon.com/what-is/reinforcement-learning-from-human-feedback/.

[44] Michael Schade, "How ChatGPT and Our Language Models Are Developed", https://help.openai.com/en/articles/7842364–how-chatgpt-and-our-language-models-are-developed, last modified January 7, 2024.

accessible internet. Yet, the result is the same as Marian hoped, and Gissing imagined, a mimicry of the process of human textual creation. Lastly, and most strikingly, in a transhistorical substantiation of the theoretical claims that extractive capitalism remains the world, Marian's conjecture on a literary machine collapses time and space, bridging the 21st Century and the 19th Century in its echoing of the rhetoric of liberation from extractive capitalism via machine automation. The imagined heights of technological progress seem to have changed little as they remain today a means for the human to escape the extractive grind of market-oriented, industrial production. The human need no longer supply the extractive value, if a machine can take on those processes without the physiological and emotional traumas of ill-use. Marian differs here greatly from Edwin, Jasper, and even Balram in her hopes for this Victorian (possibly steam-powered?) large language model. Whereas the other three accept in their own ways the values of extractive capitalism and seek to fashion themselves accordingly, or in Edwin's case become victims of its ill-use, Marian sees only the commodity as such and her function as the source for its extraction, and she deplores both. Her valuation of literary production is based solely in its ability to provide financially for herself and her family, which is why she would rather give it all to a machine to do and would do anything else to make a living. Yet, it is the trade that was handed down to her by her father, whom she helps throughout the novel, even ghostwriting some of his articles. Therefore, Marian's devalues the work itself, asking herself "what was the use and purpose of such a life as she was condemned to lead. When already there was more good literature in the world than any mortal could cope with in his lifetime, here was she exhausting herself in the manufacture of printed stuff which no one even pretended to be more than a commodity for the day's market."[45] She then takes a more revolutionary stance, akin to Cheah's opening of a revolutionary temporality that upends the dominant one, by not fully embracing the work nor extractive capitalism. In other words, shunning the values of extractive capitalism.

Conclusion: The Role of Victorian Literature in Colonial Capital's World Making Project

Victorian Literature is World Literature in the three senses of possessing a global audience from the beginning, acting as a normative force for the extension and preservation of values and norms, and thus becoming a foundation for the contemporary world as was shown in both *New Grub Street* and *The White Tiger*. Furthermore, if Postcolonial Literature is World Literature, according to Cheah, because it participates in worlding and re-worlding, the same as Victorian

[45] George Gissing, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

Literature does, then there is perhaps a great deal of overlap between Postcolonial and Victorian Literature that has remained unexplored. Finally, reading Victorian Literature and Postcolonial as World Literature demonstrates that the values and norms that underpin the world of extractive capitalism have changed little and continue to compose the horizons of the contemporary world. The overlapping characterizations of life under extractive capitalism in *New Grub Street* and *The White Tiger* help to solidify this genealogical analysis of the present. Indeed, it appears as if similarity, instead of difference has the potential to open new possibilities. Of course, such a reading signals a shift in epistemic priorities. Difference, long the major focus of humanistic discourse, is set aside under this rubric, and similarity--pointedly arguing, supporting, and analyzing similarity, a difficult position to take--replaces the traditional western approach of the always fallen from grace and unity, the forever divided, and forever searching for wholeness, re-construction of the self in its oneness. In its place is an open-ended transness, the pure potential of reaching across, which may even lead to an imperfect, yet demonstrative, connection between a canonical Victorian text and a Postcolonial text. There is, perhaps, much to be learned in deducing similarity instead of difference and beginning with the potential transness between the Victorian Era's archive and the Postcolonial present is an untapped trove for this exercise in knowing.

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CULTURAL TRANSFER AND THE RE-REPRESENTATION OF REALITY: *BARN BURNING* IN FAULKNER, MURAKAMI, AND LEE CHANG-DONG'S FILM

Dan Shao

Abstract: This paper examines the cultural transpositions and shifts in symbolic meaning of the "barn burning" motif through William Faulkner's *Barn Burning* (1939), Haruki Murakami's *Barn Burning* (1983), and Lee Chang-dong's film adaptation *Burning* (버닝, 2018). Through a comparative analysis, the study delves into the socio-economic underpinnings and contextual metamorphoses that transform the barn from a productive manorial setting of the American South to an emblem of urban marginalization in Murakami's work, culminating in a signifier of agricultural decline in Lee's narrative. Interweaving the theoretical framework of world literature, this paper spotlights the divergent realities these texts embody and propagate. It investigates how the notion of "reality" is translated and recontextualized across cultural borders, and how meanings are variously appropriated and reimagined in the realm of world literature. The intertextual study thus emphasizes the complexities in the transmission of symbolic cultural assets, shedding light on the varied interpretations and implications of the barn burning motif as it transcends and evolves through time and space.
Keywords: Cultural Transpositions, *Barn Burning*, William Faulkner, Haruki Murakami, Lee Chang-dong, Reality.

Introduction

In the beginning, Lee Chang-dong's 2018 film *Burning* (버닝) was an attempt to depict the ferocious rage that has festered and seeped into every aspect of modern Korean culture. In 2016, Lee and his crew were inspired to begin work on a film project that revolves around rage because of instances of rage in Korean society that were "so severe that it was suffocating" (Lee). The director said that this issue was not limited to Korea but rather was global in scope at that time:

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We are grateful to Director Lee Chang-dong and PINEHOUSEFILM Co., Ltd for granting permission to include screenshots from the film *Burning*.

> I've been thinking about why we've become so irritable in recent years. It's not just Korea, it's the same all over the world. There are different reasons for anger regardless of country, religion or culture. Americans are angry too, so Trump became president. [...] *However, there is no actual object of this anger, it is different for everyone.*[1]

The emphasis on anger clarifies Lee's adaptation technique, which involves transforming the protagonist of Haruki Murakami's *Barn Burning* (1983) from a middle-aged writer into a young writer-to-be named Lee Jong-su, as well as the affective resonance with William Faulkner's *Barn Burning* (1939) that is missing from Murakami's original work, but abundant in Lee's adaptation.

For the first point, the reason lies in the fact that the younger generation is the most susceptible to anger towards the immutable status quo in modern Korean society where class solidification is a defining feature[2]. For the second point, while Murakami's protagonist maintains his cool demeanor throughout the story, Lee and Faulkner's male characters both display distinct anger.

On the one hand, as a preceding piece, Faulkner's *Barn Burning* clearly elicited different reactions from Lee and Murakami. Despite the title's implied connection, seven years after *Barn Burning* was originally published, Murakami attempted to remove any reference to Faulkner by replacing specific phrases such as "Faulkner's short stories" with the more generic phrase "three magazines"[3]. On the other hand, in the film, the hero Lee Jong-su, a young novelist, admits that William Faulkner was his favorite author, and this was meant to establish a connection between him and the other male character, Ben, the rich lover of the feminine character Hae-mi: "Lee Jong-su: William Faulkner. When I read his work, I feel like I'm reading about myself." [42:14] Again, when the two men met in an upscale coffee shop following Hae-mi's disappearance, Ben was reading none other than Faulkner: "Ben: You said you liked Faulkner, so I wanted to give him a shot." [1:39:05]

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[1] Lee Chang-dong, "历史的缝隙　真实的力量　—李沧东导演访谈录" [The Cracks of History. The Power of Truth – Interview with Director Lee Chang-dong], in《*当代电影*[Contemporary Cinema], 2018, available at https://www.sohu.com/a/281163613_662038 (accessed October 5, 2024). All translations and emphasis of non-English materials are mine, unless otherwise noted.

[2] Yan Fei and Cui Elihe, "韩国社会阶层分化的特点及趋势" [The Characteristics and Trends of Social Stratification in South Korea],《*国外理论动态*》[Foreign Theoretical Trends], no. 4, 2020. pp. 158–166.

[3] Haruki Murakami, *Barn Burning*, in the collection *The Elephant Vanishes*, translated by Alfred Birnbaum and Jay Rubin, London, Vintage, 2003, p. 135 (first English edition, ed. by Gary Fisketjon, Knopf, 1993). Murakami first published his short-story in a Japanese magazine in 1983, the same as William Faulkner, who first published his short story *Burn Burning* in the American magazine *Harper's*.

Hyeyoon Kim (2021) has examined how William Faulkner's short story *Barn Burning* (1939) and Lee Chang-dong's film *Burning* (2018) depict class immobility[4]. He explores the social and historical backgrounds of both works, emphasizing how the stories in both represent the frustrations and struggles of people from lower socioeconomic classes against social systems that impede their ability to move up the social ladder. Indeed, it appears that the recurring theme of "frantic grief and despair" in Faulkner's *Barn Burning*[5] finds its contemporary manifestation in Lee's film *Burning*. In Lee's psychological thriller, the "specter" of William Faulkner – to borrow a phrase from Jacques Derrida's *Spectres de Marx* – became a haunting presence. Also, the social issue of economic inequality, an old ghost of the American story, re-enters a present-day Korean narrative.

However, in Murakami's *Barn Burning*, the spectre of Faulkner seems to vanish along together with the sense of reality. Murakami's text presents itself as a symposium of signs, where the three main characters are referred to by personal pronouns, yet William Faulkner's name, as a proper noun, was removed during the revision process. Nevertheless, Japanese academics of American literature juxtaposed the two texts with the same title and endeavored to locate the hidden link between Murakami and Faulkner. Tateo Imamura, for example, interpreted the barn burnings in Faulkner and Murakami, respectively, as a form of spiritual patricide and a metaphor for murder[6]. On the basis of a thorough structural analysis of the stark differences between the two stories, Yoshihiko Kazamaru contended that Faulkner was Murakami's inspiration when he wrote *Barn Burning*[7]. Motohiro Kojima, on the other hand, focused on the rewriting process, analyzing the intertextuality of Murakami's *Barn Burning* in relation to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and considering the erasure of any earlier connection to Faulkner[8].

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[4] Hyeyoon Kim, "The Image of Class Immobility in Chang-dong Lee's Film *Burning* and William Faulkner's *Barn Burning*", in *동서비교문학저널* [The Journal of East-West Comparative Literature], no. 57, 2021, pp. 395–423.

[5] William Faulkner, *The Faulkner Reader: Selections from the Works of William Faulkner*, New York, Modern Library, 1929, p. 500.

[6] Tateo Imamura, "フォークナーと村上春樹一「納屋を焼く」をめぐる冒険" [William Faulkner and Murakami Haruki: Adventures in *Barn Burning*], in *『フォークナー』* [Faulkner], Tokyo, Shohakusha, 2006, pp. 42–49.

[7] Yoshihiko Kazamaru, 語り手の気づかい、あるいはおせっかいー「納屋を焼く」" [The Narrator's Attention or Meddling: *Barn Burning*], *『村上春樹短篇再読』* [Haruki Murakami's Short Stories Re-read], Tokyo, Misuzu Shobo, 2007, pp. 28–40.

[8] Motohiro Kojima, "村上春樹「納屋を焼く」論ーフォークナーの消失、ギャッツビーの幻惑" [Murakami Haruki's *Barn Burning*: Faulkner's Disappearance, Gatsby's Disillusionment], *文化と言語* [Culture and language] 札幌大学外国語学部紀要, no. 69, 2008, pp. 49–67.

In fact, multilayered intertextuality has taken center stage in the analysis of these three narratives that employ various modes of expression but are connected by the common motif of barn burning since the release of Lee's film in 2018. In 2019, Yumie Yamane had expressed a different view. He contends that Lee's *Burning*, with its depiction of violence, wrath, and class inequality based on the harsh realities of contemporary Korean society, exceeds Murakami's *Barn Burning* as a work of world literature[9]. Björn Boman (2021) offers an overview of South Korea's sociohistorical context, highlighting the influence of rapid modernization and globalization on the nation's artistic production. For him, Lee Chang-dong's *Burning* (2018) functions as a cultural text that represents the intricate intertextuality of modern cinema, negotiating both local and global influences[10].

In the meantime, film studies scholars tried to situate *Burning* (2018) within the broader context of South Korean cinema, highlighting the academic and public interest in intertextuality, transnationality, and hybridization in South Korean films. Hwanki Min and Jiwon Moon examined character development and concluded that Lee Chang-dong's film form differs from the literary versions due to the protagonist's vision of reality and to his reaction to events[11]. Another perspective was offered by Kosuke Fujiki, who looks at how sociopolitical tensions in modern-day Korea are reflected in Lee Chang-dong's film version of Haruki Murakami's short story *Barn Burning*, with a focus on the competitive tension and sexual interactions between characters. According to Fujiki, the film draws a comparison between the protagonist's personal challenges and the wider geopolitical tensions between North and South Korea by setting the story in Paju, close to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and focusing on themes like visibility and invisibility[12].

Scholars studying film studies and literature alike appear to concur that Lee's *Burning* (2018) incorporates elements from both Faulkner's story – the motif of rage – and Murakami's story – the main plot, but the film adds new features and modifies existing ones. Regarded as Asia's master of realism, Lee has a unique skill in bringing to light aspects and themes of Faulkner's American South that

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[9] Yumie Yamane, "'Burning' as 'World Literature': Beyond Haruki Murakami's 'Barn Burning'", *広島大学大学院文学研究科論集* [The Hiroshima University Studies. (Graduate School of Letters)], no. 79, 2019, pp. 51–71.

[10] Björn Boman, "The Multifold Intertextuality in Lee Chang Dong's Burning", *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, volume 3, Issue 1, 2021, pp. 100–119.

[11] Hwanki Min and Jiwon Moon, "The Character Study on Lee Chang-Dong's *Burning*", *Korea Science*, volume 19, Issue 7, 2019, pp. 110–119.

[12] Kosuke Fujiki, "Adapting Ambiguity, Placing(In) visibility; Geopolitical and Sexual Tension in Lee Chang-dong's *Burning*", *Cinema Studies*, no. 14, 2019, pp.72–98.

are relevant to current socio-cultural challenges in South Korea, such as class solidification that results in severe wealth disparity. An old American story appears to be recast as a contemporary South Korean one, and this assertion is supported economically as well. The socioeconomic structure of the 21st century is quickly reverting to that of the 19th century, according to Thomas Piketty, the author of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014), when economic elites, referred to in *Burning* (2018) as the "Korean Gatsby", often inherited their wealth rather than earned it by labor[13]. The wrath of 2016 that served as the inspiration for Lee's film may be seen as a desperation expressed at the loss of any chance of revolution, the 20th century's legacy, and the hopelessness of going back to the inflexible societal structures that defined the 19th century and early 20th century. It is therefore simpler to make comparisons between Lee and Faulkner's stories, which also explains why Faulkner's name and works manifest in Lee's *Burning* (2018) and why academics are drawn to the themes that both authors share.

When it comes to the portrayal of reality, it may also seem that the narratives of Lee and Faulkner resonate beyond time, place, and cultural barriers: the strained relationship between father and son, the war experiences etc. In the meantime, while the imaginary, or unreal is perceived more realistic in the film, Murakami's story, where all mention of Faulkner was removed on purpose – seems to lose its connection to reality. But is it so? This paper will explore the psychological and social dimensions of the film's three main characters, with a focus on simultaneity and the re-representation of reality in Lee's film. My goal is to examine how Murakami's *Barn Burning* and Lee's *Burning*, as postmodern works, reflect a defining characteristic of our time: the great absence of reality.

This paper concludes that the way the story was told in both Murakami's original text and Lee's adaptation resonates with a postmodern condition that is particularly evident in the superficial cultures of early Bubble-Era Tokyo prior to Neoliberalism and the post-currency-crisis economic wasteland of Seoul. Thus, this paper assumes postmodernist theory as the foundation for its discourse, incorporating Fredric Jameson's observations on late capitalist society[14]. However, it will also be acutely aware of their relevance to an East Asian context given the intricate dynamics involved when theories travel abroad[15].

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[13] See Thomas Piketty, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, Cambridge Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.

[14] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", *New Left Review*, no. 146, 1984, pp. 53–92.

[15] Edward W. Said, "Traveling Theory", in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1983, pp. 226–47.

The Barn *Vanishes: Re-representation of Reality in Lee Chang-dong's* Burning

Lee conveyed a powerful sense of rage in *Burning* (2018), but it's also critical to keep in mind that, as Lee himself noted, the prevalent rage that caught his attention in 2016 has no set definition and varies depending on the circumstances of the individuals, much like the evasive reality of today's world. For example, the barn in *Barn Burning* alludes to a significant manufacturing area of the American Southern manor economy in Faulkner's story and an abandoned or redundant storage shed of an urban space in Murakami's story. Although the barn is depicted in Lee's *Burning* as a plastic greenhouse, a symbol of modern agriculture, it disappears in the film title, evoking a scene where people's anger loses focus. This is the precise point at which Lee's film diverges significantly from Faulkner's, despite the seemingly shared motif of wrath. Although Lee's storytelling style is inspired and based on Murakami's version of *Barn Burning*, it goes a step farther in challenging the viability of our depiction of the world.

While Lee's narrative prominently references Faulkner's *Barn Burning*, the film *Burning* (2018) effectively exemplifies the concept of postmodernism. According to *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*, "since its inception as a literary term in the late 1950s and its wider use as a critical term in the 1980s and 1990s, postmodernism has emerged as a significant cultural, political, and intellectual force that defines our era."[16] Defining the critical notion of postmodernism is nearly impossible due to its extensive variety of phenomena and inherent acceptance of multiplicity and heterogeneity from the outset. Steven Connor, author of *Postmodernist Culture* (1989), attempted to delineate the trajectory of postmodernism and identified four distinct stages in its evolution: "accumulation; synthesis; autonomy; and dissipation"[17].

The paper asserts that the argument presented by Fredric Jameson in his seminal essay *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*[18] is particularly pertinent to the current discussions, as Jameson's essay was pivotal in the third stage of synthesis from the mid-1980s onward. Since the mid 1980s, Jameson's analysis of postmodernism has dominated conversations about the concept.

Furthermore, Jameson's discourse on postmodernism originates from the American consumer society, wherein he perceives the "whole global, yet American, postmodern culture" as "the internal and superstructural expression of a whole

[16] Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist, *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, Routledge, 2001, p. xiii.

[17] Steven Connor, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 1.

[18] See Jameson, *op. cit.*, 1984.

new of American military and economic domination throughout the world"[19]. It is particularly relevant in the context of postwar Japanese and Korean society, as both nations have been integrated into the geopolitical framework of America's global domination from an early point in the postwar era. For more than half a century, the American consumer society served as a role model for postwar Japanese and Korean societies. Despite certain inherent cultural distinctions, postwar Japan and South Korea's direct and speedy Americanization further facilitates the application of Jameson's theoretical framework to East Asian reality. Thus, in line with Jameson, this study defines postmodernism as "a cultural dominant"[20] in the specific sense of the American culture's overwhelming success in postwar Japanese and Korean societies.

Connor noticed that "Postmodernist theory responded to the sense that important changes had taken place in politics, economics, and social life, changes that could broadly be characterized by the two words *delegitimation* and *dedifferentiation*"[21]. Jameson describes "delegitimation and dedifferentiation" as taking on the following characteristics: "a new depthlessness"; "a consequent weakening of historicity" as well as "a whole new type of emotional ground tone" which Jameson names "intensities"[22].

In order to examine the "constitutive features of the postmodern"[23] in Murakami and Lee's narratives, this paper will analyze three key points: characters, simultaneity, and the absence of reality, as described by Jameson. Not only the three main characters – Lee Jong-su, Shin Hae-mi, and Ben – stand in stark contrast to one another, but their expression of anger also varies greatly, which speaks to the contemporary paradox that people's anger becomes unfocused.

The Hamletian Dilemma of Lee Jong-su

The most obvious alteration Lee made to Murakami's text was to replace the thirty-one-year-old writer protagonist, the anonymous "I", with a young Lee Jong-su, who is a member of the same generation as Shin Hae-mi, the story's twenty-year-old "she". Jong-su was unable to feel empathy for his irate father, who battled the unavoidable decrease in agriculture brought on by globalization and

[19] Idem, p. 57.
[20] Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
[21] Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
[22] Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[23] Idem, ibidem.

was losing the ability to vent his own inner rage. In South Korea, this is indicative of an entire generation. Director Lee talks in his 2018 interview about the feeling of anger in young people:

> In fact, from the perspective of young people, most young people nowadays, either angry or helpless, do not even have the means to express their feelings of anger, but just keep them pent up in their hearts, without even realizing that they are burning with anger. In fact, this is a kind of consciousness disorder caused by the theory of the uselessness of the self. The social system and the environment unintentionally reinforce this perception, and if you can change something through your own efforts, this feeling of powerlessness and anger may be less, but unfortunately, the chances of such a change are getting fewer and fewer.[24]

Global capitalism no longer has external boundaries, and the majority is marginalized, undervalued, and banished as a whole along with the rapid widening of wealth disparity. However, Jong-su and his father – both members of the silent majority – do not have the same emotional structure or instinctive response to the intricacies of daily existence. For Jong-su, what Jameson refers to as "the breakdown of the signifying chain"[25] resulting in a detachment from reality, manifests itself as anorexia. The past of the older generation, exemplified by Jong-su's father, has diminished into the two-dimensional images displayed on the walls, embodying "a new depthlessness" that the camera merely captures as a fleeting view while traveling along Jong-su's home. The reason Jong-su's father fought in the Korean War was to uphold opposing ideologies, such as capitalism versus communism. In addition, he battled against the relentless tides of globalism to maintain his identity as a traditional farmer. Nevertheless, the impact of fathers' battles for existence has long since diminished, and recent generations born in the new millennium have been unable to connect with them. Jong-su therefore thought his father's fury was inexplicable and found it irritating when it manifested itself as abrupt, violent behavior. History exhibited "a new depthlessness" in the portrayal of fury, as essentially a sequence of footnotes in *Burning* (2018), exemplified by the image of a television screen featuring Donald J. Trump's address or the incessant propaganda broadcasting from North Korea.

Thus, Jong-su finds himself ensnared in a post-communist revolutionary parallel to the Hamletian dilemma, unable to revenge his father and relegate to the

[24] See Lee, *op. cit.*

[25] Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

role of a thwarted avenger, grappling with an elusive, ghostly reality. Jong-su is not speaking much in front of the lawyer who mistook Jong-su's father's self-esteem as a farmer for unwarranted arrogance. Besides, for most part of the film, Jong-su stayed silent and noticed the psychological game Ben created for the three of them. The shot-reverse of a closet full of lethal knives, which was an inheritance from his father, represents Jong-su's inner rage visually. In this scene, there is no crime or enemy – just a welling up of rage and the helplessness that accompanies that anger[26].

Figure 1. © PINEHOUSEFILM Co., Ltd
Lee Jong-su looks intently at the
knife set his father left behind.

[26] Jinhua Dai, *镜中火焰-李沧东的《燃烧》，今日电影与世界* [Flame in the Mirror – Lee Chang-dong's Burning, Today's Cinema and the World], online talk, 北京大学人文社会科学研究院 [Institute of Humanities and Social Science, Peking University]. https://shorturl.at/h3uP1 (accessed October 7, 2024).

Shin Hae-mi as the Last Man

Shin Hae-mi, another central character in *Burning* (2018), embodies the existential despair, a human condition Nietzsche describes as that of the "last" man in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Director Lee also made reference to Nietzsche's "last" man in his remarks regarding *Burning*:

> In Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, there's a description of "the last man". The last man is like this. When the system and other aspects have been stabilized, people begin to enjoy their work, are content with the status quo, and are easily satisfied. [...] We have already entered such a time, and we are all going to be the last ones, taking things as they come. *Isn't the term "small fortune" popular nowadays?* Being content with the small but real things and feeling happy. That's why there are people who work at a convenience store and earn 7,000 won per hour, but drink 8,000 won of coffee, sometimes even more than 10,000 won. Because it's tangible happiness. They also wear Nike shoes, and it's hard to change their lives by saving up money anyway, so they might as well have the money to travel to Africa. The world has changed, and this is the modern way of life.[27]

The English phrase "small fortune" Lee mentioned in his interview is a literal translation of a common term in mainland China and South Korea, and it originated from the Japanese word "shôkakkou", which means a "small but certain happiness". "Shôkakkou" is a term coined by Haruki Murakami in his Japanese book *Uzumaki-neko no mitsukekata: Murakami Asahidō jānaru* [How to Spot a Whirlpool Cat: Murakami Asahidō Diary][28]. Belief in "shôkakkou" explains Hae-mi's seemingly irrational behavior patterns such as her decision to travel to North Africa despite the fact that "she can't afford it... she's broke." (Ben's lines, [1:41:44]). Even though being impoverished, Hae-mi nevertheless saw the world through the lens of the wealthy Ben and adopted similar lifestyle choices, such as visiting foreign lands, since, as the last man without any future, she was only able to see a small but certain happiness in front of her. It could be argued that Hae-mi is, in a sense, living in self-delusion; she refers to it in the pantomime of peeling mandarin oranges: it's easier for her to forget that she doesn't have money than it is to imagine that she does. Actually, Hae-mi is one of the many forgotten victims of the credit economy. A part-time employee in a pink jacket is quoted as saying "they all seem fine,

[27] See Lee, *op. cit.*

[28] Haruki Murakami, *Uzumaki-neko no mitsukekata : Murakami Asahidō jānaru* [How to Spot a Whirlpool Cat: Murakami Asahidō Diary], Tokyo, Shinchosha, 1996, p. 126.

but you never really know their story. Some of them are drowning in credit card debt, and because of that some of them go into hiding?" [1:34:08]

Hae-mi, as embodiment of Nietzsche's "last man" "doesn't contact her family and doesn't have any friends." (Ben's lines, [1:41:44]). When Jong-su visits their restaurant, Hae-mi's mother and elder sister made it clear that they would not like to see her until she paid off all of her debt. The comment of Abner Snopes, the main character of Faulkner's *Barn Burning* – "You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain't going to have any blood to stick to you"[29]– does not apply to Hae-mi's circumstances, given the differences in the two economies (farm economy vs. credit economy). Also, the reason Jong-su was reunited with his mother after all these years was not love or compassion, but rather the fact that the mother required her son's assistance since she was in debt. Not only are our lifestyles altering in response to shifting economic systems, but so is our understanding of family and reality.

"Shôkakkou" (a small but certain happiness) stands in sharp contrast with Faulkner, who, in his Nobel speech, "declines to accept the end of man", and claimes that "the poet's" or "the writer's duty" is to write "only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat"[30]. In our postmodern world, due also to the dysfunctions of language, "the agony and sweat of the human spirit" may have already become the immense, untouchable nucleus of reality. Any attempt to approach it would be rejected at the first moment of verbalizing: it appears impossible to provide reality an adequate representation.

It should be noted that Hae-mi primarily expresses her anger through her griefs. She broke down in tears on several occasions, including when she danced at sunset in Jong-su's yard or when she told Jong-su and Ben about her travel adventures, especially about the moment when she had seen the setting sun. The motif of the sunset itself conveys a sense of closure, fitting with Hae-mi's role as the last man. Finally, the mystery surrounding Hae-mi's whereabouts and her disappearance serve to highlight the themes of existential uncertainty and the frailty of interpersonal relationships in a capitalist society.

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[29] Faulkner, *Barn Burning*, in *The Faulkner Reader*, p. 503.

[30] William Faulkner, "William Faulkner's Speech of Acceptance upon the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature", *The Faulkner Reader*, pp. 3–4.

Figure 2. © PINEHOUSEFILM Co., Ltd
When Shin Hae-mi remembers witnessing the sunset
and dancing to it, she breaks down in tears.

Ben, the mysterious Korean Gatsby

Ben, whose mysterious nature and disengagement from social conventions make him an intriguing and unsettling figure, once remarked that "It is fascinating to see people cry" [40:56] since, in his own words: "I've never shed a single tear in my life" [41:08]. Ben's hobby of burning greenhouses, which he describes with chilling nonchalance, serves as a metaphor for his underlying rage at not being able to find a purpose in his life. The narrator in Murakami's text describes Ben's character:

> He was in his late twenties, tall, with a decent build, and rather polite in his speech. A little lean on looks, perhaps, though I suppose you could put him in the handsome category. Anyway, he struck me as nice enough; he had big hands and long fingers.[31]

[31] Murakami, *Barn Burning*, *ed. cit.*, p. 135.

But in the film, he was transformed into a Ben, and American actor Steven Yeun, who was probably in his middle thirties then, was cast to play him. This may explain why Ben in the film seems more collected and grown-up. In Murakami's work, the writer, the "I" protagonist, discusses with the female character the subject of Ben's kind of work at one point, but she gives only a vague response:

> "Can you really make that much in trading?"
> "Trading?"
> "That's what he said. He works in trading."
> "Okay, then, I imagine so... But hey, what do I know? He doesn't seem to do much work at all, as far as I can see. He does his share of seeing people and talking on the phone, I'll say that, though."[32]

In the film, Ben likewise gives a highly evasive response when Jong-su asked him directly what his occupation is. However, he did offer an interesting observation about the type of work he performs. Ben commented: "well, I do this and that. You wouldn't understand even if I told you. But to put it simply, I play. Nowadays, there is no distinction between working and playing." [41:42] This actually meets the description of the consumerist society that Zygmunt Bauman defines as ours: "the trick is no longer to limit work time to the bare minimum, so vacating more space for leisure, but on the contrary to efface altogether the line dividing vocation from avocation, job from hobby, work from recreation; to lift work itself to the rank of supreme and most satisfying entertainment."[33] Hae-mi, the new poor, was forced to work multiple part-time jobs because of the shortage of jobs, brought about by neo-liberalist policies. She decided to spend all of her earnings on travel instead of repaying her debt: she acts on the "small fortune" principle, looking at what lies in front of her eyes rather than on a looming future. In a consumers' society, however, Ben, who comes from a wealthy family, also had little choice but to combine work and pleasure. There is no escape from this lifestyle, the only possible exception is the burning of a greenhouse, which touches him for the first time.

Jong-su's inner rage is visualized through the set of knives his father left him as inheritance, while Hae-mi expresses hers through tears. Although Ben may be just as desperate on the inside as are Jong-su and Hae-mi, he is unable to express

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[32] Murakami, *op. cit.*, pp. 136–137.

[33] Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 2005, p. 34.

his anger, which also explains why he is fascinated with the act of burning a greenhouse, which seems nevertheless an imaginary event. In the film, there is a greenhouse burned down in Jong-su's dream, so also at an imaginary level. Jong-su was transformed into a small boy in his dream [1:21:09]. This imaginary burning may represent metaphorically the inability to accurately represent reality, in our post-truth era, leading to the absence of reality itself.

Figure 3. © PINEHOUSEFILM Co., Ltd
Jong-su watches the greenhouse burn down in his dream.

The Simultaneity of the Barn Burner

After Ben revealed to him his secret hobby and instructed him on the morality of simultaneity, Jong-su saw a greenhouse burning in his dream – the concept of simultaneity is designed to bind the two of them. In Murakami's short-story, the character referred to as "he" gives "simultaneity" the meaning of "an extremely important force in human existence" which he defines in terms of a personal morals:

> Right, I'm here, and I'm there. I'm in Tokyo, and at the same time I'm in Tunis. I'm the one to blame, and I'm also the one to forgive. Just as for a instance. It's that level of balance. Without such balance, I don't think we could go on living. It's like the linchpin to everything. Lose it and we'd literally go to pieces. But for the very reason that I've got it, simultaneity becomes possible for me.[34]

In the film, Ben not only restates what he told about simultaneity in Murakami's text, but he also uses a metaphor to offer his own view on this concept. While cooking with Hae-mi, Ben makes some remarks about sacrifices and gods. The scenery is his opulent apartment, where he welcomes for the first time Jong-su: "just as humans make offerings to the gods, I make my own offering and consume it. An offering. It's a metaphor." [53:16] Since we are all inherently both producers and consumers in a consumerist society, everyone is subject to the morality of simultaneity, not just Ben. But for a postmodern thriller like *Burning* (2018), it's significant that Ben, playing the imaginary (or real) serial killer, while Jong-su, the part of the fictitious detective, uses this metaphor of religious offering.

In Murakami's text the act of burning a barn takes on the metaphorical sense of killing, too. While Abner Snopes is named as the barn burner in Faulkner's text, readers and viewers are left in the dark about who the barn burner is in both Murakami and in Lee's postmodern narratives. Who is the murderer? Is a homicide actually occurring? The tension between Jong-su and Ben, their duality is the crux of *Burning* (2018) and it brings on another type of simultaneity.

Burning (2018) begins with the meeting of the three key protagonists at the airport. Ben was drawn to Jong-su because, like him, he is a writer who hopes to unravel the mysteries of the universe. The man gave the following explanation in Murakami's text for his reason to divulge his story:

> You're someone who writes novels, so I thought, wouldn't he be interested in patterns of human behavior and all that? And the way I see it, with novelists, before even passing judgment on something, aren't they the kind who are supposed to appreciate its form? And even if they can't appreciate it, they should at least accept it at face value, no? That's why I told you. I wanted to tell you, from my side.[35]

In the film, Ben told Jong-su that "since you write fiction, I'd like to have a chat with you sometime." [42:28] Ben's decision to tell Jong-su about his life narrative is prompted by his knowledge that he is a writer, or at least aspiring to

[34] Murakami, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–43.
[35] Idem, p. 142.

be one. Also due to Jong-su's significance to Hae-mi, who was the prey (at the airport, Hae-mi introduced Jong-su as "this is my one and only friend" [37:00]), Ben, acting in the role of the hunter, took the initiative to ask Jong-su to join him in the psychological chasing game of *Burning* (2018). During the chase, Ben seeks to eradicate the significance that Jong-su provides to Hae-mi'. For Ben, she represents a worthless, meaningless, and abandoned existence.

Ben's deep-seated rage stems from his inability to find meaning in the surface of the world and from his automatic combination of work and play, which prevents him from taking anything seriously, as was previously argued. Ben's issue is not that his moral judgment is flawed; rather, it is that he lacks any moral judgment or value at all. For this reason, simultaneity builds for him the orderly progression of events that justify his drive for homicide. Ben is a representation of the smooth, *flat* world that we all experience daily, but are currently unable to fully grasp. In Murakami's work, the narrator perceived Ben's prototype: the man with a void expression. In the film, director Lee incorporated a phrase indicating that Ben found it atypical to articulate his emotions and that he had never wept before. Ben's rejection of meaning is validated by small, relevant details: his two yawns, once in a bar when the friends gathered and they heard Hae-mi's account of the great hunger, and again at Ben's apartment, when they listened to the saleswoman's stories.

Regarding Hae-mi, her childhood friend Jong-su is the one who gives her life a meaning. Jong-su said "I'm in love with Hae-mi" [1:19:00], whereas Ben, whom she met accidentally, turns out to be the one who takes away that meaning and purportedly erases her existence. Ben is the alleged serial killer in the psychological thriller *Burning* (2018), while Jong-su is the tenacious private investigator. Ben's elegant black Porsche and Jong-su's faded white truck represent their opposing social classes in the film, conjuring up the idea of a struggle between good and evil. Despite their apparent differences, both Jong-su and Ben use imagined or real acts of violence to release their pent-up inner anger. From the moment they first met, they have been inextricably linked as the pursued and the pursuer, the killer and the savior (or the revenger). "When she introduced us, he shook my hand, virtually in reflex", Murakami put it in his text[36]. Furthermore, the last embrace Ben gave Jong-su before he was fatally killed symbolically confirms this initial handshake.

[36] Idem, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

Figure 4. © PINEHOUSEFILM Co., Ltd
Jong-su shakes Ben's hand when they met
at the airport and Ben embraces Jong-su before he dies.

The final scene, where Jong-su confronts Ben, blurs the lines between victim and perpetrator, highlighting the complex interplay of power, class, and morality. We are both producers and consumers in a society centered around consumption. In her imagination, the "new" poor Hae-mi may momentarily live a lifestyle akin to that of the wealthy Ben. If Jong-su's father had followed the advice of the attorney and made real estate investments in Seoul's Gangnam neighborhood, Jong-su might have become a wealthy Ben himself.

Additionally, Lee's film blurs the distinction between fact and fiction. Did Jong-su actually murder Ben? Is this merely another imagined deed, similar to Jong-su's dream of seeing a greenhouse burn down? Before the retaliation killing, Director Lee showed us a scenario in which Jong-su was using his laptop to write in Hae-mi's tiny, now-empty attic. Therefore, everything in the last scene can be fictitious. In fact, while Murakami's *Barn Burning* has the same title as Faulkner's

short story, it turns out to have a completely different flavor, and Lee's *Burning* certainly leaves unresolved a lot of questions, if compared to iconic Hitchcock thrillers. In many ways *Burning* (2018) focuses on something else: it alludes to the absence of reality, to the blurring boundaries between the real and the imaginary, which are indicative features of our postmodern world.

The Absence of Reality: The Real Slips Away

As has been previously argued, *Burning* (2018) portrays a variety of unfocused forms of anger. If he had chosen to use the same title as Faulkner and Murakami, Lee would have written *barns*, the plural version of the word, rather than writing *Barn Burning*. Ultimately, the film's title becomes just *Burning*, suggesting the elusive quality of this anger. The barn, which was the object of the burning act, eventually disappears from the title itself because, in the end, there is no antagonist, no guilty act[37], just broken connections and a generalized sense of helplessness and rage.

The three central protagonists in *Burning* (2018), Jong-su, Hae-mi, and Ben, express their anger in different ways since each of them has different experiences with reality despite living in the same society. Hae-mi's approach to dealing with reality is the most common of the three, emblematic of the new poor or the underclass in South Korean society. *Burning* (2018) uses the automobiles that Jong-su and Ben drive to represent themselves, while Hae-mi is represented by the cheap, pink plastic watch that Jong-su won as a premium gift at the beginning of the film. Following Hae-mi's disappearance, the pink watch resurfaces in two distinct locations: first, it was on the wrist of her part-time coworker, suggesting that the type of work Hae-mi does is highly interchangeable; second, it surfaced in the bathroom cabinet drawer of Ben's opulent apartment, raising the possibility that Ben may have already killed her and retained it as a memento of his murder.

Regardless of how basic the plastic watch is, the department store's announcement referred to it as "a luxury sports watch" [3:13]. Exaggeration is inevitable because premium gifts are a well-known marketing tactic used to entice customers to make purchases at the store, and everyone is aware that the words and descriptions don't always correspond to reality. Similarly, Hae-mi's decision to go to other countries doesn't align with her reality: she doesn't actually have any money for leisure because she is deeply in debt. This type of mismatch graphically illustrates a very common postmodern phenomena in which the world we live in

[37] When Hae-mi unexpectedly called him without speaking and simply made indiscernible sounds that seemed to be her struggling and fighting, Jong-su started to suspect that Hae-mi had been "burned" as a greenhouse (barn). Jong-su follows Ben everywhere in an attempt to locate Hae-mi once more, even climbing to the top of a dam, but he is unable to find any convincing evidence to prove his theory.

is not consistent with the outward appearances expressed by words or languages. Postmodern problematic connection to language is best summed up by David Harvey's exposition of Lyotard's view:

Figure 5. © PINEHOUSEFILM Co., Ltd
The cheap, pink plastic watch reappears in
different locations after Hae-mi's disappearance.

> Lyotard, for his part, puts a similar argument, though on a rather different basis. He takes the modernist preoccupation with language and pushes it to extremes of dispersal. While 'the social bond is linguistic,' he argues, it 'is not woven with a single thread' but by an 'indeterminate number' of 'language games.' Each of us lives 'at the intersection of many of these' and we do not necessarily establish 'stable language combinations and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable.' As a consequence, 'the social subject itself seems to dissolve in this dissemination of language games.[38]

[38] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, London, Blackwell, 1991, p. 46.

It is evident that in the film, Hae-mi is inflicted the most with this "death of the subject"[39] if compared to Murakami's "she". The female character is portrayed in Murakami's text as someone who is cut off from the society's symbolic system, a loose sign that is not weaved into the web of meanings. For instance, she didn't care about age or marital status and "seemed to consider things like age and family and income to be of the same a priori order as shoe size and vocal pitch and the shape of one's fingernails"[40]. She represents nothing more than an empty void in the language game, which explains why, "when I was with her", "I could really relax" and "forget all about work I didn't want to do and trivial things that'd never be settled anyway and the crazy mixed-up ideas that crazy mixed-up people had taken into their heads."[41] The narrator's attitude as he listened to her confirms the words she utters are meaningless:

> not that there was any great meaning to her words. And if I did catch myself interjecting polite nothings without really tuning in what she was saying, there still was something soothing to my ear about her voice, like watching clouds drift across the far horizon.[42]

Here, her words lose all meaning; all that remains is their actual physical form, their sound, or the sound of her voice as she utters them. She even goes one step further, masking the sounds with a charade of peeling mandarin oranges. This already classic sequence, which Lee's film faithfully recreated, is described in Murakami's text:

> Then she "peeled a mandarin orange." Literally, that's what she did: She had a glass bowl of oranges to her left and another bowl for the peels to her right—so went the setup—in fact, there was nothing there. She proceeded to pick up one imaginary orange, then slowly peel it, pop pieces into her mouth, and spit out the pulp one section at a time, finally disposing of the skin-wrapped residue into the right-hand bowl when she'd eaten the entire fruit. She repeated this maneuver again and again.[43]

The key to this pantomime's success is her claim that "a question of making yourself believe there is an orange there, you have to forget there isn't one"[44].

[39] Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Bay Press, 1983, p. 114.
[40] Murakami, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
[41] Idem, p. 134.
[42] Idem, ibidem.
[43] Idem, p. 133.
[44] Idem, p. 134.

The deep-rooted value system is already lost when "in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum"[45]. What she does is an act of pastiche, an imagined procession of meaning which resulted in "the reality of everything around me being siphoned away"[46].

What separates Hae-mi in the film from the female character in Murakami's fiction, though, is that Hae-mi is more determined to find meaning, a quality that Lee added, and she uses tears to vent her rage for the loss of it. For example, Hae-mi travels to North Africa in search of a higher purpose for her existence and performs the dance of "great hunger" in front of Jong-su and Ben. While there are some similarities to specific descriptions in Murakami's short story *The Second Bakery Attack*, director Lee claimed in the already mentioned interview that the co-screenwriter Oh Jung-mi got the idea of the "great hunger" scene on her own:

> They're looking for the meaning of life itself. This is particularly primitive and religious. But in real life, Hae-mi lives in an attic, owes money on a card loan, and can't even take care of herself properly, yet she has to save up for a trip to Africa. Anyway, for a young person like Hae-mi, no matter what lifestyle she chooses, reality doesn't change drastically, but she still tries to find the meaning of life, and does the dance of finding the meaning of life, just like our ancestors did.[47]

Hae-mi's ultimate disappearance, however, signifies the absence of reality and the inability to link together any disparate events into a coherent reality. Similar to the central enigma of whether Hae-mi is killed by Ben or simply vanishes due to her card debt, the empty well in Hae-mi's early recollections and her mysterious pet cat Boil are signifiers that highlight the ambiguity of the whole story. According to Hal Foster, Jameson's interpretation of Lacan's theory of languages also reflects how we relate to reality in the postmodern era:

> A sign, a word, a text, is here modelled as a relationship between a signifier – a material object, the sound of a word, the script of a text – and a signified, the meaning of that material word or material text. The third component would be the so-called "referent," the "real" object in the "real" world to which the sign refers – the real cat as opposed to the concept of a cat or the sound "cat." But for structuralism in general

[45] Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
[46] Murakami, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
[47] See Lee, *op. cit.*

> there has been a tendency to feel that reference is a kind of myth, that one can no longer talk about the "real" in that external or objective way.[48]

The only things that are known about the cat Boil in *Burning* (2018) are mere signifiers: its name and the waste that it left behind. The real cat is nowhere to be found in Hae-mi's little attic, where it was supposed to be. As our relationship to our surroundings is essentially imagined and the symbolic system of the society is dysfunctional, the real becomes unintelligible, hinting at the absence of reality. Both Hae-mi's pantomime of peeling mandarin oranges and Ben's burning of the greenhouse are performed on an imaginary scale. In addition to seeing a greenhouse burn down in his dream, Jong-su might have as well imagined killing Ben in the end. Thus, when a real cat appeared out of nowhere in Ben's opulent apartment, we are unable to confirm that it was Hae-mi's cat Boil. Stendhal famously described the realistic novel as a mirror of reality; yet, in our postmodern world, reality is fractured by the reflections of a sequence of mirrors, each of which is a representation unto itself. This results in

> a shift from the kind of perspectivism that allowed the modernist to get a better bearing on the meaning of a complex but nevertheless singular reality, to the foregrounding of questions as to how radically different realities may coexist, collide, and interpenetrate.[49]

Conclusion

The complexity of reality radically alteres our perception of literature. In his 1950 *Speech of Acceptance upon the Award of the Nobel Prize for Literature*, Faulkner argued for "the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed [...]"[50]. The basis for "the old universal truth", however, "a meta-language, meta-narrative, or meta-theory through which all things can be connected or represented" is under attack by writers such as Foucault and Lyotard[51], according to David Harvey. In our time, it is acknowledged that "universal and eternal truths, if they exist at all, cannot be specified"[52]. Today, the motif of barn burning can only take on a new meaning.

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[48] Foster, *op. cit.*, pp. 118–19.
[49] Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
[50] Faulkner, "Speech of Acceptance upon the Award of the Nobel Prize for Literature", in *The Faulkner Reader*, p. 3.
[51] Harvey, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45.
[52] Idem, p. 45.

This paper aimed to explore the postmodern aspects of Lee Chang-dong's *Burning* (2018) and it contends that the film's self-reflective and self-questioning approach challenges traditional notions of realism, encouraging viewers to engage with the film on a deeper level. The 2018 *Burning* gives filmmaker Lee Chang-dong's steadfastly left-wing social critical viewpoint a new, reflective dimension by transferring Faulkner's motif of barn burning into realities of South Korean society and incorporating postmodern elements of Murakami's text. A psychological thriller, the film makes use of the barn burning motif to show how mysterious the world is, as pointed in director Lee's interview:

> From this suspense, the story leads to the suspense of the present world: what's wrong with the world? Is what we see with our eyes real? As we watch the film, we will think about the narrative of the film. Through the cause-and-effect relationship, we construct a reasonable story in our brain, but what we construct may only be our subjective expectation. That is, is the plausible narrative we believe and expect the actual story? Is it really true?[53]

Let us hope a masterpiece like *Burning* (2018) won't become, in our consumer society, a mere decoration on the wall of an upscale restaurant, just like the painting inspired by the Yongsan Tragedy[54] and featured in the film. *Burning* (2018) turns the barn burning motif into a question that elicits from audience their own answers regarding reality.

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[53] See Lee, *op. cit.*

[54] The Yongsan Tragedy transpired on January 20, 2009, in central Seoul, when law enforcement conducted a raid on a building occupied by demonstrators in a redevelopment area, resulting in the fatalities of five protesters and one police officer.

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PROXIMITY AND DIS/PLACEMENT. INTERROGATING SPACE IN *ROZA TUMBA QUEMA* BY CLAUDIA HERNÁNDEZ AND *DREAMING IN CUBAN* BY CRISTINA GARCÍA

Sylvia Garcia-Paluro

Abstract: Recent Latin American history (I refer approximately to the period between 1950 and 1990) has had a significant influence on the literature produced by writers in Latin America and abroad since 1950. Even books published within the last fifteen years show a preoccupation with this historical period, such as Claudia Hernández's *Roza tumba quema* (published in Spanish in 2017 and in English in 2020 [*Slash and Burn*]), which makes the Salvadoran Civil War its central event. Books published by Latinx writers in the United States show similar concerns, though they must also contend with the role diaspora has played in shaping how these events are understood or processed. What role, then, do proximity and placement (or displacement) play in shaping the relationship of writers to a history that still impacts Latin American politics and U.S. immigration policy? This paper aims to address this question by comparing the two post-war novels, *Roza tumba quema* and *Dreaming in Cuban*, a diasporic novel by Cristina García, and their relationship to space. My suggestion is that an analysis of space can illuminate the ways in which writers navigate trauma and violence and the ways one relates to these experiences in the aftermath of war. More significantly, it suggests that though resolution is never truly reached, a reconceptualization of oneself in relation to these spaces can glimpse alternative ways of being.
Keywords: Latin American fiction, Latinx fiction, space, diaspora, trauma, historical revision.

In the essay "Guerra y escritura en *Roza tumba quema* (2017) de Claudia Hernández", Alexandra Ortiz Wallner writes of Jean Luc Nancy's conceptualization of the impossible community (and by extension, of the novel *Roza Tumba Quema*):

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> It is about a fractured and fragmented community where the question of survival is also one of coexistence in a space governed by loss and death, never natural but violent, already normalized as forms of sociability.[1]

Given the prominence of violence in post-war literature like *Roza Tumba Quema*, it is not surprising that Ortiz Wallner is interested in the question of survival and in what survival looks like after the ideal of the utopic community has collapsed[2]. It is certainly a noteworthy question and there is no doubt that the two novels I will analyze, *Roza Tumba Quema* and *Dreaming in Cuban*, are novels of survival. However, my own interest lies in another aspect of Wallner's quote: the way in which spaces that tread the line between life and death are conceptualized and reconceptualized in Latin American post-war literature. The intersection of space with loss and death, or rather, with violence as a medium of loss and death, is something that figures prominently within both novels. These spaces serve as sites of return where characters can resituate their understanding of themselves and their pasts in the face of the profound communal and internal fracturing consequent of war. What differs between these two novels is their proximity to these sites: *Roza Tumba Quema* is set in El Salvador whereas *Dreaming in Cuban* is a diasporic work that alternates its setting between the United States and Cuba. As such, an analysis comparing these two novels can indicate how proximity and placement (or displacement) shape each novel's relationship to these spaces and the history they point to. Moreover, it can shape our understanding of the way in which spaces act as an active component in the incomplete project of healing from trauma.

The significance of space in *Dreaming in Cuban* and *Roza Tumba Quema* has not escaped the notice of scholars. Ortiz Wallner suggests that *Roza Tumba Quema* writes "a particular reappropriation of the countryside through the silent voices of a female genealogy" as a form of reclamation in a land marred by the politics of war and patriarchy[3]. Selma Rodal Linares argues that *Roza Tumba Quema* de-territorializes the female body through female affectivity[4]. For many scholars, the place

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[1] Alexandra Ortiz Wallner, "Guerra y escritura en *Roza tumba quema* (2017) de Claudia Hernández", *Revista Letral* no. 22, July 2019, p. 123). (my translation) The original reads: "Se trata de una comunidad fracturada y fragmentada en donde la pregunta por la sobrevivencia es también una por la convivencia en un espacio regido por la pérdida y la muerte, nunca naturales sino violentas, ya normalizados como formas de sociabilidad."

[2] Some of these ideas are discussed in the essay *Toward a Cosmopolitanism of Loss*, by Mariano Siskind.

[3] Alexandra Ortiz Wallner, *op. cit.*, p. 126 (my translation) The original reads: "se escribe una particular reapropiación del campo desde las voces silenciosas de una genealogía femenina."

[4] Selma Rodal Linares, "Cortar, Recordar y Desear: la Afectividad Femenina en *Roza Tumba Quema* de Claudia Hernández", in *Mitologías Hoy*, vol. 26, 2022, pp. 103–14, available at

that exile occupies in *Dreaming in Cuban* has raised questions about the characters' relationship to the homeland. For example, Florence Ramond Jurney write:

> For the exile, not only have geographical boundaries taken another meaning, but national identity defined only in terms of an individual's relationship to his/her country of origin has shifted.[5]

Similarly, Mary S. Vasquez describes Cuba as "a pivotal presence" in *Dreaming in Cuban*, reading it as the center from which each character and their relationship to one another is measured[6]. These articles illustrate the idea that space, as body or geography, is central to how the characters relate to themselves, to each other, and to the communities they belong to or once belonged to. Read together, they point to what this essay aims to articulate: the way in which Hernández and García structure experiences and revelations through space. I will expand on the idea of space as structure and demonstrate how movement through spaces, or sites significant to each character's past, allow these characters to begin to reconceptualize themselves (and their interrelationships) in the context of their traumas. These spaces, I will argue, offer an alternative vision of being for a world trapped in the tautologies of violence.

In Latin America, the period between the 1950s to the 1990s was a time of political turbulence and instability due to ongoing power struggles between leftist groups and conservative parties in power. In both Cuba and El Salvador, this turbulence was expressed in the outbreak of civil war fought by revolutionary guerilla fighters against the authoritarian governments in place. Profound social inequalities, violent repression, and the continual failure of these governments to live up to promises of equality and prosperity dating back to the first days of independence had led to a climate of dissatisfaction. It was in this climate that the seeds of revolution grew and in 1953, Fidel Castro led the first attack on the Batista dictatorship in Cuba[7]. In El Salvador, almost thirty years later, a military

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Cortar, recordar y desear: la afectividad femenina en Roza tumba quema de Claudia Hernández. | Mitologías hoy (uab.cat). Linares claims that in the novel "La 'mujer' constituye para la comunidad un cuerpo-territorio que diferentes actores buscan explotar" (For the community, 'woman' represents a body-territory that is exploited by various actors of that community, my translation), p. 105.

[5] Florence Ramond Jurney, "Between Nostalgia and Exile: Picturing the Island in Cristina García's Fiction", in *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2011, pp. 91–92.

[6] Mary S. Vásquez, "Cuba as Text and Context in Cristina García's Dreaming in Cuban", *The Bilingual Review/ La Revista Bilingüe*, vol. 20, no. 1, Jan. 1995, p. 22.

[7] Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America*, London, Penguin Books, 2009, p. 444.

coup in 1979 and the consequent human rights violations prompted guerilla groups to form the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMNLF), which retaliated against the military-led government in 1981[8].

Both *Roza Tumba Quema*[9] and *Dreaming in Cuban*[10] are set in the aftermath of these events, well after each civil war has been fought and won or lost. In *Roza Tumba Quema*, the unnamed protagonist[11] is a former guerilla fighter and mother of five daughters whose present life is deeply entangled with who she was — or rather, continues to be: a revolutionary soldier. Unlike Lourdes Puente del Pino from *Dreaming in Cuban*, Hernández's protagonist lives in El Salvador among the same militants who fought with her during the revolution. In contrast, Lourdes lives in New York, far removed from Cuba and the war[12]. However, though she attempts to distance herself from Cuba and the traumas associated with it, Lourdes' past materializes in her present life "through eating-[sic] and sexual disorders" that manifest in her physical appearance[13]. Consequently, both novels culminate in a confrontation, of sorts, a return to the sites of violence that have marked each character, materially and metaphysically.

Violence is the catalyst for the events that take place in each novel. In *Roza Tumba Quema*, the violence of war, its resonances, and the violence of separation (due to war) lead the protagonist on a journey that begins with a search for the daughter who was taken from her when she was a soldier and ends with the metaphorical burying of that daughter after coming to terms with the fact that she can never recuperate that relationship. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the Cuban revolution sets the scene for the trauma that Lourdes attempts to leave behind her when she escapes to the U.S.: after trying to defend her home, she is raped by a revolutionary soldier who, afterward, carves something illegible into her body. Though most of the novel is marked by her renunciation of Cuba and the revolution, Lourdes eventually returns to the site of her trauma where she is, for the first time in the novel, unable to speak.

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[8] Harald Jung, "The Civil War in El Salvador," *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe*, no. 32, 1982, pp. 10-12.

[9] Claudia Hernández, *Roza Tumba Quema*, eBook, Colombia, Laguna Libros, 2017; English edition, *Slash and Burn*, translated by Julia Sanches, Sheffield/London/New York, And Other Stories, 2020.

[10] Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban*, New York, Balantine Books, 2017; first edition, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

[11] Hernández does not use any names to identify any characters throughout her novel.

[12] Other characters in *Dreaming in Cuban* do live in Cuba, but I will not be focusing on these for this analysis.

[13] Inger Pettersson, "Telling It to the Dead: Borderless Communication and Scars of Trauma in Cristina García's Dreaming in Cuban", *Journal of Literary Studies*, Pretoria, South Africa, vol. 29, no. 2, 2013, pp. 47–48.

Mabel Moraña writes in the introduction to *Heridas Abiertas: Biopolítica y Representación en América Latina*:

> It seems impossible to refer to Latin American history without passing through the mutilations of the social body, its deterioration, its disappearance, real or imagined.[14]

Moraña, who is interested in how a dialect of biopolitics can reframe how we think about Latin America, notes the way in which violence (as control) has become embedded within Latin American consciousness, "so naturalized in the continental mind that it completely permeates our critical and fictional language"[15]. To explain this, she draws on Roberto Esposito's discussion of *comunitas* and *imunitas*, specifically, on his view that political violence is represented as a preventative measure against threats to the social body[16]. Moraña states that "The violence practiced by the political system legitimizes itself as a necessary medium to shield society from a greater ill", acting as a kind of inoculation against disease[17]. While this "inoculation" may take many different forms, it is, nonetheless, visible in the many cycles of war undertaken in the name of revolution or change, the use of force to eradicate the corruption that has entered the body politic. She thus draws attention to the ways in which modern uses of violence in Latin America leave people "suspended in the unstable equilibrium between antidote and venom, the preservation of life and the destruction of their resources for survival"[18].

The commonplace nature of violence in modern Latin America is something Hernández evokes in *Roza Tumba Quema* and also acknowledges in an interview in which she states that violence has "lost the label of war but continues to take

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[14] Mabel Moraña, "Introducción. Heridas abiertas", in Mabel Moraña e Igancio Sánchez Prado, (eds.), *Heridas Abiertas: Biopolítica y Representación en América Latina*, Madrid / Frankfurt am Main, Iberoamericana / Vervuert, 2014, p. 8 (my translation). The original reads: "Parece imposible referirse a la historia latinoamericana sin pasar por las mutilaciones del cuerpo social, su deterioro, su desaparición real o imaginado."

[15] Ibid. (my translation). The original reads: "La perspectiva biopolítica y el vocabulario que la acompaña están, en efecto, tan naturalizados en el pensamiento continental que permean completamente nuestro lenguaje crítico y ficcional."

[16] In this section, Moraña discusses ideas from Roberto Esposito's *Comunitas. The Origin and Destiny of Community* (1998) and *Immunitas. The Protection and Negation of Life* (2002).

[17] Idem, p. 18 (my translation). The original reads: "La violencia ejercida por el sistema político se legitima como medio necesario para resguardar a la sociedad de un mal mayor, igual que la inmunidad inocula en el individuo dosis de la enfermedad para crear protección contra un ataque mayor que amanece con destruir el equilibrio vital."

[18] Ibid., p. 19 (my translation). The original reads: "sostenidos en el inestable equilibrio entre antídoto y veneno, preservación de la vida y destrucción de sus recursos de supervivencia."

place in the same way"[19]. In the novel, this is suggested through various threats of violence stemming from within her own community (with men attempting to assault or murder her or her daughters). Most telling, however, and most representative of Hernández' own comments from the interview, is the protagonist's certainty that war has not passed. Hernández illustrates this certainty in a scene revealing why the protagonist refuses to leave her home:

> Later, after they turned in their equipment and were given the houses where they would live, he [her late husband] told her that their orders were also to not believe it [the end of the war] entirely, to remain skeptical. The lives they were living might fall apart at any moment. They had to be ready, in case they were betrayed.[20]

The protagonist's home, a reward for service in the revolution, is clearly entangled with a war that has supposedly passed. Most significantly, though, the instructions given to the protagonist by her late husband reveal the instability of peace, the continual threat of collapse, the tension between security and violence. This tension brings the novel into an order of violence resonant of what Moraña discusses. The people in the novel are "suspended in the unstable equilibrium between antidote and venom", caught up in the frays of a war that still occupies space in their imagination. The material spaces in the novel, then, are places of interrogation, places where the war and what it leaves behind materialize in discernible and indiscernible way.

Violence in *Dreaming in Cuban* is more of an echo, the particles of loss that wash up on the shores of one's imagination. At least, it is for Lourdes who lives a very different life from her mother and sister, who are both still very much bound up in the revolution as are the characters in *Roza Tumba Quema*. Lourdes' life is shaped by her trauma, which she attempts to erase with a new life in New York. When she and her husband first arrive in Miami after fleeing Cuba, she tells her husband, Rufino "I want to go where it's cold"[21]. This longing to be where the climate is cold, in contrast with Cuba's warm climate, indicates Lourdes' desire

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[19] My translation from the interview "Latin American Writer Series: Claudia Hernández", recorded at Stone Center for Latin American Studies, in New Orleans, on November 18, 2019, available at Latin American Writers Series: Claudia Hernández – YouTube. The original states: "Ha perdido la etiqueta de guerra pero sigue sucediendo el mismo."

[20] Claudia Hernández, *Slash and Burn*, p. 256. The original reads: "Luego, cuando entregaron su equipo y recibieron las casas donde vivirían, le dijo que también habían recibido la orden de no creerlo del todo, de no confiarse. Lo que estaban viviendo podía quebrarse en cualquier momento. Debian estar listos por si llegaban a ser traicionados".

[21] Cristina García, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

to escape her past trauma and foreshadows the effort she will put into forgetting that past. By the time the novel opens, all that is left of Cuba and the revolution is a distant memory for Lourdes, and the residues of trauma that, despite her best attempts to forget it, appear only in the ways she interacts with her new environment and the people around her.

It comes as no surprise, then, that space in this novel is more finite, more unstable than it is in *Roza Tumba Quema*. This is clear in a dream Lourdes has:

> The continents strain to unloose themselves, to drift reckless and heavy in the seas. Explosions tear and scar the land, spitting out black oaks and coal mines, street lamps and scorpions.[22]

In her imagination, even the continents are not fixed and threaten to shift, to change, to reshape the landscape upon which they are situated. They are displaced by war, by the "explosions [that] tear and scar the land". In another passage mirroring Lourdes' dream, her mother, Celia, writes to a former lover, Gustavo: "If I was born to live on an island, then I'm grateful for one thing: that the tides rearrange the borders. At least I have the illusion of change, of possibility"[23]. This experience of space – of the tides rearranging the borders – seems more hopeful than that of her daughter, Lourdes, who was violently displaced and uprooted from her home after being raped for refusing to give up her estate to the revolutionary cause. Given this distinction between their experiences, it is interesting that in both passages the land shifts, moves, rearranges itself. This reflects García's conceptualization of space, an interest in rendering the mutability of space and how space can shape and reshape our experience of the world around us.

In *After Exile: Writing the Latin American Diaspora*, Amy Kaminsky discusses the differences between how space-as-nation is perceived for the one who stays and for the exile, the one who leaves:

> Thus the «place one belongs» I am talking about has topographical features and enforced symbolic boundaries recognized – or contested – by international bodies as well as by less formally constituted groups and by individuals.[24]

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[22] Idem, p. 17.

[23] Idem, p. 99.

[24] Amy Kaminsky, *After Exile: Writing the Latin American Diaspora*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 22–23.

As she notes, the socially and politically constructed idea of place has recognizable material features and real or imagined boundaries. She claims that this – an identifiable physical location with symbolic boundaries that construe one's relationship to the nation – is an important aspect to the constitution of a national identity both within and outside a nation. Furthermore, she suggests that the idea of nation exists, in part, because of the exile's relationship to these geographically and ideologically demarcated spaces. Kaminsky sees the nation as both a physical space with discernible features as well a political and figurative space that has been discursively formed. This idea is central to what she later identifies as a claim to nationhood for the exile.

Kaminsky suggests that the exile's past experiences "of the critical events that ejected them from home and refused them return" are linked to their perception of themselves as exile and as national subject[25]. For the exile, to remember the past and to *relive* the past

> is about internal differentiation, about returning to reclaim a social and political space that has inevitably changed during their absence, in order to displace, to whatever extent possible, the generals and the culture of fear.[26]

The exile's relationship to space-as-nation is a battle over the rhetorical space of national identity, a claim to a nationhood that has been cemented through the experiences of violence one has lived through.

In the context of *Dreaming in Cuban*, it would seem that, at least initially, Lourdes has no interest in reliving her own past. Nonetheless, after several years of conversations between her and the ghost of her father (what Inger Pettersson identifies as a part of her healing from trauma[27]), she finally decides to return to Cuba where she takes the painful trip back to the estate where she once lived. Here, "she hungers for a violence of nature, terrible and permanent, to record the evil. Nothing less would satisfy her"[28]. Lourdes' desire for an event that can record the memory of her assault is a shift from her earlier attempts to forget, to move as far away from the memory of it as she can. It is also, in another sense, a reclamation of that which was forcefully taken from her: her homeland, both the *finca* and Cuba. This is further exemplified when later she yells out

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Idem, pp. 36–37.
[27] Inger Petterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–61.
[28] Cristina García*, op. cit.*, p. 227.

"Assassin!" when she sees Fidel Castro in front of the Peruvian embassy[29]. That she is emboldened to call out the injustice she both witnessed and experienced while in Cuba shows that Lourdes has chosen to fight "on discursive ground, concerning the meaning of nation, of patriotism"[30].

National identity is not as much of a concern in *Roza Tumba Quema* as it is in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Hernández chooses not to include any names throughout the novel including references to the names of any places, with the exception of Paris. Linares suggests that this exclusion is a choice that implicates anyone of Latin American heritage who has experienced the type of political turbulence that El Salvador did, further cementing the lack of emphasis on national identity[31]. Nonetheless, *Roza Tumba Quema* does explore identity, specifically, the way in which identity for the post-war subject is bound up in the entanglement of the collective and the personal. In the novel, physical spaces, fixed locations in the geography of the narrative are necessary to this exploration and are also spaces of interrogation where characters like the protagonist can begin to unravel the tensions between security and violence that have laid claim to her.

These spaces are those that line the protagonist's journey of return. In the novel, the protagonist is instructed by her ailing mother to go and find an object that represents the protagonist's lost daughter[32] so that she (the protagonist) can lay it to rest with her mother when she dies. To find this object, the protagonist decides to return to the mountains "she hadn't gone back [to] [...] since the day they'd been ordered to come down"[33]. After finding stones to represent her daughter at the *hacienda* where she grew up, she returns to the home given to her and her husband for their service in the revolution. These spaces (different versions of home in the protagonist's life) can direct us to a deeper understanding of the way the novel navigates the entanglements of the collective and the personal, of fealty and loss.

The mountains are a clear representation of the war. It is the place where the protagonist lived and fought during the war and, maybe more significantly, where she lost her father to a bomb. The mountains are also the place where she was

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[29] Idem, p. 237 (my translation). The original reads "*Asesino*!" (García uses the Spanish word.)

[30] Amy Kaminsky, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[31] Selma Rodal Linares, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

[32] This daughter is the daughter that was taken from the protagonist and given to a family in Paris without her knowledge. In the novel, the protagonist finds her daughter and tries to have a relationship with her, but the daughter refuses to know her. The protagonist's mother makes the suggestion ~~to~~ help the protagonist let go of her daughter.

[33] Claudia Hernández, *op. cit.*, p. 272. The original reads: "No había regresado a ella desde el día en que la ordenaron bajar."

given the name (and thus the identity) she uses up to the present day. The novel first describes this naming when the protagonist searches for an old friend who can house her third daughter as she attends university. The protagonist suggests that "she'll keep dropping clues until she [the old friend] finds her way to her name, not the one she got from her mother but the one she was given in battle"[34]. These two (unnamed) names reappear later in the novel when the protagonist's mother refuses to call her by her battle name despite protests from the protagonist's neighbors. Of this, Hernández writes:

> They'll say her daughter was born again up there [in the mountains]. Her mother will want to say that the mountains killed her a little, but she won't, because her daughter will intervene.[35]

This scene represents the conflict between the identity the protagonist is given in the mountains as a guerilla soldier, an identity tied to collective action, and the one she was born into, the identity that writes her into a family unit and into an individual separate from the war and its aftermath.

In this first iteration, the mountains are a kind of rebirth or, as the protagonist's mom puts it, a death. This is echoed in Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* when he writes, "Generations of citizens and of militants, of workers and servants of the States have imagined their death reabsorbed or sublated in a community, yet to come, that would attain immanence"[36]. Specifically, he refers to the concept of sacrifice ensuring the permanence of the community, of an individual reborn into the community through their death. Although the protagonist does not physically die, as her mother indicates, there is a death that takes place, the death of who she was before she became a guerilla fighter. The protagonist, then, dies as an individual to be reborn as a part of the collective and the community of militants among whom she resides throughout the novel.

The protagonists' mother's words are a turning point in the novel, a point when the protagonist's rebirth as a militant is refigured into a death. As Nancy writes, "no dialectic, no salvation leads these deaths to any other immanence than that of... death"[37]. The protagonist's return to the mountains represents a

[34] Idem, pp. 140-141. The original reads: "Le irá dando pistas hasta que llegue a su nombre, que no es el que le puso su madre, sino el que le dieron para el combate."
[35] Idem, p. 245. The original reads: "Dirán que nació de nuevo cuando estuvo en ellas. La madre querrá decir que las montañas la mataron un poco, pero no podrá porque la hija intervendrá."
[36] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 13.
[37] Ibid.

coming to terms with this as she begins to ask the questions she was unable to ask before. It is a disavowal of the narrative she was given and the beginning of a reconceptualization of the past and of herself in relation to that past.

The idea that the resurfacing of previously forbidden questions can become an entry point into narration is something Hernández touches on in her interview with the Stone Center for Latin American Studies. She states,

> When you are little and you are discovering the world, the first word you discover is don't. Don't leave, don't go, don't look, don't hear, don't tell. Everything, everything that you could do is in the negative. Don't get too close, don't look in, don't tell anyone, don't ask. [...] Then, the words are followed by hands, hands covering your mouth, hands covering your eyes, the hands of your mom trying to keep you from seeing the corpses on your way to school. [...] The moment arrives when no one covers your face anymore, no one sets a limit, and the same questions surface. And in that moment that we call a pause, or rather a silence, or rather a doubt, these stories appear. What can you say or what comes to mind now that nothing is forbidden?[38]

What Hernández describes as her own experience as a writer is what the protagonist of *Roza Tumba Quema* encounters as she walks on the mountain path she walked through to find her father after her village had been attacked by federal troops, the beginning of her own life as a guerilla soldier:

> She asks herself where the many people scattered on the wind that night [they were attacked] had ended up. She can do that now: those kinds of questions had been forbidden in her camp, as had anything that might have opened up a crack which defeat could slip through, or through which the death they'd barely escaped could seize them.[39]

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[38] "Latin American Writer Series: Claudia Hernández" (my translation). In the original interview, in Spanish, she states: "Cuando estas pequeño estas descubriendo el mundo, y la primera palabra que descubres es no. No salgas, no vayas, no miras, no oigas, no cuentas. Todo, todo lo que pudieras hacer es en negativo. No te aproximes demasiado, no te asomes, no le cuentas a nadie, no preguntes. [...] Entonces, a las palabras siguen manos, manos que se ponen sobre tu boca, manos que se ponen sobre tus ojos, que es tu mama intentando que no veas los cadáveres que están en la calle camino a la escuela. [...] Llegue el momento en cuando ya nadie pone un mano, nadie pone una limitante, y vuelven a surgir las mismas preguntas. Y en ese momento que llamamos una pausa que es más bien un silencio, que era más bien una duda, aparecen estos cuentos. ¿Qué es lo que puedes decir o que es lo que viene a la mente cuando ya no hay prohibiciones?"

[39] Claudia Hernández, *Slash and Burn*, p. 274. The original reads: "Se pregunta adonde habrán ido a parar todas las gentes que el viento sopló esa noche. Puede hacerlo ahora: estaba prohibido hacerse preguntas como esas en su campamento: estaba prohibida cualquier cosa que las abriera

While walking through the mountains she also wonders what others had done to survive, if her father knew they would lose the war, if he had ever doubted his actions or tried to erase them by revisiting that path as she does. In thinking about the past, she concludes that nothing can change what has already happened, which is a departure from earlier passages in which she or other former militants focus on the what ifs, as if the present can rewrite the past[40]. In this second iteration, the protagonist leaves behind the story of the war cause, its ideals, and fealty to that cause and instead recognizes it as an act of survival, describing the mountains as a nest where she became a daughter of the war fed with the skills needed to survive[41].

The last place on her journey – but also the first – is the house she was given after the war. It is the place she returns to after she has come to terms with her past, a place that once marked her as guerilla fighter, as a member in the militant corpus that is her neighborhood, and which, after her return, becomes something more.

I have already mentioned how the house is emblematic of the continual presence of violence. This does not change as a result of the protagonist's journey of self-discovery. The traces of violence are not eradicated nor would I suggest that the protagonist is fully healed from her past traumas. In fact, *after* this journey takes place and *after* she buries her mother with the bundle of stones she took from the *hacienda* to represent her daughter, we are given more information about this house (which the protagonist still refuses to leave), reemphasizing its connection to the war. In a conversation with a friend who was also a *guerilla* fighter, she reveals how the house is built, more as a fort than a home:

> [...] It was the end of the war.
>
> Was it?
>
> It'd reached its end.
>
> Why was she still prepared for it, then?
>
> Who'd told her?

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grietas por las que la derrota se pudiera colar o la muerte de la que apenas habían escapade las arrebatara."

[40] Idem, chapter 33. For example, when she defends her mother, her neighbors begin to wonder how many people would have died if she had become disillusioned with their cause then as they see her doing now.

[41] Idem, p. 274: "That nest had turned her from another bird's egg into a daughter of that war". In Spanish 2017 edition: "Ese nido la convirtió de huevo de otro pájaro, en hija de esa guerra. No tenía nada para reclamarle. La manera en que la alimentó la alejó de ser gente que huía."

> No one. All she had to do was look at how her house was built. She didn't mean to offend, but its layout didn't seem to correspond to any aesthetic or residential logic. No deep-rooted crops grew in the garden even though the land looked fit to sow. The birdhouse looked absurd until you realized that what mattered wasn't what slept inside it. Her anxiety about leaving the house had confirmed her suspicions.[42]

In addition to this, she reveals there are weapons buried on the property. What does change, however, is the protagonist's relationship to the house. After this conversation, the narrator goes on:

> The woman understood then that nothing would happen with these weapons that would be of concern to anyone. They were just an inheritance passed on to the daughters, a measure so that, if war broke out again, they'd be neither alone nor defenseless.[43]

The house, then – first a fortress and a safeguard from war – becomes an inheritance for her daughters, instituting the protagonist into a different role from that which was given to her when she was first instructed to never trust in the end of the war. Instead of being defined as guerilla soldier tied to the revolutionary cause, she is reinstated into the role of mother and defined by her relationship to her daughters. Her decision to wrap the stones she will bury with her mother in her military uniform further exemplifies that she is burying not just her lost daughter but also her identity as a soldier, a kind of detachment from her collective identity and a reinstatement of the individual identity she had given up to be a soldier. Though the novel suggests the violence the protagonist lived through can never be undone, it does indicate that how one conceptualizes their relationship to past events may offer another vision, one in which the tensions between the collective and the personal or between violence and security can be reconciled and identity can begin to be reclaimed.

Though *Dreaming in Cuban* explores similar themes, the state of exilehood inverts the collective-individual dichotomy that motivates the protagonist's

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[42] Idem, *ed. cit.*, p. 296. The original reads: "Eso era el final de la guerra. / ¿Lo era? / Había llegado a su fin. / ¿Por qué seguía preparando para ella entonces? / ¿Quién se lo había dicho? / Nadie. Le había bastado con ver la manera en que estaba construida su casa. No quería ofenderla, pero nada de su distribución parecía responder a la estética o a la lógica habitacional. En el patio no crecía nada con raíces profundas aunque la tierra se veía buena para sembrar. La casa de las aves parecía absurda hasta que no se pensaba en que lo importante de ella no dormía en ella. Su ansiedad por no dejar la casa le confirmó sus sospechas."

[43] Ibid., p. 298. The original reads> "La mujer comprendió que nada sucedería con esas armas que pudiera ocupar a los demás. Eran solo una herencia para las hijas, una medida para que, si la guerra estallaba de nuevo, no estuvieran solas ni indefensas."

journey in *Roza Tumba Quema*. The collective is lost (or in Lourdes' case, abandoned) in exile and the individual becomes the central locus of identity. Lourdes is forced into exile because of her refusal to embrace collective action, her unwillingness to give up the *finca* that is her home to the revolutionary cause. Though Lourdes finds in New York what Cuba would not grant her, the opportunity to claim a space for herself (her shop and her home), the novel is clear that the individuality she finds is a result of a fracturing: her relationship with her daughter is tumultuous, her husband does not love her, and she does not make any effort to maintain contact with her mother or sister in Cuba. The only relationship she truly maintains, that with her father and later the ghost of her father, is in part, the motivation for her return to Cuba. Right before the ghost abandons her, he urges: "Please return and tell your mother everything, tell her I'm sorry"[44]. His words, an apology for having abandoned his wife, Celia, to the care of his abusive mother in retaliation for her having loved another man before him, indicate the beginning of a reconciliation that could repair the fractures in the family's relationships.

In contrast with *Roza Tumba Quema*, Lourdes' return to Cuba is not a reversal — a retracing of the past. It is instead a reckoning, a confrontation with the ghost of something that has been lost or unspoken: the miscarriage of a son shortly before she is assaulted, and her rape. Two places figure prominently on this journey: the sea and the *finca* where Lourdes once lived. The sea is the bridge between the U.S. and Cuba, but it is also a representation of Lourde's mother, Celia, and thus, Lourdes' first trauma: the abandonment by her mother early in her life.

The sea is most often associated with Lourdes' mother, Celia. Its first appearance in the novel takes place when Celia is shown guarding the Cuban coast at the beginning of the novel. Its exit also signals Celia's exit as she walks into the sea presumably never to return. In another passage, after Lourdes goes to Miami to pick up her daughter who has fled from her home, García writes, "Lourdes could smell the air before she breathed it, the air of her mother's ocean nearby"[45]. Not only does she associate the smell of the sea with her mother, she also associates it with her mother's abandonment: "She imagined herself alone and shriveled in her mother's womb, envisioned her first days in her mother's unyielding arms"[46]. For Lourdes, then, the sea is a reminder of the pain she suffered when her mother refused to be a mother to her because of her own suffering at the hands of her abusive mother-in-law.

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[44] Cristina García, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
[45] Idem, p. 74.
[46] Ibid.

Despite her father's insistence (and even though he explained that Celia's inability to be a mother to Lourdes was because of the abuse she suffered), there will be no reconciliation for Lourdes with her mother. This is made apparent in her last encounter with the sea after her return to Cuba. In this passage, she walks along the sea with Ivanito, her recently orphaned nephew:

> The sea recedes for a moment, exposing a family of silvery crabs. Ivanito lifts the smallest one and watches its claws dig the air. Its relatives flee recklessly into the surf.[47]

The sea receding is revelatory. It is like the curtain lifting over the narrative in *Dreaming in Cuban*, revealing all the traumas the del Pino family has suffered like the crabs that "flee recklessly into the surf," abandoning their relative to Ivanito's monstrous hands. This scene, which represents Lourdes' own abandonment, exemplifies the violence of clashing boundaries and the recklessness of those who flee to it. Iain Chambers alludes to this type of violence when he writes:

> For the return of the «native» not only signals the dramatic «necessity to abrogate the boundaries between Western and non-Western history», but also returns to the centre the violences that initially marked the encounters out in the periphery that laid the foundations of *my* world.[48]

In the case of Lourdes, her return to Cuba also returns to the center the violences that "laid the foundation" of her world. Her return is thus a reckoning, a confrontation with the traumas she attempted to escape when she fled to the U.S.

After walking along the ocean with Ivanito, Lourdes returns to her mother's house, removes her clothing, the bits and pieces of who she became in New York, and lights a cigar. The novel states that she will not keep a promise she made to her father's ghost, to tell her mother that he was sorry for what he allowed her to endure with his mother at the beginning of their marriage. This may be because "instead, like a brutal punishment, Lourdes feels the grip of her mother's hand on her bare infant leg, hears her mother's words before she left for the asylum: «I will not remember her name»"[49]. Lourdes is unable to forget the pain of her abandonment and as such may never be reconciled to her mother.

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[47] Idem, p, 237.

[48] Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, London and New York, Routledge, 1995, pp. 4–5.

[49] Cristina García, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

Though Lourdes may never be able to fully heal from the trauma of her abandonment or even from the violence of what she experienced as a result of the war, the novel does redeem her in other ways. This can be seen when she revisits the *finca* where not only was she raped but where she also miscarried a son shortly after the soldiers first visited the estate to demand Rufino, Lourdes' husband, to relinquish it to the revolutionary state. When she arrives there, the estate is significantly changed, a trace of what it was before. She notes that "the pool is filled with concrete, the fountain is dry" that it serves as a kind of medical facility instead of a home, and that "The sculpted mahogany doors have been replaced by unvarnished plywood"[50]. This change speaks to the violence of the revolution that has not only taken her home from her but has replaced it with a mere echo of what it was before.

While there, she admits that "what she fears the most is this: that her rape, her baby's death were absorbed quietly by the earth, that they are ultimately no more meaningful than falling leaves on an autumn day"[51]. This fear is not something that is overcome in the novel, or at least in this scene. However, as she exits, she notices a nurse with "a minute scar on her cheek"[52]. When Lourdes was assaulted, the soldier carved something illegible into her stomach. The scar on the nurse's cheek is emblematic of what Lourdes herself experienced, indicating that the nurse too may have also been a victim of violence. Lourdes' visit to the *finca* instills her into the shared experience of violence and lets her know that she is not alone in her trauma. In other words, it restores a kind of collectivity, a different kind of collectivity from the one Lourdes rejected when she refused to give up her home to the revolution. Instead, the novel suggests there may be some solace in recognizing that one is never alone in one's suffering.

Given the death of Lourdes' son, reemphasized in her visit to the *finca*, the presence of Ivanito when she walks along the sea is significant. He is a boy without a mother, and she is a mother without a son. Her decision to later help Ivanito escape from Cuba by leaving him at the Peruvian embassy, where floods of refugees are fleeing the country, with money, a note, and her phone number so that they may be reunited later, is, in no small part, motivated by this earlier loss. The space of the *finca* and the sea point to the way in which Ivanito will become a son and a chance at a different future for Lourdes. As in *Roza Tumba Quema*, the novel reinvokes Lourdes into the role of motherhood, though this invocation

[50] Idem, pp. 226–227.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

offers her another type of collective rather than a restoration of individuality: the collective of the family unit.

The two novels speak of the different impacts of war on the one who stays and on the one who is displaced. In both, communities are fractured, broken, but in *Roza Tumba Quema* this community presents a kind of monstrous collective where the individual is subsumed and subject to violence while in *Dreaming in Cuban* the fractured community is replaced with a monstrous individuality that destroys relationships and rejects the past. In both, the violence of war leads to a disconnection, either with oneself (as in *Roza Tumba Quema*) or with others (as in *Dreaming in Cuban*). Although neither novel offers complete reparation, the element of return in each suggests that this is a necessary part of restoring the connections that were lost in the violence of war. Thus, each novel emphasizes the role of movement (moving through space) and of materiality (the materiality of history) in restoring that which was lost. It is in their encounters with the spaces of their past and of their traumas that the characters in *Roza Tumba Quema* and *Dreaming in Cuban* are able to reenvision history, to perceive a side of the story that was not visible to them before. These encounters, then, lead to alternative visions of being and enable a transformation in the way the characters conceptualize themselves. The project of healing from trauma is just that: it is a project always in process, never complete. Nonetheless, as both novels indicate, in this project it is possible to resituate one's understanding of past events such that new paths forward become perceptible. There is hope in this, and it is in that hope that both Hernández and García situate their novels.

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THE LITERATURES OF THE WORLD IN HERBERTO HELDER

Sérgio das Neves

Abstract: The essay reflects on the translations crafted by the Portuguese poet Herberto Helder, exploring potential relations and reconfigurations of the Goethean concept of *Weltliteratur*. The study will primarily focus on the preface of the book *O bebedor nocturno*, the poet's first book devoted to translating texts from various times, spaces, and cultures into Portuguese. The poet, unfamiliar with the original languages of these texts, modifies his mother tongue in order to translate the essence of the poem, in a gesture of love towards it. By examining his creation of a poetic language through translation and his somewhat unsystematized idea of translation, we aim to contrast the image of the polyglot translator with that of the poet translator, akin to a circus acrobat. In this way, we advance that Helder's approach to altering poems enhances the Goethean concept, extracting vitality from the ancestral literatures of the world. Thus, he reveals the unity of everything, erasing space-time and linguistic boundaries, and dissolves the limits between world, being, and language.
Keywords: *Weltliteratur*, translation studies, metamorphosis, contemporary Portuguese poetry, Herberto Helder.

The path traversed by *Weltliteratur* has assumed a metamorphosis akin to that of water: while retaining its primal matter, it alters its state, adapting to the context. Since its structural inception with Goethe, although previously employed by August Schlözer in 1773, its reality has sought to give voice to the contemporary world. The recognition of this transformation is notably emphasized by Erich Auerbach in 1952 in his essay "Philologie der Weltliteratur". More recently, we encounter the same question, for instance, reading Dieter Lamping. Here, we find some responses to Auerbach, particularly those concerning the future of the Goethean concept, which Lamping envisions within the scope of comparative literature as an "inter-textually comprehensible literary

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internationality"[1]. We also highlight the work of Ottmar Ette, *WeltFraktale: Wege durch die Literaturen der Welt*, from 2017, which, navigating through the fractality of literatures, demonstrates, beyond their plurality, a plurality of worlds. The author conceives of *Weltliteratur* as a "science of literature as a science of life"[2], where one explores "the phenomena of the globalization process, which has been occurring for centuries and through various impulses, with a poly-perspectivist complexity"[3].

The Goethean concept of *Weltliteratur* has evolved into World Literatures or, to maintain the logic of the German language, *Literaturen der Welt*, representing a more globalized and standardized idea of literature. Naturally, with necessary exceptions and studies that counter this trend. Several examples could be cited, but we highlight the work of David Damrosch, who also continues to deserve recognition in his extensive work, such as the recent *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age* (2020). His research has evolved in line with the forces of globalization, as seen in his question: "if theories developed in Paris or Frankfurt are applied by Chinese and American scholars to Brazilian novels or Sanskrit poetry, how much will be distorted or lost altogether?"[4]. It is also important to consider Damrosch's advice to comparatists, emphasizing that they should pay closer attention to "theoretical perspectives embedded in literature itself"[5]. Through this, literature reveals its own system of thought about itself, not relying solely on philosophy. The list of relevant scholars on the topic would not end here. In any case, the very translation of the concept from German to English also contributes to the deformation and reformulation of its scope, objectives, and methodologies.

This essay will endeavour to follow Lamping's intertextual path, seeking to understand, in the process of translating Herberto Helder as presented in *O bebedor nocturno*, but not exclusively, the breath that infuses life into the texts he resurrects, and the force that transforms them into another existence, extracting them from where they emerged. Thus, we may also comprehend the vitality of the science of literature, as Ette understands *Weltliteratur*.

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[1] Dieter Lamping, *Die Idee der Weltliteratur. Ein Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere*, Stuttgart, Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2010, p. 113. All quotations from German are translated into English by the author.

[2] Ottmar Ette, *WeltFraktale: Wege durch die Literaturen der Welt*, Stuttgart, J.B. Metzler Verlag, 2017, p. 2.

[3] Idem, p. 60.

[4] David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures*: *literary Studies in a Global Age*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2020, p. 129.

[5] Idem, p. 151.

Here, translation does not operate solely under the auspices of globalization, but, akin to all Helder's poetic discourse, "a discourse open to the world, to the discourses of the world, through words, making [...] of the poetic word the sole secure space from which the world makes sense and, indeed, becomes real"[6]. The process of versioning, of poems changed into Portuguese, as he himself titles them, may aim for another idiom, an idiom of its own, yet one that remains of the world and springs from the world. One of the most fruitful studies on Helder's changed poems was conducted by Helena Buescu, who states that Helder's poetry is the "demiurgic place where, like salt, these unexpected transformations occur, arising from the encounter between impossibilities that poetry makes collide with each other"[7]. She considers it is not just about "a poet who translates poems by others. It is also, [...], that he translates them as a poet, that is, as part of his own poetic stance"[8]. In this way, we will attempt to reflect on *Weltliteratur* within this dynamic of translation as incomprehensibility and creation, emphasizing the theoretical perspectives that the literary text itself presents, following Damrosch's advice.

Herberto Helder's work is notable for its experience of a living, autonomous language that exists, moves, and is always in a state of world-making. His writing enters the flow of metamorphoses, the force of metaphors, and the power of myths, encompassing different traditions, crossing lineages, and deconstructing space-time laws and principles of causality. One of the fields cultivated by Helder was that of translation, but in his unique process of versioning or changing poems into Portuguese, he speaks more about his writing than about the original source material used for its creation. The works *O bebedor nocturno* [The Night Drinker] (1968), *As magias* [Spells] (1987), *Ouolof* (1997)[9], *Poemas ameríndios* [Amerindian Poems] (1997), and *Doze nós numa corda* [Twelve Knots on a Rope] (1997) reflect this process

[6] Manuel Frias Martins, *Herberto Helder. Um silêncio de bronze* [*Herberto Helder. A Bronze Silence*], Lisboa, Nova Vega e Autor, 2019, p. 43: "um discurso aberto ao mundo, aos discursos do mundo, através das palavras, fazendo [...] da palavra poética o único espaço seguro a partir do qual o mundo toma sentido e, mesmo, se torna real". (my translation).

[7] Helena Buescu, "Herberto Helder: uma ideia de poesia omnívora" ["Herberto Helder: an idea of omnivorous poetry"], in *Diacrítica, Ciências da literatura,* no. 23/3, 2009, p. 51: "lugar demiúrgico em que salinamente ocorrem essas transformações inesperadas, vindas do encontro entre impossíveis que a poesia faz colidir entre si". (my translation)

[8] Helena Buescu, "World Literature in a Poem. The Case of Herberto Helder", in Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen (eds.), *Institutions of World Literature. Writing, Translation, Markets*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. 53.

[9] Wolof, uólofe, uolofe, or jalofo is a language spoken in West Africa.

of constructing a "Portuguese poem through his emotional, mental, linguistic sense"[10].

Regarding *O bebedor nocturno*, the featured work, as presented on the book cover, includes Ancient Egyptian poems; Psalms; The *Song of Songs*; Mayan poetry; Aztec riddles; Mexican poetry from the Nahuatl cycle; Orphic hymn to the night; three Epirotic songs; Zen poems; the mystery of Ameigen; Finnish magical prayer; Scottish song; four Arabic poems; Arabic-Andalusian poems; Japanese peasant songs; fifteen Japanese haikais; Indochinese poems; Indonesian songs; Kabyle song; Malagasy songs; Tartar song; five Eskimo poems; poems of Native Americans. In this comprehensive list, the reader perceives that the selection of texts is based on the principle of heterogeneity, as well as marginality. The diversity of times, spaces, cultures, and languages is not drawn to the centres of power of the literary canon. The attraction lies elsewhere: in what is yet to be discovered, in what is forgotten, in what is to be recreated. The choice is not random; it has to do with its poetic affinities; elective affinities, rescuing from the Goethean work what is not reduced to direct causality, but to a combinatory relation, to a reciprocal attraction, which makes the poet contemporaneous to different texts. We also know, from the studies of Jorge Souza Braga, cited by Claudio Alexandre de Barros Teixeira (2014), that much of *O Bebedor Nocturno* is based on the anthology *Trésor de la poésie universelle*, organized by Roger Caillois and Jean-Clarence Lambert, published in 1958 in Paris. In fact, the very title of this work helps us consider it in connection to world literature.

The first poem from Ancient Egypt, "The Breaking of Day", opens space for us to reflect on the selection of texts, within a cycle that merges past and future into a single point in the present, where the text is always situated, in an alchemical operation of rebirth:

> Eu sou ontem e conheço amanhã. Posso renascer – mistério da alma criadora dos deuses, alimentando os que aportam a oeste do céu, [...] senhor da ressurreição irrompendo das trevas.[11]

The text is the past and knows the future, being reborn with each reading and each version. It is mummified to be preserved and to be reborn in a new body. The

[10] Herberto Helder, *O bebedor nocturno* [*The Night Drinker*], Lisboa, Portugália Editora, 1968, p. 11: "o sentido emocional, mental, linguístico". (my translation)

[11] Herberto Helder, *op. cit*., p. 15: "I am yesterday and I know tomorrow. I can be reborn — mystery of the soul / creator of gods, nourishing those who reach the western sky, [...] lord of resurrection emerging from dark". (my translation)

first poem of *O Bebedor Nocturno* heralds the dawn of these texts, a new return of them to the body of reading. Moreover, the power of rebirth, as a mystery of the soul, is tied to the creation of gods, with Gnostic features, and this is a driving force of the poem, one that Helder pursues: "I can change the architecture of a word / [...] / I can place a name in the intimacy of a thing" [12], we read in *Poemacto*. This demiurgic operation sculpts language and the world in the same movement of transfiguration, both fabricating new gods and transforming the word, as well as breathing a name into something to give it life.

His poetic work underscores the vitality of languages as they are open to a translation exercise understood more as a creative gesture, suggesting that all language is metaphorical, flexible, and not a monolithic structure. Even the idea of structure is shaken. Helder reveals the destruction and regeneration of language structure. As he himself reflects in *Ouolof*, from error and chaos, "speech is animated with a jubilant material energy"[13]. Still in this work, Helder advances with this intention to translate: "we want to make this speech our own. We have before us a powerful mythical, magical, lyrical diction, transgressing on all fronts the norm of the Portuguese word."[14]

The poet-translator creates his own language. Similarly, this vitality suggests a language without owners, yet with properties. Language like water, essential to all, from all, but belonging to no one, and which, according to necessity and desire, exists in different states of matter. This language in a liquid state is deep, pure, and purifying, precisely as we can read in the second poem of Ancient Egypt from *O bebedor*, "The Mansion of Osiris"[15], where the poet purifies himself in the same water the gods get purified. Thus, he makes his own word the divine and creative word, also the "terrible word"[16].

Translation can be seen as an act of destruction and recreation of matter, whose existence, grounded in metamorphosis, emphasizes transfiguration. The poet who purifies himself in the water of the gods, "transforms himself [I transform myself]

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[12] Herberto Helder, *Poemas completos* [*Complete Poems*], Porto, Porto Editora, 2015, p. 119: "Posso mudar a arquitectura de uma palavra / [...] / posso meter um nome na intimidade de uma coisa". (my translation)

[13] Herberto Helder, *Ouolof. Poemas mudados para português* [Ouolof. Poems changed to Portuguese.] Lisboa, Assírio & Alvim, 1997, p. 44: "a fala anima-se com uma energia material jubilante." (my translation)

[14] Idem, p. 44: "essa fala, queremos fazê-la nossa. Temos diante de nós uma poderosa dicção mítica, mágica, lírica, transgredindo em todas as frentes a norma da palavra portuguesa". (my translation)

[15] Herberto Helder, *O bebedor nocturno*, pp. 21–32: "A mansão de Osíris". (my translation)

[16] Idem, p. 21: "terrível palavra". (my translation)

into the sun of the wise [...] to set in motion the shadows of the manes"[17]. Therefore, the poet, and here, the translator as well, transforms in order to give life to the spirits of the dead. In effect, *O bebedor nocturno*, the night drinker, drinks from this nocturnal zone of silence, shadow, and death. Translating entails "lying with the dead and closed in silence"[18], as revealed in his "Psalter", staging a shamanic trance, incorporating a memory that is not his own. The Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade warns in his work *Serafim Ponte Grande* of "the right to be translated, reproduced, and distorted in all languages"[19]. More than a right, we would say, it is the inevitable condition of the act of reading itself. Reading, even in one's own language, requires translation, reproduction, and deformation. As Helder understands in *O bebedor nocturno*, not knowing languages is his advantage[20]. The more aware of this, the greater the freedom in translation. Typically, we think that we can only translate languages that we master, precisely because we consider that they somehow belong to us. However, it might be important to consider the opposite: when we do not know the language; or, as Derrida teaches us, when "the language does not belong"[21]. The movement of metamorphosis in his versions, mutations, stems from silence and estrangement. In fact, it's about drinking the night of the world, the grand archive of world literatures.

Helder laboriously breaks down the boundaries of languages, allowing the soulful and toxic liquid of each to pour forth, mingling, transmuting, and contaminating all space, creating a new other. It's about seizing the stage of "mondialité", proposed by Pascale Casanova, which reformulates the notion of world literature as a "world literary space"[22], and making this worldliness equally individuality: the world that transforms and is reborn in its translation. Translating keeps language in an inaugural state. Helder feels the need to change the poems "to Portuguese and for myself – and this «myself» is an idiom"[23]. Also, in *O bebedor nocturno*, Helder states that he not only dares to make a Portuguese poem but a poem of

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[17] Idem, pp. 17–18: "transmudo-me em sol dos inteligentes [...] para dar movimento às sombras dos manes". (my translation)

[18] Idem, p. 40: "deitado junto aos mortos e fechado no silêncio". (my translation)

[19] Oswald Andrade, *Memórias sentimentais de João Miramar. Serafim Ponte Grande* [*Sentimental Memories of João Miramar. Serafim Ponte Grande*], Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1972, p. 97: "direito de ser traduzido, reproduzido e deformado em todas as línguas". (my translation)

[20] Herberto Helder, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[21] Jacques Derrida, "La langue n'appartient pas", in *Europe*, no. 861/862, January-February, 2001, pp. 85–86: « la langue n'appartient pas ». (my translation)

[22] Pascale Casanova, *La republique mondiale des lettres*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1999, p. 125.

[23] Herberto Helder, *Ouolof*, p. 77: "para português e para mim – e este «mim» e um idioma". (my translation)

his own[24]. The poem comes from his own idiom, the Herberto Helder idiom; an idiom, as he asserts, of pleasure and freedom[25]. This freedom and pleasure alleviate the translator's burden, endowing him with the lightness of a poet and of a circus acrobat. It is about wandering, and nomadism; its extreme malleability and adaptability resemble the moist quality: the translator pervades the air around, his creation contaminates everything. If this idiom owes itself to a mother tongue, it's not denied; it's also due to how he knows the world. The act of translating is found in the tension between the mother tongue and the world the poet reads. This tension is a play that deals, as Buescu explored, with the notion of estrangement, and "therefore what is translated is, very often, paradoxically untranslatable"[26]. Which further leads the essayist to a terrible conclusion: "there is no peace in these translations"[27].

In *O bebedor nocturno*, Helder begins by imagining the psychic life substance of a polyglot. It's described as "acrobatic" and "centrifugal" [28]. The ability to know multiple languages makes the polyglot's life a stage, spectacular, in which they appear flexible, agile, endowed with strength and coordination. The polyglot is the world of multiple languages within the unity of one body. He is a circus artist, not only because he is acrobatic, but also because he is nomadic, as his life is centrifugal. Always moving away from the centre, from the sedentary nature of a mother tongue, the polyglot moves from language to language, "animated by an uninterrupted movement of displacements, transmutations, exchanges, and exhilarating hunts for equivalence, under the sign of affinity"[29]. It's not just language that undergoes these metamorphoses, but also the psychic substance of the polyglot itself transmutes, sharing the same skill as a metaphor-maker, seeking equivalences between languages.

Helder doesn't know the original languages of the texts he translates into Portuguese; he works on English and French translations. He loves the decentralization and wandering of his imagined polyglot. It's also about a return to creative and original poetry. That polyglot moves away from the centre, radiating outwards to return to the centre with a language of his own. He invents an origin of his own from his equivalences of peripheral languages: "in the disunity of languages

[24] Herberto Helder, *O bebedor nocturno*, p. 10.
[25] Idem, pp. 10-11.
[26] Helena Buescu, "World Literature in a Poem. The Case of Herberto Helder", p. 54.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Herberto Helder, *op. cit*., p. 9.
[29] Ibid: "animado de um ininterrupto movimento de deslocações, transmutações, permutas e exaltantes caçadas de equivalência, sob o signo da afinidade". (my translation)

he seeks the unlikely unity"[30]. A polyglot, as a circus artist, is nomadic but always at home. The circus, its tent as versatile as it is, is his home. In other words, he is always at the centre, he doesn't lose it, he just extends and spreads out: "multiplying the operations of bringing about unity, he radiantly moves towards dispersion. He decentralizes"[31]. He allows himself to move away from himself, from his centre, towards the other, towards another language. The new poetry he creates multiplies, decentralizes, and disperses, repeating the entire process of fabrication within itself, fabricating itself and the world. Reading the world of the other, transforming it into his own reading, and with it, writing another world.

The translator, akin to a circus acrobat, enters and exits from himself, always on the run, in and out of their centre, tracing on the Deleuzian line of flight, a Dionysian kind of delirium, with undeniable demonic (or even diabolic) share[32]. Etymologically related to ploughing, *delirium* or going off the furrow is made up of the "linguistic malice"[33] inherent in any translator's craft. Malice allows one to go away from the path furrowed by conventional translation and to don as many masks as possible, reclaiming the Dionysian capacity for metamorphosis. This malicious masquerade may also be present in Helder's translations. They call for another poetic condition; they do not belong anymore to an authorial voice; instead, they are the voice of a continuous poem: "there is no other protagonist anymore, because the poet who writes is already, or is only, the written poem, which, therefore, is necessarily biography, the writing of a life in its inaccessibility"[34].

The linguistic mischief of the poet-translator, the one who is everything and nothing at the same time, is to poetically pretend to know the languages in order to create with them an idiomatic world: "the language, the joyful science"[35] as affirmed in Helder's *A faca não corta o fogo* [*The knife does not cut the fire*] recalls *The Joyous Science* of Nietzsche. Translation involves dying and being reborn, a reconfiguration of one's thought and a shift into another paradigm of thinking. These remakes are poetic and alchemical operations which transmute and create

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[30] Ibid: "na desunião dos idiomas busca a unidade improvável". (my translation)

[31] Ibid: "multiplicando as operações de propiciação da unidade, ele caminha irradiantemente para a dispersão. Descentraliza-se". (my translation)

[32] Gilles Deleuze, & Claire Parnet, *Diálogos* [Dialogues], translated by José Gabriel Cunha, Lisboa, Relógio D'Água, 2004, p. 55.

[33] Herberto Helder, *O bebedor nocturno*, p. 9: "malícias linguísticas". (my translation)

[34] Silvina Rodrigues Lopes, *A inocência do devir. Ensaio a partir de Herberto Helder*, Viseu, Edições Vendaval, 2003, p. 19: "não há já outro protagonista, porque o poeta que escreve é já, ou é apenas, o poema escrito, o qual, por conseguinte, é necessariamente biografia, escrita de uma vida na sua inacessibilidade". (my translation)

[35] Herberto Helder, *Poemas completes*, p. 597 (my translation).

new materials through metamorphoses. To quote Gilles Deleuze, such actions are part of

> création syntaxique, style, tel est ce devenir de la langue: il n'y a pas de création de mots, il n'y a pas de néologismes qui vaillent en dehors des effets de syntaxe. dans lesquels ils se développent. Si bien que la littérature présente déjà deux aspects, dans la mesure où elle opère une décomposition ou une destruction de la langue maternelle, mais aussi l'invention d'une nouvelle langue dans la langue, par création de syntaxe.[36]

Helder produces such a destruction and invention produces. His version of "Criação da lua" [The Creation of the Moon], a poem from the volume *Ouolof*, begins like this:

> do caxinauá seu nome seu feiticeiro é. / Caxinauás muitos pelejarem para suas gentes ajuntaram, / aqueles com pelejam. / Da vespa as gentes, muito corajosas muito, / ali do sol do rio à beira, / da vespa as gentes moram. Caxinauás de capivara rio / com moram, os / caxinauás do sol do rio ciosos / são. / Os binanauás noite dentro dormem todos, deitados / estava, os caxinauás / escuro dentro cacete com espancaram-nos, / acabaram. Um só, sono com / acordou, o terçado tirou, de feiticeiro nauá, Iobonauá, / a cabeça degolou.[37]

Within the tongue mother, the poet destroys the original syntax and proposes another that, on the one hand, is his translated version; on the other hand, it is not even that, but rather something else that attempts to account for both external and inner worlds. Ultimately, it is an understanding of language as a

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[36] Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1993, pp. 15–16: "syntactic creation, style, such is the becoming of language: there is no creation of words, neologisms that matter outside of the syntactic effects in which they develop. Thus, literature already presents two aspects, when it operates a decomposition or a destruction of the mother tongue, but also when it operates the invention of a new language within the language through the creation of syntax". (my translation)

[37] Herberto Helder, *Ouolof*, p. 47: "from the caxinauá his name his sorcerer is. / Caxinauás many would fight for their people they gathered, / those with they fight. / From the wasp the people, very braves very, / there from the sun from the river's edge, / from the wasp the people live. Caxinauás of capybara river / with they live, the / caxinauás of the sun of the river jealous / are. / The binanauás night inside sleep all, lying down / was, the caxinauás / dark inside club with beat them, / they finished. Only one, sleep with / woke up, took out the machete, from sorcerer nauá, Iobonauá, / the head beheaded". (my translation) I attempted to adhere to the same type of syntactic creations as the poet made in Portuguese, turning this exercise itself into a practice of translation embedded within *Weltliteratur*.

structural and essential element of thought, its very movement: acrobatic and centrifugal.

Translating the word "cravo" ("carnation") into "fifteen languages" makes carnation "cada vez menos cravo", i.e. "increasingly less carnation"[38]. It causes an ontological uprooting, dissolves the form, and displaces the essence into something that is no longer "carnation", yet it still is. However, the metamorphosis also triggers the translating metaphor of "carnation" thus exercising an "extreme calligraphy of the world", as we read in another work, *Photomaton & vox* [*Photobooth & Voice*][39]. The word "cravo" ("carnation") or another gains multiple lives, constantly mutating because:

> a forma lida renasce continuamente após cada leitura e permanece em equilíbrio no perigo de uma multiplicação de legibilidade. Implantado no meio das leituras, o poema funciona em estado de máquina vital.[40]

In *O bebedor nocturno*, poetry assumes the value of an idiom, reinforcing its absolute worth. It not only utilizes language but also transforms it, serving as an agent of metamorphosis and revitalization. In Helder's changed poemas, the value also resides in the power to resurrect a text that, as quoted in the first poem, "The Breaking of Day," contains the past and have the knowledge of the future. A poetic idiom, or an idiomatic and absolute poetry, asserts itself in *Photomaton & vox*, where Helder redeems Novalis and poetry as the "echt absolut Reelle [...]. Je poetischer, je wahrer" ("authentic absolute reality [...]. The more poetic, the truer")[41]. This allows words to destabilize and, like fungus, bacteria, or virus, propagate and multiply, revealing their organicity and vitality: as Novalis teaches, "the truly poetic language must be organic, alive"[42]. Helder understands Novalis' assertion that words are so poor that they cannot convey the plural idea all at once. Several times his versions strike at this "plural idea", teemed with perspectives to be revealed by each version and reading. As depicted in "The Mystery

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[38] Herberto Helder, *O bebedor nocturno*, p. 9. (my translation)

[39] Herberto Helder, *Photomaton & Vox,* Porto, Porto Editora, 2015, p. 10.

[40] Idem, p. 133: "the form read continuously rebirths after each reading and remains in balance amidst the danger of a multiplication of legibility. Implanted amid readings, the poem operates in a state of vital machinery". (my translation)

[41] Novalis*, Fragmente des Jahres 1798*, *Gesammelte Werke* [Fragments of the Year 1798, Collected Works], III, ed. Carl Seelig, Bühl-Verlag, Zurich, 1946, p. 141 (my translation).

[42] Novalis, *Blütenstaub*, *Gesammelte Werke* [Pollen, Collected Works], II, ed. Carl Seelig, Bühl-Verlag, Zurich, 1945, p. 25: "die echt poetische Sprache soll aber organisch, lebendig sein" (my translation).

of Ameigen (Ireland)": "sou palavra de ciência. / Espada viva abrindo a noz das armaduras"[43]. To be a "word of action" is to be an agent of transformation. To translate the world, to penetrate words as a sword opening the "armour" alludes to transformation and reshaping, to the need to annihilate in order to revitalize.

In conclusion, my question is: how can we approach Herberto Helder's writing, a writing that undergoes transformations into his own Portuguese, to reflect on the concept of *Weltliteratur*? He revitalizes the old Goethean concept of *Weltliteratur* extracting literatures from around the world – ancient, marginal, mystical, distant – to include them within his own creative process. On the one hand, he contemplates the depth of words without cultural and linguistic constraints, and on the other hand, he discovers and enables the reader to discover how words reveal themselves as a vital source for various perspectives through translation. However, more than a rereading, world literature "deals with the constant invention of reading – by reshaping the centre and the peripheries of literary systems, and by thus proposing ever-changing forms of actually reading texts that seemed to have been already read[44].

We could venture now to say that Helder's path, in his relationship to *Weltliteratur*, would also lead to another less-known Goethean concept, the *Urpflanz* from his 1790 *Metamorphosis of Plants*: the archetypal plant, symbolizing the restoration of a lost unity. For Herberto Helder reading, translating, and creating entail the mission of rescuing from the world what is most profound and vital, most pure and pristine in language. It is what remains unaltered, irrespective of spatial-temporal and cultural coordinates. In agreement with Manuel Frias Martins, *O bebedor nocturno* manipulates language in ways that reveal "the splendid unity of everything with everything else, and with it the recognition that the world rearranges itself in the infinite chain of meanings of each word in discovery"[45].

The centre of the universe and universal understanding of all literatures shift to the margins. Encountering one's own idiom occurs when moving away from the native language to encounter other languages. Goethe's *Weltliteratur* is renewed by capturing the singularities of each language and delving into the common root the poet apprehends. Therefore, the origin of this language is already different, it

[43] Herberto Helder, *O bebedor nocturno*, p. 113: "I am a word of science. / A living sword opening the nut of the armours".

[44] Helena Buescu, "World Literature in a Poem. The Case of Herberto Helder", p. 53.

[45] Manuel Frias Martins, *Herberto Helder. Um silêncio de bronze* [A bronze silence], Lisboa, Nova Vega e Autor, 2019, p. 44: "a esplêndida unidade de tudo com tudo, e com ela o reconhecimento de que o mundo se reordena na cadeia infinita dos sentidos de cada palavra em descoberta". (my translation)

no longer belongs to any particular language. Since there is no way "in which we would be able to reach a final description of world literature"[46], we believe in its fluidity, comparable to that of water, the analogy we started from the beginning to point to a practice of continuous transformation and creation. *Weltliteratur* brings to us anonymous texts, voiceless texts, texts strange to the place and time in which we live, but above all, texts with an inexhaustible power to produce their own language. From this convergence other voices arise, each with its own idiom. Voices coming from other places, emerging spaces of tension, produced from the dissolution of different other voices, languages, and places. A third voice [terceira voz], as proposed by João Barrento[47], emerges as the result of the contamination of the target language with the translated language. In this transfer of "literary and cultural idiosyncrasies"[48] a "new textual reality"[49] is born. Helder experiments in his poetical translations with a possibility of world literature, experienced as rhizomatic, viral, metamorphic, but most of all creative and vital.

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[46] Helena Buescu, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

[47] João Barrento, "Ensaio sobre a terceira voz (quem fala no texto traduzido?)" [Essay on the third voice (who is speaking in the translated text?)], in *Revista Colóquio /Letras*, no. 155–156, January 2000, pp. 275–289.

[48] Idem, *O poço de Babel: para uma poética da tradução literária* [The Well of Babel: Towards a Poetics of Literary Translation], Lisboa, Relógio d'Água, 2002, p. 80: "idiossincrasias literárias e culturais". (my translation)

[49] Idem, p. 110: "nova realidade textual". (my translation)

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WELTLITERATUR AND THE FIGURE OF AUTHOR-TRANSLATOR IN *THE ADVENTURES OF HAJJI BABA*

Marjan Mohammadi

Abstract: This paper focuses on the problem of "translatability" and the encounter of English as the medium of exchange with Persian in James J. Morier's *The Adventures of Hajji Baba* (1824) and its sequel (1828). It approaches the question of translatability from two vantage points. First, it considers how the economic assumption of "equivalences", where words and referents enter a relationship of commensurability, paradoxically creates a pseudo-discourse to uphold the validity of the travelogue as an "authentic" account of the "Orient" and a commodity that once rendered in English can circulate the book on a worldwide scale. Second, it considers the split in the figure of the narrator, the author-translator who swings between the axes of "assimilation" and "foreignization." The hybrid positioning of the narrator in the intertext of a travelogue that oscillates between fiction and translation ultimately undermines the hallmark desire of capital, i.e., a total transfer of meaning (value) via the voice of an authentic teller to the extent that a self-same identity can neither be imagined for the narrated (the Persian hero Hajji Baba) nor for the narrator (the English ventriloquist). The paper argues that the phantom of the non-existent original of *Hajji Baba* haunts the book and marks it as a colonial product, pointing to the unequal economy of signs. As such the aspirational approach of world literature works against its own grain: rather than creating an arena for exchange, it places English in an asymmetrical hegemonic position, which delineates the locus of center from the periphery and perpetuates the reproduction of an Anglocentric literary value at the extent of marginalization of other world languages and cultures.
Keywords: Translatability, *Weltliteratur*, Circulation, Anglophone, Commodity.

The question of *Weltliteratur* put forth by Goethe (1827) envisioned the possibility of cultural exchange in the study of an "archive" of world masterpieces, which captured the complexity of human experience across multiple cultures. However, almost two decades after the coinage of the term, Marx and Engels

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(1848) associated this universal approach to the study of world letters with the "death drive" of a particular socio-political history; namely, the rise of the nineteenth-century European bourgeois economy. From this perspective, the hallowed promise of cultural production, preservation, and exchange on a large scale becomes a byproduct of the logic of a trade economy predominantly driven by profit. This conceptualization opens the study of world literature to the practice of translation, from Latin *translatus*, meaning "to carry across," but the logic of capital, the one-to-oneness of exchange and the assumption of a total transfer of value (meaning) contaminates the domain of words. This paper focuses on the problem of "translatability" and on the encounter of English as the medium of exchange with Persian in James J. Morier's *The Adventures of Hajji Baba* (1824) and its sequel *The Adventures of Hajji Baba in England* (1828). The story, a fictive travelogue written under the guise of a translation, was coincidentally published in the same decade as Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan* (1827), a late collection of poems composed in conversation with Persian poet Hafez, which arguably influenced Goethe's conception of *Weltliteratur*.

The paper approaches the question of translatability in Morier's novel from two vantage points. First, it considers how the economic assumption of "equivalences", where words and referents enter a relationship of commensurability, paradoxically creates a pseudo-discourse (the novel can be categorized both as a pseudo-fiction and a pseudo-translation) to uphold the validity of the travelogue as an "authentic" account of the "Orient" and a commodity that once rendered in English can circulate the book market on a worldwide scale. Secondly, it considers the split in the figure of the narrator, the author-translator who swings between the axes of "assimilation" and "foreignization." The hybrid positioning of the narrator in the intertext of a travelogue that oscillates between fiction and translation modes ultimately undermines the hallmark desire of capital, i.e., a total transfer of meaning (value) via the credible voice of an authentic teller, to the extent that a self-same identity can neither be imagined for the narrated (the Persian picaresque hero Hajji Baba) nor for the narrator (the English ventriloquist). The paper argues that the phantom of the non-existent original of *Hajji Baba* haunts the book (a fetishized commodity) and marks it as a colonial product, pointing to the unequal economy of signs. As such the aspirational approach of world literature works against its own grain: rather than creating an arena for exchange, it places English in an asymmetrical hegemonic position, which delineates the locus of center from the periphery and perpetuates the reproduction of an Anglocentric literary value at the extent of marginalization of other world languages and cultures.

The Economy of the Oriental Novel: The British Envoy at the Imperial Gate of Persia

The author of *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (1824) and its sequel *The Adventures of Hajji Baba in England* (1828) occupies a unique position in the network of the nineteenth century imperial and mercantile bourgeois economy. James Justinian Morier (1780-1849) entered the British diplomatic service as a secretary to Sir Harford Jones, who had acquired oriental languages thanks to his appointment to the East India Company where he served as the Company's first Resident and Consul in Baghdad in order to deter the presumable threat to the British interests in India by the Napoleon's expedition to Egypt. The rivalry between the French and English for obtaining superior influence at the court of Persia brought the appointed envoy Jones to Tehran (1807–1811). Morier's principal qualification for the post in Persia appears to have been the result of Jones' friendship with Morier's father, the British Consul-General in Constantinople in 1806, for which he travelled to the Qajar Persia (1789–1925) between the years (1808–1809) and (1810-1814)[1]. In the preface to *A Journey through Persia, Armenia and Asia in the Years 1808 and 1809* (1812), he states: "Finding, on my arrival in England, that curiosity was quite alive to everything connected with Persia, I was induced to publish the Memoranda which I had already made in that country; more immediately as I found that I had been fortunate enough to ascertain some facts, which had escaped the research of other travelers"[2]. Considering the popular interests in the Orient, Morier writes *A Second Journey Through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, Between the Years 1810 and 1816* in 1818 to capture the imaginary of the European readership via his firsthand accounts of the East. These travelogues serve as the cornerstone of Morier's future picaresque novels, narrated through the imagined perspective of their rogue hero Hajji Baba. Their purpose is twofold: while producing an imperial map of the world, they offer a discursive reinvention of Persia to mark the location of the center from the periphery. But more importantly, they foreground the question of translatability in depicting and relating to the world in the age of European expansion.

Morier's novels are considered as "the most popular oriental tales in the English language" and "a highly influential stereotype of the so-called 'Persian national

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[1] For a historical account of Morier's life and works see Grabar (1969), Johnston (1995), Minovi (1956), and Amanat (2003). After his failed mission to the Qajar court, Jones served as the British special Commissioner in Mexico (1824–1826); for details of his mission to Mexico see Johnston's *Missions to Mexico: A Tale of British Diplomacy in the 1820s*, London, I. B. Tauris, 1992.

[2] James Morier, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople between the years 1810 and 1814*, Boston, Adamant Media Corporation, 2004, p. vi.

character', which became standard reading for all Westerners dabbling in Persian, and, in a broader context, any 'Oriental' affairs"[3]. In the preface to *The Talisman* (1825), Sir Walter Scott attests to the adequacy of *Hajji Baba* as an oriental tale[4]:

> Had I [...] attempted the difficult task of substituting manners of my own invention, instead of the genuine costume of the East, almost every traveler I met, who had extended his route beyond what was called 'The Grand Tour,' had acquired a right, by ocular inspection, to chastise me for my presumption. [...] It occurred, therefore, that where the author of *Anastatius*, as well as he of *Hajji Baba*, had described the manners and vices of the Eastern nations, not only with fidelity, but with the humor of Le Sage and the ludicrous power of Fielding himself, one who was a perfect stranger to the subject must necessarily produce an unfavorable contrast. [...] In a word, the Eastern themes had been already so successfully handled by those who were acknowledged to be masters of their craft, that I was diffident of making the attempt.[5]

The novels were intended for a literary market imbued with the images and fantasies of the East which were circulating via the French translations of the *Thousand and One Nights* (in English *The Arabian Nights*).[6] His real and fictitious travelogues written in the guise of translation install "the machinery of measurement" to distinguish the value of "Persian caftan" against "the Chinese gown" by the European touchstone. The figure of "the mercurial Persian"

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[3] Abbas Amanat, "Hajji Baba of Ispahan," *Encyclopedia Iranica* XI.6, Fasc. 6, 2003, New York, Online Edition, pp. 561–568. https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hajji-baba-of-ispahan.

[4] Edward Said confirms the role of *Hajji Baba* in the production of Orientalist discourse: "whenever the oriental motif for the English writer was not principally a stylistic matter (as in Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat* or Morier's *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*), it forced him to confront a set of imposing resistances to his individual fantasy" (*Orientalism*, New York, Panteon Books, 1978, p. 193)

[5] Walter Scott, *The Talisman*, London & Glasgow, Collins' Clear-Type Press, pp. 3–4.

[6] The oriental tales transmitted orally and collectively known as *Alf Laila wa Laila* (*Thousand and One Nights*) were first transcribed by Antoine Galland as *Mille et une nuits* (1704–14) over a century before appearing in Arabic. Galland's version is followed with different editions by the traveler and Orientalist Edward William Lane (1838–41) and later Richard Burton (1882–4). Melman contends that "travelers had access to a plethora of translations from Turkish and Persian, as well as to pseudo-oriental tales fabricated in Britain and France, such as William Beckford's *Vathek* (1795)" (p. 11). According to him, these Western works of fiction "drawing on collective fantasy and considerable prejudice regarding Muslim practices acquired the status of ethnographic sources on the contemporary Middle East" (Melman, p. 11). Morier was exposed to *The Arabian Nights*, "a present from his maternal aunt's husband, William Waldegrave, later the first Baron Radstock" (See Henry McKenzie Johnston, "Hajji Baba and Mirza Abul Hasan Khan: A Conundrum", in *Iran*, Oxfordshire, Taylor & Francis, vol. 33, 1995, p. 93).

represented via the picaroon Hajji Baba is so much "alloyed by the natural stupidity with which it is amalgamated" that it falls on the lower scale of the European proposed hierarchy of value so much so that "it has not been thought worthwhile to extract the small quantity of silver which contained in every ton of lead"[7]. Thus, the encounter of colonial European mercantile economy with the declining Persian court results in the abstraction of the Persian character as not "worthwhile" and extraction of its value as "the small quantity of silver," which immediately puts the practice of travel writing and translational exchange on par with monetary appropriation. Consequently, these novels joined in the circulation of a new literary form that was distributed with the help of the print culture and was ready to be consumed by the masses. As an overlay of the economic model of profit based on the colonial enterprise, this new mode of cultural production shifted the location of value from productive labor to the object for sale.[8] Walter Scott who plays an important role in popularization of *Hajji Baba* confirms that the novel as a literary genre was meant to gain an "exciting interest of any kind"[9]. As such, the ability to respond to the readers' fantasies, needs, and desires speaks to the rise of the novel as a literary form since it can overtake the book markets "wherever industrial capitalism becomes the dominant force in the economic structure"[10]. Finding a new niche of interest in Persia, the question for the European novelist becomes:

> Why may not European productions become, in time, as indispensable to the moral habits of a Persian, as a Chinese leaf to an European breakfast? Such expectations may appear extravagant to that sect of dampers who may be termed the Cui-bonists. [...] "Let anyone who lists," says a lively French author, "make laws for a people, so I have liberty to compose their songs;" a similarity of books paves the way for a similarity

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[7] Walter Scott, "Hajji Baba in England," in *Essays of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 2, Philadelphia, Carey & Hart, 1841, p. 72. Scott's piece was originally a preface to *The Adventures of Hajji Baba*, and then was included in the 1841 collection of *Essays*; I quote the text from this edition.

[8] *Hajji Baba* was translated both to French and German the year it was published and is still in print. It was adapted into a film by Don Weis (1954). The cinematic adaptation of *Hajji Baba* rehashes the stereotypical characterization of Iran, circulating prevalently in the colonial representations of the Orient, in the aftermath of a tumultuous period where the Iranian Nationalization Movement of Oil Industry (1951) led to a CIA orchestrated coup in 1953 which forcefully removed the democratically elected prime-minister of Iran, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh. For a discussion of Mosaddeq and the question of oil as a colonial asset in modern Iranian history see Homa Katouzian's *Mosaddeq and Struggle for Power in Iran*, London, I.B, Tauris, 1999.

[9] Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe: A Romance,* New York, Signet Classics, 2009, p. 17.

[10] Ian P. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000, p. 64.

> of manners; and the veil of separation once rent, there is no saying how soon it may be altogether removed.[11]

The effect of the expansion of the markets and territorial proximity to the Indian colonies may have brought the British empire to "the caprice of an arbitrary monarch, and the convulsions of a waning empire," represented on paper as "hillocks of unregarded dust"[12]. But it also inscribed a "contact zone" of intertwined histories where the inhibition of "the sect of dampers" is awakened to the new horizon of profitability underlined by "*cui-bono*," i.e., "to whom the benefit?" As "the Chinese leaf" has become the indispensable commodity in the West, so can the English books overtake the cultural habits of Persians — a reminder of the colonial civilization mission of the East India Company.[13] This affinity of the European bourgeois economy with the appropriation of culture for sheer gain is underlined in *The Communist Manifesto* where the colonial scrambles for raw material, cheap labor, and new markets transform the modes of economic production and consumption and result not only in the alienation and reification of the masses but also in the commodification of cultures under the banner of *Weltliteratur*. To underline the complicity of world literature in the imposition of a bourgeois cultural hierarchy, Marx and Engels refer to it as a "cosmopolitan affair" where "the intellectual creations of individual nations become common property"[14]. But above all, the "commonality" of this commodified culture with a universal outlook where "the veil of separation is rented" relies on the logic of "assimilation" and "sameness" to provide a ground for comparison and guarantee the one-to-one-ness of exchange.[15] The narrative form is thus employed to estab-

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[11] W. Scott, "Hajji Baba in England" [1829], in *Essays of Sir Walter* Scott, vol. 2, Philadelphia, Carey & Hart, 1841, p. 97.

[12] Idem, "Hajji Baba in England," p. 74.

[13] Thomas Macauley, in *Minute in Indian Education* (1835) notoriously argued for the value of European thought in comparison to the Oriental cultures and the necessity of educating an intermediary population of Indians who can secure the British interests in India: "It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England" (*Archives of Empire*, edited by Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter, vol. I, Durham, Duke University Press, 2003, p. 231).

[14] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party,* in *The Portable Karl Marx*, edited by Eugene Kamenka, London, Penguin, p. 208.

[15] Marc Shell, drawing on the question of value in *The Grundrisse*, argues that "the act of monetary exchange, like the act of linguistic translation, depends on a socially recognized (*gültige*) universal equivalent, which seems to homogenize everything, or to reduce everything to a common denominator" (*Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophic Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p. 107).

lish the hierarchy of value and to maintain the hegemony of the European center over the subordinate peripheral world done not only for the sake of power and influence but also for profit.

Authorship, Phantom Texts, and Missing Origins

Morier's oriental tale opens with a frame narrative as the narrator positions himself as "the humble translator" of an invaluable manuscript considered "as a desideratum in the history of mankind"[16]. The text is offered to him by a native of Persia (the eponymous Hajji Baba) to compensate for the teller's timely intervention which delivered him from his imminent death. Beyond the frame tale and the employment of character types such as the itinerant storyteller, Dervish Sefer (Chapter XI), Hajji Baba's Kurdish lover, Zeenab (Chapter XXVI), and the Persian ambassador, Mirza Firouz (Chapter LLXIII), the characterization of the novel as a "*manuscrit trouvé*" ties it immediately to the tradition of *The Thousand and One Nights*, a disputable translated text which hovers on the boundaries of oral literature and a case study for *Weltliteratur* that is entrenched in the practices of translation, travel writing, and colonial appropriation.[17] The frame of Morier's novel appears in the form of a preface as an epistle addressed to one "Reverend Dr. Fundgruben Chaplain to the Swedish Embassy at the Ottoman Porte" and is signed in London on 1 December 1823 by the "devoted and obliged humble servant, Peregrine Persic"[18]. The name of this fictitious teller, "Peregrine," derived from Latin, "*peregrinus*" (i.e., "foreign"), "*peregre*" (i.e., "abroad"), "*per-* + *ager*" (i.e., "through + field"), means both "foreign" and "pilgrim falcon." The pun on the name immediately implies that the narrator is one traveler (a "wandering" "foreign" Persian or a "pilgrim hunter" of Persia) whose role is accidentally conflated with that of a translator. Retracing the history of the text demonstrates that coincidentally the name of the author is reported to have been missing from the novel's cover when it was originally published which caused the text to circulate in English and in translations (French, German, and Persian) anonymously for

[16] James Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* [1824], London, McMillan & Co., 1895, pp. xlii, l. This edition, prefaced by Curzon, uses Roman numbers for the pagination of the "Translator's Epistle," continuing from the "Introduction," which upholds the presentation of the novel in its paratexts in terms of "genuine" translation. Following the edition's pagination style, the sections quoted from the "Epistle" are cited in Roman numbers.

[17] For a discussion of questions of translation, claims to ownership, and plagiarism in *The Thousand and One Nights* see Paulo Lemos Horta, who highlights "the porous boundary between translation and theft, and between imitation and ventriloquism", in *Marvelous Thieves: Secret Authors of the Arabian Nights*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2017, p. 13.

[18] Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* [1824], 1895, p. lii.

almost a century.[19] This anonymity, which created speculations over the figure of the author or the assumed translator and the book itself, played into the ambiguity of the position of the teller and his tale. Since the narrator presents the text as a real document that has been translated and published in English as it was found in Persian, there have been multiple attempts to ascribe the authorship of the text and its characters to historical figures.[20] The emphasis on the genre of travelogue and the pretense for the veracity of the tale under the guise of a translation, which is a conventional literary device going back to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, influences the reception of Morier's novels as a historical, social, and ethnographic resource of the Eastern manners. Curzon[21] in the novel's introduction refers to it as an

[19] The novel was first published anonymously in London by John Murray in 1824. It was translated to French during the same year in Paris by Haut-Coeur et Gayet jeune with the title *Hajji Baba, traduit de l'anglais par le traducteur des romans de Sir Walter Scott.* The missing name of the French translator Auguste Jean-Baptiste Defauconpret appeared in later editions. In 1966 Hassan Kamshad, a Persian scholar at Cambridge, found a letter by the alleged Persian translator (Sheikh Ahmad Rouhi) to Edward Brown which identified the actual Persian translator: Mirza Habib Isfahani (1986). During the same decade Minovi also found the manuscript of *Hajji Baba* in the library of the University of Istanbul which eventually confirmed the Persian translator.

[20] The possibility of portrayals of historical figures disguised under a thin layer overtakes all Morier's significant characters. For instance, due to a footnote, Terry Grabar takes poet Asker, a fictional character in Chapter VII, to stand for the poet laureate of the Qajar court Fatteh Ali Khan (1812–1813) and dismisses any "poetic license" in the account of Morier (See Grabar, "Fact and Fiction: Morier's Hajji Baba," in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 1969, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 1227–1228). The addressee in the epistolary introduction to the novel, Rev. Dr. Fundgruben, has also many correspondents to contemporary historical figures: the Swedish chaplain Gustave Ernst Sprinchorn in 1808 (Kolmodin); Morier's brother-in-law, Francis Vyvyan Jago Arundell, an archaeologist and the British chaplain at Smyrna (Morier, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople between the years 1810 and 1814* [1818], Boston, Adamant Media Corporation, 2004, p. 380); Joseph von Hammer (1774–1856), the interpreter for the Austrian Embassy at the Ottoman Porte and founder of one of the earliest orientalist periodicals, *Die Fundgruben des Orients* or *Les Mines de l'Orient* (1809–1818). According to George Krotkoff, Hammer's memoir makes a reference to the Moriers, "all distinguished in the British diplomatic or consular service": "Isaac Morier (1750-1817) and his four sons John Philip (1776–1853); James Justinian (1780?-1849), the author of *Hajji Baba*; David Richard (1784–1877); William (1790-1864)". Krotkoff establishes a possible relationship between Hammer and the Morier family members via a letter, but he admits any resemblance of the fictional character Dr. Fundgruben to Hammer cannot confirm a direct exchange of ideas between Joseph von Hammer and James Morier, which undercuts claims to historicity for Morier's characters and to the veracity of his tale (Krotkoff, "Hammer-Purgstall, Hajji Baba, and the Moriers", in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1987, pp. 104, 106).

[21] Lord George Curzon (1859–1925) served as Viceroy of India, the highest-ranking position in the British administration in India (1899–1905). According to Edward Said, Curzon saw the East as "a large geographical space wholly owned by an efficient colonial master" (Said, *op. cit*., p. 213).

"admirable" "immortal book"[22] and reaffirms the extent to which Hajji Baba is "a picture of actual personages, and a record of veritable facts. It is no frolic of imaginative satire only; it is a historical document. The figures that move across the stage are not pasteboard creations, but the living personalities, disguised only in respect of their names, with whom Morier was brought daily into contact while at Tehran"[23]. The fabrication and the phantom of the missing original thus haunts the imaginary of the literary scene both in the alleged source and target languages.[24]

The historical figure who closes the gap on the dilemma of the text's authorship is the Persian ambassador to England, Mirza Abul Hassan Khan, who was accompanied by Morier on a mission to England in (1809–1810). According to Grabar, it was because of "Abul Hassan's acquaintance with the English in India that Sir Harford Jones suggested him as ambassador to England"[25]. Brown contends that the "mock autobiography" is "a realist story of the Near East par excellence" which creates "the appearance of an authentic Persian document"[26]. He takes the fictitious letter in broken English from the preface to the novel's sequel to have been "genuine" and written by the Persian ambassador, who should have been "disturbed" by the "accuracy" of Morier's work: "You call me Mirza Firouz, I know very well, and say I talk great deal nonsense. When I talk nonsense? Oh, you think yourself very clever man; but this Hajji Baba very foolish business"[27]. Amanat considers the likelihood of Morier's frustrated attempts to obtain a copy of the alleged memoir of the ambassador entitled *Ḥeyrat Nameh* ("The Tales of Wonder") for translation which might have led him "to invent his own *Hajji Baba*

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[22] Curzon, "Introduction," in *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, London, McMillan & Co., 1895, p. xxiii.

[23] Idem, p. xiv.

[24] The anxiety over the necessity of closing the gap of authorship is reflected in Johnston's 1995 study: "I am not really convinced by my own arguments in proposing this scenario, and would be delighted if someone could come up with a better explanation. But on the basis of the evidence which I have recently uncovered, it seems to me that there must have been a genuine letter to James Morier from Abul Hassan (if Willock was party to a joke, why would he have told David there was one?). Document B may be a copy of this, or it may not. I feel sure that Mrs McNeill would not have said what she did to Fraser if she had not believed that her husband had had something to do with text A. But how did McNeill learn of what Castlereagh's sister said in Ireland in January 1820? [...] But was B a joke? The conundrum remains unresolved." (Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 96)

[25] Grabar, *op. cit.*, p. 1233.

[26] Wallace Cable Brown, "Prose Fiction and English Interest in The Near East, 1775–1825," in *PMLA*, 1938, vol. 53. 3, p. 833.

[27] Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan in England* [1828], Paris, Baudry's European Library, 1835, p. vi.

instead, as a grotesque caricature of [the ambassador]"[28]. He adds that *Hajji Baba* should be read in the context of "Morier's deeper frustration with the Persian government's refusal in 1822–23 to accept him as the British envoy to the Persian court, after having to wait several years for a diplomatic posting"[29]. As such the mystification of authorship infuses the text with an aura of ambivalence, which ultimately serves the construction of an Oriental discourse in progress. But more importantly the hesitation over factuality and fiction draws a picture of Orient that is inherently uncertain, unruly, and incommensurable, which needs the imposition of a universal value via European modes of appropriation and acculturation. At the same time, the anxiety induced by the nonexistence phantom of an origin in European literary history needs to be overcome at all costs.

The representation of the Orient as a colonial commodified fetish, whose excessive portrayal creates a desire for determining the European identity, generates a surplus in the European book markets. Liu states that "the circulation of the notion of the fetish as 'false value' in Western philosophical discourse is rooted in its own colonial past"[30]. The fictitious voice of the teller acknowledges the value of the book as a sensational object: "Will you believe me, that I, Persian as I am, have followed [your] example; and that during the period of my residence at Constantinople, I have passed my time in writing a detailed history of my life, which, although that of a very obscure and ordinary individual, is still so full of vicissitude and adventure, that I think it would not fail to create an interest if published in Europe?"[31] These doublings ultimately end in the uncanny duplicate image of the sovereign king of Persia reflected in the mirror of the gifted amulet to the king of England. The engraved verses of the Persian poet-laureate on the mirror's cover read:

> Go, envied glass, to where thy destiny calls thee;
> Go, thou leavest the presence of one Caesar, to receive that of another
> Still thou bearst within thee thy sovereign's form;
> And when thou'rt opened again by Britain's king,
> Thoul't reflect not one Caesar, but two Caesars;
> Not one brother, but two brothers;
> Not one Jemsheed, but two Jemsheeds;

[28] Amanat, *op. cit.*, pp. 561–568.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Lydia Liu, *Tokens of Exchange*: *The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations,* Durham, Duke University Press, 1999, p. 18.
[31] Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* [1824], 1895, pp. xlix-l.

Not one Darab, but two Darabs:
And as the two Caesars thus become one,
So will the English and Persian nations unite.[32]

The gifted poem testifies to the duality of claimed authority reflected in two Caesars, two Jemsheeds, two Darabs (the first Persian mythical and historical kings) and uncovers the vulnerability of European cultural identity formed against the mirroring image of a sovereign king from the Orient. If the mirror is doubled and the text revolves around the topics of *veritas* (honesty and duplicity) then Hajji baba the imposter challenges the sovereign authority of the Western observer. He in the company of Mirza Firouz (the fictitious Persian ambassador) wonders about the fate of India and the "greater miracle in government" in the form of colonial enterprise:

> Bewildered with this complication of real kings, and little kings, viziers, sitters upon chairs, and sitters upon stools, we held (says Hajji Baba) the finger of suspense upon the lip of astonishment, and pondered upon all we had heard, like men puzzling over a paradox. At length our visitors took their leave, and the ambassador promised that he would shortly fix a day for getting better acquainted with 'Coompani' of whom he and his countrymen had heard so much, and about whose existence it became quite necessary that Persia should, for the future, have clear and positive information. [...] When they were well off we all sat mute, only occasionally saying 'Allah, Allah! There is but one Allah!' so wonderfully astonished were we. What? India! That great, that magnificent empire!—that scene of Persian conquest and Persian glory!—the land of elephants and precious stones, the seat of shawls and kincobs!—that paradise sung by poets, celebrated by historians more ancient than Iran itself!—at whose boundaries the sun is permitted to rise, and around whose majestic mountains, some clad eternal snows, others in eternal verdure, the stars and the moon are allowed to gambol and carouse! What! Is it so fallen, so degraded, as to be swayed by two obscure mortals, living in regions that know not the warmth of the sun?[33]

As the fictitious teller reflects over this new form of colonial authority that has divested Persia of its former claims to imperial conquest, he discusses the inadequacy in the etiquette of exchange and reception at the Qajar court. The reader learns that while the British Ambassador complains about the Persian reception and the dress code, "[the infidels] asked if we thought them monkeys,

[32] Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan in England* [1828], 1835, p. 27.
[33] Idem, p. 125.

that they should dress themselves as such at our bidding, and were so obstinate in their resolution of keeping to their own mode of attire, that at length they were permitted to do as they chose"[34], the king carries the diamond of "Mountain of Light" ("*kuh-e nur*") in his armlet. Ironically the sister-stone "Sea of Light" ("*darya-ye nur*"), a former property of Persian monarchs carried to Afghanistan in the previous century, is now gifted to the British crown by Runjit Singh. The trope of translation and its link to the colonial legacy of value reveals the inequality in equal linguistic exchange and subverts the drive for authenticity and commensurability of exchange. As the exploitation has replaced the conquest and the British interest in India has remapped the world, Persia becomes a point in the network of capital connecting colonial India to Mexico via the figure of Morier.

Translatability, Acculturation, and the Anglocentric Value

While the novel revolves around the themes of authenticity and forgery, ironically it presents Hajji Baba as the impostor rogue, capable of deceit and fraud. In the epistolary preface, the alleged translator of the manuscript admits that he has "adapt[ed] it to the taste of European readers, divesting it of the numerous repetitions, and the tone of exaggeration and hyperbole which pervade the compositions of the Easterns"[35]. The two particular modes of writing "forgery and its respectable cousin, parody—have especially close, even parasitic, relationships with travel writing, since the lone traveler bearing far-fetched facts from remote climes offers the perfect alibi for the forger and a tempting target for the parodist"[36]. While the hybrid positioning of Morier as an author-translator at once acknowledges and obscures the sustained business of the empire, the position of a forged author serves as a surrogate and underground self for Morier. Pelea states that the imaginary identity of the author and the status of translator make him "stand at two removes, doubly protected"[37]. The mask of the translator is deployed both as a textual strategy and a figurative device to foreground the integral role of translation in the discursive field (a speech act that connects the world in cultural transaction), which indirectly articulates the condition of possibility of colonial history. The addressee of the translated text, Doctor Fundgruben, preoccupied with "the hieroglyphic lore" and the author of

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[34] Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* [1824], 1895, pp. 441–443.

[35] Ibid, p. l.

[36] Peter Hulme and Tim Young, "Introduction," in *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 5.

[37] Alina Pelea, "A Portrait of the Mehmandar: Accompanying Hajji Baba, of Ispahan to England", in *American, British and Canadian Studies*, vol. 32, June 2019, p. 38.

The Biography of Celebrated Mummies, discourages the narrator for embarking on writing the narrative himself.[38] He states that such an account would be "valuable" only "if a native Oriental could ever be brought to understand so much of the taste of Europeans as to write a full and detailed history of his own life"[39]. The figure of "hieroglyphic lore" enrobes the text with associations of indecipherability and foreignness, which call forth the necessity of translation. Marx in *Capital* refers to the inscribed character of value, which "does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labor into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, men try to decipher the hieroglyphic"[40]. The forged travelogue as a commodity becomes inscribed into the hieroglyphic processes of linguistic interpretation and exchange economy, which makes circulation and trafficking of objects, whether original or counterfeit, "a matter of signification, expression, and substitution"[41]. As a result, the routes of translational circulation and the figure of translator become valid subjects of cultural production for sale in the European book markets. Although the significance of translation in the literary history has shown that "the development of any literary system involves complex processes of import and export"[42], Morier's novels lend themselves more to the "manipulation school" in Translation Studies where the emphasis is "on tracing the fortunes of a text in the target culture and on the complex processes of text production that characterize the transfer of a piece of writing from one culture to another"[43]. Via the trope of translation, Morier fabricates a native identity for himself, adopting the voice of authenticity in the duplicity of a forged translation.

As fictional characters, translators are often associated with theft (e.g., Dezsö Kosztolányi's *The Kleptomaniac Translator*) or with ventriloquism (parroting other people's words and voices). These tendencies reinforce the significance of fidelity in translation to avoid the excess of flattery or the betrayal and to guarantee the reciprocity of exchange achieved not through association (domestication), but

[38] Krotkoff, *op. cit*., p. 104, in a footnote, states that Hammer, the possible historical figure for Dr. Fundgruben, "lent a willing hand to Balzac (during the latter's visit to Vienna in 1835) in providing an Arabic calligraphic rendering of a text explicitly labeled as Sanskrit and incorporated by Balzac in *La peau de chagrin*".

[39] Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* [1824], 1895, p. xli.

[40] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* translated by Ben Fowkes, London, Penguin Books, 1992, p. 167.

[41] Thomas Keenan, "The Point Is to (Ex)Change It: Reading Capital, Rhetorically," in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, eds. Emily Apter and William Pietz, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 174.

[42] Susan Bassnett, "From Cultural Turn to Translational Turn: A Transnational Journey", in *Literature, Geography, Translation*, eds. Alvstad *et al*, New Castle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, p. 69.

[43] Ibid, p. 71.

substitution (foreignization). While Venuti argues for a return to the practice of "literal translation" against the orthodoxy of "free translation" since the first can preserve the alterity of the source culture and avoid the ethnocentric violence of appropriation[44], in the case of *Hajji Baba*, the text's profitability relies heavily on the foreignization mode of translation. Considering Genette's perspective from his 1982 *Palimpsestes*, *Hajji Baba* is a layered intertext, which employs the triad of plagiarism (theft), allusion (covert reference), and citation (literal reference). Its intertextuality is constructed first, through import words (loans, calques, transliterations) from the source to target language; secondly, through the use of Persian modes of expression and proverbs in translation:

> [...] how this Boonapoort had become Shah, not a single man in Persia could explain. [...] The Shah agreed to receive his ambassador; but whether the papers which he exhibited, written in characters that no one could read, were true or false, or whether all he said was to the purpose or not, who was to say? Our viziers, great and small, knew nothing of the matter; our Shah, who (may Allah preserve him) knows everything under the sun, he had no knowledge of it; and excepting one Coja Obed, an Armenian, who had been to Marsilia, a town in France, where he had been shut up in a prison for forty days, and one Narses, a priest of that nation, who had studied in a convent of dervishes somewhere in those countries, we had no one at the gate of the King of Kings who could let any light into the chambers of our brain, or who could in the least explain whether this Boonapoort or his representative were impostors or not,—whether they were come to take our caps from off our heads, or to clothe us with the kalaats [garments] of good fortune. [...] However, we were not very long in doubt; for when the English infidels who trade between India and Persia, some of whom reside at Abusheher, heard of the arrival of this ambassador, they immediately sent off messengers, letters, and an agent, to endeavor to impede the reception of this Frenchman, and made such extraordinary efforts to prevent his success, that we soon discovered much was to be got between the rival dogs.[45]

Beyond referring to colonial rivalry of the English and French over India and their common interest in Persia, the passage underlines the significance of determining the value (veracity from forgery). It also renders foreignness visible through word-for-word substitutions, transliterations, or citing at times the source-text itself, which creates a relation of textual co-presence, where English is defamiliarized in

[44] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 19.

[45] Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* [1824], 1895, pp. 426–427.

the garb of Persian. The oddness of these textual constructions gives the language of the novel the Oriental flare of "translationese," which denounces the unfamiliar in the familiarity of English and posits a hierarchy of value.[46] Brown praises Morier's language which does not "still the voice of a very active British conscience into acquiescence with his eastern design", yet captures the Oriental "grandiose jargon" and the unmistakable "stamp of their eastern origin" in presenting hyperbolic phrases such as "with excess of amazement our livers turned into water, and our brains were dried up"[47]. The parody serves as the background for valuation and transfer of meaning, which ultimately is both patronizing and homogenizing. The prevalent allusions to Persian poets (Hafez and Saadi) are equally denounced as a marker of "self-detachment"[48]. For instance: "Saadi speaks truth when he sayeth, 'A young man, though he hath strength of arm, and the force of an elephant, will kick his heel ropes to pieces with fear in the day of battle'"[49]. This manner of rendering Persian expressions into English and transferring poetic allusions empties both the source and target languages from meaning (value). The consistency of grammatical inaccuracies and errors in the novels has made scholars like Amanat and Minovi ponder over Morier's knowledge of Persian: "many spelling and pronunciation errors, and his poor grasp of Persian syntax, were offered as justifications for vague or meaningless sentences and phrases in his prose, as though the author had translated from Persian without grasping its actual meaning"[50]. The interplay of the age-old dichotomy of "original" vs. "imitation," "source" vs. "target," brings to a halt the possibility of a regressive determination of meaning (value) in the sense of an origin. For Bassnett, the failure of the drive to capture the origin is due to the fact that "the source [is] plural, undefinable, multifaceted"[51]. Additionally, the use of paratextual means (cover, title, preface, postscript, notes) is to familiarize the audience with the assumed socio-cultural subtext of the novels. Alternately they employ the dual

[46] According to Peter Newmark, a distinction can be made between "translationese" and "interference" in Translation Studies: the latter is "the specter" of a translation where the remnants and air of the source language is preserved and revived in the target language as what "haunts" or "shines through"; the former is a subcategory of interference where "a literal translation of a stretch of the source language text (a) plainly falsifies (or ambiguates) its meaning, or (b) violates usage for no apparent reason. [It] is an error due to ignorance or carelessness which is common when the TL is not the translator's language of habitual use, and not uncommon when it is" (*About Translation*, pp. 78–86).

[47] Morier, [1828] *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan in England*. Paris, Baudry's European Library, 1835, p. 235.

[48] Curzon, *op. cit.*, p. xxii.

[49] Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* [1824], London, McMillan & Co., 1895, p. 8.

[50] Amanat, *op. cit.*, pp. 561–568; Minovi, *op. cit.*, pp. 296–7.

[51] Bassnett, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 74.

modes of paratextual target-focused familiarization and intertextual source-focused foreignization. The appendage of a complete set of notes further appeals to the European reader, interpolated and ushered into the travelogue, i.e., realm of cultural mediation. In the postscript, the speaker repeats: "And here, gentle Reader! the humble translator of *the Adventures of Hajji Baba* presumes to address you, and profiting by the hint afforded him by the Persian story-tellers, stops his narrative, makes his bow, and says, 'Give me encouragement, and I will tell you more'"[52]. The study of the translational mode reveals the intersection of symbolic and material exchange with the universalizing machine of *Weltliteratur*. Translation functions to reinforce the role of English as the center of the literary field, promoting the hegemony of Anglophone literature and homogenizing claims of global English. The perpetuation of an Anglocentric conception of literary legitimacy maintained through writing literature in English makes the category of Anglophone a "neo-colonialist term." As Marx and Engels predicted, this is due to the fact that "the hierarchical organization of the global anglophone structures the relation of English to other literatures, and that invocations of 'world literature' within this context often disguise attempts to rejuvenate English literature"[53]. Translation acts as a potent agent that influence the way signs, meanings, and values circulate in the encounter of cultures. Morier's novels showcase how culture and economy, literature and capital intersect and translate one another to ensure the extraction and reproduction of value in the economy of signs.

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[52] Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* [1824], London, McMillan & Co., 1895, p. 455.

[53] Nicolas Di Meo, "From Francophonie to 'World Literature in French': A Contextual Analysis", in *Literature, Geography, Translation*, eds. Alvstad *et al*, New Castle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, p. 6.

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BALKAN WORLD LITERATURE: A ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVE

Alina Bako

Abstract: David Damrosch discusses the relevance of what he calls Balkan world literature in a recent essay (2023) which includes two Romanian authors. The Balkan world literature paradigm serves to construct a discourse through which Romanian literature generates, in a global context, an added knowledge of the space from which it originates. The binder used by Damrosch is linked to the Balkan space, a source of inspiration for literature. The main thesis of the present essay, articulated as a complement to Damrosch's method, is around a historical figure from the Eastern space who influenced Central literatures. We proceed to a twofold movement, from the centre – to the Oriental (the adoption of the model), but also from the periphery to the centre. We consider case studies which have as protagonist a historical character, Sultana Roxelana, and we will discuss the fiction of Mihail Sadoveanu and Marguerite Yourcenar to see if "Balkan world literature" model works from this perspective as well.
Keywords: Balkan world literature, novel, historical figure, Marguerite Yourcenar, Mihail Sadoveanu, nereids.

The paradigm of World Literature in the conception of David Damrosch or world-literature as defined by the Warwick research group represents a pertinent theoretical framework for a new discussion that can integrate a relevant component for a geographical space. We find that what we call today world literature represents a transnational network in which literatures function as the circulatory system of the human body, with main vessels, central branches, and peripheral capillaries, as Marko Juvan defined interconnectivity[1].

Whether we talk about a classification in which central literatures hold the dominant role, while the others are peripheral (in Damrosch's theory) or we notice the existence of three major groups such as centre – semi-periphery – periphery (Casanova and Shapiro's theories), the existence of a category that can be labelled as

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[1] See the theory related to the study of peripheral literature in Marko Juvan, *Worlding a Peripheral Literature*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

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Balkan world literature demonstrates the congruence of several factors embodying this perspective. Seen by Damrosch as an intersection of geographical, linguistic, historical, religious, and imperial and national political determinants, Balkan world literature becomes a form through which Eurocentrism is undermined, with centres of power shifting primarily based on geographical criteria[2]. Yet with the recent discussions on Hungarian literature as world literature, Serbian literature as world literature, or even French literature as world literature, the national criterion seems insufficient for articulating the world literature component in a global context. The fact that they belong to a geographical region that produces a particular type of literature leads to the construction of a functional network in which national literatures redefine themselves as they establish relationships to each other under the umbrella of a common concept. Maria Todorova discussed how Balkanism can present a counterweight to Eurocentrism, noting that "A specter is haunting Western culture – the specter of the Balkans"[3], shifting the discussion from the European to the Eastern centres of power. We note that the discussion had begun long before – even before the moment when the Venetian commercial hub was opposed by that of Istanbul – becomes a viable form of polarization.

In Romanian literature there are several critical studies that address the aspect of Balkanism and its literary variant. The most well-known definition is that of G. Călinescu, who proposes hybridization and the existence of a contrasting substance as characteristic features to highlight the duality civilization / barbarism. This definition may be seen as an incipient form of imagological discussion: "a hefty mix of coarse expressions, lascivious impulses, a consciousness of an adventurous and murky identity, all purified and viewed from above by a superior intelligence"[4]. Literary Balkanism involves "the baroque hypertrophy of images, the appetite for digression and storytelling"[5], as well as "the redemption through

[2] "Balkan world literature can be thought of as a combination of several elements, each of which can be found individually elsewhere, but which are uniquely combined in the Balkans at the intersection of distinctive determinants of geography, language, history, religion, and imperial and national politics" in David Damrosch, "Epic traditions in Balkan world literature", in *Neohelicon*, vol. 50, 2023, pp. 459–475, available at https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059–023-00716–7.

[3] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 3.

[4] „un amestec gras de expresii măscărioase, de impulsuri lascive, de conștiință a unei identități aventuroase și tulburi, totul purificat și văzut mai de sus de o inteligență superioară" in G. Călinescu, *Istoria Literaturii Române (de la origini până în prezent)* [The History of Romanian Literature. From Its Origin to Present Day], București, Minerva, 1986, p. 900. (our translation).

[5] Mircea Muthu, *Balcanismul literar românesc. Panoramic sud-est european. Confluențe culturale* [Romanian literary Balkanism: A Southeastern European panorama. Cultural confluences],

art of an adiabatic geography, understood as a school of style that agglutinates different sensibilities and, axiologically speaking, as a form of freedom, primarily inner freedom, under predominantly autocratic conditions"[6]. The emphasis on the element related to power relations brings the authority that shaped literary Balkanism to the forefront.

One aspect is embodied by Homo Balcanicus, which "actually refers to an ethnically diversified world with a panopticon structure, depending on the state of the Byzantine model and then on the rapidly declining Turcocracy in the 19th century"[7]. The identification of the three historical periods – Byzantine, Ottoman, and modern – provides a detailed framework for analyzing literary Balkanism, offering the necessary tools to examine how cultural and social influences have intersected and generated a diversity of literary expressions. This approach aids in highlighting the specificities of literature from the Balkan region, as well as understanding the historical context that has shaped the themes, styles, and perspectives of authors from different eras: "the four categories: morphological (East/West), religious (Soul/Body), historical (Dual Byzantium), and ontological (cosmo-/anthropocentrism) make up, conjugated and articulated to the capillary level, a framework within which this behavioral archetype was born and developed in each of the three historical ages – Byzantine, Ottoman (Balkan) and modern (southeastern)"[8] in Mircea Muthu's vision. In relation to Edward W. Said's theory[9], the observation that the duality which produced stereotypes and prominent social images is validated by this reductive classification that took the Ottoman historical age for Balkanism.

Geographically speaking, The Balkan Peninsula, in its most extended definition, includes the territories between the Mediterranean Sea, the Aegean Sea, the Black

Cluj-Napoca, Editura Școala Ardeleană, p. 517: „hipertrofierea barocă a imaginilor, apetitul pentru digresiune și povestire" (my translation).

[6] Ibidem, p. 433: „ca răscumpărare prin artă a unei geografii adiabatice – trebuie înţeleasă ca o școală de stil ce aglutinează sensibilităţi diferite (oriental/occidentale, de extracţie nordică și meridională ș.a.) și, axiologic vorbind, ca o formă de libertate în primul rând interioară, în condiţii de regim preponderent autocratic". (my translation).

[7] Ibidem, p. 471: „Omul balcanic trimite de fapt la o lume diversificată etnic și cu o structură de panopticum, în funcţie de starea modelului bizantin și apoi a Turcocraţiei, în accelerată pierdere de viteză în veacul al XIX-lea." (my translation).

[8] Ibidem, p. 478: „Cele patru repere de coloratură morfologică (Orient/Occident), religioasă (Suflet/Trup), istorică (Bizanţul dual) și ontologică (cosmo/antropocentrism) alcătuiesc, conjugate și articulate până la nivelul capilarelor, un ancadrament în interiorul căruia s-a născut și s-a dezvoltat acest arhetip comportamental în fiecare dintre cele trei vârste istorice – bizantină, otomană (balcanică) și modernă (sud-estică)". (my translation).

[9] See the seminal study written by Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979.

Sea, and the Adriatic Sea, encompassing countries such as Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, Romania, and Turkey (at least part of it). Even the existence of the Sultan Trail, the trade route that connected Istanbul to Vienna, represents such a red thread that unites two centres of power.

The Romanian space is perceived fragmentarily from this perspective, especially for regions that were under Ottoman rule and whose legacies are reflected in literature. Despite geographical distance, the literature representing the Balkans resembles the literature of Central America, and many common aspects can be found regarding their evolution. Here is a definition given by Sophie Esch in the "Introduction" to *Central American Literatures as World Literatures*:

> In Central American literature, one key challenge to the nation-state and its literary apparatus arises in Indigenous and Black works that question the monolithic and simplistic narratives of Central American nation-states, which are clustered around whiteness, mestizaje, and Spanish. Indigenous and Black literatures from the region often look far beyond the nation-state and instead invoke cosmos, oceans, roots and routes, and languages other than Spanish and thus create fissures and cracks in any monolingual, monocultural, or geographically limited and limiting conception of the region's literatures. And while Central American nations often display or speak from a fervent nationalism (on the background of weak sovereignty and constant imperialist intervention on the isthmus from elsewhere), the lived reality of many of its writers often tells a very different story. It is overly common for Central American authors to have several national allegiances. Many writers were born and raised, or have lived in two different Central American countries or were forced to live in exile or migrate within or beyond the isthmus due to political persecution or personal life choices.[10]

Similarly, within the Balkan world literature construct of certain indigenous groups defined as Balkan, belonging to emerging states, there are narratives that represent marginal voices, addressing the fragmented, hybrid, mixed status of the population in the Balkan Peninsula. The authors or, we might add, the authorial instances are related to their experience of a geographical space adherent to a lived reality.

For Damrosch, what defines Balkan world literature is based on the so-called "epic tradition", but also on a dual reference, on the one hand to Balkan tradition itself, and on the other hand to supplementary sources from the Italian

[10] Sophie Esch, ed., *Central American Literatures as World Literatures*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2024, pp. 7–8.

Renaissance literature of Tasso and Ariosto, as those identified in the work of Ioan Budai-Deleanu. "The inaugural epic of a nation that didn't yet exist is built by interweaving Balkan traditions with the literature of the European core"[11], notes Damrosch in the previously mentioned article regarding Budai-Deleanu's first Romanian epic poem, *Țiganiada*. In this study, we notice that Sadoveanu's prose, to which we will refer, brings into discussion an emblematic character of Balkanism, with a dual anchoring: Roxelana, Hurrem Sultan, the wife of Suleiman the Magnificent. The three elements that build what we call Balkan world literature are represented by: the Ottoman legacy and the inclusion of historical themes and characters in narratives; the second, the "epic tradition" which we will analyse in both Sadoveanu's and Marguerite Yourcenar's fiction; the third, the circulation of certain common motifs in the Balkan space, such as the mythology of the nereids[12], in Romanian "zâne" or "iele" ("Lady's bedstraw" is the English equivalent for Romanian "sânziene", the plant dedicated to these feminine local deities).

Roxelana in Europe. From East to West

Roxelana, a well-known historical figure from the 16th century in the Ottoman Empire, is celebrated primarily for the role she played at the court of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. Of Slavic origin, reportedly the daughter of an Orthodox priest, historical studies attest that she was kidnapped by Tatars, sold at the slave market in Istanbul, and gradually accumulated power, and managed to create an aura that paralleled that of the Sultan who reigned for 46 years. Making a name for herself in both the Ottoman Empire and in the Western part of Europe, Roxelana became the subject of literary works in multiple cultures, analysed in collective volumes and studies from Italy, Spain, France, England, Germany, Turkey, Poland, and Ukraine[13].

Mihail Sadoveanus prose featuring Roxelana has a clearly defined temporal and geographical framework from the outset: the year 1930 and the city of Istanbul. The narrative brings forth the perspective of a conquered city with a component of imperiality: "the bazaars and grand mosques of the conquering

[11] David Damrosch, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[12] See a comparative analysis in Alina Bako, „Reprezentări și funcții ale sânzienelor în proza românească. Scurt studiu comparativ". [Representations and Functions of the Midsummer Night's Fairies in Romanian Fiction. A Short Comparative Study] in *Incursiuni în imaginar*, 10, Alba Iulia, Aeternitas, 2019, pp. 11–23.

[13] See also *Roxolana in European literature, history and culture*, edited by Galina I. Yermolenko, Franham, Ashgate Publishing, 2010.

sultans (...), seeking (...) the ancient basilicas transformed into mosques, the traces of Byzantium"[14]. The epic tradition is renewed through the narrator's stance as a writer. The narrator's explorations are made from the perspective of Istanbul's connections with the Romanian space, highlighting the longstanding historical relationships between the dominant power and the subordinated region under the Ottoman Empire. The issue of incomplete translations is also brought up, as the Armenian merchant shows the narrator painted objects depicting "stories from Halima that European readers do not find in the current editions of the translations"[15].The origin of the character serves as an opportunity to mention the Armenian community in Moldova, with businesses "through Cetatea Albă and Cafa". The ensuing dialogue discusses "the columns brought by the conquerors from the ruins of the Nile Delta to be used for the basilicas and mosques seen here"[16]. It's a form of reconstruction using the remnants of one civilization to build another. Still: "Undoubtedly, the best sign of civilization is not tobacco or trinitroglycerin, but a witty remark"[17].

A regional portrayal is delivered by the formula used by the Armenian merchant, who reveals to be also a poet and an archaeologist. Ghirgor Misir seeks to discover "the line of Mediterranean civilization"[18]. The centre is represented by "a languid and exhausted Byzantium in terms of military force; but it was a Byzantium of the arts and fine crafts, of scholarship and Greek intelligence"[19]. The decadent component fits the stereotype that constructed the image of the Balkans during the interwar period. Aspects of imperial power are described particularly through the perception of their decaying civilization, according to Rudolf Steiner. The Byzantine Empire, seen through its lack of brilliance due to the weakness of its army, the absence of virility, and the inclination towards intrigues, leaves an undesirable legacy:

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[14] Mihail Sadoveanu, *Roxelana*, in *Revista Fundațiilor Regale pentru Literatură și Artă* [The Review of the Royal Foundations for Literature and Art], Bucuresti, An 13, no. 1, 1946, p. 62: „bazarurile și marile moschei ale sultanilor cuceritori (...) căutam (...) basilicile vechi prefăcute în geamii urmele Bizanțului". (These fragments from *Roxelana* and the following are in my translation.)

[15] Ibidem, p. 64: „povești din Halima, pe care cititorii europeni nu le găsesc în edițiile traducerilor curente".

[16] Ibidem: „cuceritori din risipiturile de la Delta Nilului ca să le întrebuințeze pentru basilicile și moscheile ce se văd".

[17] Ibidem: „Fără îndoială că cel mai bun semn al civilizației nu e tutunul, nici trinitroglicerina, ci o vorbă de duh".

[18] Ibidem, p. 66: „linia civilizației mediteraneene".

[19] Ibidem, p. 67: „un Bizanț molatic și sleit din punct de vedere al forței militare; dar era un Bizanț al artelor și meșteșugurilor fine, al cărturăriei și inteligenței grecești".

> The Byzantine germ of decay has passed from the ruins to the new rulers, and the Ottoman power has harboured, from the very beginning, the sickness of the Praetorian guards, harem intrigues, and eunuch dignitaries.[20]

Sadoveanu defines Balkanism during the Ottoman period and thus observes a blending of Eastern and Western spaces: "The Byzantine virus, heightened by its own oriental fever, has also received the addition of European cunning"[21]. The "Byzantine virus" refers to the legacy of the Byzantine Empire, which has left a profound mark on the Balkans region, as many elements of political and administrative organization from the Byzantine period continued to exist and influence local power structures even after the fall of the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine legacy influenced the art, architecture, and literature of the Balkans.

Another topic is religious diversity, the so-called "millet" system organizing populations on religious grounds allowing for some autonomy within the framework of the Ottoman administration. To these, as the hero of Sadoveanu says, the "European cunning" is added, emphasizing the influences from Western Europe that have blended with Eastern and Byzantine influences. Starting from the 19th century, the movements for national rebirth and independence in the Balkans were strongly influenced by Western European ideas about nationalism, liberalism, and modernity.

The diversity of the harem is representative for the populations ruled by the Ottomans:

> Some of the maidens brought in here entered the harem of the Great Master. Blue-eyed girls from the lands towards North, goat eyes and chestnut braids from the Carpathians, undulating strands from the Caucasus, and quite often young ladies from the Italian and French coasts.[22]

The harem, a micro world of the empire, becomes an emblematic representation of the mix of populations and cultures ruled by the Ottomans. Syncretism and partial cultural integration are discussed here, since the women brought to

[20] Ibidem: „Ceea ce alcătuia însă morbul bizantin al decăderii a trecut din ruini în stăpânitorii noi, și puterea Osmanlăilor a clocit încă de la început în măruntaiele ei boala gărzilor pretoriene, a intrigilor de gineceu si a demnitarilor castrați".

[21] Ibidem, p. 68: „Virusul bizantin, sporit de propria febră orientală, a mai primit și adaosul vicleniei europene".

[22] Ibidem, p. 68: „O parte din fecioarele aduse intrau în haremul marelui stăpân. Copile cu ochi albaștri din ținuturile de către miază-noapte, ochi căprii și cosițe castanii de la Carpați, boiuri unduioase de la Caucaz si destul de des domnișoare de pe coastele italiene și franceze".

the harem from different regions retained elements from their original cultures, but also adapted elements from Ottoman culture. The mechanisms of power and influence are reflected in the relationships within the harem, including the assertion of the sultan's authority over the regions from where these women originated.

Sadoveanu chooses a different origin for the female hero, than that historically confirmed. The writer credits Roxelana to be of Italian descent, from a family of "patricians from Venice"[23]. The statement is not coincidental; it is an opportunity to emphasize the component through which colonization occurs through marital alliances. "Venice, triumphant on the seas and islands, won elsewhere another victory, the most important of all, because it was more hidden"[24]. It becomes another form of conquest, a more subtle way for one empire to colonizes another. Women in the harem, especially those from influential families, have often played a significant role in court politics and behind-the-scenes power dynamics. Sadoveanu suggests that subtle influence could be even more effective and lasting than apparent military victories. Influence and control could be exerted from within, from the political sidelines, without the need for direct conquest. Roxelana becomes, not just in Sadoveanu's narrative, a perfect example of influence and social ascent in the Ottoman imperial context. Initially a mere slave, she has succeeded in becoming one of the most influential figures of the harem and the Ottoman court, demonstrating how behind-the-scenes influences and alliances could change the balance of power.

The narrative thread is a court intrigue, one in which Roxelana would have wanted to oust Mustafa, Giorgiane's son, so that Mehmet, her son**,** could become sultan. Her intrigues led to the killing of Mehmet, with Sadoveanu emphasizing that "fate – with eyes of green ice"[25] was more powerful. His narrative is built around the intrigues woven by Roxelana, who loses her sons, but resorts to feminine charms to convince the sultan and strengthen her position.

Using the technique of the foreign storyteller, the Armenian merchant, Sadoveanu also brings into discussion the narrative scenario, seen in the epic tradition of hybridizing between Eastern and European elements: "his narrative, although served in a florid style, East-fashion, yet has plenty of European elements."[26] Elements belonging to the epic tradition of the East are juxtaposed

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[23] Ibidem: „patricieni de la Veneția".

[24] Ibidem, p. 69: „Veneția, biruită pe mări și în insule, câștiga în altă parte o victorie cu atât mai serioasă, cu cât era mai ascunsă".

[25] Ibidem, p. 73: „soarta, cu ochi de gheață verde".

[26] Ibidem, p. 86: „expunerea sa, deși mi-a fost servită în stil înflorit, după moda răsăritenilor, totuși are îndestulătoare elemente europene".

with European insertions, designed to prompt comparison. The Armenian merchant becomes a voice that facilitates the understanding of cultural and narrative hybridization, able to observe and report details about both Eastern and European cultures without being limited by internal prejudices or biases. Eastern narrative tends to follow a meditative and contemplative rhythm, different from the often more alert and action-oriented cadence of the European storytelling, with a clearer and more logical narrative structure, a linear unfolding of events, and focused on coherence and causality. By intertwining Eastern and European elements, Sadoveanu creates a hybrid epic tradition that reflects the complexity of cultural interactions in the Balkan space, more specifically from Constantinople.

Roxelana, persona in absentia, from Composite Notes

My discussion regarding the historical metafictions of French writer Marguerite Yourcenar, which contain historical references to the Balkan space, proposes a double perspective: on the one hand, the reference to the character of Roxelana in *The Abyss*, on the other hand, the Balkan elements from her *Oriental Tales*.

The Abyss tells the story of a fictional character Zeno, set in the early sixteenth century, a physician and philosopher through whom Yourcenar travels across Europe and the Levant. Zenon's gaze is like a surgeon's, which penetrates into the flesh of things and cities. The Balkan facets are generated by observations of a civilization in a state of decline: "Mirages", Zeno said. "Your golden ages are like Damascus and Constantinople, beautiful from afar; you have to walk their streets to see their lepers and dead dogs"[27].

To analyse carefully the closer proximity to cultural epochs means to see reality, the everyday world of ordinary people. Zeno is the physician who has also reached the court of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, an idea suggested in the moment of describing the body of John Myers:

> The still-warm body of the old John Myers was lying on the table in the adjoining room. Catherine entered with the chosen shroud to bury him. – 'The master died from a stroke', she said. She looked like one of those washerwomen with a black veil whom he had seen operating in the mansions of Constantinople when he was in the service of the Sultan. The death of the old doctor did not surprise him much.[28]

[27] Marguerite Yourcenar, *The Abyss*, translated by Grace Frick, New York, Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981, p. 120.
[28] Ibidem, p. 164.

The feminine guise of the washerwoman dressed in black recalls her experiences from the Ottoman Empire and simultaneously expresses the privileged position of women who labored. It represents a fictionalization of the woman who assumes the prerogative of the writer.

It is time to confess that *The Abyss* is mainly discussed due to... an absence. For some fragments have been omitted from Yourcenar's published text, which are included in *Composition Notes*, presented in the section *Memories of Turkey*. Several passages, sequences, and characters have been eliminated from the oriental setting: "Roxelana's intrigues, Ibrahim's evening, the character Mustapha, the eldest son of Soliman and the presumptive heir to the throne, condemned to death by his father following the machinations of his stepmother Roxelana"[29].

The author's choice to remove passages about Roxelana can only add information to our endeavour regarding the projection of such a Balkan character. Things look differently in the case of Ibrahim, a historical figure mentioned many times in Roxelana's entourage. He becomes an instrument the physician Zenon wishes to use in order to eradicate diseases or for medical systematization. We cannot fail to notice the Western stereotype of undertaking the civilization of a space that appears barbaric, as well as how medical knowledge is perceived as originating from Greek civilization, passed through Arabic manuscripts and rediscovered:

> At the Grand Seraglio, the friendship of the powerful and unhappy Ibrahim, vizier of His Highness, had made him hopeful of the success of his plan for cleaning the marshes around Adrianople; he had embraced in his heart a rational reform of the gendarme hospital; he had begun to buy – to buy up here and there valuable manuscripts of Greek physicians and astronomers, acquired once – once acquired by Arab scholars, and which, amid much clutter, sometimes contained a truth to be rediscovered.[30]

The descriptions of cities contain a mix of elements, with the debauchery of the Grand Seraglio, but also that of a Venetian brothel. Reducing the human being to primal instincts, to intrigues, and to the desire for enrichment, Yourcenar describes the successions of generations from any era.

The choice of the French writer Marguerite Yourcenar for discussing Balkan world literature is also related to her work published in 1938 *Oriental Tales*, which recalls one of the stories collected by Sadoveanu in 1947 entitled *Fantazii*

[29] Ibidem, p. 321.
[30] Ibidem, p. 182.

răsăritene [Eastern Fantasies][31]. In one of Yourcenar oriental tales, intitled *Marko's Smile* [Marko's Smile], she proposes a Balkan narrative scenario, with geographical landmarks like the Montenegrin Alps, and with foreigners as main characters, representing different facets of the centre and peripheries: "The Greek archaeologist, the Egyptian pasha, and the French engineer had remained on the upper deck. The engineer had ordered a beer, the pasha was drinking whisky, and the archaeologist was cooling off with a lemonade."[32] Stereotypes are used here to identify some geographical types.

Yourcenar resorts to concrete geographical details to situate the narrative scenario in the Balkans. The quay of Kotor and that of Ragusa serve as the sole gateways to the Mediterranean for the expansive Slavic realm, delineating a region that remains largely disconnected from maritime influences despite its vast geographical reach. This separation underscores the unique cultural and historical dynamics of the Slavic territories, which navigate a complex network of waterways rather than a direct relationship with the sea:

> The quays of Kotor and Ragusa are undoubtedly the only access points to the Mediterranean for the vast Slavic realm that stretches from the Balkans to the Urals, remaining indifferent to the changing boundaries on the map of Europe and distant from the sea. This region can only be reached through the intricate sinuosities of the Caspian, the Baltic, the Black Sea, and the coast of Dalmatia.[33]

The dominant idea that defines what we can call Balkan world literature is that the Balkan space acts collectively, disregarding the phantom borders[34] that temporarily shape the European landscape. Nation-states, with borders established through treaties or conquests, become illusory, with the only palpable reality remaining the Balkan territory united by criteria other than those drawn on the map. In accordance with the geographical space, a Balkan epic tradition is born, corresponding structurally to a sinuous landscape. Yourcenar draws a parallel between the literary creations of Balkan populations and the Kotor Canyon, which defines the Peninsula:

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[31] Mihail Sadoveanu, *Fantazii răsăritene* [*Eastern Fantasies*], București, Editura de Stat, 1946.

[32] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Oriental Tales*, translated by Alberto Manguel, New York, Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1985, p. 38.

[33] Ibidem.

[34] About „phantom borders" see more in Alina Bako, "Cognitive cartographies in Liviu Rebreanu's Forest of the Hanged", *World Literature Studies*, 4, vol. 14, 2022, pp. 78–90.

> Kotor, as we see it from the deck of this Italian steamer, is the wild and well-hidden Kotor, with its winding road that climbs toward Cetinje, and, on the other hand, the barely less wild Kotor of legends and South Slavic epic poetry. Kotor, once Turkicized and oppressed under the yoke of Muslims from Albania, is a place where, as you well understand, Pasha, Serbian ballads do not always do justice.[35]

This "South Slavic epic poetry" gives voice to the suffering of the conquered, under the dominion of an empire. The geographical image and the one constructed by literature are juxtaposed and defined as "wild", using a cultural stereotype.

The story of Marko Kralievici is narrated by an engineer, a symbol of technology that had invaded a space still loyal to tradition. The engineer confesses he had listened to the story from the peasants of the village where he stayed while digging a tunnel for the Orient Express. The epic tradition is thus brought back into discussion. Oral transmission, noted also by Damrosch as characteristic of Balkan world literature, is certainly a form of preservation for the cultural memory.

Balkan literature is one that primarily deals with conflict, the struggle against colonizers, in this case, the Ottomans. The character chosen by Yourcenar, Marko, embodies the aspect of *homo balcanicus* as defined by Antoaneta Olteanu:

> The image of the Other in this geographical region has been marked by a heavy historical past, conflicts and rivalries, but also by common struggles against invaders, for the preservation of freedom. The Serbs fought for Greece's liberty; in Tudor Vladimirescu's detachments, there were Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, and others.[36]

To position oneself against the Ottomans, the dominant imperial force during that time, temporarily erased one's belonging to a specific people:

> If I remember correctly, Marko died in a battle against the Ottomans, either in Bosnia or on Croatian soil, but his last wish was to be buried in this Sinai of the Orthodox world. A boat managed to carry his body there, despite the rocky cliffs of the Aegean Sea and the danger posed by Turkish galleys. It's a beautiful story that, for some

[35] Marguerite Yourcenar, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

[36] Antoaneta Olteanu, *Homo Balcanicus. Trăsături ale mentalității balcanice* [*Homo Balcanicus. Some Features of Balkan Mentality*], Cluj-Napoca, Paideia, 2004, p. 133: "Imaginea Celuilalt a fost marcată în această regiune geografică de un trecut istoric apăsător, de conflicte și rivalități, dar și de lupte comune împotriva invadatorilor, pentru păstrarea libertății. Sârbii au luptat pentru libertatea Greciei, în detașamentele lui Tudor Vladimirescu erau angajați greci, sârbi, bulgari ș.a." (my translation into English).

> reason, reminds me of Arthur's final journey. The West certainly has its heroes, but they are supported in battle by their principles, while the heroism of this Serb was purely about valor. The Turks Marko confronted believed that a mountain oak was falling upon them. I've told you that at the time, Montenegro was under Islamic rule: the Serbian troops were too weak to openly reclaim Mount Black from the Ottomans, from which their land derives its name.[37]

Balkan world literature has also a militant component, especially in relation to a common enemy, the invading Ottoman Empire, as well as the conglomerate of nations that define it. Another characteristic is the comparison to the Western literary models; in this case, Marko is seen as a different Arthur, not adhering to principles but to "pure courage", an embodiment of the instinctual. Yourcenar reveals that the inspiration for *Marko's Smile* and *Milk of Death* came from two medieval Balkan ballads.

The third trait of Balkan world literature is linked to fundamental motifs and themes circulating in the Balkan space. Damrosch notes the circulation of the myth of *Meșterul Manole* [Master Manole] and some of its variants. However, this is not the only motif; for example, the nereids appear in the entire Balkan region. Thus, in *The Man Who Loved the Nereids*, another novel from *Oriental Tales*, Yourcenar imagined the beggar Panaiotis, who embodies a character that "has lost his speech because he saw the Nereids".[38]

Romanian literature is also populated with appearances of nereids, found in both folklore superstitions and literary writings, from Dimitrie Cantemir to Mihail Sadoveanu and Mircea Eliade. Yourcenar chooses, through one of her characters, to counterbalance the Gothic fantastic with a Balkan fantastic where ethical boundaries blur. Innocence and destruction are equally present, and their copresence reflects human complexity and a moral ambivalence characteristic of Balkan cultures:

> You may not know that this island is inhabited by strange apparitions. Our ghosts are not like yours from the North, which only come out at midnight and then dwell in the daytime in cemeteries. They do not dress in shrouds, and their skeletons have flesh on them. But they are certainly more dangerous than the souls of the dead, which are at least baptized, know what life is, and what suffering means. The nymphs from our realms are innocent yet harmful, like nature, which either defends or crushes man. The ancient gods and goddesses have long died, and only their marble relics can be found in museums. Our nymphs resemble more your fairies and sirens than what you envision after Praxiteles.[39]

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[37] Yourcenar, *Oriental tales*, p. 131.
[38] Ibidem, p. 99.
[39] Ibidem, p. 100.

Unlike the images of spectres from the North Mythology, described as beings that wander only at night, Balkan entities appear to be more integrated into daily life and environment, as a natural aspect of the community. The cultural syncretism in which a connection is created between the ancient gods and goddesses and nereids comprises multiple historical layers and diverse, hybrid cultural influences. The image of the nereids/sirens is dual:

> These raw fairies are beautiful, bare, refreshing, and ominous like water from which you drink fever germs; those who have seen them once fade slowly, consumed by longing, drained of power, and those who have dared to approach them remain forever silent, so that no one knows the secret of their love.[40]

The nereids symbolize nude, pure, and natural beauty, but the epithet "ominous" highlights the danger associated with this attraction. The association with water concealing the danger of diseases, common in the Middle Ages, represents the warning stemming from folklore, that of approaching beings belonging to another realm. Those who see the fairies "fade slowly" – this phrase evokes the image of a passion that completely consumes the individual. The devastating effect of encountering the fairies is not immediate, but long-lasting, gradually wearing down the strengths and will of the inflicted individual.

The analysed prose fragments provide a solid foundation for understanding how historical figures like Roxelana and literary motifs like nereids can contribute to defining and exploring Balkan world literature. These elements initiate an important dialogue on the hybridization of cultural and literary traditions in the Balkan Peninsula. Roxelana is a historical figure, not only in the Ottoman history but also in a wide Balkan literary context. Her origins – assumed either to be Ukrainian / Caucasian or European (Venetian) – make Roxelana a symbol of the blending of East and West. This is reflected in her central role in the Ottoman court and harem, where she wielded significant influence.

The prose fragments analysed, and the elements discussed contribute to a broader and more inclusive definition of Balkan world literature, underlining the diversity and interconnectedness of literatures in the Balkan Peninsula. Additionally, Balkan world literature offers an alternative perspective that counterbalances the predominantly Eurocentric literary traditions, highlighting cultural and literary contributions from the Balkans. The proximity of Balkan

[40] Ibidem, p. 102.

narrative traditions to those from other European and Oriental regions reflects the dynamic transnational networks of world literature, as conceptualized by Damrosch and others.

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EMIL CIORAN – LA PEUR DE RATER EN TANT QUE ROUMAIN, UN MOBILE DE SA RÉUSSITE LITTÉRAIRE

Gina Puică

Emil Cioran – The fear of failing as a Romanian, a motive for his literary success
Abstract: In this article, we attempt to analyse what seems to be a persistent obsession of Cioran's over time: the fear of failing in life (and therefore also in his writing career) because of his Romanian origin. Cioran was convinced that Romanians were doomed to failure and that Romania embodied "the genius of failure". To escape the fate reserved for writers from "small" countries and join the "World Republic of Letters" (Pascale Casanova), Cioran chose France as his country of residence, especially as he was fascinated by the country's grandiose history. But despite having done everything to escape the "Romanian failure", the "Romanian nothingness", Cioran paradoxically remained attracted all his life by the philosophical and existential question of failure, and even seems to have despised his own success when success began to come. It is on these questions that our article will focus, drawing in particular on Cioran's correspondence, a substantial selection of which has recently been published.
Keywords: literary success, failure, assimilated writer, major culture, minor culture.

Emil Cioran (1911, Rășinari-1995, Paris) qualifia sa rencontre avec la France de « [f]atale rencontre »[1] et il n'oublia jamais le « coup de foudre »[2] qui fut le sien pour ce pays dès son premier voyage en France, en 1935, lorsque, boursier en Allemagne depuis 1933, ses centres d'intérêts semblaient plutôt tournés vers ce dernier pays. Ainsi, écrivait-il, sur une carte postale destinée à ses parents, le 26 mars 1935 : « Aujourd'hui, je quitte Paris. En route, je vais m'arrêter à Cologne pour deux jours. J'ai vu [à Paris] tout ce que je pouvais voir en un mois. Si je n'étais pas venu à Paris, je l'aurais regretté toute ma

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[1] Cioran, *De la France*, traduit du roumain par Alain Paruit, Paris, L'Herne, 2009, p. 59.

[2] Cioran, *Manie épistolaire. Lettres choisies 1930-1991*, édition établie par Nicolas Cavaillès, Gallimard, 2024, p. 288.

vie ». Précédemment, le 14 mars, sur une autre carte postale, également envoyée depuis Paris, à son frère Aurel, il avait noté : « Il y a beaucoup de choses que j'ai apprises ici [à Paris], et beaucoup de choses que j'ai appris à oublier. Seule ma mélancolie est restée la même, douce et amère, à Paris, comme à Sibiu, Berlin ou Râul Sadului. »[3]

Entre autres, la riche correspondance de Cioran avec sa famille et ses amis – dont un choix consistant fut publié en cette année 2024[4] – nous renseigne sur la façon dont l'écrivain se rapporta en tant qu'esprit créateur au potentiel que pouvait lui offrir la Roumanie. Autour de ses vingt ans, il dévoile à son ami d'enfance Bucur Țincu ses grandes ambitions d'accomplissement intellectuel, même s'il précise qu'il vise moins une réussite sociale qu'une réussite intérieure : « je n'ai jamais été un ambitieux vulgaire. Mon ambition fondamentale [...] n'est qu'un désir, illimité ou presque, de réalisation intérieure personnelle [...] »[5]. Or, cette ambition précoce s'accompagne chez Cioran de la révélation concomitante, qui ne sera jamais démentie, de l'échec du peuple roumain dans l'Histoire, déclinée sur maintes formes. « [C]oncernant le destin de notre culture, il y a de quoi déprimer », écrivait-il au même correspondant le 10 novembre 1931[6]. Dix ans plus tard, dans une lettre à Petru Comarnescu : « Je voudrais écrire une philosophie de l'inaccomplissement dont le sous-titre serait : *À l'usage du peuple roumain*, mais je ne crois pas en être capable. Mon destin est celui d'un convalescent. Je ne peux pas dépasser le virtuel [...] »[7]. On s'aperçoit que le jeune Cioran est par moments convaincu qu'il partage le sort du peuple dont il est issu. Et quand il s'attarde sur les défauts de ses conationaux, c'est en partie de lui-même qu'il parle. Dans une missive adressée à Alphonse Dupront le 19 avril 1941, Cioran évoque encore « ce spectre qui hante l'intellectuel roumain : la peur de rater »[8].

Cioran commence à bâtir non sans opiniâtreté sa carrière roumaine d'écrivain au début des années 1930. Son premier livre, *Pe culmile disperării* [*Sur les cimes du désespoir*], paraît en 1934. Le dernier de cette série roumaine, rédigé, lui, à Paris, *Amurgul gândurilor* [*Le Crépuscule des pensées*], est publié en 1940. Les cinq

[3] Frédéric et Maryse Castaing, *Lettres autographes et manuscrits littéraires et artistiques du XXe siècle. Exceptionnel ensemble du philosophe roumain Emil Cioran*, catalogue d'exposition de documents mis en vente à Drouot le 7 avril 2011, Paris, Binoche et Giquello, documents traduits du roumain par Gina Puică et Vincent Piednoir, p. 38.

[4] Cioran, *Manie épistolaire. Lettres choisies 1930-1991*, *op. cit.*

[5] Idem, pp. 50-51.

[6] Idem, p. 53.

[7] Idem, p. 134.

[8] Idem, p. 138.

livres qu'il compose et fait paraître durant cette quatrième décennie secouée par les soubresauts de l'Histoire dévoilent un écrivain scandaleusement pessimiste, aux propos outranciers, d'une liberté thématique, stylistique et idéologique insolente, égotistes et sans aucun souci du système. L'insolence, l'esprit de fronde, l'immoralité de ces textes sont en partie le signe d'une part, de l'immaturité de l'auteur, d'autre part, d'une volonté de sortir du lot. Plus tard, l'écrivain reconnaîtra une certaine valeur seulement au dernier d'entre eux, celui rédigé à Paris. L'emballement idéologique de *Schimbarea la față a României* [*Transfiguration de la Roumanie*], l'ouvrage le plus controversé de Cioran, celui qui par la suite lui paraîtra le plus étranger, participe lui aussi d'un énorme complexe d'infériorité, voire d'une haine de soi en tant que Roumain. Cioran regrettera autant ses propos inadmissibles que les illusions qu'il s'était faites sur le compte de sa génération. Il l'écrira à de nombreuses occasions, notamment dans son très court essai *Mon pays,* trouvé après sa mort.

> Nous, les jeunes de mon pays, vivions d'Insensé. C'était notre pain quotidien. Placés dans un coin d'Europe, méprisés ou négligés par l'univers, nous voulions faire parler de nous. [...] Nous voulions surgir à la surface de l'histoire : nous vénérions le scandale, seul moyen, pensions-nous, de venger l'obscurité de notre condition, notre sous-histoire, notre passé inexistant et notre humiliation dans le présent. « Faire de l'histoire » c'était le mot qui revenait sans cesse sur nos lèvres : c'était le maître-mot. Nous improvisions notre destin, nous étions en rébellion ouverte contre notre néant. Et nous ne craignions pas le ridicule. Car notre savoir était insuffisant, notre expérience illusoire ; mais par la suite notre déception devait être solide, inébranlable. Elle finit par devenir notre loi... Nous retombâmes *au niveau* de notre pays.[9]

En 1937, avant que l'Institut français de Bucarest ne lui octroie la fameuse bourse qui l'amènera à Paris, Cioran fait part de son besoin d'espace plus large pour évoluer intellectuellement. Bucarest, Sibiu, Brașov lui semblent trop étriquées. Preuve en est une lettre qu'il adresse à Mircea Eliade le 4 avril, où il avoue : « toutes les extases de sainte Thérèse ne sauraient éteindre mon besoin insensé de partir à l'étranger. Une avidité d'espace qui prend chez moi une forme pathologique. »[10] S'ensuivent de nombreuses années de recherche de soi de Cioran à Paris (un entre-deux couvrant une décennie environ de sa

[9] Cioran, *Țara mea / Mon pays*, Humanitas, București, 1996, pp. 133, 136. C'est Cioran qui souligne.

[10] Cioran, *Manie épistolaire. Lettres choisies 1930-1991*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

vie) que vient conclure la parution de son premier livre français : *Précis de décomposition*, publié en 1949, un adieu à son identité d'écrivain roumain et l'acte de naissance d'un nouvel écrivain français. Mais en 1937, Cioran ne se doute pas de ce que le sort lui réserve et le chemin sera long jusqu'à sa pleine accession aux milieux littéraires parisiens. Son dernier voyage en Roumanie date de 1940-1941.

Il continue d'écrire en roumain jusqu'en 1946 : *Despre Franța* [*De la France*], *Îndreptar pătimaș* [*Bréviaire des vaincus*], *Razne* [*Divagations*] et le manuscrit de ce qui deviendra *Carnetul unui afurisit* [en version française *Fenêtre sur le Rien*]. Il ne publie alors aucun de ces textes et seule une partie de *Îndreptar pătimaș* paraîtra de son vivant (en 1991). Ces années d'errance créatrice préparent la « transfiguration » idéologique, linguistique et stylistique de Cioran. L'issue de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, son propre passé pesant qu'il tentait de fuir, mais aussi le contact prolongé avec la culture française, une culture considérée encore à l'époque comme majeure, et son mûrissement intellectuel le conduisent à rejeter en bonne partie son héritage roumain. Lorsqu'il s'apprête à faire paraître son *Précis de décomposition*, il confie à ses parents : « Si je m'étais mis à écrire en français dès mon arrivée ici, j'aurais aujourd'hui un nom et d'autres possibilités ; quoi qu'il en soit, j'ai réussi à apprendre à écrire avec facilité »[11] (lettre du 19 février 1948). Une année auparavant, tout en critiquant acerbement ses écrits roumains, il écrivait à Petru Comarnescu :

> Mon malheur est d'avoir cru que l'âme est tout, alors que les mots sont les véritables dieux. Cette découverte tardive me désespère. Maintenant je paye cher d'avoir mis les frénésies du cœur au-dessus de la conception d'une œuvre.[12]

L'influence de la France, d'une certaine France alexandrine, est perceptible ici. Ses premières années françaises subissent la fascination intellectuelle de Valéry[13]. Dans son *Despre Franța* (*De la France*), rédigé en 1941, Cioran évoque à plusieurs reprises cette figure majeure de la littérature du moment. Il semble évident que Cioran aspire à devenir un nouveau Valéry. Comment comprendre autrement ces lignes :

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[11] Idem, p. 153.

[12] Idem, p. 151.

[13] Ultérieurement, Cioran relativisera la portée de la création de Valéry, en dénonçant notamment ce qu'il appellera le « narcissisme » de Valéry. Voir *Valéry face à ses idoles*, dans *Exercices d'admiration* (Cioran, *Œuvres*, édition établie, présentée et annotée par Nicolas Cavaillès, avec la collaboration d'Aurélien Demars, Gallimard, pp. 1174–1188).

> La France attend un Paul Valéry pathétique et cynique, un artiste absolu du vide et de la lucidité. Lui qui, de tous les Français de ce siècle, s'est le moins trompé [...] n'est pas l'expression maximale de la décadence, car il lui manque une vague nuance prophétique, et le fier courage dans l'irréparable. [...] Le renoncement au contenu est le secret de Valéry et de l'avenir français. Le culte absolu des prétextes, appuyé sur un dynamisme sans illusion, telle est la voie qui s'ouvre à sa possibilité alexandrine. Si la France ne devient pas le pays des dangereuses subtilités, nous n'avons plus rien à en apprendre. Qui trouvera la formule de ses lassitudes ?[14]

Ce nouveau Valéry « balkanique » ferait la synthèse du « sous-monde de la Valachie »[15] et de la décadence française que Cioran tente d'ausculter alors ! Quoi qu'il en soit, il entend contribuer à la constitution de cette « culture d'*orgies formelles* »[16] qu'il pressent venir ou plutôt incarner lui-même. On a énormément écrit (Cioran lui-même) sur les différences entre les deux Cioran (le Cioran roumain et le Cioran français) et leurs deux styles d'écriture soi-disant opposés. Les choses ne sont pas aussi nettes. Il n'y a pas rupture stylistique totale entre les deux étapes de la création de Cioran. Que le roumain et le français soient des langues ressenties par les écrivains bilingues dont Cioran comme très différentes est un fait, mais la tentation de l'aphorisme, du style épuré, néo-classique, de la perfection formelle existe dès la période roumaine de l'écrivain, sans oublier certains thèmes obsédants. Quoi qu'il en soit, il est certain qu'il aura ambitionné de s'assimiler à la littérature française et même à la « langue de Racine » (Pascale Casanova parle dans ce cas d'« hyperidentification »), de devenir ainsi « plus français que les Français » de son temps, dans l'espoir de fuir « le sort » réservé « à tous les écrivains des 'petits' pays »[17].

L'entrée de Cioran dans le beau monde littéraire parisien ne passe pas seulement par la création d'un style propre recyclant de l'ancien, mais aussi, de manière plus terre à terre, par certaines tentatives de s'attirer la faveur de gens qui comptent dans les milieux intellectuels. Pendant plusieurs années, Cioran est un mondain, courant les cocktails et autres dîners en ville. Il n'hésite pas à flatter de façon aussi charmante qu'intelligente certains grands noms et à entrer en correspondance avec eux. Complaisant jusqu'à l'hypocrisie, il est surtout alors (et il le restera toute sa vie) un maître dans l'art de l'auto-dérision en tant que Roumain (ou

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[14] Cioran, *De la France*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48–49.
[15] Idem, p. 66.
[16] Idem, p. 88. C'est Cioran qui souligne.
[17] Pascale Casanova, « Cioran, de l'inconvénient d'être né en Roumanie », in Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, Paris, Seuil, 2008, pp. 308–310.

« Valaque », comme il se plaît à se décrire), certain d'amuser ainsi les autres. Pour certaines pages de son *Irréfutable essai de successologie* (celles sur « l'écrivain transfuge » ou « l'écrivain intercalaire »[18] notamment), Lydie Salvayre aurait pu s'inspirer un peu de Cioran. Voilà ce qu'il écrivait, par exemple, à Henry Miller, dans une lettre du 7 mars 1951 :

> Vous dirais-je, quant à moi, que votre Paris est le mien, que je me suis retrouvé dans maintes de vos pages ? J'ai vécu comme vous la poésie des bordels, les épilepsies intérieures, la hantise de la misère. Il n'y a qu'un étranger (soit dit en passant, je suis roumain, fils d'un prêtre orthodoxe) pour comprendre entièrement la qualité de vos délires. Aussi m'arrive-t-il souvent de parler de vous comme d'un frère génial, auquel on est trop attaché pour pouvoir l'envier ou le juger.[19]

Quelques années plus tard, Cioran fera son autocritique quant à cette époque mondaine de sa vie, où il était « de tous les cocktails »[20], comme il l'écrivait dans une lettre à Constantin Noica du 7 janvier 1958. En effet, à partir du moment où il commence à être connu, il commence aussi à mépriser non seulement les honneurs (après lesquels il n'a jamais couru), mais aussi les efforts précédemment déployés pour accéder à la reconnaissance. Le 29 juillet 1960, il en fait part (sans doute avec sincérité), à Ernst Jünger, mais non sans admettre que ce sentiment reste ambivalent chez lui :

> je n'ai plus le désir d'être connu, l'idée même de notoriété m'écœure, et cependant, par un enchaînement fatal ou par veulerie, je me trouve acculé à des démarches incompatibles avec mes convictions. Souhaiter l'anonymat et courir après des traducteurs![21]

Cette ambivalence de son rapport à la réussite, tant intérieure qu'extérieure, est perceptible aussi lorsque Cioran se compare à d'autres : aux bourreaux de travail que sont Mircea Eliade ou Armel Guerne, par exemple. Devant leur productivité intellectuelle effrénée, Cioran hésite entre regret et soulagement. Ses propres publications sont précédées de longs atermoiements avant leur remise chez l'éditeur. Ainsi de celle de *La Chute dans le temps*, que dans une lettre à Armel Guerne, il décrit comme n'étant qu'un simple recueil d'articles, « un peu

[18] Lydie Salvayre, *Irréfutable essai de successologie*, Paris, Seuil, 2023, pp. 65 *et sq*.
[19] Cioran, *Manie épistolaire. Lettres choisies 1930-1991*, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
[20] Idem, p. 167.
[21] Idem, pp. 171–172.

plus qu'une brochure »[22], alors que vers la fin de sa vie, il pensera que c'est sans doute l'un de ses livres les plus importants[23].

Mais plus le temps passe, plus les œuvres cioraniennes s'accumulent, plus « l'orgueil de l'échec »[24] l'obsède, mais toujours sur le mode du paradoxe. Car qu'est-ce qu'au fond l'échec, selon Cioran ? Il semble rimer avec abstention (de noircir le papier et de publier) et stérilité, lucidité et sagesse, mais bien d'autres choses encore ! De ses réussites propres (dans le sens courant du terme) serait plutôt responsable sa « veulerie »[25]. « *N-a fost să fie*. C'est ce que notre sagesse «nationale» a conçu de plus profond et de plus vrai »[26], écrit-il dans une lettre à Petru Manoliu du 6 novembre 1969. Cette même année, il confie à Constantin Amariu : « secrètement, jamais je ne me suis désolidarisé du *dor* et de l'*urât*. »[27] Deux années plus tard, au même philosophe roumain préoccupé par ces deux concepts, Cioran les lui décrit à son tour comme représentant des « états privilégiés »[28] et poétiques. Mais il ajoute aussitôt à ce binôme le mot « *silă* », à savoir « la lie de l'un et de l'autre, un dépôt, un déchet remarquable, ce qui reste en nous quand nous avons épuisé nos réserves lyriques ». Et il poursuit :

> Elle serait, cette *silă*, le danger qui nous guette tous, la déchéance de l'être chassé de la poésie. Si cette interprétation est juste, il en résulte qu'une seule originalité nous est dévolue : celle de l'échec. Et vous conviendrez que là (en tant que destin collectif) nous excellons.[29]

Le thème du « néant roumain » a toujours préoccupé Cioran[30]. Dans sa correspondance avec Constantin Amariu, il décrit celui-ci comme étant « vulgaire », obligeant le philosophe à recourir à des « concepts métaphysiques dégradés »[31]. Mais il entrevoit encore une chance de rattrapage :

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[22] Idem, p. 184.
[23] Cioran, *Entretiens* avec Sylvie Jaudeau, Paris, José Corti, 2e éd., 1990.
[24] Cioran, *Manie épistolaire. Lettres choisies 1930-1991*, *op. cit.*, p. 216.
[25] Idem, p. 184.
[26] Idem, p. 220.
[27] Idem, p. 221.
[28] Idem, p. 230.
[29] Idem.
[30] Cioran n'aura pas écrit de livre consacré au sujet du « néant roumain » (même si la question l'aura poursuivi toute sa vie), si l'on excepte le livre d'entretiens réalisé au crépuscule de la vie de Cioran par Luca Pițu et Sorin Antohi et publié plusieurs années après la mort de l'écrivain : *Le Néant roumain. Un entretien / Neantul românesc. O convorbire*, Iași, Polirom, 2009.
[31] Cioran, *Manie épistolaire. Lettres choisies 1930-1991*, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

> Maintenant, pour être juste, il faut reconnaître que ces expériences à un niveau si bas ne manquent pas de vertus positives, et qu'elles supposent une supériorité sur le monde, un détachement, une sagesse enfin qu'on ne rencontre chez aucun peuple en Occident (excepté peut-être les Espagnols). *Mi-e silă de mine*, *mi-e silă de toate*, c'est tout de même autre chose que *j'en ai marre*...[32]

On pourrait penser par moments à un Cioran devenu progressivement fier de la philosophie de son peuple, mais il n'en est rien. En 1970, s'adressant à Constantin Noica : « Quoi qu'il arrive, nous n'échapperons pas à un destin mineur, c'est là ma conviction profonde »[33]. Et il évoque par la même occasion sa souffrance d'antan devant cette évidence, sublimée, au fur des années, en simple regret. Pire encore, à la même époque, au seuil de ses 60 ans, il écrit à Armel Guerne :

> Plus je vais, plus je sens les tares de mes ancêtres s'accuser et revivre en moi. Et quels ancêtres ! Des sous-hommes qui n'ont rien foutu, qui ont mené une existence cachée, et qui n'eurent même pas le privilège d'être des esclaves. Ces hordes qui se replièrent vers les Carpathes et qui y menèrent pendant des siècles une existence vile et morose, je m'aperçois bien, à certains signes, que j'en descends. J'ai fini par prendre en grippe tout ce qui me les rappelle, et il suffit que je rencontre un « compatriote », fût-il passable, pour que je me mette aussitôt en fureur. Si on pouvait changer d'origine![34]

Vrai-faux mépris pour les Roumains ? Peut-être... Paradoxe cioranien ? Sans aucun doute... En tout cas, les Roumains décrits ici rappellent ceux du « pays des Roumains », présenté au début du *Bréviaire des vaincus II*, essai rédigé durant les premières années parisiennes de Cioran – pays « de la malchance » et « *de l'inaccomplissement* » (souligné par Cioran), où « rien ne réussit », où « personne n'est voué à s'accomplir »[35].

Sur le tard, dans une lettre adressée à Alina Diaconu, le 2 avril 1989, il mentionne encore « l'enfer natal », ajoutant même : « C'est ainsi qu'au drame d'exister s'ajoute celui d'appartenir au plus malheureux des peuples. »[36] Enfin, quelques mois après, en cette même année 1989, il synthétisait, pour Norman

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[32] Idem, p. 233.
[33] Idem, p. 222.
[34] Idem, p. 227–228.
[35] E. M. Cioran, *Bréviaire des vaincus II*, traduit du roumain par Gina Puică et Vincent Piednoir, Paris, L'Herne, 2011, pp. 16, 17, 21.
[36] Cioran, *Manie épistolaire. Lettres choisies 1930-1991*, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

Manea, qui venait de prendre lui-même la voie de l'exil, son attitude face à l'évidence du malheur roumain :

> J'ai quitté en 1937 ce pays *nefericit* et c'est de loin l'acte le plus intelligent que j'aie jamais commis. En 1934 j'avais passé un mois à Paris. Ce fut le coup de foudre. De retour en Valachie, j'ai tout fait pour revenir en France. [...] Paris est l'endroit idéal pour rater sa vie. C'est ce que je fais avec succès depuis cinquante et un ans.[37]

Rater sa vie, oui, mais à Paris ! Et glorieusement, au su de tous ! Tel semble avoir été le pari paradoxal, plus ou moins conscient de Cioran. Car on le pense honnête lorsqu'il écrit, le 9 mai 1979, à son frère Aurel :

> En soi, le fait de vivre à Răşinari ou à Paris n'a rien à voir avec ce que l'on est vraiment. Les voyages, les aventures – des illusions. Et c'est très bien ainsi et très juste. Quand j'étais jeune, je m'imaginais qu'en m'établissant au « centre du monde » je deviendrais un type inouï. Bêtises que tout cela.[38]

Mais, plus raisonnablement, on peut penser qu'ici, Emil (Miluţ, Luţ) tente toute simplement de consoler son frère cadet, qui a continué de vivre dans l'enfer de là-bas. Le contenu de la correspondance subit l'influence du destinataire, surtout quand on connait la délicatesse de cœur dont Cioran fut capable lorsqu'il s'est agi de ses proches.

De même, quand Cioran évoque ses succès de critique (pour *Ecartèlement*), les commentaires des « journaux (de droite et de gauche) » dont il aurait pu se satisfaire mais qui ont « un effet déprimant » sur lui et qu'il ajoute : « Être au goût du jour, c'est dans le fond une défaite spirituelle. Moi qui ai très clairement prévu l'impuissance de l'Occident, j'ai été puni. »[39] (lettre à Wolfgang Kraus du 30 novembre 1979), on peut n'y voir que de l'hypocrisie et de la mauvaise foi. Mais on a toujours affaire ici aux saillies d'un esprit extrêmement exigeant avec soi, pris entre un inextinguible désir de surmonter ses origines et de s'affirmer dans la « république mondiale des lettres »[40] et la conscience philosophique de l'inanité de toute gloire, sans oublier sa volonté d'être fidèle à ce qu'il a de plus authentique en lui.

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[37] Idem, p. 288–289.
[38] Idem, p. 262.
[39] Idem, p. 264.
[40] Pascale Casanova, *op. cit.*

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REWRITING MEDIA AND LITERARY SPACE IN THE METROPOLIS: IMMIGRANT WRITINGS IN LONDON ACROSS CENTURIES

Hongyu Chen

Abstract: This article analyses how elements of mass media in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and Guo Xiaolu's *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* (2007) reinforce and challenge London's position as "literary capital" and also transform its language, value system, and hierarchy. This system of values absorbs people into a "monolingual paradigm" which reinforces the dominant position of the language. However, Selvon's novel challenges the city mediascape, the standardized English language, and even English literary tradition. Fifty years later, although Guo Xiaolu fails to transform the position of English in the metropolis, she still adopts elements of mass media and uses formal innovations to challenge the hierarchy established by mass media and English literary traditions, pointing to the immigrants' new life experience and relationship to the metropolis in the 21st century.
Keywords: immigrant writing, mass media, metropolis, immigration experiences, English literature.

> You could tell that they are waiting for somebody, the way how they getting on. Leaning up there, reading the *Evening News*, or smoking a cigarette.[1]
>
> Suddenly white-snow-screen changes to green-snow-screen, and the BBC voice continues. A man nearby eating some bacons with the *Daily Mirror* says to the chef: 'That's an improvement.' [2]

As a metropolis with a large number of immigrants, London is constantly experienced and re-written by newcomers. To cover a wide timespan and experience, this essay chooses a novel published almost at the middle of the last century and one published within the last two decades. *The Lonely Londoners* (1956)

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[1] Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, London, Penguin Books, 2006, p. 72.

[2] Xiaolu Guo, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*, London, Vintage Books, 2007, p. 118.

by Trinidadian writer Sam Selvon narrates West Indian migrants' lives in urban London in the 1950s. Around half a century later, Chinese-born author Guo Xiaolu tells a story from a Chinese woman's perspective. The protagonist who is also the narrator comes to London to learn English, compiling her feelings and experiences in a book titled *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* (2007). The two authors are immigrants to London from the Global South and they both published in English their works written *in* and *of* London. Interestingly, as the above quotations show, though there are fifty years between, the two immigrant writers portray urban London as saturated by mass media, with characters actively engaged in different forms of media like print media (newspapers and magazines) and radio broadcasting (The BBC).

Mass media, an essential element in modern cities, includes a wide array of tools used to store and deliver content. According to Peter Burke, "A concern with the so-called 'masses' can be traced from the early nineteenth century onwards, at a time when daily newspapers were helping to shape national consciousness by making people aware of their fellow readers"[3]. This indicates that the emergence of media is related to wider audiences and to the formation of a collective, mass consciousness. In the twentieth century, when film industry and broadcasting were created, the two new forms "were grouped together with print as 'mass media'"[4]. At the end of the century, Arjun Appadurai proposes the term "mediascapes" as one of the five cultural dimensions of globalization, which

> Refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media.[5]

Similar to Burke, Appadurai points out to the "growing number of private and public interests", i.e., the larger audiences of mass media, suggesting that from the 19th century to the age of globalization, mass media keeps reaching out to more audiences and makes cultural products more accessible to consumers from anywhere in the world, a fact that builds on and largely influences people's lives. In the novels, immigrant characters participate in the city's mediascape and are

[3] Peter Burke et al., *A Social History of the Media: from Gutenberg to Facebook*, 4th ed., Cambridge, Polity Press, 2020, p. 1.
[4] Idem, p. 16.
[5] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 35.

especially involved with the idea of "mass media". In a larger context, both Selvon and Guo, immigrants to London, are actively engaged with the mediascape of the metropolis and we might consider their novels as significant representations of their experience of London.

The two immigrant novels include elements of the mass media landscape which reinforce and transform the metropolis, i.e., the position of London as "literary capital"[6] and the received ideas or hierarchies in this metropolis. Mass media and immigrant writings generally produce stereotypical representations of the newcomers, they reinforcing the Englishmen's imaginative assumptions of the immigrants and thus broadening the gap between English people and out-comers in London. As they use and circulate the mass media and language of the metropolis, the two immigrant novels written in English reinforce the dominant position of the English language in the metropolis, confirming Casanova's idea that London and its English language have here the "power of recognition" that confers "real literary legitimacy" for immigrant writers[7]. However, as the newcomers portrayed in both novels absorb London mass media as part of their lifestyle, they also transform the city's mediascape since they ignore and reverse its value system. Selvon and Guo engage with mass media in their novels and use their own distinctive ways to narrate the city. They subtly subvert the codes of the city and its very language, which suggests they try to renegotiate their position within one of the "centers" of the literary world. Selvon's novel challenges the notion of standardized English as he adopts in his narrative the voices of the once colonized subjects to write back to the center. His use of a "creolized" English in *The Lonely Londoners* was a novelty in 1956 and has been considered ever since groundbreaking. Fifty years later, although Guo Xiaolu's English narrative merges into "standardized English", she uses her distinctive formal innovations to challenge English literary tradition and to indicate immigrants' new ways of life and relationship to the metropolis. As Casanova has indicated, "These outsiders supply a new way of keeping up with modernity and thereby of revaluing the nation's stock of literary capital"[8]. My argument is that the two novels about immigration to London are literary works written *in* and *of* the literary center which at the same time reinforce the center and nevertheless decenter it.

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[6] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, translated by M. B. DeBevoise, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 118.

[7] Ibidem.

[8] Idem, p. 120.

Mass Media: Reinforcing Stereotypical Understandings of Immigrants

Mass media plays an important role in introducing and telling stories about foreign cultures, through which English people get to know more about their city out-comers. In both novels, the radio channel BBC is a crucial lens for the British to learn about foreign cultures and traditions. At the big festival organized by Harris in *The Lonely Londoners*, when Harris asks his English guest whether she has heard of the band from the West Indies, the lady answers, "No, I heard a band on the BBC the other evening – I don't know if it was this one"[9]. The detail indicates that she gains access to West Indian music through the broadcasting channel. Similarly, in Guo's novel, the English lover learns about politics in China through the report of the BBC. When the protagonist Z quarrels with her English lover over the Tibetan issue, he insists that "the Chinese government killed Tibetans", a fact reported by BBC. Z's remark highlights her own, different, perspective: "of course BBC news only report bad side of China"[10]. In the two novels mass media appear as a means by which Englishmen get informed about immigrants and their home cultures.

John McLeod points out that in the 1950s and 1960s, London's "vocabulary often intimated something of the imaginative assumptions and barriers that would impact centrally upon the lives of London's newcomers for many years to come"[11]. McLeod's idea of London's "vocabulary" refers to the media's storytelling of the immigrants, the "imaginative assumptions" of the newcomers: the "barriers" between Englishmen and the newcomers are consequences of this public storytelling. The "imaginative assumptions and barriers" constructed by mass media's storytelling in the city space suggest that "new Londoners from countries with a history of colonialism [...] would be subjected to a series of attitudes which frequently objectified and demonized them"[12]. The knowledge people got through mass media was often the stereotypical and even reinforced their positions as "outsiders". Set in the 1950s, the mass media portrayals of newcomers in Selvon's novel suggest that creation and circulation of mass media in the metropolis play an important part in boosting the negative "imaginative assumptions" of immigrants to London.

In *The Lonely Londoners*, when Moses and Tolroy, two West Indian immigrants living in London are waiting in Waterloo Station for their relatives to

[9] Sam Selvon, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
[10] Xiaolu Guo, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
[11] John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 2.
[12] Ibidem.

come, a reporter is also there to capture the stories of newly-arrived newcomers. Taking Moses for an immigrant who has just arrived, the reporter asks him about the conditions in his country and the reason for their migrations, seeking to narrate moving headline stories about people's migration to a new land. However, Moses seizes the opportunity and starts to complain about the situation of migrants in the UK. At this moment, the reporter "feel that he get catch with Moses, and say 'Thank you' and hurry off"[13], showing indifference to the immigrants' real suffering in Britain. The attitude of this reporter shows that media creators in London do not care nor sympathize with foreign cultures and newcomers. They produce instead stereotypical and hostile contents that guide public opinion and perceptions of the immigrants. At the arrival of Tolroy's family, the reporter asks Tanty some questions, takes a picture of the whole family, and makes it a headline: "The next day when the *Echo* appear it had a picture, and under the picture write: Now, Jamaican Families Come to Britain"[14]. This report with a picture and a factual title without any sympathy leads readers to imagine a massive number of migrants coming to the city, reinforcing their anxiety and hostility. As Galahad, another immigrant character points out at the end of the novel, "the papers always talking about fellars coming up here to work and creating problems"[15], showing that mass media like newspapers demonize them as job-appropriators and problem-creators. Therefore, through reading these papers, English people get negative and stereotypical ideas about West Indians, reinforcing the barriers between themselves and the newcomers. In this novel, evidence of people's negative opinions of immigrants can be found in employers' attitudes. When Moses takes Galahad to the talent market to find a job, he tells Galahad how employers will use labels to exclude people of certain ethnicity, which they don't want to recruit:

> You will see mark on the top in red ink. J-A, Col. That mean you from Jamaica and you black [...] They don't tell you outright that they don't want colored fellars, they just say sorry the vacancy get filled.[16]

According to Moses, some employers will classify the candidates by race and reject the people of color from West Indies, as they have negative opinions of the

[13] Sam Selvon, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
[14] Idem, p. 12.
[15] Idem, p. 129.
[16] Idem, pp. 28–29.

Caribbeans and therefore treat them differently. This attitude of the employers largely resulted from their absorption of mass media content that often "objectified and demonized"[17] the newcomers.

In the twenty-first century, owing to globalization, the range of immigrants to London has broadened, from people of the former British colonies to citizens all round the world. Guo Xiaolu, like her fictional hero Z, is an immigrant from China in the age of globalization. However, Guo's representation of mass media in her novel, like Z's lover's knowledge of China drawn from the BBC channel still suggests that mass media keeps on playing a significant role in building people's understanding of the newcomers, and again, it still strengthens their stereotypes. As Britain embraces more immigrants from larger parts of the world, British media's new targets have moved to developing countries such as China. In Guo's novel, media reinforces the labels that English people attached to the Chinese. In a chapter called "Identity", the protagonist Z reflects upon her own identity as a Chinese immigrant:

> As long as one has black eyes and black hair, obsessed by rice, and cannot swallow any Western food, and cannot pronounce the difference between 'r' and 'l', and request people without using please – then he or she is a typical Chinese: an ill-legal immigrant, badly treat Tibetans and Taiwanese, good on food but put MSG to poison people, eat dog's meat and drink snakes' guts.[18]

Here Z lists many stereotypical labels that are connected to Chinese people, including the fact they "badly treat Tibetans and Taiwanese", an opinion her lover gets from the BBC report. Living in London, Z realizes how different she is and how often the Chinese are categorized into certain labels, created and reinforced by the media. The labels and stereotypes are so distinct that Z can feel it clearly from the first day: "The day when I arrived to the West, I suddenly realized I am a Chinese"[19]. Just as English people believe that "the West Indians think that the streets of London paved with gold" because of the words in the newspaper[20], fifty years later, they are also guided to take for granted that Chinese people fall inevitably into the characteristics mentioned above. Thereby, since forms of mass media keep reaching out to more and more audiences around and beyond the metropolis, they offer British people a knowledge deliberately constructed,

[17] John McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[18] Xiaolu Guo, *op. cit.*, p. 187.
[19] Xiaolu Guo, *op. cit.*, pp. 186–187.
[20] Sam Selvon, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

stereotypical, and often negative, reinforcing the hierarchy between the British and the immigrants.

The stereotypical opinions of the newcomers presented in the two novels also reinforce the readers' perception, as we get to know more about the West Indians and the Chinese through the novels. Presenting the scene of the reporter at Waterloo Station at the beginning of the story, Selvon's narration also suggests to his readers that there are "too much West Indians coming to the country"[21], leading readers to form a pre-emptive impression of the characters in the story. Similarly, reading Guo's novel, we are constantly informed of ideas such as "In China, every family live together"[22]or "We Chinese are not encouraged to use the word 'self' so often"[23]. Although the protagonist Z is aware of the stereotypical understanding of the Chinese shaped by British media, she also narrates the Chinese identity as collective and undifferentiated and ignores the particularities and differences of individuals. While the author displays stereotypical representations of Chinese people in media, she still creates her own description of Chinese people stereotypically. Thus, the readers of her work, especially those from England, are guided to understand the Chinese from a certain angle and to form a biased perception of the Chinese newcomers. The novels, as the second layer of mass media, continue to build and strengthen the stereotypical labels attached to the newcomers. Although the two works involve new perspectives and ways of narration that challenge the acknowledged notion of the metropolis, as I will discuss in the third section, they inevitably present the newcomers as the "other" in the city becoming the confederate of the mass media which consolidate the differences between the English people and the immigrants.

Mass Media, Urban Imagination, and Language

Just as the English people understand and categorize the newcomers through mass media, mass media informs immigrants of the city space and its very language. As an important means of communication carrying the language and its embedded cultural messages of a certain nation-state, mass media is also an essential medium for the circulation of the national language in a certain area. According to the *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, "the model used for (the pronunciation of the) British English (in this dictionary) is

[21] Ibidem.
[22] Xiaolu Guo, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
[23] Idem, p. 269.

what is referred to as *BBC English*", indicating that the accent of different broadcasters becomes an important lens through which people get access to the English language and is used as a model of English pronunciation[24], suggesting a strong association between mass media in England and the use and circulation of English. In the novels, immigrants participate in the city's mediascape, and they also actively engage with the English language spoken and circulated around the metropolis.

In *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, Yasemin Yildiz introduces the concept of "monolingualism" which emerged in the eighteenth century along with the production of the modern nation-state. According to Yildiz, monolingualism advances the idea that "having one language was the natural norm, and that multiple languages constituted a threat to the cohesion of individuals and societies"[25]. This idea of having one's "mother tongue" not only becomes "a vital element in the imagination and production of the homogeneous nation-state"[26], but also forms a paradigm that enables the nation-state to construct and organize its citizens, as monolingualism

> constitutes a key structuring principle that organizes the entire range of modern social life, from the construction of individuals and their proper subjectivities to the formation of disciplines and institutions, as well as of imagined collectives such as cultures and nations.[27]

Yildiz's argument points out that the practice of "monolingual paradigm", i.e., making individuals and social formations possess and use only one language identified with "clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nations"[28], is also a means by which modern societies shape the individuals' knowledge, behaviors, and subjectivities. In London, the circulation and popularization of English as the national language cultivate individuals into proper British citizens. As individuals possess the language and its related principles of modern social life, they confirm the popularization of English and strengthen its ability to influence individual subjectivities. The two immigrant writers, Selvon and Guo, present how mass media in London carries the British English to create and promote a

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[24] Daniel Jones, *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. V.
[25] Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition,* New York, Fordham University Press, 2012, p. 6.
[26] Idem, p. 7.
[27] Idem, p. 2.
[28] Ibidem.

certain "structuring principle" which forms individuals' perception of the urban city and shape the knowledge of its ideology. It absorbs the newcomers into the "monolingual paradigm" and thus reinforces the position of English in London.

As London mass media presents information about and publicity for the metropolis, it becomes part of the immigrants' urban imagination, making immigrants understand the city and its ideology through the English words they learn from newspapers and the radio. In *The Lonely Londoners*, one passage narrates the first attempt of Tanty, the old nanny of Tolroy who just arrived from Jamaica, to navigate the public transport in the city. However, before her first physical try, she can already talk about public transport with others because she is familiar with the city's transportation system "just by reading about it and hearing about it": "You travel on the Bakerloo Line? And you change to the Central at Tottenham Court Road? But I thought it was the Metropolitan Line that does pass there!"[29]. Although Tanty still experiences "the anxiety of the new"[30] when she first tries public transport, she becomes able to talk fluently about ways of transportation which she has not experienced, which proves the power of the media to build a knowledge of the city. London becomes a "textual" place which can be understood through the English names of its places. The fascination of another immigrant character, Galahad, with central London is also inseparable from mass media. He is fascinated with other names of places in London: he imagines Piccadilly Tube Station as a sacred place that "everybody knows, everybody does have dates there"[31]. In the two episodes, the Caribbean newcomers get a first fascinated touch with the city by means of the "chic" English names of the places. They also have a knowledge of the city space before they physically experience the city: they have already experienced its image shaped by mass media. As they get to know more about the city through mass media and through the English words they grasp, they equip themselves with the "disciplines and institutions" built by the "monolingual paradigm"[32], i.e., by the use of English language.

Fifty years later, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* shows that media is still an important lens through which newcomers understand London. In this novel, the protagonist (Z) understands the metropolis through media, and this gradual understanding is closely connected to the learning of the English

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[29] Sam Selvon, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

[30] Andrew Thacker, "London Unplaced: Sam Selvon" in *Modernism, Space and the City: Outsiders and Affect in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and London*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2022, p. 206.

[31] Sam Selvon, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

[32] Yasemin Yildiz, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

language. Z constantly learns new words from mass media, which largely consist of Western concepts which introduce her to the meaning of Western values. For example, Z learns the word "financial independence" on a radio channel and then she uses this word in a quarrel with her English lover. When her lover complains that he has to pay for both of them, Z says:

> No, not that! You are man and I am woman, and we are live together. When couple is live together, woman loses social life automatically [...] So woman can't have any social position at all. She loses ... what is that word ... financial independence?" These are what I learned from Radio Four Woman's Hour every morning ten o'clock.[33]

Listening to the radio, she not only learns new English words, but also understands the concepts these words send to. She is introduced to Western feminist arguments, which give her a standpoint in the quarrel with her husband. She picks up the words and concepts used in the media and starts using them in her real life, suggesting that she accepts and internalizes the underlying value system those words and concepts belong to. She learns words like "identity crisis"[34], "anarchist"[35], and "dilemma"[36] from papers, using her own experience in the city to grasp the meaning and accept these notions. Z understands London through learning new words from the media, echoing the idea in Selvon's novel that London is a "textual" place where print media plays a critical role in shaping the perception of the city. Moreover, it also indicates that Z has already become part of the "monolingual paradigm" in London. While she continuously improves her English by reading papers and internalizes the ideology behind the English concepts, she is also constructed into an individual of English society with a "proper subjectivity"[37].

In addition, as mass media helps immigrants imagine, understand, and fit in the new city, those newcomers also imbibe and internalize mass media as an essential element of their lives. In Selvon's novel, Bartholomew is a brown-skin immigrant who admires a girl and chases after her from the beginning to the end. Bart's girl is described as "sitting in the tube with she legs crossed, reading the *Evening Standard* through rimless glasses"[38]. The image of a Londoner reading a

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[33] Xiaolu Guo, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
[34] Idem, p. 186.
[35] Idem, p. 188.
[36] Idem, p. 323.
[37] Yasemin Yildiz, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[38] Sam Selvon, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

newspaper is portrayed as an icon of urban life in London, a life that Bart seeks to imitate and participate in. Bart sees the English girl reading the newspaper, and he takes to reading the newspaper himself: When the girl invites him to her home, Bart "make himself comfortable and was just looking at a *Life* magazine when the girl father come in the room"[39]. Although the father will later make him leave the house, Bart's looking at a magazine as a guest in the drawing room indicates his effort to be integrated into a British family life saturated with mass media. On the same page of this novel, two names of real print newspapers appear written in italic letters, pointing to media in standardized English as a vital part of the British lifestyles the immigrants try to absorb and internalize.

Similarly, the protagonist Z in Guo's novel gets used to engaging with mass media in her daily life. Whenever she waits for her lover at home, she listens to the radio: "I come back home in the evening and switch on BBC radio 4"[40], or, "trying to stop this painful visual imagination, I turn up the volume of the radio"[41]. Her lover points out: "I wish I'd never given you books. Now all you do is sit there reading and writing. You've become so bourgeois"[42]. Although her lover's remark may reflect his own desire to get rid of this bourgeois society as a property-owing bourgeois, still his words reveal that Z has internalized the capitalist lifestyle and value system. She now behaves as a usual media consumer in London. Thereby, the immigrants' active participation in London's mediascape turns into their absorption of the "monolingual paradigm"[43]; they become subjects of the English language and thus reinforce its position in London.

We must remember the two novels are written in English by newcomers to London and published in London, the home of "BBC English". The choice of the English language for their publication strengthens the use and circulation of English in the metropolis, a way to confirm London's position as the "literary capital"[44]. Selvon adopts the style of British modernism, claiming that "I was boldfaced enough to write a complete chapter in a stream-of-consciousness style (I think that is what it is called)"[45]. Malachi McIntosh argues that Selvon "differentiates himself from others by his supposed lack of knowledge of the name

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[39] Ibidem.
[40] Xiaolu Guo, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
[41] Idem, p. 291.
[42] Idem, p. 175.
[43] Yasemin Yildiz, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[44] Pascale Casanova, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
[45] Sam Selvon, "A note of Dialect", in *Tiger's Triumph: Celebrating Sam Selvon*, edited by Susheila Nasta and Anna Rutherford, London, Dangaroo Press, 1995, p. 74.

of the stream-of-consciousness technique"[46], which suggests that he strategically positions himself outside the literary British technique. He uses the name of the technique as an "outsider", but nevertheless, correctly; his own masterly example of a "steam-of-consciousness" writing inscribe his novel within the English literary tradition he differentiates from. Similarly, in Guo's memoir *Once Upon a Time in the East* published in 2017, she talks about the reason for her choice of writing in English:

> If I continued to write in Chinese I would have no readers here. Besides, I would never create a community of fellow artists and thinkers in my Western life while speaking Chinese.[47]

Guo's words express her wish to fit into the English publication industry and the society of English-speaking artists. In this case, writing in English is a deliberate choice for her to get published, make income, and reach out to the targeted English-speaking audience. As she writes in English her story of a Chinese immigrant to London, she positions herself as an immigrant writer and reinforces the idea that London is the very place and English the very language that enables voices from other parts of the world to get heard, read, and remembered.

Rewriting Mass Media and English Literature in London

However, as the immigrant characters get used to the omnipresent mass media in the city, they also transform and reshape it in their own ways. Similarly, when immigrant writers Selvon and Guo choose to fit into the English literary space and London, they also challenge the literary tradition and the English language. Their rewriting of the city presents similar, but also different perspectives on the role of mass media. There are fifty years between the two immigrant stories and their different use of English reveals different relationships to the metropolis across space and time.

John McLeod argues that Selvon's version of the immigrants' life in London is a "utopian"[48] one, as he creates "a way of envisaging just for a moment a new kind of socially inclusive space"[49], i.e., a community that is exempt from the hierarchy

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[46] Malachi McIntosh, ch. 2, "Participant-Observers: Emigration, Lamming, Naipaul, Selvon", in *Emigration and Caribbean Literature*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 58.
[47] Xiaolu Guo, *Once Upon a Time in the East: A Story of Growing up*, London, Vintage Books, 2017, p. 259.
[48] John McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[49] Idem, p. 39.

and the existing power relationship between the English and the newcomers. Capturing moments of the immigrants' daily interactions with mass media, Selvon envisages a "utopian" possibility of reversing the hierarchy of mass media society in London. An episode of Galahad's dating the white girl Daisy in Selvon's novel indicates the newcomers' particular ways of engaging with the media, as well as their possibility to revalue and challenge it. When Galahad invites Daisy to his home, he "throw a copy of *Ebony* to her and she begin to turn the pages"[50]. After that, Selvon portrays Galahad making tea: "He take the kettle off and rest it on a sheet of *Daily Express* on the ground"[51]. Once again, two exact names of real print media appear on the same page: *Daily Express* and *Ebony*. *Daily Express* is a national daily middle-market newspaper, published in London and widely read by English people. In contrast, *Ebony* is an American monthly magazine focusing on the lifestyles, cultures, and politics of black people. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, the circulation of *Daily Express* in Britain in 1947 was 38.552,134, and in 1961, the figures soared to above 43 million[52]. However, "in 1947, the Audit Bureau of Circulation registered *Ebony*'s circulation as 309,715"[53]. According to a research paper, the circulation of *Ebony* "peaked at nearly two million in 1997"[54], which is still far lower than the circulation figures of *Daily Express* in Britain in 1947. Hence, in the mid-20th century, especially in London where the novel takes place, *Daily Express* is far more popular and widely circulated than the foreign magazine *Ebony*. However, in Galahad's room, he gives *Ebony* to his girlfriend Daisy to look at and instead uses *Daily Express* as a mat for his kettle. He thus suggests that the locally popular newspaper is less important or noteworthy than a foreign magazine focusing on the life of a minority group. Here, contextual use of the two names of the mass media implies a reversal and revaluation of the local media industry, suggesting a possibility for immigrants to transform dominant positions in the mass media of the metropolis.

Galahad's treatment of the two piece of print media also suggests that instead of becoming part of the "monolingual paradigm"[55], i.e., subjects of the ideology carried by the English language, Selvon creates a "utopia"[56], a fictional space

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[50] Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, London, Penguin Books, 2006, p. 82.
[51] Ibidem.
[52] John Benyon, *Central Debates in British Politics*, Oxford, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002, p. 197.
[53] E. James West, "Johnson Publishing Company and the Search for a White Audience", in *American Journalism*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2022, p. 310.
[54] Marlo Barnett and Joseph E Flynn, "A Century of Celebration: Disrupting Stereotypes and Portrayals of African Americans in the Media", in *Black History Bulletin*, vol. 77, no. 2, 2014, p. 30.
[55] Yasemin Yildiz, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[56] John McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

where immigrant characters can assign their own systems of value, build their own societies, and become hosts in the city they arrived. The episode of Galahad inviting Daisy to his house echoes the earlier episode of Bart coming to his white girlfriend's house. The two scenes reverse the host-guest relationship. Galahad takes up the host position, he is the one who gives magazines to his guest Daisy. While Bart tries to be integrated into the British family by reading an English magazine he finds in his girlfriend's house, Galahad invites Daisy to his house and gives her a magazine that reflects his own preferences and system of values. Therefore, the immigrant Galahad becomes the host who can assign his value system in his home "territory" and let the white girl read and absorb his values as displayed in the *Ebony* magazine. Endowing Galahad with the agency of the host, Selvon weaves a "utopian" society in his novel, where West Indian immigrants could build their own communities and systems of value, a less hierarchical and more diverse city space, independent of the standardized English society.

A West Indian immigrant himself, Selvon assigns his own value system in London while experimenting with the English language. An emblematic linguistic feature of his novel is his use of "creolized" English throughout the novel. New words have been created in *The Lonely Londoners*, such as "fellar", "test", and "spade", which are Selvon's invention and translation of "the humorous dynamics of the Caribbean street talk."[57] English grammar and syntax in this novel are far from accurate according to the criteria of standardized English, as Selvon faithfully restores the original way the newcomers speak. There is no difference between the immigrants' use of English and the English in Selvon's narration. The storytelling preserved the narrator's voice, his "creolized" and "improper" English:

> 'Where you get that car, Big City?'
> 'Mind your own – ing business. You want a drive?'
> The week he get this car he meet with a accident with a number fortynine bus and he had was to go to court.[58]

In this quotation, both characters and narrators use present tense "get" to describe something that happened in the past, failing to follow basic grammar rules of standardized English. Selvon displays his standpoint through this equivalence between spoken street dialogue and his literary narration. His literary use of the same creolized language as his immigrant characters shows his sympathy for the West Indian immigrant society in London. According to

[57] Sam Selvon, *op. cit.*, p. x.
[58] Idem, p. 85.

Susheila Nasta, by alienating structured English, Selvon "not only envisioned a new way of reading and writing the city but also exploded some of the narrow and hyphenated categories by which black working-class voices had hitherto been defined"[59]. The invention of new words and expressions also creates a "utopian"[60] fictional world where his fellow migrant characters keep their particular voices to express themselves.

Selvon's creolization of the English language challenges the English practiced in London by questioning the notion of "proper English", i.e., the English that follows a rule-based system. Although the whole novel is full of "grammar mistakes" and "improper" ways of expression, readers nevertheless understand the plot and can guess contextually the meanings of unfamiliar words like "test" and "fellar". The matter of "proper English" loses importance for reading and understanding the novel. Thus, Selvon challenges the standardized English prevailing in the English publication industry and extends the possibilities of literary English.

In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, the authors point out that "challenging the language of colonial power"[61] is an important feature in literature from once-colonized countries. They argue that "post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the center and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place"[62]. As a Caribbean writer from the 1950s, Selvon's novel demonstrates the postcolonial writer's effort in seizing and adapting "the language of the center" in order to produce new perspectives and possibilities of expression for the voices of the once-colonized subjects.

Similar to Galahad in Selvon's novel, Guo's protagonist Z also participates in London's media society in a manner that challenges its hierarchy and value system. In a chapter named "Instruction", Z's lover asks Z to buy a condom. Z is curious about it and reads the instructions on the pack. These instructions are inserted in bold, line by line, in the narration[63]. Z asks her lover questions concerning the meaning of the instructions on the pack of condoms while he is reading his newspaper:

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[59] Idem, p. vi.

[60] John McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[61] John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 28.

[62] Bill Ashcroft, ch. 2 "Re-placing Language: Textual strategies in post-colonial writing", in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffinin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 37.

[63] Xiaolu Guo, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*, London, Vintage Books, 2007, pp. 69–71.

> *Condoms are intended for vaginal intercourse, other uses can increase the potential for breakage.*
> I stop: 'What's that mean?'
> 'It is a hint. It means you shouldn't put it into the arse'. You answer, very precise, but no more patience, as you start reading your *Guardian Weekend*.[64]

In this passage, Z's reading the condom instructions juxtaposes with her lover's reading the newspaper. The author let the name of a newspaper from the mainstream left of British political opinion (*Guardian Weekend*) appear in the middle of a conversation related to condom instructions, symbolizing a mix of politics and sexuality. When reading the instructions for how to use the condom, Z also picks up new words like "jewellery" and "STD"[65], which suggests a kind of equivalent learning: Z simultaneously understands condom instructions, new words and things she learns from print newspapers. Juxtaposing newspaper information with condom instructions, Z reduces print media and its supposedly intellectual content to a layout. Regardless of newspapers or instructions, it is the language and informations she has to learn to fit into the English society. She engages with mass media in her own manner, instrumentalizing the media productions of the metropolis.

In the chapter called "Custom", Z and her lover sit in a London coffee shop and have a discussion on media issues. Z talks about a previous experience of reading a porn magazine in the same cafe. Although her lover insists it is improper to "read porn mags in a cafe" because "you'll make other people feel embarrassed", Z believes that "everything to do with the sexuality is not shameful in West"[66], which shows her indifference towards British customs. During the conversation, Z spots a half-naked woman in the newspaper of a man reading *Daily Mirror*: "The man next to us finishes his bacons, half naked woman photo with huge breasts still being exposed"[67]. Although *Daily Mirror* is not a porn magazine, the image that appears here contradicts Z's lover's remark about British customs. That man's reading should be considered "improper" too, according to same social standards, which hints at a possible parallel between newspapers' content and porn magazines. The presence of a nude female body in the newspaper challenges the image of the newspaper as an icon of dignity and British customs. This episode depicts how the newcomer Z may use her

[64] Idem, p. 71.
[65] Xiaolu Guo, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
[66] Idem, p. 119.
[67] Ibidem.

gaze to question the value system of the city and participate in the media society in her own way.

Although the two episodes in Guo's novel suggest the protagonist's distinctive way of engaging with the media and value system in London's mediascape, Z emerges herself in London's textual productions such as newspapers, instructions, and porn magazines, absorbing their languages and information. Z learns English through media, a process the writer records in her own use of English language along the novel. As the first-person diary of the protagonist Z, the narrative evolves from broken English, with little vocabulary and loose syntax, at the beginning, to proper and fluent English, with almost no grammar mistakes, at the end of the novel. Compared to Selvon's use of creolized English throughout the text, the "evolving" language in Guo's novel suggests that she seems more willing to be absorbed into the "monolingual paradigm" of the metropolis. Guo's "surrender" to "the language of the center"[68] suggests that fifty years after Selvon published his groundbreaking novel, immigrant writers still face, or face even more severely, the hegemony of English language. Selvon and Guo's different treatment of language indicates their different identities as well as their respective relationships to the English language and the city they moved in.

First of all, Selvon and Guo, immigrants from Trinidad and China respectively, have different identities and "mother tongues"[69] which make their interaction with the English language quite different. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* point out that linguistic groups in the Caribbean are "polyglossic" or "poly-dialectical", which means "a multitude of dialects interweave to form a generally comprehensible linguistic continuum", that is, "the world language called English"[70]. The fact that English is the "continuum" of the intersections of languages indicates that although there are various speaking habits and language varieties in the Caribbean, they are all variations of the English language and can be recognized by all English speakers. As the book points out, "the varieties themselves produce national and regional peculiarities which distinguish them from other forms of English"[71], suggesting that the languages of the Caribbean are "forms of English" that are related to, but still distinct from the English spoken in the "center".

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[68] Bill Ashcroft, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
[69] Yasemin Yildiz, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[70] Bill Ashcroft, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–39.
[71] Idem, p. 39.

A native Chinese speaker, Guo Xiaolu's mother tongue has nothing to do with any varieties of English. For her, English is a foreign language that she must learn beyond national borders. Guo lives in the age of globalization, when the content of mass media is "available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world"[72]. Living outside the English-speaking world when she was young, Guo was still able to access mass media in English language, such as films and television. As her character writes in the novel, "American TV series dubbing into Chinese, showing us big houses in suburb, wife by window cooking and car arriving in front house"[73], which suggests that American language and values enter the Chinese market along with media products.

There is much difference from Selvon's novel. As media production is widely controlled by English-speaking countries like Britain and The United States, the language Guo had accessed and learned through media is the standardized English coming from the "center", not "other forms of English", as those spoken by Caribbean Sam Selvon or his fellows. Besides, compared to colonial histories in the Caribbean, China was not directly colonized by the British Empire and its language, which means that Guo has no urgency to "write back to the center"[74] by seizing and transforming its language. In this case, compared to Selvon, who keeps speaking his "mother tongue", i.e., a version of English that can challenge the center but still be understood by others, Guo has to learn "the language of the center" to integrate into an English-speaking society.

Guo's novel also suggests that the age of globalization requires the learning of English, becoming another reason for her merging into the "monolingual paradigm". John McLeod points out that one of the key features of globalization is the emergence of "new networks and institutions which operate transnationally [...] through which cultural products circulate across large global audiences"[75]. The circulation of cultural products across the globe is demonstrated in Guo's novel, when the narrator comes back to China and finds that:

> In the West there is 'Nike' and our Chinese factories make 'Li Ning', after an Olympic champion. In the West there is 'Puma' and we have 'Poma'. The style and design are exactly the same [...] We have everything here, and more.[76]

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[72] Arjun Appadurai, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
[73] Xiaolu Guo, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[74] Bill Ashcroft, "Introduction", in *op. cit.*, p. 6.
[75] John McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
[76] Xiaolu Guo, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

At the time when Guo wrote the novel, most of those international institutions and companies were based in English-speaking countries and were operated in English: the knowledge of English language was essential for better opportunities and a prosperous future. The story of Guo's novel is about the protagonist Z's journey of learning English in the UK, as she states at the beginning, "As I far away from China, I asking me why I coming to West. Why I must to study English like parents wish? Why I must to get diploma from West?"[77]. Getting a "diploma from West" is important for her career development, but the idea of learning English is also related to prosperity, as reiterated at the end of the novel. Z's friend tells her directly: "But you can speak English, that alone should earn you lots of money! Nowadays, anything to do with the West can make money"[78]. The two quotations not only illustrate the "progress" of the English language, but also the significance of "learning English" not only in Guo's novel, but also for her generation. The progress of the narrator's language in Guo's novel proves the author's approval of the hegemony of English in the age of globalization. In this respect, she adopts English language on very different terms from Selvon.

Finally, the titles of the two novels are also suggestive. Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners* uses the adjective "lonely" to describe the newcomers to London, indicating that the newcomers portrayed in his novel cannot really get along with English people and integrate into the new society. Characters in Selvon's novel seem aloof and often operate in a "utopian"[79] Caribbean community rather than meeting new friends and communities in London. The immigrants' brief relationships with white girls often end up in failure, in contrast to Guo's novel. Guo uses the plural "lovers" in the title to suggest an intimate and deep relationship between a newcomer and an English man. Although Z does not remain with her English lover in the end, her emotional attachment to him is strong. While characters in Selvon's novel remain in the position of outsiders living in self-contained immigrant societies, Z successfully moves into an Englishman's house and lives a life with him. Hence, the titles and characters of the two novels also reveal the immigrants' different relationships to London, English language and society.

Nevertheless, Guo uses the English language differently, which suggests her different identity and position in the metropolis. Her writing also challenges traditional novel. Named after a bilingual dictionary, *A Concise Chinese-English*

[77] Idem, p. 4.
[78] Idem, p. 353.
[79] John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 19.

Dictionary for Lovers is a mixture of novel, diary, and dictionary. Formally, it is a diary arranged by month. However, any section for each month has for title an English word followed by a dictionary definition of that word. Guo juxtaposes in her narrative the standardized dictionary definitions of a certain English word with the protagonist's life experience related to that word, i.e., the content of each section. Therefore, she tries to give multiple definitions and interpretations to that word through combining 'official' and personal narratives. The novel blurs the distinction between artistic genres as there are photos, pieces of handwriting, and images of hand-made maps inserted in the pages of the narrative and erase the boundary between fiction and reality. This further complicates the nature of this novel and makes it a distinctive, particular literary expression.

Conclusions

Mass media such as print media and radio broadcasting is omnipresent in modern metropolis. Novels like Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Guo Xiaolu's *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* incorporate mediascape in order to narrate immigrants' lives in London, indicating their participation in and reinforcement of the city's media, literary and hierarchical society. Selvon's use of creolized English, the West Indian voices he adopts, create a language and social "utopia"[80] in his novel, which resists London's "monolingual paradigm"[81]. In contrast, within the context of globalization, the protagonist Z displays a different identity and a more intimate relationship to the city, in *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*. Guo's protagonists keeps learning the proper English and fails to transform the hegemonic position of the language. Nevertheless, Guo has her own innovative ways of writing and, like Selvon, she also challenges the mediascape in London and the accepted literary forms in English writing. Even if the two novels adopt English differently, they both rewrite the metropolis, reversing the value system of local media, and adding diversity to the English language and literary productions in the English space.

[80] Ibidem.

[81] Yasemin Yildiz, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

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NAVIGATING LITERARY CONTROVERSIES: A REREADING OF MO YAN'S *FROG* IN THE GLOBAL LITERARY LANDSCAPE

Shiqian Zhou

Abstract: The essay examines the controversies surrounding Mo Yan's Nobel Prize. Western critics argue that Mo Yan does not deserve the prize because of his ties with the Chinese Communist Party. The essay critiques the Western assumption that Chinese writers must openly express political opinions despite censorship. By using close reading analysis, the essay aims to understand how Mo Yan creates a fictional space to discuss sensitive topics by analysing his novel *Frog*. It suggests that Western ideals of democracy and freedom influence the assessment of Mo Yan's authenticity, overlooking the Chinese political context that limits free expression. The essay argues for a more inclusive global literary sphere while emphasizing close reading over Franco Moretti's distant reading. This approach reveals how Mo Yan's *Frog* navigates censorship through literary devices and a narrative subtly criticizing state policies such as the Cultural Revolution and the one-child policy. Even within a restrictive environment, Mo Yan constructs an autonomous literary space in his fiction, as Pascale Casanova proposed, which allows him to discuss sensitive issues without overt political alignment.
Keywords: world literature, Mo Yan, censorship, literary autonomy, peripheral literature.

Mo Yan became in 2012 the first Chinese citizen to win the Nobel Prize in Literature awarded by The Swedish Academy, but his Nobel elicited both celebration and criticism. For China, Mo Yan's Nobel Prize symbolizes national cultural and the nation's enhanced standing in a literary landscape historically dominated by Western culture. However, Mo Yan's Nobel Prize has drawn international criticism due to the author's ambiguous political stance on sensitive Chinese history and close ties with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Western criticism, such as Charles Laughlin's comment, questions whether Mo Yan's close ties with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) undermine principles

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like advocacy for freedom and human rights that a Nobel Prize would stand for[1]. In response to the controversy, Mo Yan eventually defended his position in a 2013 interview with *Spiegel International*, where he considers literature and politics to be separate[2]. Instead of being a political activist, he sees himself as a storyteller who narrates stories experienced by ordinary people from China[3]. While Mo Yan believes literature should focus on human experiences rather than political reality, many Western critics believe literature must be overtly political. The two viewpoints reflect the differences in the Eastern and Western understanding of the relationship between literature and politics due also to very different political contexts I will later point to.

The literary controversies surrounding Mo Yan's Nobel Prize suggest that there is a debate on whether world literature must be a political weapon advocating for freedom and human rights. While Western critics blame Mo Yan for defending state socialism and avoiding sensitive political issues in his work, this essay argues that his literature is political in different ways within the Chinese context, where public criticism of state policies or political stances risks censorship – a point often overlooked by Western critics. In Western perspectives, writers are expected to morally support oppressed groups and critique authoritarian socialist governments, making their literature inherently political[4]. However, they distance themselves from the Chinese context while demanding that Mo Yan risks his career in China. Western criticisms question whether Mo Yan deserves the Nobel; it seems like a failure as it does not stand for human rights and freedom[5]. In my view, this conclusion is Western-centric, because it analyses Mo Yan's political stance within a Western context – one where writers are not subject to strict scrutiny from the government.

Therefore, whether a work is political or not is primarily a construct determined by Western institutions and cultural traditions that historically dominated global literary stage, while neglecting other voices or traditions from peripheral cultures. To reasonably interpret how Mo Yan addresses sensitive political issues, this essay will first discuss why Western criticisms can be biased; second, it will demonstrate how global prizes and the approach to reading world literature could

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[1] Charles A. Laughlin, "Why Critics of Chinese Nobel Prize-Winner Mo Yan Are Just Plain Wrong", *Asia Blog* of Asia Society, posted on December 12, 2012, https://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/why-critics-chinese-nobel-prize-winner-mo-yan-are-just-plain-wrong

[2] "Nobel Literature Prize Laureate Mo Yan Answers His Critics", interview, in *SPIEGEL International*, February 26, 2013.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Charles A. Laughlin, *op. cit.*

[5] Charles A. Laughlin, *op. cit.*

be Western-centric. This approach overlooks the cultural context that shapes the literature of non-Western cultures. To reread Mo Yan's works, this essay uses Pascale Casanova's "literature as a world" theory. I will examine how Mo Yan creates a literary space to investigate political issues in an environment restricted by censorship in his notorious novel *Frog* (2009), dealing with the Cultural Revolution and the One-Child Policy in China. I argue in this essay that Mo Yan's *Frog* constructs an independent literary space detached from real politics, and that his literature encourages readers to examine and reconsider themselves sensitive issues within a fictional space.

The divergence between Mo Yan's and Western critics' viewpoints on the relationship of politics and literature arises from cultural differences between Chinese and Western contexts. For Western critics, Mo Yan should be responsible for not criticizing oppressive regimes outspokenly in his literary works. The fact that he does not take a clear stance against the oppressions performed by the authoritative government of his country[6] undermines the moral responsibility expected of Nobel laureates. Among other Western critics, Salman Rushdie blames Mo Yan for being silent about the political oppression faced by his fellow Chinese activist Liu Xiaobo. Rushdie criticizes Mo Yan for being a "patsy of the regime"[7], as Mo Yan did not sign an international petition demanding the release of Liu Xiaobo, Chinese writer engaged in pro-democracy activism, imprisoned for his criticism of Chinese government. Salman Rushdie wrote:

> He defends censorship and won't sign the petition asking for the freedom of his fellow Nobelist Liu Xiaobo. Hard to avoid the conclusion that Mo Yan is the Chinese equivalent of the Soviet Russian apparatchik writer Mikhail Sholokhov: a patsy of the régime.[8]

Rushdie's assertion about Mo Yan suggests that Mo Yan aligns himself with the Chinese government's policies by defending censorship and refusing to sign a petition that advocates for the freedom of the imprisoned Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo, which questions whether Mo Yan's works reflect his personal opinions or the political ideology of China. Mo Yan's refusal to sign the petition advocating for the freedom of Liu Xiaobo, an activist who calls for democratic reforms in China, positions Mo Yan in direct opposition to the values of human rights and freedom of

[6] Charles A. Laughlin, *op. cit.*

[7] David Daley, "Rushdie: Mo Yan is a 'patsy of the regime'", published online on 7 December 2012, in *Salon*.

[8] Ibid.

expression that Liu Xiaobo represents. After assuming Mo Yan endorses the government's censorship against dissenters, Rushdie's quote compares Mo Yan to Mikhail Sholokhov, a Soviet Russian writer often viewed as a loyalist to the Soviet regime. Sholokhov, a writer known for his novel *And Quiet Flows the Don*, was accused of being an "apparatchik" – a bureaucrat and regime supporter. This comparison suggests that Mo Yan, like Sholokhov, benefits from supporting an oppressive political system, and that he compromised his integrity for political favours.

However, Western criticism, as exemplified by Rushdie's comments, only criticizes Mo Yan for not openly opposing the government, not for his literary work, overlooking that Western writers are not subject to the same level of scrutiny for their political positions. In China, literature has been a mechanism to disseminate the state's political ideology, which causes censorship and self-censorship among Chinese writers as they fear imprisonment and punishment[9]. Literature has been utilized as a "tool of propaganda"[10] with the aim of "disseminating key ideological concepts among the broad masses of people"[11] since Mao delivered his "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts" in May 1942. Kamila Hladíková states that censorship and forced self-censorship have been a natural part of the Chinese literary system since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Even though the state-controlled literary establishment was gradually abolished after Mao's era, the basic principles of the official Party's views still remain in use. Literature is still expected to serve political and social objectives to some extent. Specifically, Perry Link describes the aspects that could lead to censorship, suggesting that Chinese writers have limited space to express their personal experiences rather than adhering to the state's policy:

> The literary control system was used to limit a variety of things: political disloyalty to the leadership or its ideology; exposure of social problems such as corruption and poverty; decadence and cultural "pollution" from abroad; and unclear writing such as "misty" poetry or stream-of-consciousness fiction. In the end, all of these issues were essentially political.[12]

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[9] Kamila Hladíková, "In the Name of Stability: Literary Censorship and Self-Censorship in Contemporary China", in *The Routledge Handbook of Chinese Studies*, edited by Chris Shei and Weixiao Wei, London and New York, Routledge, 2021, p. 508.

[10] Idem, p. 506.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 59.

This strict control forces Chinese authors to navigate the line between creative expression and political conformity. On the one hand, writers should depict the complexities of human experience and societal issues in their works; on the other hand, they are constrained by the need to avoid politically sensitive topics. This constrained environment in China often forces Chinese writers to make compromises because they have to comply with state ideologies while presenting their voices about the social realities they are exploring in their works. Consequently, Chinese literature is inevitably limited, as writers are forced to self-censor and be censored by the government.

A cautious approach is crucial for Chinese writers in order to avoid political scrutiny while addressing sensitive subjects. Censorship can limit literary creativity by enforcing government restrictions instead of allowing authors to express their authentic voices. Especially during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), writers and artists could not express personal opinions on politics[13]. Consequently, many resorted to self-censorship and conformed to the Party's guidelines, which led to a stifled creativity. After the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, citizens gradually adopted an apolitical stance as a passive resistance to the government's increasingly stringent censorship measures. This period saw a retreat from politics to the personal and from ideology to market-driven entertainment[14]. This shift in literature can be interpreted as a subtle defiance against the oppressive political climate, as writers sought to explore themes beyond the limits of government censors. Meanwhile, this transformation reflects a broader disillusionment and alienation from the political system. Above all, censorship has shaped the literary landscape, restricted diversity, and altered how Chinese writers express themselves and engage with society.

Addressing the censorship issue within the Chinese context does not aim to justify Mo Yan's silence in his political work. Instead, this essay hopes to recognize that Mo Yan is progressive within the constraints of censorship in China when discussing sensitive topics. As a coping mechanism in response to governmental censorship pressures, writers often adopt an apolitical stance, which may not explicitly convey their political or social commitments. However, Mo Yan's works do not lack political connections, as they often feature specific historical periods in Chinese history. While censorship may pressure conformity to government policies, Mo Yan crafts literary works that facilitate open discussions and interpretations of historical events, allowing for alternative perspectives without overtly opposing the state ideology. For instance, Mo Yan's novel *Frog* employs epistolary

[13] Kamila Hladíková, *op. cit.*, p. 508.
[14] Idem, p. 510.

forms, magical realism, metaphors to render the dark consequences caused by the Cultural Revolution and the one-child policy through his characters' traumatic experiences. Nevertheless, those viewpoints conveyed through literary devices are often overlooked by Western scholars because they directly assume Mo Yan is a traitor of democracy due to his CCP membership and refusal to sign the petition to free Liu Xiaobo.

Without recognizing the constrained socialist environment in which Chinese writers operate, criticisms from Western readers often project a sense of superiority towards non-Western literature by imposing a Western context to critique Mo Yan's works as less progressive. This imposition of Western perspectives on interpreting works from peripheral cultures perpetuates an issue: the misrepresentation of peripheral literature on the world literary stage. Franco Moretti discusses the problem in his essay *Conjectures on World Literature* that core nations, which refer to culturally dominant nations, can impact the interpretation of works from peripheral nations, which means nations with less economic and cultural influence:

> I will borrow this initial hypothesis from the world-system school of economic history, for which international capitalism is a system that is simultaneously one, and unequal: with a core, and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality.[15]

Moretti's description of world literature suggests that core nations, with greater economic power, can exert influence over peripheral nations, which are less culturally and economically dominant in world literature[16]. Drawing upon the world-system school of economic history, Moretti acknowledges the unequal power system between the core and peripheral nations[17]. He admits that while there is a singular world literary system, inequalities characterize it. Specifically, literature from core nations dominates the world and has more influence, but literature from peripheral nations is marginalized and less visible. As a result, dominant literature from core nations often sets the standards and definitions for what constitutes world literature. In contrast, literature from peripheral nations may struggle to gain recognition and representation[18].

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[15] Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature (2000)", in *World Literature: A Reader*, London and New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 162.
[16] Idem, ibidem.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

The selection standard of the Nobel Prize for Literature could also be Western-centric. As a global award, the Nobel Prize for Literature recognizes peripheral cultures in world literature while maintaining Western influence over other cultures. Awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature to a non-Western writer represents genuine recognition of peripheral nations. However, the standards for the Nobel Prize are predominantly defined by a Western perspective. Using these standards to judge whether Mo Yan deserves the prize could misrepresent his works, which originate from peripheral cultures. James English argues that recognizing a local culture from a global perspective means "imposing external interference on local systems of cultural values"[19]. English's argument suggests that global recognition can affect local cultural values positively and negatively by affecting the recognition of local literature[20]. While these prizes aim to honor local cultures, they also carry the influence and values of the Western nations. Global prizes can elevate the status of peripheral cultures by bringing international recognition and respect to their achievements. At the same time, the global prizes also sustain the old patterns of Western imperial control through the imposition of external values from the Western nations[21]. Thus, the elevation of peripheral cultures through global prizes is a nuanced issue because it shows respect for the literature of peripheral cultures but still employs a Western standard to interpret the values of the local literature. The dual nature of the Nobel Prize for Literature reveals that the Nobel prize for literature might allow Western critics to misinterpret peripheral literature, including Mo Yan's works, while recognizing its significance.

If the Nobel Prize selection standard is based on a Western view, how can Western readers accurately interpret other non-Western cultures? The Nobel Prize for Literature, conferred by a Western institution, could easily overlook the contexts within which non-Western authors craft their work because the award is historically associated with Western values. The criticisms towards Mo Yan's Nobel Prize win reveal a superior attitude that suggests Anglo-American writers possess higher moral standards by outspokenly opposing oppressive regimes. The critics believe that writers can bear the responsibility of opposing authoritative regimes in a relatively democratic environment, but they could easily neglect the political climate in China, where public criticism towards the country's policy or cultural history might result in censorship. Consequently, the argument from Western authors that Mo Yan is not qualified to win the Nobel Prize due to his

[19] James English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 298.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

silence means that Westerners interpret Mo Yan's position as a Chinese author from a Western perspective. Specifically, critics fail to understand that China does not have the same relative freedom as the West and also do not acknowledge the oppressive environment that Mo Yan faces. This essay opposes Westerns assumption that Chinese writers can be legitimate only if they anger their government[22]. To provide an alternative approach to reading Chinese literature on the global literary stage, I will use Mo Yan's *Frog* as a case study to root literary analysis within the Chinese context. My argument is that Mo Yan's novel is political in ways that allow him to avoid state censorship.

While one fashionable approach to reading world literature is the distant reading methodology proposed by Franco Moretti, this essay will analyse its limitation in understanding peripheral literatures. I advocate for a close reading approach to understand how Mo Yan critiques the Cultural Revolution and the one-child policy in *Frog* in many ways that go beyond the governments' censorship. Moretti believes that studying world literature should focus on synthesis of shared literary trends rather than detailed textual analysis of a few individual texts[23]. The reliance on a small canon becomes a limitation when studying world literature, as close reading is not equipped to handle its breadth[24]. In opposition to close reading of individual texts, Moretti prioritizes distant reading, which involves analysing literary phenomena across multiple texts and languages from a broader perspective[25]. From Moretti's perspective, distant reading enables scholars to examine a common pattern, such as narratives and genres, across different cultures and languages. Therefore, distant reading enables researchers to understand how the same literary forms are adopted and adapted in various cultural contexts. However, distant reading might lead to biased comparisons of literary works: it often employs a Western perspective to analyse non-Western cultures, potentially overlooking how similar ideas are expressed differently due to cultural differences. Distant reading helps world literature get involved with a diverse range of texts and find common patterns across various cultures. But at the same time this approach could privilege literatures that conform to Western readers' expectations or overlook specific cultural contexts that make non-Western literature special and different.

Therefore, the preference for distance reading over close reading might reinforce Western ideologies in the study of non-Western literatures. For instance,

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[22] Charles A. Laughlin, *op. cit.*

[23] Franco Moretti, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

Harvard scholar Karen L. Thornber suggests that Moretti's approach to reading world literature could have cultural biases. She quotes from Harish Trivedi's critique of Moretti:

> Harish Trivedi criticizes Franco Moretti for emphasizing, in "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000) the sub-genre of the novel, and in particular its global Western manifestations, rather than focusing on the broader form of the narrative, with which a larger variety of communities engaged for far longer.[26]

Thorbner's reference to Harish Trivedi's critique point to the same idea, that Western ideologies developed within Western contexts have shaped a certain concept of novel. Moretti's focus on Western forms in novels, which neglects the diversity of non-Western traditions, is sharply criticised by the Indian scholar. Such perspectives, like Moretti's, perpetuate a skewed understanding of world literature, where Western forms become the standard rule for interpreting literary traditions in other cultures. Moretti's distant reading methodology, which seeks to identify large-scale patterns and trends in literature, is limited if it focuses primarily on Western literary tradition. On the opposite, I apply a close reading approach to analyse the overlooked elements in Mo Yan's novel *Frog* and argue its progressiveness within the Chinese cultural context.

If one adopts a close reading approach, one can capture the subtle nuances of the text. Interpreting *Frog* from a close reading perspective could help Western readers understand how Chinese writers break the limits imposed on their creative agency in a restrictive environment. While Moretti's distant reading methodology may discover those shared literary motifs across cultures, world literature should also admit these motifs can appear differently within different cultural contexts, especially in peripheral cultures. Otherwise, world literature would remain Western-centric and adopt Western cultural mindsets to engage with cultures of peripheral countries. Western readings of other literatures often result in less accurate or conventional representations, since inappropriate ideological tools are handled to interpret unique cultural backgrounds as reflected in literature. A close reading of Mo Yan's novel *Frog* would help readers comprehend how Mo Yan finds an alternative approach to craft his work – one that provides an alternative view of sensitive historical issues in China without publicly opposing the government. Since Chinese writers cannot openly raise their political opinions on sensitive issues in their literature due to censorship limitations, only a close reading of such

[26] Karen L. Thornber, "Why (Not) World Literature: Challenges and Opportunities for the Twenty-First Century", in *Journal of World Literature*, Brill, vol. I, 1, 2016, p. 111.

literary devices may ensure that political voices hidden within their texts can be listened to and understood.

The close reading methodology will focus on three literary topics in *Frog*: the narrative structure, the symbolism of Gugu's marriage with Hao Dashou, and the frog metaphor. Then, I will use Pascale Casanova's concept "literature as a world" to discuss how Mo Yan creates in his fiction a mediating space, detached from the reality of politics, to address sensitive issues from Chinese history. Pascale Casanova's concept of "literature as a world" illuminates how Mo Yan escapes censorship when discussing tabooed topics. Casanova proposes a mediating space between literature and the world, an autonomous territory, separate from the political space. This realm is fictional, detached from real political world; however, it reinterprets political and social struggles through the lens of literary forms[27]. Casanova's hypothesis challenges some Western assumption of Mo Yan's work as apolitical. She demonstrates in her well-known book that literature is able to maintain independence from the political field as it creates a parallel world where politics is reimagined. Casanova's theory confirms the possibility that Mo Yan's literary creativity can transcend censorship constraints. Rather than explicitly expressing political views, *Frog* uses literature to examine and reimagine the Cultural Revolution and the one-child policy. While Mo Yan may not overtly utter his political alignment, his work does not lack connections to politics. His work *Frog* is an example of his progressiveness that indirectly critiques the tragic mistakes of state policies in China. He creates an intermediary space between literature and politics where he depicts his characters' tragedies, but they reflect similar tragedies from historical reality. Thus, he offers political interpretations or questions beyond the official history endorsed by the Chinese government.

This approach gives Mo Yan some freedom to present an alternative interpretation of sensitive historical events. It is expected from Chinese literature to reinforce the ideologies endorsed by state authorities, Perry Link argues[28]. He suggests that Western writers should acknowledge that Chinese authors cannot freely express their thoughts in a literary system controlled by the state: "the purpose of literature was to lead readers to think what the leadership determined it was best that they think"[29]. However, Mo Yan managed to address in *Frog* taboo subjects like violence. By use of literary devices, he created a safe space for reflection on

[27] Pascale Casanova, "Literature as a World (2005)", in *World Literature: A Reader*, London & New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 276.
[28] Perry Link, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
[29] Ibid.

atrocities in Chinese history. It is this space where he "forcefully assert his particular vision without regard to pressures to adopt and convey a political posture"[30], argues Charles Laughlin. Building on Laughlin's statement, this essay examines how Mo Yan addresses political taboos in his fictional world.

The plot of *Frog* is set against the backdrop of two tabooed topics in China: Cultural Revolution and the one-child policy. Both caused chaos and violence. Mo Yan addresses the sensitive subjects of the one-child policy and the Cultural Revolution depicting the trauma experienced by the female protagonist Gugu [Chinese spelling for "paternal aunt"], a midwife in rural town Gaomi (the native place of the Mo Yan himself) and the narrator's aunt. Instead of echoing the government's positive advocacy for the one-child policy or overlooking the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution, Mo Yan alludes to their violence and inhumanity through his character Gugu, who was an agent of the state violence, but also suffered and felt guilty for her own actions. It is how *Frog* encourages an individual reflection on harsh realities and long-lasting effects of atrocities in recent Chinese history. Mo Yan does not offer an open critique, but a counter-narrative to official accounts.

For example, to depict atrocities during the Cultural Revolution, Mo Yan uses visual imagery. He describes a horrible denouncement meeting Gugu went though. During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, denouncement meetings (批斗会) were a form of public persecution of "class enemies" who dared to exhibit values different from the state ideology promoted by the Chinese Communist Party. This kind of public persecution involved humiliation and verbal abuse directed at an individual accused of violating state values. To describe the cruelty of the public meeting where Gugu had to be blamed and humiliated, Mo Yan employs a traditional Chinese literary device called Bai Miao (白描), a "straightforward style", a detailed depiction of an image in literary works. This is how Mo Yan makes visible the invisible atrocities experienced by ordinary people:

> Just then, a piercing wail exploded from some wherein their midst. It was my mother's howl of anguish: My poor suffering sister...have you horrid beasts no conscience at all... [31]

The graphic description of the guards forcing Gugu's head down and the subsequent physical suppression illustrate physical violence and Gugu's struggle

[30] Charles A. Laughlin, *op. cit.*

[31] Mo Yan, *Frog*, translated from Chinese by Howard Goldblatt, London, Penguin Books, 2015, p. 83 (first Chinese ed., 2009).

for dignity. The image of a guard placing a foot on her back symbolizes the oppressive power of the state over the individual, reduced to helplessness. The cry of the narrator's mother' ("My poor suffering sister...have you horrid beasts no conscience at all...")[32] verbalizes the deep anguish of the person who witnessed the inhumane treatment of a loved one. It is an example of how Mo Yan chose to criticise the cruelty of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which tore families apart and dehumanized individuals.

Frog also uses a unique narrative form that bridge the gap between the realities of the one-child policy and the realm of fiction. The novel does not present political commentaries; however, it shows the author's criticisms throughout the narrative. The epistolary structure of the novel situates the story within a genuine historical background. The story is told through the letters of the protagonist, Tadpole, sent to his Japanese professor, Sugita Yoshito. As the narrative unfolds, it also turns into an absurd play to emphasize the tragic mayhem of the one-child policy as experiences by the characters. This blend of narrative forms – the letters that anchor the story in a historical context and dramatic elements that point to a literary dimension – blurs the boundaries between political reality and fictional world. It creates a space where the consequences of the 1979 one-child policy can be examined without direct political involvement.

At the beginning of the novel, the letter written by the narrator portrays Gugu as a real person who participated in implementing the one-child policy. The narrator and his friends visited her. The narrator will later turn Gugu's life into a play, which summarize all the critiques directed against the one-child policy. Gugu's life turns from a narrative into a play on stage at the end of the novel. There is a literary device which confront readers with Guru's guilt, who had been involved, as a midwife, with the crimes of the one-child policy. The play included in the novel incorporates elements of magical realism which display a harsh political criticism in the terms of a dark and absurd fantasy. The supernatural element is clear allegory: two children leading a group of frogs demand justice from Gugu. The character is more a guilty killer of innocent lives rather than a glorious obstetrician, a supporter of lawful state policy: "Those desolate and resentful cries 'wa-wa-wa' entangled her from all directions (那些哇-哇-哇-的凄凉而怨恨的哭叫声，都从四面八方纠缠着她)."[33]. The frogs' angry "wa-wa-wa" cries

[32] Ibid.

[33] My own translation from Chinese edition of Yan Mo, 蛙 [Frog], Hangzhou, Zhejiang, Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House Co., Ltd., 2023, p. 214. I translated this passage from the original to emphasize the phonetic symbolism in Chinese language. The word "child" in Chinese and the word that refers to desolate "cries" of babies share the same "wa" pronunciation. See also

symbolize the aborted children that Gugu was forced to kill and who demand justice for their lives unjustly taken. Gugu screams, at her turn, and then faints. Her scream represents the real guilt she acknowledged symbolically within the 'supernatural' staging of a shared trauma.

Moreover, *Frog* uses the symbolism of Gugu's marriage to Hao Dashou to emphasize her guilt for engaging in forced abortion. Though the novel seems to initially glorify Gugu's position as a loyal Chinese Communist Party member who always conforms to state policy, it later condemns her actions. Gugu is initially presented as a government agent forcing people to accept the one-child policy, which "deprives Gugu of her sentiments and capacity for sympathy and completely transforms her into a demon"[34]. When she enforces the one-child policy by killing the babies of pregnant women, Gugu keeps on saying the same slogan that embodies the state policy:

> You youngsters need to obey the Party, walk the Party line, and not veer from the straight and narrow. Family planning is national policy, and is of paramount importance.[35]

In Gugu's words, this reinforcement of state policy contrasts with her later redemption, symbolized by her marriage to Hao Dashou. He is a folk artist who makes clay dolls resembling children. This marriage may suggest Gugu's redemption from her harsh enforcement of the one-child policy and wish to bring those innocent lives back again. The metaphor of frogs further illustrates the trauma inflicted on Gugu, allowing Mo Yan to critique a harsh reality that dehumanizes policy enforcers and ordinary people alike. The frog is a homophonic metaphor, a technique of "using different words with a similar or the same pronunciation, but with distinct spelling and meaning to build up an association in meaning mapping"[36]. Specifically, in Chinese, the word for "frog", "wa" (蛙) is similar in pronunciation to a "wa" (娃) meaning "baby". Using this homophonic metaphor, the novelist makes a connection between frogs and the aborted babies: "Doesn't that prove that our earliest ancestor was a frog, and that we have evolved from

Mo Yan, *Frog*, translated from Chinese by Howard Goldblatt, London, Penguin Books, 2015, p. 251.

[34] Jinghui Wang, "Virtue or Vice? Trauma Reflected in Mo Yan's *Frog*", in *Interlitteraria*, vol. XXIV (1), August 2019, p. 183.

[35] Mo Yan, *Frog*, English edition, p. 102.

[36] Siqi Yao, "Frog Metaphor in Mo Yan's Novel 蛙 [Wa] [Frog]: A Cognitive Perspective", in *Manusya: Journal of Humanities*, vol. XX (2), January 2017, p. 127.

her?"[37] (Notably, the narrator's English name Tadpole is the larval stage of an amphibian.) Frogs metaphorically represent the children aborted by Gugu, her trauma caused by killing unwanted babies:

> For an obstetrician, no sound in the world approaches the soul-stirring music of a newborn baby's cries. But the cries that night were infused with a sense of resentment and of grievance, as if the souls of countless murdered infants were hurling accusations.[38]

Gugu's illusion of hearing the frogs' cries refers to her traumatic experience of forcefully aborting babies and feeling guilty for her enforcement of the policy. The frogs' cries symbolize Gugu's guilty consciousness, which haunts her. The frog metaphor externalizes Gugu's inner horror and emphasizes the psychological consequences of her involvement in enforcing the one-child policy. The trauma experienced by Gugu contrasts with the economic benefits promoted by the Chinese government's one-child policy. The close reading of *Frog* suggests that Mo Yan does not align with state ideologies when discussing sensitive topics, though he is not openly critical. Rereading Mo Yan's *Frog* within the Chinese socialist regime framework suggests that the author is political in a different way in order to transcend censorship limitations.

While Western critics might expect Chinese writers to use their voices to openly critique repressive regimes in their work, the Chinese literary atmosphere limits the freedom of expression. If advocacy for human rights should be a shared standard of world literature, excluding Chinese writers from world literature due their particular approach to dealing with sensitive political topics would only imply that world literature is Western-centric. To make it fair, world literature should realize that shared motifs can be expressed differently within different contexts. This understanding requests a more inclusive and accurate assessment of peripheral nations' contribution to world literature.

Perry Link discusses the question whether Mo Yan deserves the Nobel Prize win stating: "The deeper question, though, is how and to what extent a writer's immersion in, and adjustment to, an authoritarian political regime affects what he or she writes"[39]. Extending this argument, this essay concludes that Western critics must examine the specific Chinese context and consider Chinese writers' perspective. Open discussion of their personal political viewpoints could result

[37] Mo Yan, *op. cit.*, p. 260.
[38] Idem, p. 250.
[39] Charles A. Laughlin, *op. cit.*

in imprisonment. They need to avoid such consequences. Therefore, it is unfair for Western critics to demand Chinese writers who live in China to outspokenly express their viewpoints.

In *Frog*, Mo Yan refuses to adhere to state ideology and the official history, which often remains silent about the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution and only praises the positive, economical outcomes of the one-child policy. The author reveals his political criticism of state policy within a fictional space characterized by a blend of truth and illusion, reality and unreality. He creates an absurd magical reality within the fiction that escapes political scrutiny, allowing cruel realities to be reconstructed and metaphorically questioned. Such a narrative not only allows a Chinese writer to avoid being punished due to direct political commentary, but also creates a safe space to critically examine the victimhood of those affected by state policy. My rereading of Chinese national literature suggests a new perspective on the relationship between literature and politics: literature can indirectly influence politics rather than exerting direct influence as political activism does. It offers in exchange an alternative to official history, a reflection on the traumatic experiences of real ordinary people. Mo Yan's *Frog* invites individual readers to pay attention and even criticize the dark history that governments try to cover.

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PORTRAIT D'UN COMPARATISTE : YVES CHEVREL

Muguraș Constantinescu

A portrait of a comparatist : Yves Chevrel
Abstract: This paper proposes a portrait of the French comparatist Yves Chevrel, Professor Emeritus at the Sorbonne University in Paris. We will showcase his professional development, research career as well as his major works and achievements. The paper will particularly focus on comparative literature as envisioned by Chevrel, namely a concept broad enough to accommodate an acknowledgement of foreignness and of alterity, in general.
Keywords: comparative literature, openness, interlinking, translation, comparative method.

« Les œuvres traduites sont le vecteur
le plus important de la diffusion des œuvres de l'esprit »
Yves Chevrel

Formation et parcours professionnel

Le professeur Yves Chevrel de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, devenue Sorbonne Université, France, est une personnalité du monde scientifique, bien connue par ses contributions d'exception dans des domaines comme : la littérature comparée, les courants littéraires, la traduction, la didactique de la recherche et, plus récemment, l'histoire des traductions.

Sa démarche comparatiste/comparative prend en compte un large horizon, pluridisciplinaire, inter-artistique, plurilingue, visant à faire mieux connaître la culture humaniste européenne. La relation entre littérature comparée et traduction sera également mise sous la loupe ainsi que l'ouvrage monumental *Histoire des traductions en langue française,* initié par Yves Chevrel et son collègue Jean-Yves Masson de la même prestigieuse université.

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L'activité scientifique et didactique du professeur Yves Chevrel est très riche : elle comporte des volumes, des études et des articles de référence, qui ont été inclus dans les bibliographies courantes concernant la littérature comparée et l'histoire des traductions. Ses ouvrages et articles sont connus en France et dans les milieux francophones et souvent traduits dans d'autres langues et cultures. A cela s'ajoute son important apport à la création de sociétés et d'associations de littérature générale et comparée, où l'accent est mis non plus sur l'étude des œuvres en soi mais sur leur rapport avec l'étranger, les arts, les pratiques culturelles, voire sociales. On doit mentionner aussi les colloques sur la traduction, sur la littérature étrangère, sur les œuvres traduites, organisés par le professeur Chevrel et ses collaborateurs, dont les actes ont été parfois publiés, parfois enregistrés.

Le futur chercheur fait ses études à la renommée École Normale Supérieure. Cette scolarité lui permet de passer une année à Berlin (1960-1961) pour y préparer son premier travail de recherche, notamment le mémoire sur « Maupassant en Allemagne ». En 1962, il obtient l'agrégation en lettres classiques. Cette agrégation en lettres grecques et latines lui a donné accès à des œuvres qui constituent « un des socles d'une culture humaniste européenne ».[1]

Tout en sachant que la recherche comparatiste est « au moins double », il entame un parcours de comparatiste. En 1979, il soutient son doctorat d'État en littérature comparée avec une thèse sur *Le Roman et la Nouvelle naturalistes français en Allemagne (1870-1893)*, thèse soutenue à l'Université Paris IV. En 1980, il acquiert le titre de professeur et jusqu'en 2001 y enseigne avec passion et conviction la littérature générale et comparée.

Dans ce remarquable établissement le professeur Chevrel a contribué à la formation de plusieurs générations d'étudiants et chercheurs, qu'il a souvent conseillés en tant que directeur de recherche. Il a ainsi renforcé et élargi le domaine de la littérature générale et comparée en France, en Europe et dans le monde.

Yves Chevrel a publié des livres devenus ouvrages essentiels pour tout chercheur comparatiste, parmi lesquels : *Le naturalisme : étude d'un mouvement littéraire international***,** Paris, PUF, 1993 (1982); *La littérature comparée*, Paris, PUF, 1989, livre déjà traduit en albanais, arabe, anglais américain, chinois, coréen, italien, japonais, persan.

D'autre titres, tout aussi importants pour la connaissance des courants littéraires et des mythes littéraires, sont : *Rejet et renaissance du romantisme à la fin*

[1] Yves Chevrel, « Entretien avec Muguras Constantinescu », *Atelier de traduction*, 2019, p. 18.

du XIX^e siècle, Paris, PUF, 2000 (numéro spécial de la revue *Romantisme*), *Le mythe en littérature* (en collaboration avec Camille Dumoulié), Paris, PUF, 2000.

L'année 1989 est à retenir car elle marque l'intérêt du chercheur pour une théorisation de la littérature comparée, lorsqu'il fait paraître, en collaboration avec Pierre Brunel, l'ouvrage *Précis de littérature comparée,* Paris, PUF, précis qui a été traduit en espagnol, japonais, portugais.

Par ailleurs, le professeur Yves Chevrel a dirigé plus de 40 thèses de doctorat dans des domaines tels que : littérature et civilisation comparées, littérature française, études anglophones et germanophones; théâtre, études slaves, etc. Sous sa direction, les étudiants ont entrepris des recherches sur les cultures et littératures américaine, espagnole, norvégienne, suédoise, polonaise, slovène, vietnamienne, chinoise, grecque, égyptienne, algérienne, tchèque, italienne, arabo-andalouse, libanaise. Attentif à la formation des jeunes chercheurs, le maître a publié à leur intention un *Guide pratique de la recherche en littérature,* en collaboration avec Yen-Maï Tran-Gervat, paru aux Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, en 2018.

Yves Chevrel est, avec son collègue Jean-Yves Masson, l'initiateur et le co-directeur d'un ouvrage monumental dans la culture française et européenne, notamment *Histoire des traductions en langue française, XV^e-XX^e siècles / HTLF.* Il est aussi le coordinateur (en collaboration) de trois des quatre volumes de cette *Histoire*, il s'est donc beaucoup investi dans cet ouvrage.

Une perspective nouvelle

Malgré la tendance encore dominante à l'époque dans la recherche littéraire de s'intéresser à l'auteur et à son œuvre, en les mettant en étroite relation à travers la biographie de l'écrivain, le chercheur Yves Chevrel choisit de focaliser sa recherche sur la réception que les lecteurs font à l'œuvre :

> J'ai donc suivi une perspective d'étude de réception en travaillant à ma thèse et j'ai essayé de comprendre, d'un point de vue historique, les raisons de l'accueil réservé à un groupe d'écrivains dits « naturalistes », d'abord en Allemagne, ensuite dans un certain nombre de pays d'Europe.[2]

Cette perspective originale, focalisée sur la réception d'une œuvre ou d'un mouvement littéraire est bien valorisée dans l'ouvrage *Le Naturalisme*, paru chez PUF, en 1982. Un aspect de nouveauté de cet ouvrage est la mise en lumière des éléments de modernité que le naturalisme a suscités dans beaucoup de littéra-

[2] Idem, p. 19.

tures de l'Europe. Une nouvelle édition de cet ouvrage en 1993 annonce, dès le sous-titre, l'envergure internationale du mouvement naturaliste – « Étude d'un mouvement littéraire international ». La préoccupation pour le naturalisme est également valorisée dans le *Dictionnaire des naturalismes* (retenons le pluriel), paru sous la direction de C. Becker et P.-J. Dufief, aux éditions Champion, en 2017. Le chercheur comparatiste y rédige un important essai introductif ainsi qu'une quinzaine d'entrées concernant des littératures ou des auteurs étrangers. Dans l'essai il pose le problème d'un pluriel de ce mouvement car, d'une culture à l'autre, d'un espace linguistique à l'autre, le naturalisme se développe différemment.

Comparatiste convaincu, Yves Chevrel collabore souvent avec des articles à la *Revue de littérature comparée*, revue fondée en 1921 par Fernand Baldensperger et Paul Hazard. Il y publie, entre autres, un très intéressant article sur « Les premières revues de littérature comparée (1877–1910) », où il souligne l'intérêt plus que centenaire pour le domaine comparatiste. L'article, paru en 2021 dans le numéro 380, remonte dans le temps jusqu'à la parution des premières publications comparatistes, à la fin du XIX^{e} siècle, dues au Hongrois Hugó Meltzl von Lomnitz, à l'Allemand Max Koch et au Nord-Américain George E. Woodberry.

Acta comparationis – *une communication littéraire globale*

La revue la plus intéressante pour le lecteur roumain est celle qui a été sortie par Hugó Meltzl, originaire de Transylvanie, qui connaît les trois langues (hongrois, roumain, allemand) parlées à l'époque dans la région. Devenu professeur à l'Université de Kolozsvár ou Klausenberg, aujourd'hui Cluj-Napoca, il y enseigne les littératures allemande, française et italienne. Vers l'âge de trente ans, le chercheur plurilingue a l'idée de publier une revue d'un type nouveau, comparatiste, intitulée d'abord, en hongrois, *Journal d'histoire littéraire comparée,* dont le premier numéro paraît en janvier 1877. Dès le deuxième numéro, la revue reçoit un titre latin ciblé sur la méthode comparatiste et la littérature universelle, *Acta comparationis litterarum universarum ;* on y pratique un dialogue intercontinental, en ouvrant de la sorte la voie aux revues comparatistes.

Meltzl a établi, à travers ses voyages et à travers une vaste correspondance, des relations avec les collaborateurs à *Acta*.... Le magazine portait le titre en frontispice en 12 langues (entre autres en anglais, français, espagnol, portugais, italien, allemand, suédois, islandais), annonçant ainsi une grande ouverture envers les langues et les cultures du monde. La revue initiée par Meltzl comptait plus de 120 collaborateurs, recrutés sur les cinq continents, parmi lesquels des célébrités scientifiques, des traducteurs et des auteurs de l'époque : ainsi, par exemple le Prix

Nobel Frédéric Mistral, le professeur de philosophie de Genève Frédéric Amiel, le folkloriste parisien Eugène Rolland, l'orientaliste et linguiste Emilio Teza de Pise.[3]

A travers *Acta Comparationis*, on fait connaître les principes de Meltzl sur la littérature universelle, empruntés à Goethe et modifiés selon l'intuition du professeur de Cluj. Il était d'avis que toutes les littératures, qu'elles appartiennent à des nations grandes ou petites, sont également importantes pour la recherche et il pensait que, grâce à la méthode nommée par lui « indirecte », c'est-à-dire à travers les traductions, une communication littéraire globale est possible. L'exemple de sa théorie est la traduction d'un poème de Petöfi, l'auteur préféré de Meltzl, en 36 langues. Le comparatiste, qui est aussi traducteur, peut contribuer activement, par des traductions, à l'élargissement de son propre objet d'étude.

Meltzl propage également l'idée selon laquelle ce n'est que par l'échange continu d'informations que l'on peut parvenir à une connaissance adéquate des littératures mondiales. Cet échange d'idées devait être renforcé par la revue de Cluj, qui élargissait progressivement sa palette de préoccupations.

Par *Acta Comparationis,* l'initiateur de la revue s'intéressait aux littératures africaine, chinoise et japonaise, à la littérature brésilienne, ce qui fait de la publication comparatiste un véritable forum mondial, qui ne se limite plus, comme c'était le cas au XIX^{e} siècle, exclusivement à la littérature européenne. Contrairement à Goethe, qui croyait en une Weltliteratur (« littérature universelle », « du monde ») connue à travers des traductions allemandes, Meltzl était d'avis que les recherches devaient être publiées à la fois dans la langue maternelle de l'auteur et dans celle de la littérature dont il s'occupait. Conformément à ses principes, Meltzl a écrit sur Dante en italien, sur Shakespeare en anglais, sur Goethe en allemand, sur Petöfi en hongrois et sur la réforme de la littérature contemporaine en français, étant d'avis que la littérature française est la plus innovante.

Par ailleurs, la pratique de la méthode nommée « directe » (c'est-à-dire la lecture directe de l'original) a conduit Meltzl à l'idée que tout comparatiste doit maîtriser plusieurs langues et aborder la littérature sous l'angle du « polyglotisme », plus précisément du « décaglotisme »...

Méthode comparative et responsabilités comparatistes

Pour ce qui est d'une définition de la « littérature comparée », Yves Chevrel considère que le déterminant « comparative » serait plus approprié pour rendre compte de ce phénomène dynamique de mise en relation de deux littératures, de

[3] Horst Fassel, « *Acta comparationis litterarum universarum*: prima revistă de literatură universală din lume », *Philologica Jassyensia*; vol. 20, no. 2, 2014, pp. 155–159.

deux cultures, ou, au cas des traductions, du texte original et de sa (ses) version(s) en une langue étrangère.

Déjà dans le *Précis de littérature comparée,* écrit avec Pierre Brunel, le chercheur Yves Chevrel reconstitue l'histoire de la littérature comparée, « discipline récente, née au XIX[e] siècle avec d'autres disciplines comparatives », comme par exemple « l'anatomie comparée », que Littré aurait préféré nommer « comparative » pour éviter la suggestion de phénomène passé, venant d'une forme verbale passive.

Estimant que « la confrontation directe d'œuvres étudiées dans leurs langues d'origine est une « démarche féconde indispensable », le chercheur de la Sorbonne apprécie comme « au moins double » la responsabilité du comparatiste dans le cas des traductions :

> La première, dans une perspective historique, est de comprendre pourquoi et comment certaines œuvres ont été traduites, parfois retraduites, à tel ou tel moment, dans tel ou telle langue – peut-être aussi de se demander pourquoi d'autres n'ont pas été traduites ; sur cette base, on peut aller plus loin et s'interroger comment, sur un territoire donné, s'est formé un patrimoine intellectuel provenant d'horizons divers : la voie est alors ouverte pour une « histoire culturelle aréale », c'est-à-dire concernant une aire géographique.[4]

On retient de sa réflexion des notions importantes pour une histoire des traductions comme : « perspective historique », « patrimoine intellectuel d'horizons divers » et « histoire culturelle aréale », associée à une certaine « aire géographique ».

La deuxième responsabilité du chercheur comparatiste est plus complexe encore car elle suppose qu'il va « fournir des outils critiques sur des œuvres traduites à ceux dont c'est le seul accès possible à ces œuvres ». Il existe déjà un ouvrage sur cette problématique, proposant d'intéressants outils, notamment *Introduction à l'analyse des œuvres traduites* de Danielle Risterucci-Roudnicky, paru aux éditions A. Colin, en 2008.

Par ailleurs, le comparatisme reste une approche importante dans la recherche doctorale, où un candidat en quête d'un sujet de recherche peut être orienté vers une formule comme « tel écrivain (polonais, grec, slovène, ...), dans le contexte européen de tel genre (prose, théâtre), à telle époque » ; parfois, il s'agit simplement des sujets portant sur les rapports de tel écrivain étranger avec la France, ou sur un « objet littéraire » (thème, mythe, personnage, sentiment, image, ...) dans au moins deux œuvres de langues différentes.

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[4] Yves Chevrel, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19.

Le texte traduit : travail textuel et respect de l'original

Comme Yves Chevrel l'avoue, il a découvert les problèmes que pose le texte traduit lors de son premier poste à l'université de Nantes. Jusqu'alors il avait toujours travaillé seulement sur des textes originaux (français, grecs ou latins, plus rarement allemands ou anglais)

> [...] c'est donc d'abord un souci d'ordre pédagogique qui m'a guidé, et qui a donné lieu à un premier article publié dans une revue belge en 1980 « Traduction et enseignement de la littérature ». Par la suite, j'ai toujours gardé cette préoccupation, ce qui m'a notamment conduit à organiser, avec des responsables et des enseignants de l'enseignement secondaire ainsi qu'avec des universitaires, un séminaire national (Paris, novembre 2006) dont les *Actes* ont été publiés par la Direction de l'enseignement scolaire en 2007 sous le titre *Enseigner les œuvres littéraires en traduction*.[5]

En explorant le domaine des traductions, Yves Chevrel a mis l'accent sur la relation entre original et ses versions en d'autres langues et sur le fait que les traductions ne se limitent pas aux textes littéraires, mais concernent également des textes scientifiques, techniques, philosophiques, médicaux etc.

Il a attiré l'attention sur le fait « qu'une traduction réussie transmet une œuvre, non une langue. Cette distinction paraît capitale dès qu'il s'agit de littérature, d'œuvre considérée comme littéraire. Lire une œuvre littéraire en traduction n'est pas lire une traduction de l'allemand ou du grec, c'est lire une œuvre écrite par Goethe ou Hofmannsthal, Eschyle ou Cavafy... », œuvre qui [...] mérite d'être bien traduite, partant d'être bien enseignée en traduction, une œuvre bien écrite, une grande œuvre.

Mais qu'est-ce qu'une œuvre « bien traduite » ? À côté de celui de Wilhelm von Humboldt, on peut retenir le double critère qu'Antoine Berman suggère pour évaluer les traductions. Le premier est d'ordre poétique : « La poéticité d'une traduction réside en ce que le traducteur a réalisé un véritable *travail textuel*, a fait texte, en correspondance plus ou moins étroite avec la textualité de l'original », indépendamment des objectifs du traducteur et des stratégies auxquelles il a recours dans sa traduction. Le second critère est d'ordre éthique ; il « réside dans le respect, ou plutôt, dans un *certain respect de l'original* » (souligné dans le texte)[6]. Pour éclaircir ce que veut dire un « certain respect », Berman cite Jean-

[5] Idem, p. 19.
[6] Idem, pp. 18–19.

Yves Masson et nous fait comprendre que le respect comporte aussi un dialogue avec l'original :

« Si la traduction respecte l'original, elle peut et doit même dialoguer avec lui, lui faire face, et lui tenir tête. La dimension du respect ne comprend pas l'anéantissement de celui qui respecte son propre respect. »[7] Une belle métaphore à retenir proposée par Masson serait : « Le texte traduit est d'abord une offrande faite au texte original»[8] .

Le concept OLT et l'enseignement des OLT(s)

Dans le séminaire consacré en 2006 a l'enseignement des œuvres traduites ou OLT, Yves Chevrel évoque d'abord les débuts de cette pratique :

> La traduction est une pratique qui est documentée dès l'apparition de l'écriture, et son utilisation dans l'enseignement français n'est pas une nouveauté du XXI^e^ siècle : au milieu du XIX^e^ siècle, Victor Duruy inclut des œuvres traduites dans un programme destiné à faire connaître des littératures étrangères.[9]

Il pose à cette occasion le problème d'une définition de l'œuvre littéraire, ensuite celle d'une œuvre traduite :

> Le concept d'« œuvre littéraire »: [...] Sans vouloir à tout prix s'inscrire dans la formule de Roland Barthes selon laquelle « la littérature, c'est ce qui s'enseigne, un point c'est tout », on partira du fait qu'est prise ici en considération toute œuvre reconnue comme littéraire.[10]

La « canonisation » d'une œuvre dans la culture d'origine et dans la culture d'accueil reste un problème délicat à trancher :

> Mais une difficulté propre aux œuvres traduites surgit : dans quelle tradition telle œuvre est-elle canonisée : dans la tradition culturelle nationale où elle a été créée ou dans celle du pays d'accueil ? Il existe naturellement des auteurs dont la renommée est incontestablement mondiale : Shakespeare, Cervantès, Goethe, Tchékhov...

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[7] Jean-Yves Masson, « Territoire de Babel. Aphorismes », *Corps écrit,* n° 36, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1990, pp. 158–159.

[8] Idem, p. 158.

[9] Yves Chevrel, « Présentation du séminaire », Actes du séminaire national *Enseigner les oeuvres littéraires en traduction* (Paris, le 23 et 24 octobre 2006), Paris, 2007, p. 12.

[10] Idem, p. 13.

> Mais les nouvelles d'E. A. Poe ont longtemps connu une meilleure fortune en France que dans leur pays d'origine ; inversement, celles de Guy de Maupassant ont été d'abord appréciées dans les pays de langue allemande avant de s'imposer vraiment en France même.[11]

Le séminaire est aussi l'occasion de mettre en lumière la littérature de jeunesse, celle qui offre les premières lectures pour tout lecteur en devenir, littérature longtemps ignorée en France :

> Il est d'ailleurs un domaine précis où la tradition scolaire et universitaire française est restée, jusqu'à une date récente, en marge de celles d'autres pays, notamment des pays de langue germanique (Allemagne, Grande-Bretagne, pays scandinaves) : celui de la littérature de jeunesse. Longtemps ignorée en tant que telle, voire disqualifiée en tant que littérature, elle n'est entrée que récemment dans les programmes scolaires et n'a suscité vraiment l'intérêt de l'Université française que depuis une quarantaine d'années.[12]

Histoire des traductions en langue française /HTLF-un projet hors normes

La culture française s'est considérablement enrichi par l'œuvre monumentale publiée à partir de 2012, intitulée *Histoire des traductions en langue française /HTLF.*

Comme l'avoue Yves Chevrel, les débuts du projet commencé par « des conversations d'abord informelles avec mon collègue Jean-Yves Masson ont aidé à préciser quelques pistes : les premières traces d'échanges écrits entre lui et moi remontent à 2002 ; cette même année Bernard Banoun, alors professeur d'Études germaniques à l'université de Tours, figure parmi les premiers à être contacté et, en 2003, deux réunions permettent de rassembler quelques collègues susceptibles d'être intéressés. En novembre 2004 le projet est suffisamment avancé – Jean-Yves et moi avions rédigé un article-programme «*Pour une Histoire des traductions en langue française*», qui paraît en 2006 dans la revue allemande *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte.* » Un extrait de cet article présente synthétiquement ce grand projet :

> L'intitulé *Histoire des traductions en langue française* (HTLF) entend définir l'entreprise de la façon la plus précise. L'objet d'investigation est constitué par un certain

[11] Ibidem.
[12] Ibidem.

> type de textes, les traductions, c'est-à-dire des textes qui ont été d'abord rédigés, et généralement divulgués, dans une autre langue que le français : cette définition exclut les textes rédigés directement en français par des auteurs de langue maternelle non française. En second lieu, les traductions étudiées sont celles qui ont été réalisées en langue française, c'est-à-dire indépendamment tant de leur lieu de publication – France ou autre pays, francophone ou non – que de la nationalité ou la langue maternelle de leur auteur. Le pluriel de traductions signale qu'il s'agit des textes traduits, que sont en cause, au premier chef, les réalisations, les résultats, et non le processus même de traduction, même si, bien évidemment, il ne peut être fait l'économie des théories qui ont présidé aux manières de traduire. Par ailleurs, aucun adjectif ne précise le type des œuvres traduites : c'est bien l'ensemble des traductions en langue française qui est pris en compte, dans quelque domaine que ce soit (en clair : l'entreprise ne se restreint pas au seul champ des belles-lettres), sur quelque support que ce soit (livre, revue, film...) ; la seule restriction dans ce domaine a été de ne considérer que les œuvres publiées, ou rendues publiques. Enfin il s'agit de faire l'histoire de cet objet tel qu'il vient d'être précisé : ce terme signifie qu'au-delà de la mise en évidence de faits et de données les plus exacts possible est tentée une perspective explicative, ou interprétative.
>
> Ce projet trouve donc place dans les études culturelles qui, par leur nature même, ont nécessairement une dimension historique.[13]

L'histoire de cette aventure intellectuelle est évoquée avec toutes ses diverses étapes. Après une première réunion de lancement d'une journée, organisée à la Sorbonne, ouverte à un large public, sont organisées de nouvelles rencontres. Un plan d'édition est défini, portant notamment sur trois points importants :

> 1) décision de s'intéresser aux traductions dans *tous les domaines de la vie de l'esprit* (donc : de ne pas se limiter aux seules traductions littéraires) ; 2) organisation de la série en 4 volumes suivant une périodisation par siècles, en regroupant les XVII^{e} et XVIII^{e} siècles ; 3) conception de chaque volume comme un ensemble de *chapitres* (non d'articles) placés sous la responsabilité d'un ou de plusieurs responsables (au maximum trois) dont la tâche est de solliciter des contributions et de les ordonner. Un calendrier prévisionnel est ensuite arrêté : le 1er volume à paraître sera consacré au XIX^{e} siècle, pour lequel on dispose de nombreux collaborateurs vite disponibles : il est lancé en novembre 2007, sous la direction de Lieven D'hulst (université de Leuven), Christine Lombez (université de Nantes) et Yves Chevrel.

[13] Yves Chevrel, Lieven D'Hulst, Christine Lombez (dir.), *Histoire des traductions en langue française ; XIX^{e} siècle 1815–1914*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 2012, pp. 8–10.

> En février 2009, c'est le lancement d'*HTLF XVII-XVIII*, sous la direction de Yen-Maï Tran-Gervat (université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle) et d'Annie Cointre (université de Metz), direction rejointe plus tard par Chevrel. En février et mars 2010 c'est le tour des volumes *HTLF XV-XVI* (sous la direction de Véronique Duché, université de Melbourne), puis *HTLF XX* (prévu pour être coédité par Bernard Banoun et Jean-Yves Masson). En octobre 2012 paraît le premier volume, *HTLF XIX*, et l'aventure se termine en mai 2019, avec la publication d'*HTLF XX*, le plus gros des quatre volumes (près de 2000 pages), finalement codirigé par Bernard Banoun, Isabelle Poulin et Yves Chevrel.[14]

En résumant cette œuvre hors normes on peut dire que dans l'histoire des traductions en français sont étudiés six siècles de traduction littéraire et non littéraire et une soixante d'aires linguistiques. On y met en évidence le rôle des traductions (littéraires, scientifiques, techniques, religieuses, d'art, philosophiques, etc.). On présente et illustre le rôle décisif des traducteurs dans la constitution du patrimoine littéraire, culturel et intellectuel de la langue française.

Les traductions élargissent le domaine du littéraire

Par ce portrait de comparatiste dédié à la personnalité complexe d'Yves Chevrel, nous avons voulu mettre en lumière les multiples domaines où l'activité du chercheur a laissé des traces importantes : dans l'étude des naturalismes, dans la focalisation des études littéraires sur leur réception par le public et surtout, dans un domaine peu exploré avant lui, notamment l'histoire des traductions en langue française.

Faire le portrait d'un comparatiste d'une telle envergure suppose consulter ses principaux articles et ouvrages, passer en revue les problématiques abordées dans les thèses qu'il a dirigées, les volumes qu'il a coordonnés, les colloques qu'il a organisés et ceux auxquels il a participé.

En tant que grand spécialiste en histoire des traductions, faisant preuve d'une grande générosité intellectuelle, il a également aidé des chercheurs intéressés par ce domaine et qui voulait l'aborder, en l'adaptant à leur langue maternelle. C'est notre cas et celui de tous les chercheurs roumains qui ont pu lui adresser des questions à ce propos, à lui et à sa femme, la chercheuse Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, en 2019, lorsqu'ils ont participé, les 3–4 octobre, à un colloque sur la traduction à l'Université de Suceava.

[14] Idem, p. 8–9.

Journées mémorables, qui ont permis de nombreux et fructueux échanges avec l'un des initiateurs et coordinateur de *l'Histoire des traductions en langue française* et avec une grande spécialiste en littérature de jeunesse, Isabelle Nières-Chevrel. Cette ambiance effervescente a donné le courage nécessaire à l'équipe roumaine, encore hésitante à l'époque, d'entamer un projet similaire sur les traductions en langue roumaine. Nous avons ainsi expérimenté cette idée valorisante pour les traductions, idée selon laquelle « faire appel à des traductions est aussi un moyen d'élargir le domaine du littéraire ».

Cette opinion avisée, qui met en lumière autant la traduction que le littéraire, en dévoilant leur relation heureuse, exprimée par le chercheur de Sorbonne, mérite d'être la touche finale à notre portrait d'Yves Chevrel.

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II. Interviews

ENTRETIEN SUR *LA RÉPUBLIQUE MONDIALE DES LETTRES*[1]

Pascale Casanova et Tiphaine Samoyault

Les pages qui précèdent en témoignent, la publication, en 1999, de *La République mondiale des lettres* a transformé en profondeur l'idée de littérature mondiale et la réflexion sur les méthodes d'investigation de ce champ. Traduit depuis en plusieurs langues (anglais, portugais, espagnol, japonais...), ce livre a ouvert une discussion ample et parfois vive, à la mesure du courage de ses propositions, sur la structure à la fois spatiale et temporelle de l'univers littéraire. Nous ne voulions pas clore ce premier volume de mise au point sur l'état de la question de la littérature mondiale en France sans revenir, avec Pascale Casanova, sur certaines affirmations de son livre et sur l'histoire qu'il dessine, en tenant compte aussi de l'évolution de sa réflexion.

Tiphaine Samoyault: Comment définissez-vous l'espace littéraire mondial? Est-ce une notion historique (susceptible d'évolution historique) ou bien est-elle exclusivement politique? En quoi distinguez-vous cet espace de l'idée de littérature mondiale ? Seriez-vous d'accord avec l'expression de Franco Moretti selon laquelle il est « un mais inégal » ?

Pascale Casanova: Je voudrais faire d'emblée une distinction entre la notion de « littérature mondiale » et celle d'« espace littéraire international », que j'ai pour ma part essayé de développer. Je n'ai évidemment pas le projet – qui serait absurde et fou – d'embrasser et de décrire dans sa totalité LA littérature mondiale, comme s'il était question de constituer un nouveau corpus ou d'élargir les problématiques de la littérature comparée. Je propose simplement de prendre, sur les textes et sur leur histoire, un point de vue différent de celui qu'adopte

[1] Cet entretien, dont on réproduit des fragments, a été publié en guise de conclusion dans le volume collectif *Où est la littérature mondiale?,* sous la direction de Christophe Pradeau et Tiphaine Samoyault, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2005, collection „Essais et savoirs", pp. 139–150. Nous remercions Madame Tiphaine Samoyault et les Presses Universitaires de Vincennes pour leur autorisation de reproduction partielle dans notre revue. © Christophe Pradeau et Tiphaine Samoyault, *Où est la littérature mondiale?*, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2005.

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traditionnellement le comparatisme. Il ne s'agit pas du tout de déclarer périmés ou illégitimes les autres points de vue, ou les méthodes d'analyse qui ont cours aujourd'hui dans l'université, mais de dire qu'il y a une dimension capitale de la « fabrique » des textes qui a été oubliée, ou qui, en tout cas, a été passée sous silence dans les zones les plus autonomes de l'espace littéraire. Et cette dimension est précisément la structure mondiale que j'ai tenté de décrire, c'est-à-dire un espace hiérarchique, inégal, contraignant, violent (même s'il s'agit de violence douce) et qui, de façon invisible (et d'autant plus invisible qu'il est contraire aux présupposés ordinaires de la croyance littéraire), imprime sa marque à tous les textes du monde. Mais cet espace est difficile à observer puisqu'on ne peut pas le mettre à distance comme on le ferait d'un phénomène lointain et facilement objectivable. Il est, en effet, comme la « forme symbolique » chez Cassirer, ce au sein de quoi, en tant que « littéraires » (que nous soyons enseignants, écrivains, critiques, lecteurs, éditeurs, etc.), nous pensons, lisons, débattons, écrivons, cela même qui nous fournit les catégories pour le penser, ce qui imprime sa marque, sa contrainte, ses enjeux, ses hiérarchies et ses croyances dans chacune de nos têtes et qui vient ainsi renforcer les choses matérielles qui le constituent.

C'est ce que j'ai essayé d'expliquer en évoquant le fameux *Motif dans le tapis* de Henry James: on sait que l'Américain a génialement réussi à transformer le problème de l'interprétation d'un texte littéraire en un magnifique suspense narratif. [...] Je me retrouve parfaitement dans cette métaphore du tapis persan qui suppose simplement de prendre un autre point de vue, c'est-à-dire de changer le point à partir duquel on observe d'ordinaire le tapis ou, disons, la littérature dans son ensemble. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'on ne s'intéressera qu'à la cohérence globale du tapis, mais que, à partir de la connaissance de l'ensemble des motifs et de leur distribution dans le tapis, on pourra mieux comprendre, et jusque dans le moindre de leur détail, chaque dessin, chaque couleur, autant dire chaque texte et chaque auteur particulier, à partir de la place qu'il occupe dans cette immense structure. Pour le dire autrement, mon projet est de restituer la cohérence de la structure globale à l'intérieur de laquelle les textes apparaissent, et qu'on ne peut apercevoir qu'en acceptant de faire le détour par ce qui apparaît comme le plus éloigné des textes: cet immense territoire invisible que j'ai appelé la République mondiale des Lettres. [...]

Ce n'est donc pas une notion politique. Au contraire: j'essaie de montrer que l'espace littéraire se construit *contre* la politique, qu'il se constitue pendant quatre siècles dans une lutte des écrivains pour inventer et imposer la loi spécifique de la littérature, c'est-à-dire l'autonomie. L'histoire de l'espace littéraire mondial est celle d'un arrachement, d'une émancipation progressive à l'égard des

contraintes et des impositions des instances politiques et nationales. Cela dit, ce processus d'autonomisation progressive suppose en même temps, d'une part la dépendance originelle de la littérature à l'égard des instances nationales, et d'autre part, le fait que tous les espaces ne sont pas dotés du même degré d'autonomie, c'est-à-dire qu'ils ne sont pas tous indépendants au même degré des instances et des « devoirs » nationaux.

C'est pourquoi il ne s'agit pas de « politiser » la théorie littéraire, comme ont pu le faire par exemple les études post-coloniales, en forgeant des instruments qui ne me paraissent ni assez spécifiques ni assez précis pour rendre compte de la spécificité du fait littéraire. D'une façon générale, il me semble que le post-colonialisme a le mérite d'avoir fortement réaffirmé le lien entre la littérature et l'histoire (au sens politique) et surtout d'avoir internationalisé ses problématiques. Mais, en revanche, il rabat les textes sur la seule histoire politique et coloniale, sans aucune médiation, par une sorte de court-circuit caractéristique de toutes les analyses externes des textes littéraires. Je cherche, pour ma part, à réintroduire, grâce à l'idée d'« espace », le lien entre les « deux continents » comme le dit Barthes, la littérature et « le monde », à rétablir en d'autres termes la relation entre les deux histoires (l'histoire littéraire et l'histoire politique, sociale, etc.), sans rien « réduire » de la spécificité littéraire.

Je crois que Franco Moretti et moi ne parlons pas tout à fait de la même chose. Lui parle de « système », et il s'intéresse aux genres littéraires et en particulier au roman. Il pense, du moins c'est ce qu'il m'a semblé comprendre, que la seule façon d'envisager la question d'une *World Literature,* c'est de faire l'histoire mondiale d'un genre comme le roman et de suivre son évolution (sa « fortune », comme disent les comparatistes) et ses transformations selon les pays, les langues et les traditions nationales, culturelles et linguistiques. Et, fidèle en cela à la vision et aux catégories de pensée traditionnelles des comparatistes, il cherche à rapporter la littérature à la seule littérature et à l'histoire littéraire considérée comme l'histoire des formes et des genres (et leur diffusion dans les différentes aires culturelles et linguistiques). Il restaure ou renforce, en d'autres termes, la coupure radicale entre l'histoire des textes et l'histoire du monde.

Tiphaine Samoyault: Vous décrivez au quatrième chapitre de *La République mondiale des lettres* le fonctionnement de la « fabrique de l'universel » en évoquant les instances consacrantes, garantes et créatrices de la valeur. Pensez-vous que la « mondialisation » du problème pourrait empêcher, actuellement, le processus ? Y a-t-il selon vous accord ou bien désaccord entre le mondial et l'universel ?

Pascale Casanova: La question de la valeur littéraire est l'une des plus passionnantes aujourd'hui et autour d'elle s'organisent, tacitement ou explicitement, beaucoup de prises de position théoriques et critiques. [...]

En fait, il me semble qu'on devrait poser la question de la valeur de façon tout à fait différente. Plutôt que de continuer à croire que le jugement de goût ou de valeur existe à l'état de principe abstrait, et au lieu de poursuivre le vieux débat sur l'impossibilité apparente de le fonder, pour finir par se réfugier sur des positions de relativisme absolu ou, à l'inverse, de sacralisation déshistoricisée des textes valorisés par la tradition, il faut, je crois, réfléchir aux conditions réelles de la production et de l'énoncé des jugements de ce type. Le jugement de goût n'existe pas (ou pas seulement) comme simple expression subjective ou intersubjective: il y a des conditions sociales de production et d'expression du jugement de goût qui permettent (ou non) qu'il devienne légitime, c'est-à-dire qu'il soit doté d'une force telle qu'il ait (ou non) des effets objectifs et mesurables. L'évaluation exerce des effets en fonction du degré de légitimité de celui qui énonce ce jugement. C'est pourquoi la valeur littéraire est, en réalité, à la fois et inséparablement objective et subjective. On peut donc montrer qu'il y a une histoire de la (des) valeur(s) littéraire(s) sans faire de cette valeur un fait relatif et contingent et qu'il y a des mécanismes historiques qui concourent à créer la valeur des valeurs, c'est-à-dire l'universel. Mais il s'agit d'un universel historicisé (ce qui le rend encore plus miraculeux).

Et c'est là que l'espace littéraire mondial est un outil essentiel. C'est en effet à travers les mécanismes infiniment subtils et complexes de formation et de légitimation des consécrations nationales et internationales qui rivalisent dans la République des lettres qu'on peut montrer comment, historiquement et socialement, la valeur s'impose, selon quels mécanismes de consécration, à travers quelles instances, quelles institutions, quels prix littéraires, quels médiateurs. En d'autres termes, la valeur littéraire est inscrite à la fois dans les choses et dans les têtes, les unes venant constamment renforcer les autres. Elle est créée dans l'espace littéraire, ce qui contribue, en retour, à créer ou à renforcer celui-ci par une sorte de création continuée.

Travailler à l'échelle et avec les instruments de l'espace littéraire mondial, c'est travailler sans cesse sur ces questions-là: comment se fabrique cette valeur des valeurs ? par quels mécanismes? quels médiateurs ? quelles luttes ? Quel rôle Paris joue-t-il dans cette immense fabrique ? etc. En d'autres termes, nous n'avons pas, comme semble le croire Gérard Genette, la liberté de dire « j'aime » ou « je n'aime pas » Proust, Flaubert ou Joyce. Il y a des mécanismes sociaux qui permettent de rendre légitimes (c'est-à-dire d'inscrire objectivement, sous la forme

d'anthologies scolaires par exemple) des jugements subjectifs, et de leur donner une puissance et un crédit tels que nous ne sommes pas libres de contester ces jugements qui sont incorporés très solidement dans nos croyances, nos hiérarchies tacites, ce qu'on appelle précisément nos « valeurs ». Il est très rare que quelqu'un se permette de dire publiquement « je n'aime pas Proust ». C'est une sorte de blasphème spécifique, ou alors c'est une « incorrection » (comme on le dit en grammaire), une sorte d'inconvenance spécifique, qui produit en général l'exclusion de l'univers.

Plus l'instance de consécration qui énonce des jugements de valeur est légitime (c'est-à-dire autonome, reconnue comme indépendante dans l'énoncé de ses jugements), plus le jugement prononcé sera accepté comme légitime et sera donc imposé comme fondé au reste des protagonistes de l'espace. Cette légitimité dépend du prestige, du crédit, de la reconnaissance de celui qui la décrète (ou du collectif, s'il s'agit du jury du prix Nobel, par exemple). S'il est vrai que Paris a été désigné, au cours du XIX^e^ siècle, comme la capitale internationale de la littérature, c'est-à-dire un lieu dénationalisé, constitué contre les divisions politiques et linguistiques, c'est précisément parce qu'il est devenu le lieu par excellence de l'autonomie littéraire, la contrée où se décrètent les jugements les plus autonomes, c'est-à-dire les plus littéraires, c'est-à-dire les plus transnationaux.

Cela dit, il n'y a évidemment pas de jugement absolu et absolument légitime ; il n'y a que des luttes pour le monopole de la légitimité littéraire, comme le dit Pierre Bourdieu. Et c'est pourquoi l'immense univers de la « fabrique de l'universel » que j'ai tenté de décrire repose sur la lutte des jugements de goûts. Certains l'entre eux acquièrent suffisamment de légitimité pour permettre œuvre du processus de consécration d'une œuvre qui, lui, a des effets matériels, mesurables et objectifs. J'ai travaillé récemment sur Henrik Ibsen et sur l'histoire de sa consécration internationale pour essayer de comprendre concrètement les voies de la fabrique internationale de la valeur. Ibsen est un cas intéressant puisque, ayant été reconnu et consacré assez vite comme un dramaturge immensément novateur, il a bouleversé toute la pratique théâtrale européenne de la fin du XIX^e^ siècle. En fait, sa « valeur » littéraire et théâtrale a été créée par la lutte de quelques médiateurs parmi lesquels Antoine, Lugné-Poe, Bernard Shaw et James Joyce, c'est-à-dire par une sorte de « club des découvreurs internationaux ».

Aujourd'hui, paradoxalement, la mondialisation comme phénomène commercial et éditorial – soit l'augmentation ou la maximisation des profits à court terme des grands éditeurs mondiaux – met en danger toutes les possibilités créées et inventées par les écrivains pour produire une véritable internationalisation de la littérature, c'est-à-dire pour perpétuer l'existence de valeurs autonomes,

et ce d'autant plus qu'elle parvient souvent à mimer les acquis et les formes de l'autonomie. Le cas de Umberto Eco est assez explicite à cet égard, qui mime l'autonomie littéraire alors qu'il produit des best-sellers internationaux formatés aux normes du marché international. La *globalisation* menace très fortement cette sorte d'« écologie », comme le dit l'historien d'art Ernst Gombrich, nécessaire à la perpétuation des pratiques, des croyances, des luttes pour faire exister les formes et les textes les plus improbables, les plus éloignés des lois du marché, les plus novateurs. Il suffit qu'une partie de ce « milieu » au sens de l'écologie, cet ensemble si fragile face à la puissance du marché, s'effondre ou se soumette, et c'est la possibilité même d'une littérature autonome qui est menacée de disparaître. On voit bien aujourd'hui comment, sous couvert de mondialisation, toute cette longue et lente construction élaborée pendant quatre siècles est très brutalement menacée de disparition. [...]

Tiphaine Samoyault: Y a-t-il selon vous une réponse spécifique de la littérature à ce que vous appelez la tragédie de la domination, à la tragédie du dominé ? Quel rôle joue la traduction à la fois pour cette réponse et dans la définition d'un espace littéraire mondial ?

Pascale Casanova: La traduction est l'un des moteurs essentiels de constitution et d'unification de l'espace littéraire mondial. Comme elle est le principal « véhicule » de la circulation de la littérature, elle est souvent décrite comme simple translation, transport horizontal, neutre et neutralisé des textes. En réalité, il me semble qu'on ne peut pas parler de LA traduction comme s'il s'agissait d'un phénomène unique et générique, mais de la diversité des opérations de traduction dont le sens (la signification) dépend précisément du sens (de la direction) dans lequel elles se font. Du fait de l'inégalité de la structure, les échanges linguistico-littéraires qui s'y produisent sont eux aussi dissymétriques et il faudrait, je crois, introduire des différences entre ces « transports » de textes selon qu'il s'agit d'extraductions ou d'intraductions et selon la position respective qu'occupent la langue cible et la langue source dans l'espace des langues littéraires. Dans les régions dominées, la traduction est l'une des réponses les plus efficaces à la tragédie de l'éloignement: elle peut être soit un accélérateur temporel soit une possibilité d'accéder à l'universel.

Tïphaine Samoyault: Depuis la publication du livre, comment voyez-vous s'inscrire et s'infléchir, dans différents champs (critique littéraire, discours politique, sociologie), la notion de littérature mondiale et celle de République mondiale telle que vous l'avez définie ?

Pascale Casanova: C'est surtout aux Etats-Unis (et aussi en Angleterre à travers la *New Left Review)* que s'amorce un débat passionnant pour moi autour de la notion de *World Literature.* La question se pose désormais parmi les comparatistes de savoir si la *global literature* pourrait remplacer la *comparative literature.* Et puis, du fait que la discussion théorique et critique est, là-bas, beaucoup plus vive et plus vivante qu'ici parce qu'elle oppose de façon plus explicite et plus radicale les tenants de la lecture interne des textes à ceux de l'interprétation externe, les critiques, les comparatistes sont à l'affût de toutes les nouvelles armes spécifiques dont il pourrait être fait usage dans leurs débats. Il est vrai aussi qu'ils ont d'emblée une vision plus « politisée », en tout cas plus matérialiste des phénomènes littéraires. La critique (tant britannique qu'américaine) est aussi plus sensible à la question de la domination spécifique depuis la « révolution » post-coloniale opérée par Said, mais aussi Jameson, Eagleton et beaucoup d'autres.

L'étude de la renaissance littéraire irlandaise par exemple s'est beaucoup développée depuis quelques années, en Irlande même et aux États-Unis, sous l'influence du post-colonialisme, et la réflexion tant historique que littéraire sur la création littéraire en Irlande entre 1890 et 1930 s'est considérablement renouvelée. L'espace irlandais est presque devenu une sorte de laboratoire pour l'expérimentation ou la mise à l'épreuve des outils et des théories post-coloniales. En fait, je pense que ces études restent prisonnières des catégories de pensée externalistes et qu'elles pratiquent ce que j'ai appelé tout à l'heure des courts-circuits systématiques, en rapportant directement et sans aucune médiation les créations et innovations littéraires aux faits et aux événements politiques. Je me suis moi-même beaucoup intéressée à cette discussion et au cas particulier de l'espace irlandais : j'y ai consacré un chapitre de mon livre, que j'ai intitulé le « paradigme irlandais ». Il me semble en effet que c'est une sorte de « modèle réduit » des formes et des effets de la domination à la fois politique et littéraire. L'Irlande a été colonisée pendant huit siècles et elle a trouvé en quelque quarante ans les moyens de son émancipation littéraire et artistique. Et j'espère pouvoir entamer une véritable discussion « scientifique » avec les chercheurs irlandais sur ces questions en confrontant nos différentes approches et hypothèses qui sont aussi le produit de nos traditions critiques nationales. [...]

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ON WORLD LITERATURE WITH DAVID DAMROSCH

CG: (...) You are one of the few people in academia and in the humanities that can say their work started a discipline. Your book *What is World Literature?*, published in 2003 is together with Pascale Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* and maybe Franco Moretti's "Conjectures on World Literature," one of the founding texts of the discipline. What advice would you give a young academic, who's just started in literary studies?

DD: One thing that strikes me as a comparatist is that still a great deal of literary studies builds on a kind of a 19th-century model in which the nation state and the national language are at the center of gravity. Particularly when you go beyond immediate direct relations of one country with its neighbor, or its model that it may be emulating, there's all kinds of interesting work to be done, which is more broad and more varied than that. So, a lot of my interest in comparative studies is in looking at how a work travels into new circumstances or where it becomes something different in translation or it has a different reception, or also at how different writers or their works can relate to each other whether or not they actually knew each other.

CG: You gave an example of the Moretti paper that appeared in *New Left Review*, "Conjectures on World Literature," which was initially a six-page article. (...) You said you don't need a full book-length project. You just need to have a great idea like this and put it down on paper and look, it can spark a lot of polemic. (...) Would you think that model, that Moretti example is still adequate today?

DD: Well, I think in some respects more than ever today on the blogosphere and in so many places one can experiment with different kinds of writing

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* Fragments from *Podcastul narativ cu Cezar Gheorghe* [The Narrative Podcast with Cezar Gheorghe], episode 31, available at Ep.31. David Damrosch (selected and edited by Raluca Dună). We are grateful to Cezar Gheorghe for his kind permission and to Professor David Damrosch for reviewing the edited transcript.

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for different kinds of audiences (...). There are all kinds of different modes of writing, and even a fair number of influential books are really collections of articles that then come together on a common theme. So I think there's a lot to be said for working at different scales and really just thinking what's important and working on that. There's a great comment by George Bernard Shaw in the preface to one of his plays, in which in his usual, comic way he asks why is he the most important writer alive in England at that time. (...) He says what makes a really good writer isn't mere productivity, or even sheer intelligence: it is one who sees the importance of things. I've always thought that's a great goal for any scholar. See what's important, why it's important, and to whom and write about that.

CG: Your most recent published book *Around the World in 80 Books* is also addressed to a wider audience. (...) Was it a challenge to write for a wider audience? Is something lost in a book directed to a non-specialized audience, is something to be gained?

DD: That's a very different experience and has to be understood differently. I remember talking to a colleague, who was a medievalist, who had just written a book for a general audience on the Bayeaux Tapestries, and he was complaining that his publisher made him "dumb it down," as he said, and take out most of his footnotes, and that suggested to me that he had a wrong approach to begin with. For a general audience, you should be opening the work out, opening the subject out, and it is a real pleasure and challenge to think of how to write about material you love that is not already well known to the audience. And that's the single biggest difference from academic writing, where you assume that the reader already knows the material or at least knows the issues you're talking about. Whereas with the general audience, you have to interest them in things that they may not know that they should be interested in.

CG: Also the model for your book is very interesting (...) It's something like the model suggested by Cortázar in *Rayuela*. You can jump from a chapter to another, not necessarily in a chronological or typical geographical order.

DD: Yes, Cortázar is one of my 80 authors, in fact. And I discuss him in Paris; he has already hopscotched over to Paris at the time he starts his major writing. Well, in thinking of the book, I needed some kind of narrative line for a

general reader. This is my second book for general readers. The first one is a book on the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. And there I had to figure out how to interest readers in the ancient Near East when they might not know anything about ancient Mesopotamia. And there I thought about the issue of time, and I structured the book on the analogy of an archaeological dig, where you start in the present and then you go deeper and deeper into the past. In this case, with *Around the world...*, I thought about space and organized the space through a literary analogy to Jules Verne's famous travelogue. And loosely speaking, then, I follow it, I start from London and return to London just as his hero Phileas Fogg does. I go more widely, because it's a broader world. It's not just the outlines of the British Empire, which is where his hero and his servant Passepartout go. But very much I was going from place to place, and I was thinking of how to interest general readers in literary works they would never have known necessarily or even looking back at famous works. And I thought cities are interesting, how works create the world or how the world creates works, and particularly then I got a new viewpoint during the pandemic**:** how are writers responding to trauma, global catastrophes? And that became a line through it as well. So, then I chose sixteenth cities, five works per city in order to have eighty books in eighty days of work, sixteen weeks, five books a week. I did it first as a blog, and then became the book.

(...)

CG: The selection in itself is very interesting. You have writers who are in the canon already, like Cortázar, Borges, Virginia Woolf and other very well-known writers. But at the same time I see you have authors like Olga Tokarczuk and other very recent writers. What was the principle for selection?

DD: Fundamentally, the pleasure principle. I wanted to convey to readers as best as I could the excitement and pleasure of reading widely. Then it was also strategic, to mix some well-known classics that I might have a fresh way to read, whether it's the Bible or Dante; Boccaccio, with his plague narrative, was an almost inevitable choice, and also some great classics of other parts of the world, like the *Tale of Genji*, but also some less familiar works. Tokarczuk is now very popular, but I also have works that people might not have heard of it. By mixing them together with a place and some well-known works, my readers might now encounter these other works. I also wanted to have more connection of popular literature with

high literature. So, we have a running theme of detective stories. Detective fiction is probably the most widespread kind of world literature in the world. So, very interesting to have Donna Leon in Venice or Dror Mishani in Israel, Jamyang Norbu writing a detective story of Sherlock Holmes in India about the Tibetan situation. It's really interesting to see how literature travels the world, through that genre as well as more classic genres.

CG: There is a prejudice that literary studies are about works of high literary values (...), but you just mentioned detective stories or other types of genre literature. (...)

DD: I myself will never work on a work that I don't really love and enjoy., but there are many different kinds of pleasures that works can give us. If you speak of high literary value, you may speak of an elite canon, but a compelling work of popular literature can have very high literary value too. There's a lot of popular literature of relatively low literary value, and I don't write about that. But then there are also canonical works that are boring to us these days or just passé. A classicist in the middle of the 19th century would never have thought that Statius's epic *Thebiad* would ever cease to be read. I don't know anyone reading Statius outside of a few classicists. And that was a work of extremely high prestige and literary value, but these things can come and go. I do feel that literature as a system should include popular works as well as elite works, but the works that are worth really talking about are the ones that are compelling.

CG: Jules Verne himself, your model for the book, is also a good example of popular literature...

DD ... and at least he traveled very well... I'm going to say again, he is not one of my actual 80 books. Because it's not a great literary work as far as I'm concerned. Actually, it's better known today probably as the movie, rather than as the original novel.

CG: I'm going to move back a little bit to your previous book, before *Around the world in 80 books*, *Comparing the literatures*, which, as you say, is a book addressed to scholars in comparative literature, but also to scholars interested in a comparative method in their work. What do you mean by that?

DD: Well, in my student years back in the seventies and in the decades before that, the assumption was that comparative literature was a very specialized and indeed elite discipline, opposed to national literatures and separate from them. I think increasingly we see a really vital connection between national traditions and comparative studies, partly because of globalization, internationalization. Someone working in Romanian literature from my point of view will benefit by knowing not just French literature, but also by thinking about other Eastern European literatures, other literatures in the shadow of empires elsewhere. There can be a lot to learn from authors who have comparable struggles, even in other locations.

(...)

CG: There was a lot of discussion, even this year, in the Institute for World Literature, about the relationship between more dominant languages or more dominant cultures to less dominant cultures or smaller cultures. (...) How can we overcome the supposed hegemony of global English or other more powerful languages?

DD: One thing that I think is that global English itself becomes a kind of transit medium, for creative writers who can use it and also for translators. Take the case of Orhan Pamuk, who writes only in Turkish, but he's been translated into sixty languages. He has remarked that he knows that half of the translations will be made not directly from Turkish but from English. And he would rather have a good translation, by a good translator who knows English and Vietnamese, than not have a Vietnamese translation at all or have a really bad translation by someone who's hasn't got good Turkish or is not a good literary mind in Vietnamese. (...) In that case, and for many other cases, English becomes a stimulant to the circulation of works from other languages, not only to anglophone readers, but then into translation in other languages. One case of this, even from the *Around the World in 80 books* project, which I was very pleased about, concerned one of my 80 books, *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood, in which the great Canadian writer retells the story of the *Odyssey* from the point of view of Penelope, or rather particularly Penelope and her servants who were murdered at the end. It's a very interesting, satiric and great novel. And this was published in a series by a small Scottish press called Canongate about rewriting myths (...). One of the people following my blog version of the *80 books* was an editor in China, and she got interested in Atwood and in the series. And

then she has commissioned translations of the entire series from Canongate into Chinese. So, this is thanks to anglophone circulation, and people like Olga Tokarczuk are now getting translated into Chinese, often through this *transit* medium of English.

CG: Speaking of translation, I want to open up the issue of translatability or untranslatability. (...) Would you say that there is such a thing as the *untranslatable*?

DD: One of my themes about world literature (...) is that there are excellent works that simply don't translate well, don't travel well, and they don't figure in world literature, even important as they can be in their home country. So, it's not a simply matter of universal brilliance, but of whether it is translatable without too much loss, too much change, and some things just don't translate very well. Not so much for linguistic reasons, it's more for cultural reasons. One example, say, from medieval Icelandic literature, is that the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson is widely translated and well known around the world, whereas his history of the kings of Sweden, the *Heimskringla*, is unknown outside Iceland and Sweden. It's a work of high quality, it's an important work, but you have to really care a lot about the history of medieval Sweden to care about that book. So that doesn't translate as well because just the cultural frame is too different. There are also especially poetic traditions that are very hard to translate, but a lot of creative translators now are translating things that a generation ago would have seemed untranslatable. I tend to the view that everything is translatable in multiple ways, not just with one translation.

(...)

CG: I want to go now to the idea of circulation of world literature. In your seminal book from 2003, I think, you speak about works of world literature that travel beyond their point of origin either in translation or in another forms. I see now you're also interested in cinema. Do you think that the literariness of a certain type of work can travel into other mediums, cinema, maybe, I don't know, new media. (...) What sparked your interest in reading world literature together with other mediums?

DD: I think that literature professors are often the last to get the news of where the culture is going. A lot of professors of modern literature today are like

professors of classics in 1850 who thought that what we have to study is Greek and Latin, and you can read these novels by Balzac on your own. You don't even need to study them in class. They would be surprised to find out that Classics is 1%, 2% of literature enrollments today, and the modern literature has won. But I think the same thing with literature now, that there's so much interest in the culture, the way narrative circulates in things like cinema, the way poetry circulates in things like popular song. Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize is one belated recognition of a fact that really does go back for centuries. In terms of literariness, I'm interested when there is an adaptation from a literary work, what the filmmakers have done, how do they translate and what do they choose to translate? (...) And it's very interesting to see the creative ways in which a filmmaker will translate a whole page or two of prose into a shot of, like, a shoe, and how that suggests the character's economic situation, relationships, things like that. Or a great filmmaker like Ang Lee can take pages of dialogue by Eileen Chang and pages of narrative by an objective narrator and translate them into just a silent look between one character and another.

(...)

CG: To end on this note: where is the culture going? (...) More traditional, more conservative scholars feel that if one opens up the space, the scope of the study, one might lose the specificity of the national literature and, of course, the language, the literary language itself loses its power. How do you address this anxiety?

DD: I feel that it's very much a *both/and* situation, rather than *either/or*. To me, a lot of what's interesting in world literary studies is the strength and connection to the nation and the national, as long as the nation is understood as shot through with the international at the same time. So whereas in 2003 I was talking particularly about circulation abroad, I'm also increasingly interested in the way in which writers in one locale can write world literature at home. I did an article not long ago on Mircea Cărtărescu, who is now seen to be a world writer. He was already a world writer in his own mind and in his writing, under Ceausescu, even when he couldn't be read abroad and couldn't travel outside Romania. But you can see him as both a Romanian and a world writer, and those figures are really fascinating at that intersection. I think there's increasing interest in seriously connecting to local traditions and languages through a global perspective.

«QUEL CHE È FATTO È FATTO»
AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANCO MORETTI

S.: Let's start from *The Bourgeois. Between History and Literature* (2013): how do you see world literature through the concept of "class"? What other concepts and categories do you find significant vectors of world literature?

FM: In verità, con la borghesia – almeno per come molti, me compreso, la vedono – uno finisce col limitarsi a uno spazio-tempo ristretto: un paio di secoli in mezza Europa. In via di principio non c'è niente di male: se uno studiasse, che so, la schiavitu' moderna, il suo campo di lavoro sarebbe anch'esso limitato (sia pure, naturalmente, in modo diverso). Ma devo ammettere di aver sentito un po' di frustrazione. Sono riuscito a uscire dall'Europa occidentale solo nel capitolo sulle "malformazioni nazionali" – un concetto coniato dal grande critico marxista brasiliano Roberto Schwarz a proposito dalla cultura brasiliana. Una categoria come quella permette di seguire le metamorfosi della borghesia di cultura in cultura, facendo appunto leva sulle loro "patologiche" mal-formazioni. Il che non vuol dire che la cultura borghese in Francia o Germania fosse "sana"; ma era piu' coerente. Per me, come ho scritto in un articolo intitolato "Learning from Sao Paulo", la scuola sociologica brasiliana di Antonio Candido e Roberto Schwarz è il modello piu' fertile per lo studio della letteratura mondiale. Ma quasi nessuno è d'accordo.

S.: In a recent article you make a distinction between what a theory or theoretical paradigm aims to do and what it really *does*. Are you happy with what *your* theory *does*?

FM: Abbastanza. Sono convinto che le nostre categorie lavorino per conto loro nel corso dei nostri lavori, per cui mi lascio sempre un margine ampio di tempo alla fine per capire davvero quel che ho fatto. Mi guardo indietro, e in genere sono contento.

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* The Editorial Team is grateful to Professor Franco Moretti for answering their questions. The title, a quote from *Macbeth* ("What's done, is done"), belongs to the interviewed.

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S.: In 2022 you published with Nottetempo *Falso movimento...* . Is it a kind of critical self (re)reading? Does it reset the trend you launched two decades before?

FM: Si', è uno sguardo retrospettivo al lavoro quantitativo e digitale, e a quel che è – e, soprattutto, *non* è – riuscito a compiere. Il mio lavoro è naturalmente anch'esso compreso in questo ripensamento critico. Che poi il libro offra una nuova base di partenza per quel tipo di ricerca, non credo. Intanto perché nessuno ha voluto pubblicarlo in inglese; e poi perché le *digital humanities* sono divenute una nicchia indipendente, che ha scarso interesse e scarsissima capacità di discutere delle grandi questioni della teoria letteraria e della storia culturale.

S.: Are there any (yet) unwritten books behind the books you have already written?

FM: Be', c'è il libro cui sto lavorando adesso – sulla forma tragica e la guerra civile – che dovrebbe esser pronto per l'estate 2025, e uscirà quasi simultaneamente in italiano, rumeno e tedesco. E' un argomento che ho studiato per decenni; e sarà anche, per evidenti motivi biologici, il mio ultimo libro con una gran mole di ricerca alla base.
Ci potrebbe anche essere una raccolta sul *Lavoro degli altri*: articoli, recensioni, pre- e post-fazioni, conferenze, seminari su Rossana Rossanda, Pascale Casanova, Carlo Ginzburg, Sianne Ngai, Roberto Schwarz, Fred Jameson, Antonio Candido, D.A. Miller, Holst Katsma. Ma chissà se ci sarà un editore interessato.
Poi ... boh. Magari provero' la forma del saggio lungo, che non ho mai tentato; ma intanto meglio finire quello che sto facendo.

S.: What book/ essay would you write differently now? How would you describe your evolution?

FM: Non so se sia giusto parlare di "evoluzione"; comunque, direi che l'intrecciarsi di storia e morfologia nel mio lavoro è passato da un'iniziale preponderanza della storia a una crescente presenza della morfologia. Ma forse è un cambiamento di poco conto. Quanto al riscrivere ... non l'ho mai fatto, non lo faro', e non ci penso. Come dice Lady Macbeth, *What is done is done*.

S.: What do you love more: trees, maps or graphs? What the profit of "abstract models" (2005) for the study of literature? What about what is to be lost?

FM: Gli alberi, perché contengono piu' elementi di conoscenza (ma sono anche I piu' difficili da fare). Non so che dire sul vantaggio che i modelli astratti avrebbero potuto portare allo studio della letteratura: come spiego in *Falso movimento*, l'uso di modelli teorici è stato di fatto respinto dalle *digital humanities*, quindi la prova non è mai stata fatta. Peccato.

S.: How do you see the future of World Literature / Humanities? (If you like, use a metaphor or allegory.)

FM: Il futuro degli studi letterari sarà sempre piu' frammentato su base nazionale (e nazionalistica, che ne è la patologia). E gli studi di letteratura mondiale saranno come le Nazioni Unite, una fonte di buone intenzioni senza intelligenza e senza forza.

S.: The circulation of literature is a matter of "market", but also a space where institutional intermediaries (literary agents, managers, editors etc.) act. How do you approach this institutional aspect?

FM: Non lo faccio. Sono convinto che le forze reali della storia letteraria siano gli scrittori (che la producono) e i lettori (che la selezionano). Gli altri esistono, fanno qualcosa, esagerano la propria importanza per comprensibile narcisismo, ma non influenzano la forma della storia.

S.: Do you write differently in Italian? Do you think content is a matter of (linguistic) form?

FM: Si', scrivo in modo diverso, perché controllo meglio le sfumature della lingua. Visto pero' che quello in cui riesco meglio sono i ragionamenti in bianco e nero (in cui le sfumature non hanno importanza), forse le versioni inglesi sono piu' vicine al mio modo di ragionare.

S.: Please put down a question for younger scholars / readers.

FM: Proprio non so che dire. Lasciamoli lavorare e leggere in pace...

III. Post- and Pre-views

THE PARISIAN WORLD REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

Matei Călinescu

Originally published in 1999, as *La république mondiale des lettres* (Éditions du Seuil, Paris), Casanova's ambitious sociological-historical essay deals with an extraordinarily wide range of topics, all of them of interest to the student of comparative literature: they include cultural power struggles for prestige, conflicts and rivalries generated by "literary domination," aesthetic nationalism and ethnocentrism versus the international character of the modern "literary space," translation, the migration of texts and writers from small or peripheral literary spheres, not seldom postcolonial, toward central spaces as defined by the major languages (French, English, German), and a variety of identitary problems faced by writers from small or colonized cultures seeking transnational recognition. Much attention is devoted to what the author calls "the importance of being universal" (that is, being "consecrated" by international awards or prizes, the Nobel in the first place), and, more interestingly, to atypical individual literary careers (from Kafka to Beckett, Naipaul, Rushdie, Kundera, Danilo Kiš, E.M. Cioran and others) or to larger cases such that of Irish literature, discussed with good insights in "The Irish Paradigm." (Casanova's first book, published in 1997, was a study of Beckett.)

In terms of methodology and central ideas, the book owes more to the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) than may be apparent. The very notion of the "Republic of Letters," as well as that of an independent "literary field," with its internal relations of force between dominants and dominated and functioning within a larger "market of symbolic goods," can be found in Bourdieu's sociology of culture, for example in his commentaries of Flaubert's novel *L'éducation sentimentale*. Thus, in chapter "Field of Power, Literary Field and Habitus", Bourdieu cites the definition given by Pierre Bayle (1648–1706) in his *Dictionnaire historique*

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* The title belongs to the Editor. The article was published in *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, vol. 52, 2005–2006, as a book review to the first English edition of Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*. © Adriana Călinescu and *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*. We are grateful for their kind permission to reprint this text.

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et critique to the "Republic of Letters" as a "free state" whose inhabitants are engaged in an incessant war – for Truth and Reason – against each other and comments:

> Several fundamental properties of the field are enunciated in this text [...]: the war of everyone against everyone, that is, universal competition, the closing of the field upon itself, which causes it to be its own market and makes each of the producers to seek his customers among his competitors. [...] It is a veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted. This universe is a place of entirely specific struggles, notably concerning the question of knowing who is part of the universe, who is a real writer and who is not.[1]

Economic concepts and metaphors (capital, market, competition, wealth, poverty, production, etc.) abound in Bourdieu's discourse, as they do in Casanova's. When such concepts are used analytically, they can lead to interesting, enlightening insights into literature's complex relations with social life; as metaphors, they acquire a polemical dimension – they are meant to demistify older notions of artistic disinterestedness, purity, gratuitousness, superiority; they can also be meant to rectify certain wrongs or injustices which are by no means absent in "Republic of Letters" (Casanova actually views it as an empire and would like her book be regarded as a "weapon" of cultural liberation).

The important thing about the "Republic of Letters," which Casanova unlike Bourdieu conceives in global terms (reviving Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur*), is that it possesses internal mechanisms of legitimation by which one is recognized as *a real writer*, as a rightful citizen of this specific state. Casanova's main criterion for including authors in her panoramic account is validation by the Paris intellectual elite. The need for such credentials would explain, among other things, why *The World Republic of Letters* excludes from the discussion popular literature and all forms of literary commercialism, such as international best-sellers (of the type of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*), which should normally elicit the interest of the cultural sociologist. All the authors mentioned in Casanova's book are practitioners of "high literature." They are either part of the international canon of modernity (never settled, always in flux) or strive, from the margins, to be admitted to it. What is at stake here is not (commercial) success, not material

[1] Pierre Bourdieu, "Field of Power, Literary Field and Habitus", in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, edited and introduced by Randal Johnson, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 163–164.

rewards, but aesthetic prestige or, in other words, "access to literary existence." In the struggle for "literary existence," the author of *The World Republic of Letters* identifies naturally with the "underdog," with the underprivileged coming from former European colonies or, as the case may be, from small cultural spaces (a full chapter is devoted to "The Small Literatures"). In keeping with the agonistic metaphors of war that she uses over and over again, she would like her book, as we have already pointed out, to be a "weapon":

> My hope is that the present work may become a sort of critical weapon in the service of all deprived and dominated writers on the periphery of the literary world. I hope that my reading of the texts of du Bellay, Kafka, Joyce, and Faulkner may serve as an instrument for struggling against the presumptions, the arrogance, and the fiats of critics in the center, who ignore the basic fact of the inequality of access to literary existence. [...] The incredible constancy – I myself was amazed to discover it – of the literary struggles, proclamations and manifestoes that led from du Bellay to Kateb Yacine, via Yeats, Kiš and Beckett, ought in the future to encourage 'latecomers' to the world of letters to claim as their ancestors some of the most prestigious writers in literary history and, above all, to find in the work of these writers the justification of their own work, with regard not only to the forms they adopt but also to the language they use and the political and national perspectives they express.[2]

These words come, of course, from an obviously ambivalent inhabitant of Paris, which for better or for worse remains for her the center of the modern literary world. It may be noted that the anglophone domain is only spottily represented.

Why did Paris come to play such an outstanding role "in the manufacture and diffusion of literary modernity"? The emergence of French cultural hegemony in post-Renaissance Europe is certainly linked to the assertion of France as a great, for a time the greatest, European political power, but also to the "universalist" claims of its nationalism – a "nationalism" to which, as already suggested, Casanova herself is not immune. Taking Joachim du Bellay's manifesto, *Défense et illustration de la langue française* (1549), as a turning point in world literary history – the point at which a vernacular language forcefully breaks away from the domination of Latin, the medieval language of knowledge and of the Catholic Church, to become itself dominant in 17th and 18th century Europe – Casanova argues that "a careful historical analysis [shows] that the exceptional concentration of literary resources that occurred in Paris over the course of several centuries gradually led

[2] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, translated by M.B. DeBevoise, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 354–355.

to its recognition as the center of the literary world"[3]. Interestingly, in the 19th and 20th centuries, even as France's great power status constantly declined (and many French intellectuals, particularly after the 1870 defeat in the French-Prussian war, were gripped by a sense of decadence), Paris became increasingly a convergence point of literary pilgrimages and encounters of writers, visitors or self-exiles, from the most diverse places of the world (including the Americas, South-Eastern Asia, and the French colonies in Africa). Writers from small European nations also looked to Paris and the French language for recognition, to the point of splitting or even trying to abandon their original cultural identity. The force of attraction of Paris was due in large part to the French capital's sophisticated receptiveness for other cultures.

The literary space, as Casanova describes it, is always politicized, and more intensely so after the appearance of romantic literary nationalism – it "can be understood," she notes, "only in terms of the often antagonistic relationship between two possibilities, the hatred that some writers feel toward their homeland and the passionate attachment that it inspires in others."[4] But, she adds, and this is important:

> [I]t is through the interplay between established national positions and the emergence of autonomous literary positions, which are necessarily international, occupied by writers who often are condemned to a sort of internal exile (like Juan Benet and Arno Schmidt) or to actual exile (like James Joyce in Trieste and Paris, Danilo Kiš in Paris, and Salman Rushdie in London), that the full complexity of national literary space appears.[5]

The awareness of such identitary complexities and paradoxes allows the author to see Kafka's writing in German as if it were a translation from the Yiddish (a language he did not know) in the Czech linguistic environment of Prague. Kafka, she says, wrote in German in order to "recount for the assimilated Jewish people the tragedy of their assimilation" and his position was "exactly the same as that of colonized writers [...] coming to understand the state of dependence and cultural destitution into which assimilation has led them"[6]. What is missing in such broadly suggestive observations, striking and thought-provoking as they may be, is any attempt to ground them in textual evidence, to support them at

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3 Pascale Casanova, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–47.
4 Idem, p. 206.
5 Ibid.
6 Idem, p. 271.

the level of concrete, graspable, convincing literary detail. Casanova's proposed interpretations, often exciting at first glance, remain always abstract and become somewhat disappointing on second thought.

The merit of the book is that it identifies and dramatizes a problem rarely discussed by literary scholars. It has to do with influence, but neither in the traditional sense of influence studies, nor in the more recent sense of strong poets engaged in battle against their strong precursors, as in Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. The struggle Casanova focuses on is one for admission to, and a position in, the "Republic of Letters," that is, for a chance to exert influence, to have a wider and presumably more discriminating readership, to measure oneself against more demanding standards and to promote one's work and reputation more effectively, beyond the boundaries of one's small or even large culture (aren't the Parisian writers themselves desirous to be translated into foreign languages, large or small? the fact is that over the last decades fewer and fewer of them have actually been translated). Rivalries and envies among artists are not a new thing. If Pierre Bayle's competitive "Republic of Letters" was culturally homogeneous and purely French, modernity has obviously enlarged it and made it ethnically more diverse, more cosmopolitan, a space of complicated multi-cultural tensions and creative identitary dilemmas. Casanova's wide-ranging essay addresses this new stage. That Paris has been for such a long time the main venue of modern literary writing – not only in the imagination of the French intellectuals, but also in that of cultural immigrants to the "City of Light" – is due to many factors and, among these, to one that Casanova seems to neglect: a certain surviving mentality that still grants the "homme de lettres," including the writer, an inordinate social importance, a quasi-mythical status – a legacy of the 18th century, when one could speak justifiably of the "French Europe," *l'Europe française*, a Europe for which France was an uncontested cultural model. Such a singularly "premodern" feature adds to the unique appeal that Paris has for foreign writers even today.

INSOUMISE

Franco Moretti

Ogni tanto, ma di rado, esce un libro che cambia il modo in cui una disciplina lavora. Trent'anni fa, quello di "letteratura mondiale" era un concetto da museo, scomparso dal dibattito critico; oggi ne è al centro, e il merito è del libro che avete tra le mani. Libro francese-francese, *La République mondiale des Lettres*, impensabile senza la Parigi di metà Ottocento, e sorretto da modelli storico-sociologici anch'essi francesi: incline, come scrive Casanova nella prefazione retrospettiva del 2008, "du seul fait de mon identité française, à me mêler des affaires de l'universel littéraire" in una sorta di "'littéraro-centrisme' caractéristique de la tradition littéraire nationale" (p. XVI). Sarà; ma il suo impicciarsi degli affari del mondo le ha trovato lettori un po' ovunque – dal Brasile al Giappone, dall'Egitto alla Corea alla Romania. Solo l'università francese ha fatto finta di niente, evitando fino alla fine di aprirle le porte. E' stata, diciamolo, una vergogna.

* * *

Scrivere "una storia della letteratura mondiale, o meglio, della Repubblica mondiale delle Lettere" (p. 76)[1]; progetto ambizioso, che risale metà a Braudel e metà a Bourdieu. Da Braudel, che compare fin dalle prime pagine del libro, viene l'idea di un mondo unificato ma diseguale, dove un centro ristretto subordina ai propri valori una vastissima periferia. Questo centro, per parte sua (e qui entra in scena Bourdieu), non è né la Gran Bretagna né gli Stati Uniti – le potenze economico-politiche egemoni degli ultimi due secoli – bensì la Francia, perché è qui che si è imposta per la prima volta l'idea dell'autonomia della letteratura. Il modello

* We thank Professor Franco Moretti and Nottetempo Publishing House for the kind permission to include the text in our journal. "Insoumise" was originally published as a postface ("Postfazione") to Pascale Casanova, *La Repubblica Mondiale delle Lettere*, ed. and translated into Italian by Cecilia Benaglia, Milan, Nottetempo, 2023, pp. 607–614. Quotations from Casanova in the text send to this Italian edition.

[1] La differenza tra "letteratura mondiale" e "Repubblica mondiale delle Lettere" è essenziale al ragionamento di Casanova: nel primo caso, opere di ogni dove confluiscono in un'unica letteratura tendenzialmente aperta ed egualitaria; nel secondo, emergono invece i rapporti di forza che esistono su scala internazionale, e le diseguaglianze che ne conseguono.

francese diventa dunque egemone su scala internazionale "non perché francese ma perché autonomo, vale a dire puramente letterario, vale a dire universale" (p. 133).

Letteratura autonoma – "'pur', je veux dire délivré (relativement bien sûr) des deux grandes formes de dépendance: commerciale et nationale" (p. XIV). Letteratura non per tutti, e anzi spesso sprezzante verso il grande pubblico, come è caratteristico del settore autonomo del campo letterario nel suo contrapporsi ai prodotti commerciali. Fin qui, Bourdieu. Ma a questo punto Casanova compie un passo avanti decisivo rispetto al modello delle *Regole dell'arte*: questa letteratura "difficile", abitualmente associata allo studio minuzioso delle piccole dimensioni (un testo, una scena, anche un singolo verso), diventa qui *il fondamento stesso dell'analisi su larga scala*. L'autonomia è "uno dei principi che organizzano lo spazio letterario mondiale", si legge nel paragrafo *Les chemins de la liberté*; e una pagina dopo, piu' di netto: "la legge dell'universale letterario: l'autonomia" (p. 133–4).

Questo universale letterario, Casanova lo descrive a chiare lettere come "il sistema di vincoli e gerarchie dell'universo letterario [...] la violenza invisibile [...] i rapporti di forza specifici, le battaglie [...] la frattura tra il mondo letterario legittimo e le sue *banlieu*" (p. 73). La metafora-guida, specie nella prima parte del libro, è inconfondibile: "economia spirituale" (Valéry), "oro spirituale" (Larbaud), "mercati verbali" (Chlebnikov), "assegno bancario" (Pound), "banche centrali" (Ramuz), "agenti di cambio", "prezzo dell'universale", "acquisizione dell'eredità", "accumulazione di risorse letterarie" (p. 31, 38, 40, 37, 43, 47, 217, 329, 478). E' il lato profondamente *realistico* del libro, che vede nell'esistenza dei rapporti di forza il punto di partenza di ogni ragionamento. Poiché pero' i rapporti di forza sono fondati sull'autonomia estetica, il modello di Bourdieu finisce col prevalere decisamente su quello di Braudel[2]. A voler seguire quest'ultimo, infatti, il motore dello spazio letterario mondiale non potrebbe che trovarsi negli scambi e nel mercato: esportazioni, resistenze, compromessi, bolle, crisi... (Nella storia del

[2] Il concetto di modello è fondamemntale per Casanova, che lo evoca a piu' riprese – "un modello generatore che permetta, a partire da una serie limitata di possibilità [...] di riformulare la serie infinita di soluzioni possibili", un "'modello ridotto' per comprendere la quasi totalità dei problemi" – e gli affida il compito di rendere esplicite "le leggi non scritte dell'universo letterario" (p. 256, 260, 460n.). Sul piano epistemologico, la peculiarità del libro consiste cosi' nella reciproca illuminazione di astratto e concreto grazie a una lunga serie di dettagli rivelatori: "la lucidità dei nuovi venuti" (a proposito di Goethe, p. 70), Parigi come "meridiano di Greenwhich della letteratura" (p. 135 e *passim*), Bruxelles, o della "seconda chance" (p. 196), gli scrittori "di seconda generazione" come i rivoluzionari per eccellenza, la scrittura di Faulkner come "acceleratore temporale" (p. 468), e molti altri ancora.

romanzo, ad esempio, che alla fin fine è stato il vero collante della *Weltliteratur*[3], la natura di merce ha quasi sempre prevalso su quella in senso proprio estetica.) In una visione braudeliana della storia letteraria, insomma, è dall'*etero*nomia che emerge lo spazio letterario mondiale, mentre il contributo dell'autonomia si restringe per converso a un che di circoscritto, tardivo, e probabilmente assai meno duraturo di quel che siamo soliti pensare.[4]

Su questo, Casanova è un poco all'antica. Un giorno, al sentirmi parlare di come Sue e Verne avessero catturato l'immaginazione europea, sbotto' in uno sdegnato *Mais ce n'est pas de la littérature!* Scherzava, d'accordo ... pero' ci credeva. E se è impossibile non apprezzare questa sua intransigenza, cosi' incompatibile con le tante edulcorazioni correnti, è anche vero che Sue e Verne (e compagnia) *sono* letteratura, e che il libro liquida con troppa disinvoltura il loro ruolo nella dinamica storica.[5] Lasciarli fuori del quadro rende infatti la repubblica delle lettere una terra benedetta da continue rivolte e rivoluzioni – da Ruben Dario agli irlandesi, all'ondata faulkneriana in America Latina, fino al sottotitolo del libro su Beckett (*Anatomia di una rivoluzione letteraria*). E' l'indomabile, ammirevole combattività di Casanova, ai cui occhi "la sola vera storia della letteratura è quella delle rivolte specifiche, dei colpi di mano"[6]. Ma se nel campo della letteratura autonoma le cose stanno spesso in questi termini, nel sistema letterario nel suo insieme, dominato com'è dall'industria culturale occidentale, i rapporti di forza hanno invece tutt'altra solidità. Qui, la sua generosità internazionalista – come quando, nell'ultima pagina del libro, si augura che esso diventi "una sorta di arma critica" per chi è lontano dal centro del sistema – le ha fatto velo alla realtà delle cose.

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[3] Il termine stesso di *Weltliteratur*, come è noto, venne coniato da Goethe in seguito alla lettura di *The Fortunate Union*, una (mediocre) traduzione inglese di un (mediocre) romanzo cinese che partecipo' dell'intensissimo *import-export* romanzesco intorno al 1800.

[4] Non è questione cui si possa rendere giustizia in una nota, ma l'idea che l'autonomia estetica sia uno sviluppo storico irreversibile ha perso negli ultimi decenni molta della sua forza. La riconciliazione di sperimentalismo e mercato verificatasi nel postmoderno, lo sbandieramento (a sinistra) di una concezione censorio-virtuosa della cultura, e il ritorno (a destra) di una mentalità nazionalista-autoritaria, fanno ritenere che il modello di Bourdieu abbia ormai i giorni contati.

[5] Benché il capitolo *La fabbrica dell'universale* menzioni un "terzo polo essenziale per comprendere la struttura del campo mondiale: il polo economico" (p. 221), e quello sull'*Internazionalismo letterario* parli delle "leggi del commercio internazionale che, trasformando le condizioni di produzione, modificano la forma stessa dei testi" (p. 249), alla questione vengono dedicate si' e no una decina delle cinquecento pagine del libro.

[6] Su questo, si veda l'introduzione di Claire Ducournau, Tristan Leperlier e Gisèle Sapiro al numero speciale di *ConTextes*, 28, 2020, e il ricordo di Dominique Edde („Pascale Casanova, le courage de la colère et de l'acceptation"), in *L'Orient Littéraire*, 10, 2018.

* * *

La prima citazione della *République* è tratta da *The Figure in the Carpet* di Henry James; le ultime, dal *Tempo ritrovato* di Proust. Nel corpo del libro, pero', di letteratura non ce n'è molta. A James fanno seguito i saggi di Larbaud e Valéry, Bourdieu, ancora Valéry, l'*ABC della lettura* di Pound, le lettere di Goethe, un manifesto di Chlebnikov, i saggi di Ramuz, il libro su Parigi di Victor Hugo, i saggi di Glaser... Nella seconda parte del libro entrano in scena autori lituani, albanesi, antillani, rumeni, somali, belgi, messicani; e di nuovo interviste, lettere, discorsi, diari, conversazioni, ricordi. Di Dante si citano il *Convivio* e il *De vulgari eloquentia*, ma non la *Commedia*; Federico II di Prussia compare piu' spesso di Mallarmé e Rimbaud; Larbaud, che lancio' Joyce in Francia, piu' di Balzac Baudelaire Flaubert Rimbaud Rilke Pound Dostoevsky Tolstoy Dickens ed Eliot (George e T.S.) messi assieme. Di Joyce, che condensa forse meglio di ogni altro i temi centrali del libro – autonomia, esilio, rivolta, "letterature minori" – vengono citati diversi articoli giovanili; dal *Ritratto*, una manciata di parole, e una mezza frase dall'*Ulisse*.

Strano? Si' e no. Piu' un'area di ricerca è vasta, scrisse Auerbach nel saggio sulla *Weltliteratur* del 1952, piu' nettamente va demarcato il fenomeno – il "punto d'appoggio" – che permette di unificare la gran massa dei materiali[7]. Su questo, la scelta di Casanova è priva di ombre: il suo *Ansatzpunkt* sono quelle che un tempo si chiamavano le "poetiche" – prefazioni, progetti, manifesti, conferenze – piu' che i testi letterari veri e propri[8]. E' un'ipotesi netta e perseguita con coerenza, e gliene va reso merito; ma non la trovo convincente. Con la scomparsa delle opere scompare infatti la stessa letteratura, riassorbita per intero all'interno delle poetiche, ossia della consapevolezza che gli scrittori hanno del loro lavoro. Ma sono davvero cosi' coscienti di quello che fanno, gli scrittori[9] – o non aveva

[7] "Come si può risolvere il problema della sintesi? Una vita è troppo breve per crearne anche solo le condizioni preliminari. Il lavoro di gruppi organizzati, utilissimo per altri scopi, in questo caso non è una soluzione. La sintesi storica a cui pensiamo [...] è un prodotto dell'intuizione personale, e quindi può essere fornita soltanto dal singolo." Erich Auerbach, „Filologia della Weltliteratur", in *Letteratura mondiale e metodo*, a cura di Guido Mazzoni, Nottetempo, Milano 2022, p. 65. Si legga anche la bella introduzione di Mazzoni, *Il paradosso di Auerbach*, specie pp. 26 sgg.

[8] Di qui il paradosso di un grande libro di storia letteraria in cui l'interpretazione è pressoché assente. A differenza delle opere letterarie, infatti – e soprattutto di quelle "autonome" – le poetiche si possono di norma prendere piu' o meno alla lettera.

[9] Si pensi a Joyce: negli anni Venti, quando apparve il cosiddetto "schema Linati", egli avallo' l'idea che l'*Ulisse* fosse stato programmato fin dall'inizio nei suoi minimi dettagli – laddove Michael Groden ha dimostrato al di là di ogni dubbio che il libro prese forma in modo altamente casuale e brancolante.

forse ragione Panofsky nel sostenere che, "quando di un artista si sono conservati enunciati riflessi sulla propria arte [...] essi costituiscono [...] nella loro totalità un fenomeno parallelo alle sue creazioni artistiche [...] ma non una spiegazione di queste ultime"?[10]

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Ma insomma, questo che vuole, si starà forse chiedendo chi legge: prima dice che Casanova ha cambiato il modo in cui la comparatistica lavora (o dovrebbe lavorare) – e poi infila un'obiezione dopo l'altra. Dove sta la verità?

La verità è che le critiche bisogna sapersele meritare. Nessuna delle mie obiezioni sarebbe immaginabile se Casanova non avesse scritto un grande libro, che riesce a istituire, per la prima volta, un *rapporto intellegibile* tra le tante letterature moderne in tutta la loro enorme varietà. Invece di sottacerne le differenze – come si ama fare a sinistra, quasi che le ingiustizie scomparissero se non se ne parla – Casanova *articola* il sistema delle diseguaglianze culturali sulla base di presupposti chiari e plausibili, offrendo cosi' un quadro che è al tempo stesso vastissimo e perfettamente comprensibile. Parla solo degli ultimi due secoli, d'accordo, e di poetiche invece che di forme, e trascura la gran massa delle merci letterarie. Tutto vero. C'è qualcuno che ha saputo far meglio? Questo è il punto. Una teoria non cade perché non collima alla perfezione con le nostre osservazioni empiriche. Cade se c'è una teoria migliore; e questa ancora non c'è.

Per il momento, dunque, chi vuol ragionare di letteratura mondiale è da questo libro che deve partire. Vi troverà una tesi forte, materiali ricchissimi, e formulazioni che fanno venire il sorriso alle labbra; sentirà una voce diretta, scanzonata e coraggiosa, che è scomparsa troppo troppo presto. Ce ne fossero, di persone cosi'.

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[10] Erwin Panofsky, „Il concetto del Kunstwollen", 1920, in *La prospettiva come 'forma simbolica' e altri scritti*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1979, pp. 156–7. Dell'ipertrofia della consapevolezza nella *République mondiale des Lettres* parlai di persona con Casanova quando discutemmo il suo libro a Stanford, nel 2006. Capisco quel che dici, rispose, ma secondo me alla periferia del sistema letterario bisogna battersi contro cosi' tanti vincoli materiali e simbolici, che gli scrittori *sono costretti* a divenire consapevoli. Questo fulminante intreccio di storia sociale e intellettuale, che rovescia come un colpo di judo un'obiezione in un punto di forza, dà un'idea dell'intelligenza – e dell'ironia – di Casanova, e della serietà con cui si misurava con le critiche che le venivano mosse.

TRAVELLING WORLD LITERATURE CONCEPTS: DAVID DAMROSCH TRANSLATED INTO ROMANIAN

Roxana Eichel

Abstract: This article briefly explores some of the current main theoretical frameworks in studying world literature, with a focus on David Damrosch's recent books *Comparing the Literatures* (2020) and *Around the World in 80 Books* (2020). As both of these works have been translated into Romanian in 2023, the travelling notion of *world literature* and its particular horizons and possible meanings in Romanian raise questions about the concept's "refractions" and nuances in local and regional contexts. I argue that although Damrosch's reception in Romanian academia long predates his translation into Romanian language, there is still little consensus with regard to appropriate equivalents of world literature concepts in Romanian. In a small national culture which still negotiates its positions within the networks of world literature, responses to major paradigms can be shaped not just epistemologically, but also ideologically.
Keywords: travelling theory, translation, world literature, David Damrosch, "literatură mondială".

One of the questions the field of world literature has to answer after the last decades, while it has risen as the leading discipline in literary studies, revolves around the criteria and methods it entails. Is it possible to make literary histories and reevaluate hierarchies beyond a binary frame defined by the polarity of center(s) and peripheries? David Damrosch, one of the most prominent authorities in the field comparative literature, embraces perspectives which map a polycentric world, nevertheless stressing the responses and the chances that the "ultraminor"[1] stands in front of literature produced in the literary spaces hosted by the great powers, called by some "NATO literatures"[2]. Most outlooks on world literature

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[1] Bergur Rønne Moberg, David Damrosch (eds.), *Ultraminor World Literatures*, Leiden and Boston, Brill Academic Publishing, 2022.

[2] Werner Friedrich, quoted in David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2020, p. 337.

emerging from individual scholars or research teams in Western academia tackle cultural hegemony and world systems by redefining their relations to power, and Romanian responses to such discourses are particularly interesting, as the aperture of the notion pertains to a post-1989 geopolitical and cultural context.

While Damrosch posits that world literature is not a canon or a list of works, but a mode of reading and of circulation depending on the decisive instrument of translation, he still opts for linking the networks thus created to a successful commerce of ideas and intercultural dialogue rather than questioning the systems making this circulation possible, and their underlying values. The articles and essays brought together in *Comparing the Literatures* retrieve some of these issues, which had been investigated in the author's previous seminal works[3]: comparative comments upon the agonistic nature of literary productions and scholarship, as well as portrayals some of the less fruitful or famous projects in world literature are some of the recurring foci of Damrosch's books. In addition to these, *Comparing the Literatures* enhances the self-reflective traits of the discipline, by questioning the very nature and methods of cultural and literary comparison.

No matter how outdated the very idea of defining literature through a single lens might seem today, some of its avatars are still lurking behind every theoretical attempt at understanding and analyzing world literature. Whether we engage in close or distant reading, one of the fundamental and perennial questions for literary researchers is: do literary worlds propose autonomous, alternative orders to sociopolitical and/or economic systems, or do they mirror the global hierarchies, conflicts, and international economic relations? While the scope of such questions is too vast to be expedited in brief articles, grasping the divergent plurality of world literature outlooks relies, among other factors, on this manifold construction of the "world". David Damrosch chooses the pluralist approach: he admits to the possibility of multiple "worlds", which we can regard either as "scriptworlds"[4] (as he terms the wide circulation of cuneiform which has helped *The Epic of Gilgamesh* survive and gain various forms across Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent, accounting for ancient world literature) or as "global mediascape"[5] (illustrated by the transformations of literature and its characters in videogames such as *Dante's Inferno* or *Final Fantasy*).

[3] *What is World Literature* (2003), *The Buried Book* (2007), *How to Read World Literature* (2009), *The Canonical Debate Today. Crossing Disciplinary and Cultural Boundaries* (2011, ed., with Theo D'haen and Liviu Papadima), to name but a few of Damrosch's works.

[4] David Damrosch, "Ancient World Literature", in *The Cambridge History of World Literature*, ed. Debjani Ganguly, Cambridge, New York, Port Melbourne, New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 56.

[5] Idem, *Comparing the Literatures*, p. 237.

With two of his books recently translated into Romanian, namely *Around the World in 80 Books* (2020, in Romanian: *Ocolul Pământului în 80 de cărți*, Tracus Arte Publishing, 2023, translation by Monica Dobrescu and Georgeta Constantin) and *Comparing the Literatures. Literary Studies in an Age of Globalization* (2020, in Romanian: *Cum comparăm literaturile*, Tracus Arte Publishing, 2023, translation by Roxana Eichel, both translated volumes included in the collection "Cultura ideilor" [The Culture of Ideas], coordinated by Carmen Mușat), the Romanian literary space reencounters an author and a paradigm it had already responded to. Works such like *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, edited by Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, Andrei Terian in 2017 (Bloomsbury Academic), or Delia Ungureanu's book *From Paris to Tlön. Surrealism as World Literature* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018) and her activity as Associate Director of the Institute of World Literaure founded by Damrosch at Harvard University, or the 2018 *Journal of World Literature* issue titled "Romanian Literature in Today's World", edited by Thomas Pavel and Delia Ungureanu, had already been engaging with this notion and its academic practices**.** All these works actively renegotiated Romanian literature's postures among contemporary research paradigms.

Damrosch's experiment of literary blogging one's way through the COVID-19 lockdown led to *Around the World in 80 Books*, a project which includes an impressive range of texts, with writers as diverse as Voltaire, Ghalib, Madeleine L'Engle, Judith Schalansky, James Merrill, Derek Walcott. The author illustrates his notions of world literature by selecting works which eschew the "hypercanon" and testify to the variety of literary texts which can form milestones in this reading adventure à la Jules Verne. This kinetics of reading therefoe relies on a mixture of instruments: the alertness of the online media, further accelerated by the shift towards digitalization the pandemic triggered, accompanies the reference to modernity's metaphors and ideals of mobility. The contemporary comparatist becomes a digital Phileas Fogg, and his methods might be represented through another iconic motto employed by Jules Verne: *mobilis in mobile*, inscribed on the fictional submersible Nautilus in *20 000 Leagues Under the Sea*. Alertness is of the essence in Verne's fictions as well as in the process of translation which swiftly made Damrosch's essays available in Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Serbian, German, Romanian, Turkish, Ukrainian. As it often refers to works not yet translated into Romanian, the book provides a comprehensive tool for approaching difference and cultural diversity.

Though most certainly more than familiar to readers, some of the features of each decisive endeavour in world literature research need to be reminded here. If there is a wide academic consensus with regard to the fact that dismantling "the

Herder effect"[6] (as Pascale Casanova named the tendency to monopolize literature and literary studies within national frameworks and to subordinate the literary to national culture), represents a desideratum that contributes to reflecting more accurately the transnational networks and pathways to cross-cultural circulation of literature, the methods and perspectives proposed for doing so are substantially distinct. As Stefan Helgesson, Birgit Neumann, and Gabriele Rippl point out in their "Introduction" to the *Handbook of Anglophone World Literatures*, although the seminal books written by Damrosch, Franco Moretti, and Casanova have spawned a tremendous number of comments and a widely enthusiastic reception of their methods, "their emphasis on the conjuction of power and literature"[7] has not yet been sufficiently explored. Each of the three scholars discusses the possibilities of critical approaches toward national literatures and outlines the fertile outcomes of such perspectives. Casanova's *World Republic of Letters*, Moretti's "distant reading" going "against the grain of national historiography"[8], or Damrosch's "elliptical refraction of national literatures"[9] all suggest alternative models for cultural borders shaped by the nation-state. While the digital and graphic methods proposed by Moretti and the quest for literary autonomy defined by Casanova are usually read as systematic models, David Damrosch's bold exploration of wildly different literary spaces has been received as "a sort of rule-of-thumb method for defining what qualifies a literary work as world literature and for how to read it as such"[10].

But are such approaches, still extremely focused on the connections and disconnects of local, regional, transnational, and global networks and systems, enough for a comprehensive diachronic understanding of literature or do they merely account for modern and postmodern frames of circulating texts?

For instance, as she proposes an alternative model of world literature, Debjani Ganguly argues that instead of focusing on macrosystems and foregrounding the modern interdependence between capitalism, colonialism, decolonization, and literary circulation, research on world literature should "think about the locatedness of readers, publishers, festivals; about the fragility and serendipity of networks; and

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[6] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, English translation by M.B. DeBevoise, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 77.

[7] Stefan Helgesson, Birgit Neumann, Gabriele Rippl, *Handbook of Anglophone World Literatures*, Berrlin and Boston, De Gruyter, 2020, p. 4.

[8] Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature", *New Left Review*, no. 1/2000, p. 61.

[9] David Damrosch, *What is World Literature*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 281.

[10] Theo D'haen, "Re-Reading Classical Approaches from a Postcolonial Perspective: Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti, David Damrosch", in Helgesson, Neumann, Rippl (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

about circulation outside publishing conglomerates"[11]. The option animating her project is aimed at generating "a sense of coevalness"[12] and a "post-Eurocentric"[13] embeddedness of world literature. These broadening horizons of world literature are not yet the most compatible to befit the Romanian literary space, defined by the traits and complexes of a small culture, recovering after the struggles of a long post-communist transition era and still negotiating its place within a European literary field. As Magda Răduță points out in an article about Pascale Casanova's reception in Eastern Europe, "*The World Republic of Letters* needed almost a decade to configure its circuit of regional impact"[14] (from publication to local translation and theoretical import). Marginality and subalternity are notions difficult to supersede in a literary space that has sought autonomy from the communist dictatorship and is known to regard travelling concepts with cautiousness, Răduță argues. The same phenomenon and a similar interval might be expected for Damrosch's reception as his texts take root in the particular local context defined by contemporary Romanian literary studies: Romanian literature's place in relation to world literature is still an ambiguous task. As one of the characters in Damrosch's own academic novel *Meetings of the Mind* pointed out, "we must recognize that when we carry our theories into some distant scholarly territory, that territory is already someone *else*'s home"[15].

One of the main symptoms of this cautiousness or skepticism features in the responses to Damrosch's translation in Romanian. The choice to translate the notion of "World Literature" into Romanian as "literatură mondială" is not entirely self-explanatory and can raise issues which need to be adressed in order to avoid confusion. In translating *Comparing the Literatures*, I opted for this term rather than alternatives such as "literatura lumii" ("literature of the world") or "literatură-lume" ("literature-world" or "world-literature")[16], or even "literatură-în-lume"

[11] Debjani Ganguly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of World Literature*, Cambridge, New York, Portt Melbourne, New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 18.

[12] Ibidem, p. 14.

[13] Ibidem, p. 34.

[14] Magdalena Răduță, "Reading Pascale Casanova's *World Republic of Letters in Eastern Europe*", in *Pascale Casanova's World of Letters and Its Legacies*, eds. Gisèle Sapiro and Delia Ungureanu, Leiden and Boston, Brill Academic Publishing, 2022, p. 71.

[15] David Damrosch, in collaboration with Vic d'Ohr Addams, Marsha Doddvic, and Dov Midrash, D.C.A., *Meetings of the Mind*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 55. For explanations regarding fictional authors and their academic title (D.C.A.), see https://shc.stanford.edu/arcade/publications/dibur/comparing-literatures-contemporary-perspectives/locations-comparison,

[16] Cf. Emanuel Modoc, "Literatura română ca fenomen transnațional", *Revista Transilvania*, no. 2, 2019, pp. 1–3.

("literature-in-the-world", which would inadvertently suggest a Heideggerian turn of the notion), for several reasons beyond the argument of authority based on the prior circulation of the phrase "literatură mondială" (Delia Ungureanu, Andrei Terian, Cezar Gheorghe, etc.). While seemingly more innocent and "natural" to some Romanian readers, or devoid of political connotations, the term "lume" is simultaneously more ambiguous and more likely to be associated with ideologies and hierarchies that Damrosch does not prioritize or endorse: which world? The whole world? The one divided into the "First World", "Second World", "Third World", in the spirit of the Cold War or of models such as Fredric Jameson's "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism"[17]? Although he frequently mentions the ideal of "comparison without hegemony"[18], Damrosch emphasizes the obvious fact that not all literature written across the world is "World Literature", thus positioning the concept as pluralistic, clearly transcending the narrow horizon of "national literature" without opposing it, while rejecting all the same the hegemonic, usually Eurocentric, claims of the "universal". Damrosch's research consistently advocates for the expansion of the domain of world literature, which automatically implies that there are many linguistic territories yet to be explored, translations from and into several languages are still insufficient, and many comparative works limit their scope, as scholars usually deal only with texts whose language they master perfectly.

Texts which become "World Literature" transcend, not just through their mere translation, but also through their decisive impact, the boundaries of the culture in which they were produced. However, Damrosch insists, readers become aware of them through the national cultures in which they happen to find themselves, so we cannot speak of a single image of "world literature": instead, we should rather envisage variable assemblages and cutouts depending on space, temporality, and the globalizing or isolationist tendencies of the "target" cultures. Moreover, as previously stated, for Damrosch the concept does not refer to a single "world" but to different layers of meanings the term encompasses: real world, fictional world, worlds of the present, worlds of the past, etc., and the various relations of convergence or divergence between them, so that the Romanian term "mondial" seems to capture more eloquently the meanings of the concept and better serve his text.

The incumbent issues surrounding the options for the Romanian translation are not the only context where the phrase "world literature" itself has encountered critical

[17] Fredric Jameson, „Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", *Social Text*, no. 15, Autumn, 1986, pp. 65–88.

[18] David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures...*, *passim.*

questions and debates. In the Anglosphere and in its overall internationalization, the wording choice has been contested for its claims to comprehensiveness and inclusive contents that its methods often preclude.

To add to the polemic comments the English phrase has stirred, as the author shows in *Comparing the Literatures*, in the chapter "World Writers' World Literatures" the perspectives authors embrace do not usually overlap with those of critics, theorists, or comparatists, since writers "are less interested in what a work may have meant in its home context than in what it can do for them now."[19]

Damrosch illustrates this statement through Mircea Cărtărescu's personal writerly stance in the essay "Europa are forma creierului meu" [Europe Has the Shape of My Brain], wherein he rejected the self-exoticizing "Eastern European" label that some Western European editors attempted to impose on him in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In the same vein of aesthetic autonomy, Cărtărescu declared that the geographical space from which an author comes is rather irrelevant to their literature and its reception. Two decades later, Cărtărescu maintains this viewpoint, favoring the absolute singularity or particularism of works over their placement within different systems or networks:

> I don't read literatures, like Călinescu does; I read books. When I read a book, I don't care if the author is Chinese, French, or Mongolian, if they are alive presently or lived a thousand years ago. All I care about is whether they are a good writer or a bad one. I don't really believe in national literatures, even though the spirit of different languages may influence your writing. People read authors, not representatives of national cultures.[20]

Cărtărescu's position reflects a strong belief in the "self-evident" triumph of the value of literature in the world, while the paradigm of world literature, as constructed by Damrosch, without necessarily proposing a theory of values, cannot ignore the paths, whether autonomous or institutional, through which texts circulate and gain recognition.

For David Damrosch, a certain transgressiveness of world literature, perhaps akin to Harold Bloom's notion of "strangeness" and the virtues of misreading, is pervasive throughout the chapters of his book. *Comparing the Literatures* boldly attempts to provide thorough answers to many essential questions regarding

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[19] Ibidem, p. 269.

[20] Mircea Cărtărescu, „În spatele minții mele pândește mereu mintea cititorului" [Europe Has the Shape of My Brain], interviewed by Laurențiu Ciprian Tudor for *Libris Blog*, November 2022, available on: https://blog.libris.ro/2022/11/29/mircea-cartarescu-in-spatele-mintii-mele-pandeste-mereu-mintea-scriitorului/, last accessed: 13.11.2024.

comparative literature, such as "what do we actually mean and what do we compare when we say we compare literatures". In doing so, it addresses right from the start such questions by resorting to a dream, recounted in an anecdote told by Harry Levin in 1968: a graduate student's wife dreams of her husband's professors (namely Levin and Renato Poggioli) whom in this oneiric projection are featured as workmen dressed in overalls who have come to the young married couple's home to "compare the literature". Departing from this pretext, the American scholar writes in the *Introduction*: "This book is intended to answer the question behind the young woman's dream: Just what was her husband doing with his life?"[21] The critical biography of the discipline seems to adopt a specific gendered perspective in responding, almost 60 years later, to a young woman's queries about life and comparative literature. The book goes on to feature extensive references to women writers and critics ranging from Madame de Staël to Anna Balakian, Lilian Furst, Alice Kaplan, or Lin Yutang's sister. The latter, only referred to as "the second sister", is a woman solely dreaming of the academic studies her brother would pursue and hoping to enjoy this type of education vicariously, mirroring Virginia Woolf's portrayal of Shakespeare's sister in *A Room of One's Own*. All these reconstructions are part of a comparative and theoretical kaleidoscope comprising the biographical and the institutional, the idiosyncratic and the theoretical as no longer disjunct pieces, but narratives which cross boundaries and converge towards the foundational reasons of the discipline. While the "elliptical refractions" of Romanian literary space in world literature, discussed in *Comparing the Literatures*, include Hugo Meltzl's pioneering *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1877–1878) or Mircea Cărtărescu, this perspective could be enhanced by more thorough reflection on Romanian exiled writers or comparatists, a task to be completed perhaps as transnational outlooks on literature, such as Damrosch's, gradually contribute to an expansion of angles in literary criticism and comparative literature in Romania.

Although it clearly privileges transnational circulation, Damrosch's model of world literature cannot, however, be understood as a radical critique of the study of literature from a national perspective. Notably, Damrosch carefully analyzes the factors that cause comparative literature in the United States to simultaneously take on both "Americentric" and "Amerifugal" forms – an approach that can inspire reflection on Romanian critical settings, such as the dynamics of protochronisms and inferiority complexes of a small literature. The comparatist's standpoint specifically opposes the nationalistic and parochial radicalisms which isolate linguistic and geopolitical spaces, and therefore limit and distort the systemic and

[21] David Damrosch, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

dialogic diversity of literature. For Damrosch, world literature is always organized into discursive formations that contradict narrow frameworks and this is one of the most important messages to be conveyed by his translation and "travel" into Romanian.[22]

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IV. A few Reflections on Translation. An Afterword

ON TRANSLATING AND WORLDING

Mircea Martin

Abstract: This article is the first part of a larger essay that advances a general theory of translation. It starts from the argument that we are all *translators* (even self-translators) and we are all *translated* throughout our lives. The paper offers an analysis of the state of the field of translation studies under the conditions of irrepressible globalization and technological and media revolution. Nowadays "Translational Turn" is discussed taking into account the convergence between the implicitly colonizing trend of American language and culture and self-colonizing aspirations of "small" languages and cultures in quest for international recognition.
Keywords: translation, self-translation, globalization, "major" and "minor" cultures, worlding, cultural diversity, George Steiner.

"Language is the main instrument
of man's refusal to accept the world as it is."
(George Steiner, *After Babel)*

Far from being just the transfer of a text from one language to another, translation is a fundamental human act – profoundly human, though not exclusively human. Ethology, zoo-psychology, and neurobiology have provided unsettling evidence in this regard, and these sciences are likely to surprise us even more. The act of translation is significant not only for literature, but for all forms of human knowledge, from earliest manifestations on the phylogenetic scale to contemporary sciences, philosophy, and arts. To get to know something involves, first and foremost, an act of translation. We keep on translating throughout all our lives; we are perpetual translators. In fact, we are *translators* and we are *translated* all the time.

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We translate our own sensations, perceptions, and impressions, and we translate the gestures and gazes of the Other – who in turn translates our actions. We do this even before mastering our mother tongue and long before learning foreign languages. The issue of translation, therefore, precedes the linguistic issue and cannot be reduced to it. Cave paintings are translations, as are – infinitely more complex – Renaissance paintings. The language of music, in its specific way, is also a translation. Every externalization of a soul's content involves an act of translation, whether it manifests linguistically or non-linguistically. Likewise, every information we receive, from the natural environment around us or from our fellow beings, goes through our translation filter. The quality and intensity of our experiences depend on the efficiency of this filter.

We may therefore take our *im-pressions* and *ex-pressions* for translations. Their directness, naturalness, and spontaneity are short-circuited by a certain moment in time and by a switching mechanism in our minds. It is a *transfer* within the mind, between semiotic systems. It is a *mediation* that occurs so quickly, which is so rapidly absorbed into the innate nature of our synapses, that it goes unnoticed. Our eyes, wet with tears looking at the splendors of nature or when we hear the sounds of a sublime music, trigger a physiological response to our mute delight: our tears are a regressive translation from the language of emotions into the language of senses. This mediation by means of translation is embedded in the very structure of the human being, as a back-and-forth between mind and body, between our brain's connections and impulses. Before we translate the others, we translate ourselves: translation is, first and foremost, *self-translation*.

Therefore, any individual is able to translate, the act of translation is in our power, it belongs to a so-called natural endowment, regardless of the place, language, and culture in which we live. At this basic level, translation is a constitutive part of us all. The fact that it manifests as a privileged result of the intelligence and culture of each individual does not negate its universal nature.

In time, *linguistic* factors would deeply modify this innate correlation, a new semiotic system will take hold, include and subordinate the initial system. Articulated language will recover, interfere with, and control the entire process, resulting in a huge increase in complexity on one hand, and in the possibility of a specialized use of language, on the other. The primary act of translation, that occurred in a sort of "Auftakt", extends and becomes more complex in what we now call – inappropriately – *simultaneous* translation and, on a different scale of time and intensity, in what we generally mean by "translation" in our everyday language: *textual* translation, translation of written texts.

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We cannot conceive of an objectivity of language without translation. We have to admit that translation is at the foundation of a social contract exercised through language, through any language. In the absence of its immediate efficiency, so instantly performed that it seems implicit, communication and cohabitation would be impossible. But the immediate efficiency of this translation does not, in any way, exclude the complexity of the act itself, the *discreet conventionalism* it assumes, which makes us select each time certain generally-accepted invariants, despite the fact that we have an implicit, personal and particular understanding of the terms handled in a conversation.

The field of translation, therefore, is much broader than we expect. Beyond *literary* translations, which are the specific – intensive, complex, selective – case of a universal phenomenon, there is also a vast amount of translation done for informational purpose. Furthermore, every specialist or researcher, before engaging in interlinguistic exchange or addressing foreign sources, has to translate in *the professional language of* their field of work the phenomena encountered and captured by experience, whether in laboratories, in investigations of all kinds or in everyday life. Scientific presentations or papers are transpositions of personal observations and reflections into a specialized, conceptual and terminological network, as such acknowledged.

Every branch of science or technology translates: it understands and names in its own way the data and facts handled by that particular field. And similarly, every form of culture translates. Mythology is translation, and in our epoch, semiotics is translation, programmatically and to the fullest extent. *Literature* is translated not only from one language to another, but also from one discipline to another: literary studies approach it in a way that respects its specific difference; historiography, sociology, or philosophy consider it mainly a testimony of significant social and political events or options, an illustration of a non-conceptual way of thinking. *Human body*, too, is the object of various translating operations, ranging from medicine to anthropology, from history to geography, from literature to visual arts. At their turn, the *arts* essentially translate, regardless of how imitative or non-imitative they aim to be. The relationships between them are often translations from one language to another. For example, German composers in the 18th century committed an explicit act of translation when they conceived their suites "in the French style." Latin literature borrowed themes, figures, and scenes from Greek authors, and Roman sculpture replicated and transposed Greek models. Aren't film adaptations of so many novels also kinds of translations?

All these observations may seem trivial as they name implicit or assumed approaches, but I do find necessary to acknowledge the *implicit*, and the *assumed* – especially the delicate, yet important difference between the two. And I think a general theory of systems should probably admit that all its components are fundamentally translations.

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Equally fundamental is the relationship between translation and *interpretation*. These are acts that involve each other, however fragile and tenuous this reciprocity might have been in the beginning. In fact, translation precedes and is a condition of our understanding; it is, chronologically and logically, the first *hermeneutics* of the human species. At a large timescale, the role of interpretation in the process of translation has naturally increased with articulated language and with the higher reflexivity it required. At a small scale, the confrontation of one interlocutor to another, of one text to another, reverberates within any speaker or reader; over time, these confrontations produce inner reverberations. The *comparative* regime of all communication and reading stimulates the emergence of *self-interpretation*. By means of interpreting and understanding others, we also interpret and understand ourselves. If self-translation preceded translation, self-interpretation can only follow interpretation.

Numerous anthropologists, philosophers, and especially literary scholars have examined the importance of the act of translation in epistemological, ethical, and social terms. Among these is Christian Moraru, who, in his book on "cosmodernism", emphasizes that through translations"[...] we can apprehend, or reapprehend rather, our own world of images and ideas as we look into the worlds of others"[1]. However, the translator's effort has even deeper consequences on us. We are not only informed, but also *shaped* by what we translate: the translated object imprints on the subject, it influences, changes, and constructs translators. One does not need to be a professional translator to feel that translations enrich our experience and convey a sense of complex fulfilment.

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Modernization, with its scientific and technological progress and the subsequent broadening of horizons, along with increasing physical and cultural mobility, has intensified the need for inter-human and international communication. The

[1] Christian Moraru, *Cosmodermism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2011, p. 175.

presence of the Other has become more active in daily life and for individual and collective consciousness, and at the same time, translation has become an indispensable mediator. The intensification of translational gestures between cultures with established traditions, as well as new initiatives that accompanied the formation of national literatures in Eastern Europe, contributed to shaping a *continental literary* space. This space, built beyond political and linguistic borders, will gradually expand and acquire a really global dimension through *colonization* and especially *decolonization*. A brief retrospective would reveal how translations played an important role in the articulation of each national culture at every stage of evolution during the constitution of their literary and intellectual space.

It is true that this perspective is relatively a recent one; it began to develop only in the 1970s and 1980s. During the interwar period and in the aftermath of the Second World War, the issue of translation was reduced to a discussion of linguistic aspects and to the *fidelity* or infidelity towards the original text. It involved an asymmetrical form of bilingualism and a subordinate, servile status for the profession itself. The secondary nature of translation unjustly reflected on the translator, whose personal contribution was taken as auxiliary and instrumental. Translators' work was considered relevant only in terms of accurate reproduction, not in terms of creation. In 1995, Professor Lawrence Venuti wrote about the "invisibility of the translator", his dissatisfaction was directed at a common translation practice in American culture, subordinated to the criteria of "fluency" and "transparency"[2].

Looking back at what happened with translations in Romanian culture during the 1960s–1980s, we must introduce a few nuances to the broader image described above. Despite ideological censorship, within a cycle of relaxations and intensifications of state repression, it was a fertile period, with long-awaited and widely read translations, and remarkable translation performances. Of particular importance was the professionalization of literary translation. The translator's work was acknowledged as creative during this period, which resulted in the establishment of a body of specialists (translators and comparatists) within a distinct section of The Writers' Union of Romania.

In close relation to *comparative literature*, the study of translations gained full autonomy throughout the 1980s. *Traductology*, *Translation Studies*, *Translationswissenschaft*, *translation theory*, and the *poetics of translation* are the new disciplines that, in the United States and Europe, have reconsidered the role of translations in the history of literature, in the first place, and second, in

[2] Lawrence Venuti, *Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London, Routledge, 1995 (1st edition).

the history of culture. They addressed, among other things, the consequences of translation on reading and public education, as well as on the shifts of the canon, in the literary field.

Research domains dealing with translational processes have gradually increased in number and propelled comparative literature itself within this expanding movement, even if comparative literature was the field where translation studies originated. There are interferences with the history of mentalities and the sociology of information, with cultural diplomacy, in other words with foreign policy of states that respect themselves as nations and seek the most advantageous position in a rapidly changing world.

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Over the last decades, there has been a technological and media revolution. An unstoppable, increasingly uncontrollable race for globalization has been set in motion. These major events have exponentially increased the importance of translation within a broader framework where ideological and political issues – i.e., the issue of Power – have influenced the epistemology of the discipline and, in fact, of all humanities.

After the success of postcolonial studies, which contested the Eurocentric perspective on culture, transcultural and global studies have launched a real campaign to undermine the concept of national culture, questioning its overlap with one single language and a clearly defined geographical and political territory. Indeed for many cases, there are multiple languages and cultural identities within a state and competing or alternative variants may coexist within the same culture. According to globalisation theories, mutual exchange is not possible anymore between distinct, homogeneous cultures but *beyond* them, under the new circumstances of internalized diversity and hybridity. Comparative literature itself is *worlding* and it approaches – without fusing with – *world literature*. It opens up, both in principle and practice, towards all literatures, from all regions of the world.

A balanced, nuanced perspective, paying attention to the situation on the ground and not to one *trend* or another, is proposed by David Damrosch (in a discussion with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak at the plenary session of the annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in Vancouver, 2011, later included in an edited volume):

> [...] in one sense, world literature is prior to the creation of most national literatures, but in another sense, world literature exists only *within* a national space, for any given

> reader. So in this sense, world literature is actually a function of national systems and needs to be thought about that way. National literature, comparative literature, world literature exist in a dynamic interplay, and no one of these can eat the others up.[3]

The regime of translation is undergoing a spectacular change, its interdisciplinary study becomes increasingly *transdisciplinary*: on one hand it goes by expansion, on the other hand it goes by inclusion, as it merges with other areas of research that most of all interest disciplines like history, anthropology, ecology, and even economics. Translation studies today address broad topics, including the relationship between *global* and *local*, bilingualism and multilingualism, migration (as a social-political phenomenon, but also cultural and artistic), and the issue of Power as source and agent of inequality between individuals, languages, and nations. Given this expansion and intricate interactions, we may speak of a "Translational Turn" aiming to replace the previous shift produced by cultural studies in the early 1980s.

The issue of translation, ideologically and even politically charged, is nowadays involved in anthropological, ecological, and ethical controversies concerning the preservation of tradition and collective memory, the survival of small languages, and of minor or marginalized cultures. It is no coincidence that some contemporary scholars in translation studies, especially from the United States, describe their field of research and reflection in terms of conflict and cultural war. The translation zone is a war zone, argues Emily Apter. It is a linguistic and literary "war" turning into a cultural and political war between "small" languages, confined to national spaces, and "major" languages of international circulation; but it is also another "war", scarcely noticed and discussed, a war between "small" cultures competing one to another in order to get the attention and reception of "major" cultures.

I introduced the term "war" in quotation marks since these wars have never been declared, nor acknowledged by their combatants. I also used the adjectives "major" and "minor" in quotation marks to highlight their fundamental inadequacy with reference to literature or culture; although, if we consider criteria such as the consistency of tradition and the value of intellectual production, we should probably accept, selectively and critically, the evidence.

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[3] David Damrosch and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Comparative Literature / World Literature: A Discussion", in David Damrosch, (ed.), *World Literature in Theory*, Malden, MA (USA) / Oxford (UK), Wiley Blackwell, 2014, p. 385.

The truth is that the *annexationism* (if not imperialism) of major languages and cultures – the *French*, from the 17th century or even earlier (if we consider the fact that English authors translated Greek and Latin classics through French versions), and the *English*, from mid-20th century until today and who knows for how long from now on – has met the *self-colonizing* aspiration of small languages and cultures in their quest to be noticed and recognized. It is nevertheless true that the beneficial effects of the *con-fluence* of small languages and literatures into the vast reservoir of the English language, and into the reservoir of (not only) symbolic capital, reputation, and prestige of the Anglo-American world, have also had quite an perverse reverse: these small languages and cultures have been drained of creative energy, which resulted in their intellectual and artistic impoverishment, and – from the long-term perspective – in the shrinking of linguistic and literary *diversity* of the world itself.

The distinguished American comparatist Emily Apter had reasons to assert as early as 2006, that:

> For translation, especially in a world dominated by the languages of powerful economies and big populations, condemns minority tongues to obsolescence, even as it fosters access to the cultural heritage of "small" literatures or guarantees a wider sphere of reception to selected, representative authors of minoritarian traditions.[4]

However, a symptomatic phenomenon occurs within the framework of "major" and "minor" languages – an imbalanced *relationship of power*, beyond personal or institutional intentions and initiatives. The difficulties of translation, the translatability and especially the *untranslatability* are experienced differently by those who translate, depending on where they are, at one pole or the other. Problems related to issues like origin, identity, and audience, concerning what we might call in one word *fidelity*, are generally solved, as we know, depending on the target language. If the target language is a small language, the difficulties of translation, the untranslatable usually represent a serious, dramatic problem, acknowledged as such by the translator. If translation is done in the opposite direction, what is at risk – the untranslatable – matters less, and priority is given to the actual transfer, not to strict fidelity toward the original text. Inclusion into the major language system often occurs by sacrificing the specificity and complexity of the source language and literature. This asymmetry of the relationship is effective most of the times.

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[4] Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone*: *A New Comparative Literature*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton UP, 2006, p. 4.

Great translators from cultural "centres" are true "artisans" of the universal, they work towards the "unification" of the literary space", writes Pascale Casanova in *La République Mondiale des Lettres*[5]. However, this unification is sometimes achieved through interventions which distort the texts coming from cultural peripheries. It is comforting and encouraging to assert today – and even believe – that there are no longer "centres" and "peripheries", but the real practice of literary exchanges only exceptionally confirms such a statement. There are two (reductive) solutions that Western translations of texts selected from marginal literatures resort to in order to increase readability and appeal to an audience usually unprepared to understand and taste its savours: they either choose to *homogenize* (Anglicization, Francization, etc.), or to *exoticize* – which converts *aesthetic* strangeness into regional, ethnological, etc. strangeness.

Language is an instrument of power: "la langue n'est pas seulement un instrument de communication [...], mais un instrument de pouvoir" [6], asserts Bourdieu. If linguists are right to believe that all languages are equal from a linguistic point of view, they are deeply wrong to believe that languages are equal from a social point of view, he argues. This inequality exists, despite the fact that it is not recognized as such by some theorists of translation and world literature. Even Lawrence Venuti, confident in the possibility and success of translation through creative rewriting, does not hesitate to acknowledge the global dominance of British and American cultures and of English language, which leads to hasty, "fluent" translations and to the "insidious domestication" of foreign texts. Venuti also considers that the relationship of these two major cultures to other cultures ("cultural others") can be described as "imperialistic abroad and xenophobic at home"[7].

Of course, this does not mean that, despite the imbalances and the subsequent hegemonical relationship, successful translations have not been possible and that impactful cultural messages have not been carried from margins to *one* centre (or another). My aim is to draw attention to trends that – since they precisely respond to local aspirations – risk to be absorbed into the irresistible whirlwind of a so-called *progressivism*, often ignorant of the losses it causes, always ready to ignore or despise everything unfitted for the latest ideosphere or even idiolect.

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[5] Pascale Casanova, *La République Mondiale des Lettres*, Paris, Seuil, 1999, p. 201 (the chapter « La Fabrique de l'universel »).

[6] Pierre Bourdieu, « L'économie des échanges linguistiques » in *Langue française*, no. 34, 1997, p. 20.

[7] Lawrence Venuti, *op. cit*., p. 13.

At a time when the *trend* I am pointing at was not propelled yet by the powerful engine of globalization, a most prominent scholar like George Steiner wrote, in the conclusion of his groundbreaking synthesis *After Babel* (1975):

> To move between languages, to translate even within restrictions of totality, is to experience the almost bewildering bias of the human spirit towards freedom. If we were lodged inside a single "language-skin" or amid very few languages, the inevitability of our organic subjection to death might well prove more suffocating than it is.[8]

The pathos of the author only emphasizes how serious would be the loss of linguistic and cultural *diversity* – which, in his view, is a synonym for the loss of freedom itself.

(English translation by Raluca Dună)

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[8] George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of language and translation*, Oxford/ London/ New York, Oxford UP, 1995 (first edition), p. 473.

V. Reviews

David Damrosch, Gunilla Lindberg-Wada (eds), *Literature: A World History*, vol. 1–4, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022, 1776 p.

Constructed from the beginning not only with the idea of assembling a comprehensive history of universal literature but also with the clear purpose of reshaping the reader's comprehension of literary history through a global and comparative perspective, *Literature: A World History* reveals, beginning with the title, the editors' intention to transcend traditional, geographically bounded perspectives on literature, aligning with the growing academic movement towards a genuinely global, interconnected view of literary history. In this case, David Damrosch's vision for the comparative field proposes a critical shift from viewing literature as a series of isolated national traditions to highlighting its characteristics as a dynamic global narrative, shaped by cross-cultural exchanges, transnational influences, and historical transformations. The complexity inherent in constructing such a discourse is obvious also in the balance of the terms: the four volumes offer a "world history," not a "history of literature," and, in this particular instance, the choice to position *literature* within the context of global *history* emphasizes that literature is not a frozen, ossified object but, like lived history, is subject to processes of development, adaptation, and diffusion across regions and eras. This perspective will be developed not only on a horizontal axis, namely, as we can ascertain by going through other previous attempts of this type, but also in a vertical direction, suggesting that literature does not merely mirror historical movements but actively participates in them, as it reflects and shapes cultural identities and ideologies over time. The *General Introduction* offers a series of details concerning this innovative standpoint: "It would simplify matters if we could take a purely historical view, erasing our present perspective and recounting the histories of literary production purely on the terms employed by writers and readers of each time and place we discuss. [...] Inevitably, *Literature: A World History* reflects contemporary interests and concerns, and is shaped by our contributors' understanding of the idea of literature, even as we seek to open out our understandings to the great variety of literary expression found over the course of the world's literary traditions" (p. LXIV). The series' primary objective is to challenge the notion that literature is merely a collection of distinct national representative items, referred to as "traditions," by emphasizing the subjective aspects of literary historiography. This is achieved by attempting to create a "webbed" interconnected history that is influenced by ongoing transnational and transcultural interactions. This implies a shift from a system that works conventionally with a closed world to one that operates as part of "the open web." D. Damrosch and

G. Lindberg-Wada's perspective is very clear about this assumption over almost 2000 pages: literature has always been fluid and adaptable, shaped by influences that cross borders and cultures, while the way of dealing with the history of literature, the traditional historiographical model that prioritizes linear, temporally bound narratives, is questionable, in the same way we question nowadays the notion of an objective or universal literary canon.

This four-volume series serves as an expansive and detailed historical survey of literary traditions worldwide, designed not only to document key works but also to analyze how literary production has evolved in response to shifting social, political, and cultural currents, which can be considered general scaffolding, while volume editors employ their skills to focus on literature as a vehicle for cultural exchange, tracing themes, forms, and genres across civilizations and periods. The coverage encompasses literary development from ancient civilizations to the contemporary period, spanning thousands of years of human expression. What is interesting here is, again, how this process is induced: we don't have, in fact, a "four-volume history of literature," but a history "sliced" in four parts that are inextricably linked one to another, a fact demonstrated basically by the pagination, not from 1 to 228, where the first volume ends, but from page 1 to 1546, where the history ends. Even if each volume addresses a different epoch, allowing readers to examine literature's progression chronologically, we must take into consideration that "the reason for the division is pragmatic: literary history is divided into four blocks which are handy to work with when one approaches literary history with our purposes in mind. The dates 200, 1500, and 1800 cannot be said to be genuine turning points in the world history of literature" (p. LXXVIII). Therefore, these chronological boundaries serve functional rather than strictly historical purposes. They reflect a flexible approach, underscoring the editors' commitment to a pluralistic and nuanced understanding of world literature, being sensitive to local contexts, and resisting simplifications arbitrary periodization can impose.

As they survey literary traditions from nearly every corner of the world, the chapters will take the reader beyond Eurocentric and Western-focused frameworks to South and East Asia, Africa, the Americas, Oceania, and the Middle East, thus placing the various perspectives within a modern global context. In addition, the four volumes have their own specialized editors (Anders Pettersson for the first volume, Bo Utas and Theo D'haen for the second, Zhang Longxi for the third, and Djelal Kadir for the fourth), as well as a number of "macroregional editors," all overseen by David Damrosch, a prominent figure in the field of comparative literature, and Gunilla Lindberg-Wada, a renowned authority on Japanology: Zhang Longxi (East Asia), Harish Trivedi (South Asia, Southeast Asia, and

Oceania), Asad E. Khairallah (West and Central Asia), Eileen Julien (Africa), Anders Pettersson (Europe), and Djelal Kadir (The Americas). The list of contributors is extensive; we can count dozens of experts in comparative literature from all over the world. Representing a collective scholarly endeavor, availing of a multiplicity of perspectives, the series *Literature: A World History* reflects, as a consequence, a plurality of voices within the narrative of global literary history. To address the need for a global, interconnected concept transcending nation-bound literary studies, its inner structure adopts programmatically an approach that foregrounds transnational literary links, emphasizing cross-cultural, comparative analysis mechanisms.

The methodological foundation proposed here further emphasizes the importance of innovative techniques, particularly for exploring literary genres, translations, and adaptations across cultures. Comparative literature, as practiced in this series, does not merely juxtapose texts from different traditions but seeks to uncover the points of intersection and divergence that reveal the mechanisms of cultural influence, adaptation, and synthesis: "The primary problem with formalist and reductionist approaches is not so much that they result in too broad generalizations or erase significant amounts of cultural specificity long the way. Rather, they often start from formalist equations of coincidental similarities between literatures that are actually 'false friends,' and end up as random comparisons that do not reach the centers of gravity of either of the literary traditions compared" (p. 63). The solution proposed resides in an attempt to "approach historically unrelated literary traditions through 'deep comparison,' [...] that produces comparability between unrelated literary traditions through a complex translation process of incommensurate concepts, instead of from a higher-order abstraction or reduction" (p. 63–64). Similar, but with divergent meanings, may be parallels like the one dedicated to the Latin poet Ovid and the Japanese poet Sugawara no Michizane, both sharing the "poetry of exile" label, as it is exemplified in a chapter like *World Apart: Comparing Literary Tradition*, in the 1st volume. If a formalist comparison based on coincidental resemblances is implied, the result will be misleading, creating only an illusion of similarity without taking into account, in fact, the distinct aesthetic, cultural, and historical contexts from which each literature emerges. As a result, the key lecture of the entire "world history" filtered through the "literary lenses" of this monumental work will pay extreme attention to how literary forms are historically and culturally situated and how they are developing in response to specific local conditions and ideological frameworks. The ultimate goal is to recognize both the shared human elements and the distinctive qualities of different literary traditions on a global scale.

The first volume of *Literature: A World History* covers "The World before 200 CE," and it analyzes the earliest literary traditions not only chronologically but also from a global perspective. By examining core texts and oral traditions in various cultural regions, these chapters will focus more on the cultural memory preserved by these texts than on their intrinsic literary characteristics. Covering the heritage of East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Oceania, West and Central Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas, information regarding the cultural material is always linked to geographical, historical, sociological, mythological, and religious aspects. In fact, through keen analysis and using cross-regional and interdisciplinary perspectives, this volume delves into how early literatures capture human experience, how philosophical inquiries are born, and how spiritual beliefs are constructed. And, in this case, literature's early function, more than a cultural act, becomes a form of collective memory and identity: "Our first volume presents the early history of literature macroregion by macroregion. [...] Two cross-cutting essays break out of the geographical grid, one demonstrating how intercultural comparisons can shed light on literary cultures, even literary cultures without mutual contact, and the other reflecting on various writing systems and their cultural importance. The volume concludes with a brief consideration of important similarities and differences between some of the literatures introduced" (p. 5–6). The geographical framework, which captures the unique historical, social, and linguistic forces that shape literary expression within distinct macroregions, is combined with the effort to respect each region's evolution, altogether defining the portrayal of the diversity of the various cultural contexts. The reference to "intercultural comparisons" strengthens the text's coherence by showing how thematic and formal patterns arise independently across cultures, while the examination of "writing systems" underscores the vital role of literacy in the creation, preservation, and transmission of cultural memory, avoiding a focus on dull, technical details.

Inherently constrained by the timeframe, the main zones of interest are, besides the fragments of texts and the whole texts rarely conserved in their integrity, the oral tradition, and mythology, which are to be seen as the backbone of the early literary expression. Balancing both literary and religious functions as it happens, for example, in the sub-chapter dedicated to *South Asia, The Vedas, Brahmanas, and Upanishad*s, will reveal how literature has been generated, in the beginning, as a device capable of shaping the memory of human existence in a ritualized language.

The regional insights are sustained not only by the choice of the key texts but also by the structure created in detailing the specific literary forms, considering

that "the differences in genre spectrum" are more relevant than the texts themselves sometimes, and, for having an overall perspective, one must take into account "genre hierarchies, literary forms, rhetorical figures, thematic tropes, and the treasury of historical and cultural knowledge inscribed into each literary tradition" (p. 63).

With a focus on Chinese literature from the pre-Qin and Han dynasties, the volume's first section centers around East Asia. The core concepts of self-reflection and ethical values that would eventually consolidate as foundations of Chinese literary tradition are examined in this section's comprehensive investigation of poetry and prose. The next chapter, oriented in *South Asia,* discusses texts such as the *Vedas*, the *Brahmanas*, and the *Upanishads*, highlighting the religious and philosophical dimensions of early Indian literature. Another sub-chapter comments on *The Great Epics* (*Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*) – again, not only from the traditional point of view of approaching texts undoubtedly labeled as "universal masterpieces," but pointing at their crucial role as "repositories of cultural memory." More exotic, the glimpse into early Tamil literature further diversifies South Asian contributions. Short comments on Southeast Asia and Oceania are closing this area, the next stop being the first "cutting-back" essay, already mentioned, *Worlds Apart: Comparing Literary Traditions before the Global Age*.

The chapter *West and Central Asia* deals with *The Ancient Near East*. The subjects are "The Invention of Writing," "What Was Literature?," "The First Patron of Literature," and "The Bible as Literature," concluding with a panoramic over Iran – a journey from the invention of cuneiform in Mesopotamia to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Another section is about Ancient Egypt, as part of Africa, talking about "ancient Egyptian genres," "orality," *The Book of the Dead*, and other fascinating ritualistic texts that oscillate between literary experimentation and afterlife practical "handbook" materials. D. Damrosch, as the author of the following essay, *Writing Systems and Cultural Memory*, draws the borders to the next section, dedicated to Europe, divided into two areas: Ancient Greece, where the structure follows the literary genres – epic, lyric poetry, drama, classical prose, and the literature in Greek after 300 BCE – and Ancient Rome, with a chronological structure (*Latin Literature before 100 BCE*, *First-century BCE Latin Poetry and Prose*, *Literature during the First Two Centuries CE*). The final part, before the conclusion of the 228 pages of the first volume, is dedicated to *The Americas*, a concentrated commentary on early indigenous literatures seen as bearers of unique oral traditions that encompass mythological storytelling, ritualistic chants, and historical narratives, often preserved through collective memory rather than written records.

By situating literature within the broader influence of the making of history in light of the rise and fall of the various areas of influence and examining the junction of oral and written practices, this volume offers a foundational understanding of world literature's early developments, setting the stage for the subsequent evolution of global literary traditions.

More than twice as much material is covered in the second volume of *Literature: A World History* as in the first, covering the years 200-1500 from pages 229 to 696. At first glance, we notice how literature emerges as a dynamic force, mirroring and, at the same time, having a direct influence upon volatile power structures and religious developments in a period marked by expanding empires, nascent alternative trade routes, and, above all, by the increasingly vigilant eye of religions like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. The regional narratives will serve, as in the first volume, to conceive the multiplicity of how literature reacted to and, most of the time, shaped the global landscape of this transformative period composed of extremely different fragments of place and time. In the *Introduction*, Bo Utas warns us that "while it is always dangerous to generalize over such vast amounts of time and space as covered in this volume, it is still possible to notice several things common to the major literary cultures then present on the Euro-Asian double continent. Writing, in the first instance, serves to express religious or moral precepts and not what we, after Immanuel Kant, have come to define as 'literature,' that is to say instances of writing appreciated not for their truth-value, however defined, but rather for satisfying their audience's 'taste' preferences" (p. 234). However, while literary traditions across this vast region do share certain thematic or functional similarities, these connections do not cancel the distinct identities of each literary culture.

Favoring, again, a geographically oriented structure at the macro level, this volume begins with East Asia, exploring the Chinese (from the Wei-jin Period to the Early Ming Dynasty), Japanese (preceded by a historical overview, followed by thorough studies on the literary genres – talking not only about genres as such but also about "genre divisions" – from poetry to the performative arts of the Noh Theatre), and Korean Literature (seen, again, in a time-frame, from the period of The Three Kingdoms to the Early Chosŏn, "the period extending from the founding of the kingdom in 1392 to the Japanese invasions of 1592–1597" (p. 341). The next chapter, focusing on *Court Literature in East Asia and Europe*, may be viewed as another type of approach, covering not only space and time but also themes, motives, and readers' tastes and cultural necessities. The third section, dealing with *South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania*, introduces us to sacred texts and cultural synthesis, going from *Notions of Literature in India and the West* to

The First Masters and the "National" Poet: Kalidasa, passing through indigenous genres and external influences to close with *Traditional Islamic Narratives*. A first landmark is embodied here, in the same manner as in the first volume, by an essay signed by Harish Trivedi and Keith Busby, *Animal Stories in South Asia and Europe*, the motivation being that "the fable and related text types constitute an excellent model of medieval literary works and their interrelationships. [...] The flexibility and universal applicability of the fable have ensured a continuing afterlife in children's literature, cartoons and animated cartoons, and other modern media, perhaps matched only by the enduring popularity of the Arthurian legend" (p. 431–432).

Next chapter is oriented toward *West and Central Asia*, discussing Syriac, Arabic, pre-Islamic, Iranian, Persian, Turkic-Mongolian, and Turkish literature. Another milestone will be represented by *Alexander the Great in Medieval Literature*, a thematic essay that traverses geographical boundaries using comparative approaches to illustrate shared motifs and literary devices across distant cultures. The extremely detailed 7th chapter deals with Africa, from Coptic Literature to Ethiopic (Ge'ez) Literature, touching also extra-literary areas like philosophy, medicine, and history. The third and last essay of this volume, by Bo Utas, bears the title *The Circum-Mediterranean Scene in the First Centuries of the Second Millennium – Mirrored in the Works of Ramon Llull*, and its purpose is to show how "real geography" has the capacity of connecting products of human imagination, as it is the case of literature. The passage to the next chapter focused on Europe becomes, therefore, natural. The structure is very similar to the previous one, dealing with Africa: European literature during this period has been similarly shaped by religious influences, with Byzantine literature and Latin texts influenced by Catholicism, counterbalanced by vernacular traditions (Western European literature, but also Celtic, Germanic, and Slavonic cultures), which illustrates the complex interplay between religion as an institution and literary thought and culture. Further research can be found in the study dedicated to *Christian and Islamic Mysticism*. Following the same pattern, this 2nd volume closes with *The Americas*, a very heterogeneous section analyzing mainly oral traditions that serve as cultural repositories. One can find details about cave drawings, petroglyphs, beaded belts, and totem poles, all of which are tangible elements that serve as vehicles for preserving human values, myths, and history. Maybe it is exactly this last section that underlines the series' commitment to a genuinely global perspective, highlighting not only how literary traditions have been shaped by religious, political, and linguistic influences around the world but also taking into consideration cultural identity in the absence of a written language.

Next volume, the third in the *Literature: A World History* series, covers only 300 years, spanning from 1500 to 1800, on 328 pages. The volume editor, Zhang Longxi, maintains the overall framework, moving from the first chapter of East Asia to the penultimate, which represents *The Americas*. The last chapter is represented by the only "landmark" of this part, an essay on *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in the Literary World*. From the *Introduction*, the reader is warned that "it is always problematic, if not totally impossible, to epitomize what transpires in the world across such vast space and time in a keyword or catchphrase, and yet, globalization might be just such a word to summarize the historical tendencies of the world in the three centuries under discussion in this volume and thereafter. [...] That was the time, many would argue, when globalization really began as European expansion gradually reached much of the rest of the globe and effected social, economic, political, and cultural transformations everywhere in the world" (p. 697–698).

Summarizing three centuries of diverse cultural experiences under a single label may be challenging, without doubt, but the perspective of "globalization," even if it may offer, in the first instance, a useful framework for understanding the transformative forces set in motion, does so and even more by tracing how early modern texts have been shaped and re-shaped by external influences, whether represented by the impact of geopolitical forces, historical changes, or even shifting social conditions. Underscoring a newly born, ascensional "global sensibility" reflected in the literary output, transcending geographic and cultural gaps, has created a complex dynamic that elucidates how literary expansion has been catalyzed worldwide in this lapse of time. Starting with East Asia and Chinese Literature (Mid- to Late Ming Dynasty to Qing Dynasty), the first chapter encapsulates Japanese and Korean Literature of this epoch, following the main genres of poetry, prose, and drama. The next area, that of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, makes a shift in perspective and concentrates, in the first section, on "periodization, political regime, and languages, followed by themes, forms, patronage, and location," with separate chapters dedicated to *Heroic Poetry*, *Bhakti Poetry*, and *The Epic Poets and the Devotional Sublime*. It continues with *Islam in the Malay World*, *Javanese Literature after the Coming of Islam*, *Vietnam: Developing Indigenous Literary Traditions*, and *The Philippines*, seen in the context of the "emerging Christianized tradition." The next stop is West and Central Asia, with Arabic, Persian, and Turkish/Turkic literature. In *Africa*, the sub-chapters contain presentations of the *Oral Genres of Sub-Saharan Africa*, examinations of *Praise Poetry*, *Epic*, *Dynastic Poetry*, *Divination Poetry*, *Swahili Written Literature*, shifting to *North African Literature in Arabic*, and closing with *Anti-Slavery Writing*. Almost

a hundred pages are dedicated to Europe. First, there are separate insights into the social, linguistic, geopolitical, military, and religious aspects, continuing with concise presentations of the cultural currents of the period: Renaissance, Baroque, and Neoclassicism. In this section, the other points of interest are, among others, the "printing and publishing," the "new institutions of learning," the periodicals," and "the social position of authors." The genres are followed in an apparently traditional manner: *The Poetry* contains *The Renaissance Epic*, *Other Classical Poetical Genres*, *The Sonnet*, *Militant Poetry*, *Baroque Poetry*, *Landscape Poetry*, *Fables*, *Ballads*, *"Minor" Genres*, *The Drama* groups *La Celestina*, *Italy's Part*, *The Spanish Siglo de Oro*, *Elizabethan Drama*, *Comedy of Humors and Neoclassical Tragedy*, *The Lure of the Orient*, *Restoration Drama*, *Sentimental Drama*, *Bourgeois Tragedy*, while *The Novel* section is working on *The Picaresque*, *The Picaresque at Large*, *The Epistolary Novel*, *Authenticity and Libertinism*, *The Sentimental Novel*, *The Bildungsroman or Novel of Education*, ending with the *Discursive Genres*, which include *Travel Literature*, and *Philosophical Considerations and Oriental Tales*. The last stop before the landmarks of the "Utopian Literary Zone," as mentioned above, is *The Americas* in the 5th chapter, which contains Latin America, Canada, and the United States.

Even if we only consider the huge amount of literary stuff accumulated here, the conception of the whole structure will be impressive and more interesting when ascertaining how concentrated the information is on the three hundred pages: a puzzle with all the pieces in their proper place. First, we can discern a thoroughness of the information on periodization and global context, which situates literary evolution alongside technological novelties such as the printing press and trade expansion, both elements that revolutionized literary production; only after this, the literary forms (with a visible preference for the novel) and the cross-cultures are examined, and, last but not least, the reader gains access to the thematic interconnections, mapped in a detailed manner across different literary traditions. Handling a period when the boundaries between local and global literature began to soften, this volume takes early modern literature not only as the logical precursor to contemporary literature – as history teaches us – but also as a hypothesis of what should have been (or not) the current literature without the yesterday literature.

The fourth and last volume of this innovative travel proposed by *Literature: A World History* makes a smaller time leap of "only" 200 years, a sign that "the years 1800-2000 may well be the period of greatest major changes in human history. These two centuries have witnessed the most profound transformations in the life of the planet – ecological, cultural, scientific, political, and certainly literary.

Literary production, like other forms of art, is simultaneously a symptomatic portrayal of this turbulent era and a proactive agent in the performance of those transformations that characterize the period and its historic ruptures" (p. 1029). This perspective takes into consideration literature not only as a passive mirroring of society's upturns but as an active participant in them; therefore, in the introduction, concepts like "industrial and the ideological revolution," "emancipation, colonization, decolonization, neocolonialism," "modernisms, modernization, modernity," and "the scientific and technological revolution" metanarratives imply that literary expression, in this period, is deeply linked to historic transformations, also embodying ethical, social, and imaginative mutations like pivotal elements in understanding the modern world. Based on a similar geographical direction as the previous volumes, ranging from East Asia to the Americas, we can see how literature in this period has foregrounded the observation of marginalized communities, proposing alternative modes of being, conceptualizing systems that may be in deep touch with the "social consciousness," with the "identity question," or the "ideological battles." Presenting an exhaustive narrative of the literature's evolution from the 19th century through the post-World War II era, each section dealing with literary traditions across East Asia, South and Southeast Asia, Oceania, West and Central Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas, seen, again, in an interconnected perspective, contains, in its inner structure, various feedback to the external forces that shape this period, which is formed by different events, ways of evolution, political forces, molding of social groups, perceptions of history, geography, etc.

Modernity and political upheaval are two terms that guide the reader to the European space, but as the entire series of *Literature: A World History* has already demonstrated, literature is not, by any means, confined to Europe or European influences. Therefore, the volume, opening up with *Chinese Literature*, will express a different reality, a global way of seeing and understanding literature in general. From a theoretical perspective, this section may also illustrate, in general terms, the literature's response to cultural and political shifts. Dealing with the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean contexts in the 19th and 20th centuries, the reader, besides being in detailed contact with some exotic literatures, will also become aware of how literature, in its entirety, is capable not only of adapting itself to external pressures but also actively resist and fight the mechanisms of oppression. For Chinese literature, the sub-chapters focus on *Poetry with Social Consciousness*, *The Rise of the Novel*, *The May Fourth New Culture Movement*, *Lu Xun and Left-Wing Writers*, *The Pluralistic 1930s*, *New Poetry from the 1920s to the 1930s*, *Literature of the 1940s in Different Locations*, *Literature in the Latter Half of the*

Twentieth Century, *Contemporary Chinese Literature*, while Japanese literature is discussed in the evolution against the backdrop of rapid modernization and political change, beginning with the Meiji restoration of 1868, considered "as the starting point of the transformation" (p. 1066), and ending with the works of Kōbō Abe and Kenzaburō Ōe, "who reflect the sociopolitical landscape in their novels in modernist and postmodernist styles" (p.1077). The Korean literature sub-chapter has some short, concentrated fragments in which diaspora literature and post-liberation writings are discussed, as well as North Korean literature.

Next chapter, on *South and Southeast Asia*, is divided into two parts. The one talking about South Asia is constructed synthetically, analyzing themes of conquest, resistance, and a struggle for self-identity in a colonial and postcolonial context, considering that "in this macroregion, geography is in this period unified – or at least thematically tied together – by history, over these two centuries, 1800-2000, as it was probably never before. Nearly the whole of this expanse was subjected to colonial rule by one European power or the other, and, in several cases, one after the other: the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and above all the British" (p. 1091). The essay discussing *The Novelty of the Novel* shows how writers like Bankimchandra Chatterjee, "the Walter Scott of Bengal," and Jagmohan Singh crafted works that contested British hegemony and highlighted indigenous voices. Poetry and drama were also relevant for this period, especially as vehicles of subversive undertones. In its last part, this chapter focuses on *Nationalism: Freedom and Partition*, *Postcolonial Disenchantment*, and *New Voices at Home and Abroad*, closing with *Indian Literature in a Global Context*. Southeast Asia is geographically considered, with countries such as Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines acting as repositories of cultural memory, mediating between indigenous heritage and the transformations wrought by colonial encounters. The next chapter, talking about Oceania, Australia, and New Zealand, presents a more chronologically oriented perspective with two sub-sections constituting the backbone: *1788–1915: Writing Life* and *1915–1950: Women Write Australia*, an introspection into works of women authors in the early 20th century: Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Marjorie Barnard, Eleanor Dark, and Christina Stead.

Instead, in West and Central Asia, literature of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Turkic-speaking cultures articulates a dynamic engagement with modernity and the redefinition of cultural identity, asserting how, beyond regional traits, literature as a concept has the power to serve as both a statement of cultural legacy and a place designated for the negotiation of modern identity.

African literature, presented in the fifth chapter, follows two directions: one based on the language of various literatures (Swahili, Yoruba, Zulu, Sotho, but also English, French, Portuguese, Arabic, and French), while the other viewpoint aims at the literary genres and synthesizes drama, novel, poetry, and prose in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Egypt and North Africa.

The European literature of this period, investigated in the next chapter, starts with a *General Background of Europe*, continuing with details about demographics, "the map of Europe," aspects of politics, economics, education, and so on, and only after this does it begin to traverse the main currents of Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, Postcolonialism, and Multiculturalism. Every current is deepened by examinations of literary genres, from Romantic narrative poetry to postmodernist novels. Two sections in the last part of the chapter, one on *The Holocaust Literature* and the other on *Literature Behind the Iron Curtain*, further highlight the impact of global conflict on European identity.

Last chapter, *The Americas*, is concerned with "indigeneity," national identity, and another type of interplay between cultural forms in North, Central, and South America. An in-depth perspective on subjects like native literature, focused on cultural preservation, the multifaceted literature of Canada (Anglophone, Francophone, and Indigenous), Latin American literature, with works that challenge colonial narratives and explore issues of cultural hybridity, and the United States literature, a space grappling with race, gender, and class divisions, materialized in works embodying both a critique of American ideals and an exploration of individualism, leads to the conclusion that "questions of being [...] propose ontology as a major overarching concern of twentieth-century literature, a proposition reinforced by the well-known critical contention that the distinctive feature of postmodern as opposed to modernist self reflexivity is its prevalent emphasis on ontological, rather than epistemological, destabilization" (p. 1545–1546). By positioning ontology as a core issue of twentieth-century literature, in The Americas' case, it may suggest a shift from epistemological to ontological destabilization as the feature of postmodernism in contrast to modernist tradition. The contrast between modernism, embodying a current largely preoccupied with questions of knowledge, self-reflexivity, and subjective perception, and postmodernism as bearer of a disruption of the being itself, has the capacity to destabilize not just how reality is known but whether it possesses an inherent structure or stability at all. As a consequence, such a shift reflects a literary response to anxieties underscoring literature's role in articulating the uncertainties of the postmodern condition. In this context, ontology does not merely represent a thematic choice but rather signals a paradigmatic conversion in the conceptual groundwork of literature itself.

The four volumes of *Literature: A World History* reveal literature not only as a cultural domain but as a profound, evolving force, one that implies imagination, but also the "real life" which molds this creative power, captures and reshapes the social, political, and ideological transformations of human history. Across time and space, the reader can see how literature transcends its role as mere documentation, acting instead as a dynamic medium for cultural memory, social critique, and existential inquiry, as Anders Pettersson and David Damrosch, together with the collective of editors, expressed their intent in the beginning: "What works from these many centuries and cultures should come under the rubric of 'literature'? How can we best understand their life in their place and time and their ongoing life thereafter? What kind of history does literature have, and with what relation to broader social history? How should these literary histories be mapped across the world, with its hundreds of past and present polities and its thousands of languages? *Literature: A World History* proceeds in chronological fashion from antiquity onward, but it is written in awareness that in a very real sense literary history begins in the present – the present of those who deem certain facts to be literary and historical. In this sense, literary history is as revealing of the present as of the past" (p. LXIII). Delving, along almost 2000 pages, into the enigmatic substance of literary history, following the ontology and, eventually, the literary fate of the palpable "objects" of literature, namely the literary texts, inscribed not only on real material supports but also on human memory, gives us the chance to contemplate, after this long journey, what it means to gather diverse voices from across centuries and label them under the singular construct of "literature." Such inquiry unsettles the traditional notion of literature, compelling us to consider each text as a momentary coalescence of linguistic, cultural, and historical intricate details, each unique and irrefutable yet infinitely mutable in the hands of readers from future ages. We do not merely inherit literature as a relic of the past, but we are invited here to actively reconfigure it through the prism of our current moment, suggesting, in this manner, a metaphysical temporality in which literature is never truly past but always in the act of becoming, a continual unfolding through each generation's eyes.

Cristina Deutsch

Galin Tihanov, *The birth and death of literary theory. Regimes of Relevance in Russia and beyond*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019, 258 p.

Revisiting the birth and death of literary theory, Galin Tihanov puts forth not just a history of the thoughts about literature and the models of understanding and valorizing it from a past tense stance, but also interesting insights on a relatively *new* interpretative framework, represented today by the "Anglo-Saxon liberal discourse" that is known as "world literature". At first glance, the distance between conceptualizing literature in the manner of Russian Formalism in interwar decades that, according to Tihanov, marked the birth of modern literary theory, and David Damrosch's discourse on undermining the focus of "methodological nationalism" seems insurmountable. Yet, by placing the nuclei of debates, old or new as they may be, to gravitate around the "fundamental question" of how we "think about literature within the horizon of language or beyond that horizon", Tihanov makes a compelling case when he identifies a strong line of descendance between the early Soviet discourses and the current practices of world literature; boldly put, "world literature" presents itself as the "elusively seminal afterlives" of literary theory. Given that to comprehend "world literature" as a "specific construct", "we must ask the unavoidable question about the location of 'world literature' vis-à-vis language" (p. 180), I retain the conclusion Tihanov reaches in his epilogue: "the current discourse of 'world literature' is an iteration of the principal question of modern literary theory at the time of its birth (...). The Anglo-Saxon discourse on world literature, foremost in the work of David Damrosch, had proceeded – so it seems to me – in the steps of Shklovsky by foregrounding the legitimacy of working in translation. Damrosch has implicitly confronted the tension between the singularity and multiplicity of language by concluding that studying a literary work in the languages of its socialization is more important than studying it in the language of its production, not least because this new priority restricts and undermines the monopoly of methodological nationalism in literary studies" (p.182). Bahktin is also presented as a predecessor of the non-Eurocentric and non-philological perspectives, his entailing with world literature being marked by "recontextualizing the study of world literature as a study of the processes that shape the novel to become a world genre, a global discursive power" (p. 176), just as the debate about the specificity and nature of "literariness" in the flanks of Russian Formalists, mainly the findings of Shklovsky and Tynianov, who proposed that "the language of the original is not the only vehicle of literariness", anticipated the new paradigm long before the "legitimization of reading and analyzing literature in and through translation" (p. 180).

Since I started my introduction to Tihanov's narrative about the life-span of literary theory with a detour, jumping straight to its *Epilogue* (*A Fast-Forward to "World Literature")*, I should probably have to mention that the George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature at Queen Mary University of London has a very rigorous, transparent and straight to the point analytical discourse focused on de-essentialization, that, through successive reiterations, builds a coherent and simultaneously innovative perspective on the evolution of 20th-century views on literature. Tihanov calls his endeavor a way of thinking about literary theory characterized by "radical historicity", since literary theory is perceived as a "product of a particular historical constellation of factors" and a "chronotopic approach" (p. 9) is required. It is no surprise that Tihanov' s hypothesis is built upon the premises that the birth of literary theory took place in the interwar period in Russia and in Central and Eastern Europe. Consequently, French Structuralism is grounded in Saussure, Russian Formalism, the Prague Linguistic Circle, but also in the phonology of Nikolai Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson. Narratology, as is well known, "never severed" from Vladimir Propp, and Marxist literary theory was influenced by Lukács's works. As for the symbiotic relation between Bakhtin and Kristeva, and, I may add, the "second" Todorov, that is a well-established subject in the history of Postmodernism.

With its birth set in the 1920s with Russian Formalism and its so-called "death" occurring in late 80s and early 90s with Iser's *turn* from *reception theory* to *literary anthropology* and Lotman's incorporation of *semiotics* in the global theory of culture, as Tihanov observes, literary theory initially strives for liberation from philosophy, with a love-hate relation with aesthetics, while its late years are marked by a return to philosophy. The birth and death of literary theory is, in fact, the rise and the demise of its status as an "autonomous branch of the humanities" (p. 29). Moreover, in addition to the strict dependence between the emergence of literary theory and the splintering of "monolithic" philosophical approaches, Tihanov insists on the links between Russian Formalism and the Prague Linguistic Circle and the "process of constructing a new state with a new political identity" (p. 11).

Two key aspects are instrumentalized by Tihanov in order to comprehend the inherent transitions of theoretical viewpoints. The first one is interwar exiles and emigration with the author stressing the importance of transnational mobility, cultural cosmopolitanism, and estrangement for thinking theoretically (p. 152), as "appropriating literature theoretically meant being able to transcend its (and one's own) national embeddedness by electing to position oneself – through a journey in and among languages, if not necessarily in space – as an outsider contemplating its abstract laws" (p.15).

The second one is the "regime of relevance", or "the prevalent mode of appropriating (both interpreting and using) literature at a particular time" (p. 20), "a historically available constellation of social and cultural parameters that shape the predominant understanding and use of literature for the duration of that particular constellation" – "literary theory is the product of one specific phase in the evolution of one particular regime of relevance" (pp. 1–2). So, according to Tihanov, literary theory is the by-product "of the transition from a regime of relevance that recognized literature for its role in social and political practice to a regime that valued literature primarily for its intrinsic qualities as art" (p. 22). The "death" of literary theory "has by now confirmed the transition to a third regime of relevance, where literature is increasingly recognized not for its social and political weight, nor indeed for some presumed discursive uniqueness, but, in a rather low-key way, for the (largely individual) entertainment and therapy it can provide" (p. 23). This third regime of relevance *understands* and *valorises* literature "in the multiple contexts of its global production and consumption" (p. 176) seems to be responsible for the interpretative framework of "world literature". Going back to Tihanov's reception of Damrosch, let's remember that the Anglo-Saxon theorist juggles between the "production" and "socialization" of a literary work: he opts, when the two do not coincide, for the study of a given work in the language of its socialization.

After a very convincing demonstration about the implications and determinations of this field of relationality between political, social and cultural factors that shape the perceptions about literature named by Galin Tihanov "regime of relevance", our interest lies on the new way in which the literature is being mediated in contemporary contexts. Tihanov promptly addresses this question in the introduction of his study: "Today, the regime of relevance validating literature as a source of therapeutic experience and entertainment overlaps with the freshly transfigured regime of direct social relevance exemplified in the struggles of 'identity politics' and the battles over 'representative' minority, national, and global canons" (p. 24).

Senida Poenariu

Carmen Brăgaru, Ana-Maria Brezuleanu (coord.); Carmen Brăgaru; Ana-Maria Brezuleanu, Ileana Ciocârlie; Cristina Deutsch (coautori), *Bibliografia relațiilor literaturii române cu literaturile străine în periodice (1945–1964)*, București: Editura Academiei Române, vol. I, 2023, 454 p.

La Bibliographie des relations de la littérature roumaine avec les littératures étrangères dans les périodiques, ample recherche réalisée au cours des dernières décennies, dans le cadre de l'Institut d'Histoire et de Théorie Littéraire « G. Călinescu », représente – à côté des ouvrages tels que *Le Dictionnaire chronologique du roman roumain dès l'origine jusqu'à 1989* (2004), *Le Dictionnaire chronologique du roman traduit en Roumanie dès l'origine jusqu'à 1989* (2005) ou bien *Le Dictionnaire chronologique du roman roumain : 1999–2000* (2011), élaborés par l'Institut de Linguistique et d'Histoire Littéraire «Sextil Pușcariu» de Cluj – un outil de documentation extrêmement précieux et une démarche très audacieuse pour une cartographie systématique et presque exhaustive de certains domaines significatifs du patrimoine de l'histoire littéraire. Commencé, au milieu des années '70 du XXème siècle, à l'initiative de Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga (à ce moment-là directeur de l'Institut « G. Călinescu »), le vaste projet de la *Bibliographie des relations...* comprend jusqu'à présent 14 volumes, partagés en trois séries qui correspondent à des époques distinctes de l'histoire de la littérature roumaine. Ce sont des époques littéraires/ culturelles qui se superposent à des époques historiques bien définies, le politique, dans un cadre historique plus large, soutenant et, partiellement, influençant ou bien déterminant les complexes évolutions culturelles/ littéraires : 1) 1859–1918 (à partir de l'Union des Principautés Roumains à la Grande Union), série concrétisée en trois volumes parus entre 1980 et 1985, 2) 1919–1944 (l'entre-deux-guerres), série comprenant dix volumes, publiés entre 1997 et 2009 et 3) 1945–1964 (dès la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale jusqu'à la fin de la première époque du communisme roumaine, c'est-à-dire l'époque Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej), série qui se trouve à peine au commencement et dont vient de paraître, à la fin de 2023, un premier volume.

Pour chacune de ces trois séries on a utilisé des dizaines de milliers de fiches, établies à partir de quelques centaines de publications périodiques. En ce sens, on peut trouver de donnés exactes dans la *Note introductive* qui accompagne le volume de la *Bibliographie...* récemment paru – note rédigée par Carmen Brăgaru, la coordinatrice de la troisième série de cet ouvrage. Ce sont des données qui ne peuvent qu'impressionner, parce qu'il s'agit de « 49 000 fiches, recueillies dans 516 périodiques roumaines », pour la première série, et – pour la deuxième – de « 75 000 fiches, recueillies dans 824 périodiques ». En ce qui concerne la troisième

série, qui commence avec le volume paru en 2023 et qui va comprendre sept ou huit volumes, celle-ci s'appuie sur l'analyse des «70 000 fiches qui ont résulté de 300 périodiques parus dans l'assemble du pays ». Voici les chercheurs qui ont travaillé pour les premières deux séries de la *Bibliographie des relations...*, dans les différentes étapes de l'élaboration de cet ouvrage : Cornelia Ștefănescu, Ana-Maria Brezuleanu, Michaela Șchiopu, Viorica Nișcov, Ileana Mihăilă, Catrinel Pleșu, Luminița Beiu-Paladi, Mariana Pascu, Ileana Verzea, Eleonora Hotineanu, Carmen Brăgaru, Emil Moangă et Ileana Ciocârlie. Commencé en 2009, le laborieux effort pour la documentation et pour la sélection du matériau en vue de l'élaboration de la *Bibliographie...* pour l'intervalle 1945–1964 s'est déroulé dans des conditions difficiles à cause de la diminution de l'équipe des chercheurs attribués au projet. Le volume de 2023, qui ouvre la troisième série, paraît sur la coordination de Carmen Brăgaru et d'Ana-Maria Brezuleanu, des chercheuses qui ont fait partie aussi de l'ancienne équipe de la *Bibliographie des relations...*, étant rédigé, en grande partie, selon les clarifications de la *Note introductive*, seulement par l'effort de trois chercheuses, Carmen Brăgaru, Ana-Maria Brezuleanu et Christina Deutsch, auxquelles s'ajoutent – avec des contributions moins substantielles – Ileana Ciocârlie, Andrei Milca, Viorica Nișcov, Mihaela Șchiopu et Cornelia Ștefănescu (les deux dernières nous ayant quittés entre-temps). (Eleonora Hotineanu, Ileana Mihăilă et Catrinel Pleșu ont collaboré sporadiquement à ce volume.)

Le titre de ce vaste projet pourrait nous induire en erreur par sa modestie par rapport au contenu des 14 volumes déjà parus, car il ne s'agit pas d'une simple bibliographie, d'un simple et mécanique répertoire de titres/ articles de presse, mais d'un ouvrage à rigoureux caractère analytique – démarche à laquelle se sont engagés, avec un obligatoire discernement critique, des chercheurs avisés en matière de théorie et de comparatisme. Organisée, principalement, en sections dédiées à la réception des différentes littératures dans l'espace culturel roumain (la littérature française, anglaise, américaine, allemande, russe etc.), *La Bibliographie des relations...* prend en compte de toute une série d'autres possibles divisions, visant des genres, des courants ou des techniques littéraires (avec des sous-divisions visant, par exemple, la théorie des genres, l'histoire des genres etc.). Les 14 volumes de la *Bibliographie...* offrent une image d'ensemble extrêmement révélatrice du champ littéraire roumain à différentes époques, du point de vue des littératures et des modèles externes fréquentés – y compris les polémiques et les débats, les préférences et les idiosyncrasies (littéraires et idéologiques) les plus significatives. La préférence des commentateurs pour certaines littératures ou bien pour certains auteurs, à une époque donnée, leur accès aux littératures « périphériques » ou « demi périphériques » (en termes actuels), à partir les littératures est-européennes

jusqu'à celles baltiques, la prédominance contextuelle de certains modèles littéraires – voici des aspects pleinement mis en évidence dans cet ouvrage de cartographie historico-littéraire. Qu'est-ce qu'on lit (et comment) des littératures du monde dans l'espace culturel roumain de la deuxième moitié du XIXème siècle, à l'entre-deux-guerres ou bien pendant les premières décennies après la deuxième guerre mondiale – voici une question à laquelle *La Bibliographie des relations...* répond, d'une manière rigoureuse et convaincante, par l'étalement des documents. Chaque entrée dans la *Bibliographie...* contient aussi, hors les informations obligatoires pour ce type d'ouvrage, un résumé de l'article enregistré ou bien une courte citation révélatrice, ce qui facilite considérablement l'orientation du lecteur à travers un matériau documentaire vaste et complexe.

Cette troisième série de la *Bibliographie des relations...* (1945–1964) va couvrir (lorsque tous les sept ou huit volumes seront parus) une époque assez compliquée de l'histoire de la littérature/ de la culture roumaine, pas encore suffisamment documentée, malgré le fait qu'après la révolution de 1989 toute une série de volumes de critique et d'histoire littéraire se sont proposé de faire l'analyse de cette période définie par des termes comme « proletcultisme » ou « réalisme socialiste ». En tout cas, la dimension comparatiste a été presque absente jusqu'aujourd'hui des débats concernant l'époque d'entre la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale et le début de la libéralisation d'après Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Le vaste territoire des relations entre la littérature roumaine et les autres littératures, à cette époque-là, n'a pas encore été exploré, ainsi que *La Bibliographie...* remplit en ce sens un vide d'information, par une documentation presque exhaustive et par une rigoureuse structuration du matériau.

La période 1945–1964 est en quelque sorte compliquée aussi par le fait qu'étant hétérogène, elle pourrait être subdivisée, à son tour, en trois périodes relativement distinctes : les années d'après la fin de la guerre et jusqu'à l'instauration du communisme (une sorte de prolongement de l'entre-deux-guerres, ce qui implique, pour le moment, la persistance d'une relative liberté des débats dans l'espace culturel) ; la période la plus dure du communisme, dès 1948 jusque vers la fin des années '50 ; et, enfin, une période qui annonce, bien que timidement, un relâchement idéologique, de même que le retour à un discours plus « naturel », moins oppressif du point de vue idéologique, après le retrait des troupes soviétiques de Roumanie, en 1958. Même si elle n'est pas dessinée en tant que tel dans *La Bibliographie des relations...*, cette subdivision se distingue clairement même par l'enchaînement des articles/ des interventions que la *Bibliographie...* enregistre et systématise. À ce que l'on voit, par exemple, de cet enchaînement « bibliographique », les noms des auteurs, ainsi que les titres – pour ne plus parler des attitudes, du style et des références

– changent d'un intervalle à l'autre. Ainsi que, si avant la borne représentée par l'année 1948 la *Bibliographie...* consigne, dans la section consacrée aux questions d'esthétique littéraire, des articles signés par des auteurs tels que Adrian Marino, Virgil Ierunca, N. Steinhardt – noms qui vont être ultérieurement interdits –, des interventions variées et polychromes du point de vue idéologique, après 1948 le paysage change, monopolisé par les discussions sur « Lenine et les voies de la nouvelle littérature », sur « patriotisme et internationalisme en culture », « le problème du typique dans la littérature » etc. et par les incriminations de « l'esthétique du décadentisme contemporaine » ou du « formalisme » comme expression d'une idéologie « rancunière », les références qui renvoient à l'espace soviétique étant, évidemment, dominantes ; un peu plus tard, au commencement des années '60, deviennent possibles – dans un océan de textes qui appliquent à la littérature la grille marxiste-léniniste – des prises de position théoriques plus diverses, ayant dans ce contexte un certain potentiel subversif. Voici quelques exemples : en 1961, A.E. Baconsky publie dans *Gazeta literară* un article intitulé « L'Erotisme et l'art », mettant en discussion, bien que d'une manière polémique, des idées avancées par Denis de Rougemont, afin de dénoncer « l'obsession sexuelle » de la littérature de l'Occident ; Ion Ianoși cherche (toujours dans *Gazeta literară* et toujours en 1961) une timide et indirecte réhabilitation de la discussion sur le critère esthétique, dans un article qui s'intitule « Le Socialisme et les valeurs esthétiques » ; enfin, Vera Călin écrit pour la revue *Secolul 20* (toujours en 1961) un essai sur « La Fonction du rire dans la littérature de notre siècle », avec des références non-soviétiques tels que G.B. Shaw, Bertolt Brecht ou Jerome K. Jerome – et on pourrait continuer avec d'autres exemples. *La bibliographie des relations...* représente vraiment une mine d'or pour ceux qui voudraient comprendre, les documents sur table, comment s'est imposé et ultérieurement nuancé le discours idéologique sur la littérature dans le champ culturel roumain – extrêmement pittoresque – des premières décennies d'après la deuxième guerre mondiale.

Le premier volume de la troisième série de la *Bibliographie des relations...* est consacré à des questions générales (tandis que les prochains volumes seront dédiés, comme dans le cas des autres deux séries, à la réception de différentes littératures dans la presse roumaine des années 1945–1964). Il y a onze grandes sections, avec des subdivisions : *Théorie littéraire* (*Esthétique littéraire*, *L'Esthétique du folklore*, *Critique littéraire*, *Aspects théoriques concernant l'histoire de la littérature*, *Plagiat. Aspects théoriques*), *La Théorie des genres littéraires* (*Généralités*, *Le Genre lyrique*, *Le Genre dramatique*, *Le Genre épique*, *Le Genre épistolaire*, *Le Genre satyrique*, *D'autres genres*), *Époques et courants littéraires* (*Généralités*, *Littérature médiévale*, *Humanisme. Renaissance. Baroque. Illuminisme*, *Classicisme*, *Romantisme*,

Réalisme. Naturalisme, *Courants modernistes*), *Le Problème et la technique des traductions. Traducteurs roumains*, *Technique littéraire. Rhétorique, stylistique littéraire, versification*, *L'Histoire de la littérature universelle* (*Généralités*, *Littérature universelle contemporaine*, *Politiques éditoriales*, *Revues littéraires*, *Evénements, visites et rencontres culturelles et littéraire*, *Varia*), *Thèmes et motifs littéraires*, *L'Histoire des genres littéraires* (*Poésie*, *Théâtre*, *Prose*, *Satyre. Pamphlet*, *D'autres genres*), Littérature comparée (*Généralités*, *Influences. Comparaisons. Parallélismes*, *Relations littéraires*, *Plagiats*, *Dramatisations. Adaptations*, *Articles*, *Chroniques. Notes*, *Textes*), *Folklore universel et comparé*, *Échos de la littérature roumaine dans les littératures étrangères* (1. *Études. Articles. Notes* : *Généralités*, *Littératures étrangères*, *Écrivains roumains*, *Sur le folklore roumain* ; 2. *Traductions et transformations* : *Poésie époque*, *Poésie lyrique*, *Folklore*). Par rapport aux deux séries antérieures, la troisième série de la *Bibliographie des relations*... – explique Carmen Brăgaru dans la *Note introductive* – implique « de nombreux défis méthodologiques, très divers, visant des problèmes théoriques, de classification ou même la difficulté d'inventer de nouvelles sections, dictées par les caractéristiques de la période parcourue, difficile à digérer à cause du mélange de l'idéologie dans la sphère de la culture et de la littérature. Le matériau existant dans les périodiques consultés a imposé de nouveaux chapitres et de nouvelles subdivisions, surtout dans ce premier volume de la série. Une section assez étendue réunit des *Dramatisations, adaptations et localisations* selon des romans goûtés à l'époque ou considérés progressistes, de même que des versifications selon des textes en prose (par exemple, A. Toma écrit des poésies inspirées par quelques lignes du roman *Jean-Christophe* de Romain Rolland ou par des récits de Maxime Gorki). En même temps, inexistants dans les séries antérieures, de nouveaux sous-chapitres s'imposent avec nécessité dans le chapitre de *l'Histoire de la littérature universelle* – tels que *Politiques éditoriales* [...] ou *Revues littéraires* (qui réunit de nombreuses entrées qui réfèrent au contenu des publications au profil culturel-littéraire international), *Visites et rencontres culturelles*, dans le cadre plus large du chapitre concernant les événements de l'époque (qui vise à coaguler les informations sur le délégations d'écrivains qui traversent le monde d'un bout à l'autre, le plus souvent pour des raisons de propagande ».

Explorant un territoire insuffisamment valorisé, celui des centaines des publications périodiques roumaines de différentes époques – peu fréquentées et connectées –, *La Bibliographie des relations de la littérature roumaine avec les littératures étrangères dans les périodiques* constitue un point de départ pour un grand nombre de possibles recherches, dans divers domaines des études littéraires, à partir de l'histoire littéraire avec allonge comparatiste jusqu'aux « études quantitatives », aujourd'hui en vogue. Dans cet ordre d'idées, on ne doit pas oublier l'évidence selon

laquelle aucune analyse quantitative, bien que high-tech, « novatrice », inspirée par les théories d'un Franco Moretti, par exemple, ou appartenant au domaine *Digital Humanities* ne pourrait se dispenser de la recherche positive, « traditionnelle », à l'absence de laquelle il n'y a pas des instruments de travail, ni la base absolument nécessaire pour une analyse sérieuse, appliquée, au-delà des spéculations et des improvisations théoriques ou idéologiques. Certes, parmi les réussites majeures du comparatisme roumain des dernières décennies, *La Bibliographie des relations de la littérature roumaine avec les littératures étrangères dans les périodiques* devrait devenir une mention obligatoire, non seulement en vertu du travail bénédictin impliqué par l'élaboration d'un tel ouvrage, mais aussi, et en premier lieu, pour ses mises – qui ne sont pas tout à fait modestes.

Bianca Burța-Cernat

Muguraș Constantinescu, Daniel Dejica, Titela Vîlceanu (coord.), *O istorie a traducerilor în limba română*, București: Editura Academiei Române, vol. I, 2021, 1440 p., vol. II, 2022, 2152 p.; Suceava: Editura Universității "Ștefan cel Mare", vol. III, 2023, 878 p.

La traduction est avant tout un acte de communication et d'auto-communication, un lien entre les personnes, les peuples, les cultures et les civilisations, médiateur dans la transmission des connaissances de l'homme et de la vie. Roger Bacon dit que la connaissance des langues est la porte de la sagesse et U. Eco affirme aujourd'hui que la langue de l'Europe est la traduction, ce qui se confirme d'ailleurs à travers les siècles. La traduction est l'art de la communication à travers lequel une culture ou un peuple s'ouvrent aux autres pour recevoir la richesse de la connaissance, déversant à leur tour les trésors nationaux dans le grand trésor de la culture universelle. Ceci est souligné tout au long de *l'Histoire des traductions en langue roumaine.* (vol. I, vol. II et vol. III), résultat remarquable d'un projet dédié à la traduction, initié en 2018–2019 par Muguraș Constantinescu de l'Université « Ștefan cel Mare » de Suceava, qui a impliqué plus de 200 chercheurs du milieu universitaire roumain, de la France, de l'Allemagne, de la Grèce, de l'Espagne, etc.

Les trois volumes ont été publiés entre 2021 et 2023 et couvrent, sans prétention d'exhaustivité, cinq siècles de traduction vers le roumain (XVI^{e}-XX^{e} siècles), de toutes les provinces roumaines (y compris la Bessarabie), en utilisant, outre l'approche linguistique et littéraire, des outils sociologiques, statistiques, des éléments de théorie et de pratique contemporaines de la traduction, des éléments de traductologie et de critique de la traduction, tout en proposant des perspectives sur l'acte de traduire et des aspects liés à la voix, au statut et à la condition du traducteur, ainsi que des portraits de traducteurs célèbres. Outre l'approche diachronique, propre à une histoire, ces trois volumes contextualisent les traductions réalisées en langue roumaine, en les encadrant dans divers domaines épistémologiques dans la perspective d'une histoire de la langue roumaine, de la littérature roumaine, des sciences humaines (psychologie, philosophie) et de l'art, de l'histoire du langage des sciences et des techniques, etc. *ITLR* est ainsi une histoire de la traduction fondée sur une histoire du savoir humain et universel.

La traduction est un acte de communication humaine par excellence. Comme le souligne Mircea Martin dans son article introductif intitulé « Une théorie de la traduction plutôt qu'une préface »: « nous traduisons nos propres sensations, perceptions, impressions et nous traduisons les gestes et les regards des autres. Nous le faisons avant même de bien connaître notre langue maternelle et bien

avant d'apprendre des langues étrangères. Le problème de la traduction est donc antérieur au problème linguistique et ne s'y réduit pas » (I, p. 19). Toute communication d'une expérience, d'une pensée, d'une idée, de certaines émotions passe par un acte de traduction, de retraduction ou d'auto-traduction. Ces expériences, émotions, pensées, idées, etc. viennent toutes d'espaces différents et mènent à l'Autre, qu'il s'agisse d'art, de science, de littérature, d'histoire, de médecine, ayant besoin de traduction ou d'autotraduction pour être communiquées. La traduction est donc un acte communicatif, une tentative de pérennisation de la communication, quel que soit le domaine auquel elle est associée, une ouverture sur l'Autre, une preuve de la générosité humaine, surtout lorsque « la langue traduisante doit sortir d'elle-même, c'est-à-dire de sa nature, et se plier – virtuellement, imaginairement, mais aussi réellement, pratiquement – aux exigences de l'autre langue. La tentative du vrai traducteur, réitérée mot par mot, phrase par phrase, est de transmettre d'une langue à l'autre non seulement le sens, mais aussi le charme.» (I, p. 26).

Le premier volume du projet *Une histoire des traductions en roumain* (ITLR), paru en 2021, aux éditions de l'Académie Roumaine, coordonné par Muguraș Constantinescu, Daniel Dejica, Titela Vîlceanu, avec une préface de Mircea Martin, regroupe des contributions scientifiques sur les traductions réalisées vers le roumain tout au long du XX^{e} siècle. Comme le souligne Muguraș Constantinescu, initiatrice du projet ITLR, « une histoire des traductions en langue roumaine signifie une histoire des contextes (social, politique, historique, culturel, diplomatique, etc.) dans lesquels elles ont été élaborées ; une histoire des traducteurs et de leurs idées sur l'acte de traduire ; une histoire des genres et sous-genres littéraires à travers lesquels la littérature roumaine a évolué d'une époque à l'autre. » (I, p. 36). Structuré en six chapitres, le premier volume propose dans ses 1440 pages une synthèse du contexte linguistique, littéraire, historique, géopolitique, social et culturel dans lequel ont été réalisées les traductions sur le territoire roumain. Le premier chapitre part de l'entre-deux-guerres, présente la situation des traductions roumaines dans la période communiste dominée par la censure, évoque l'image de l'étranger « filtrée et façonnée par les traductions » (Muguraș Constantinescu), proposant un tour d'horizon sur la traduction en roumain de la littérature minoritaire, des expressions ethniques allemandes, yiddish, hongroises, polonaises, slovaques, etc. Une section importante est réservée à la dynamique des mentalités et aux traductions de la littérature consacrée aux mentalités, y compris la période post-communiste en Roumanie dans les années 1990-2000. Le chapitre I se termine par une synthèse des outils de travail du chercheur, tels que la *Bibliographie des relations de la littérature roumaine avec les littératures étrangères*

dans les périodiques, *Le Dictionnaire chronologique du roman traduit en Roumanie depuis ses origines jusqu'en 1989* (2005), *Le Dictionnaire chronologique du roman traduit en Roumanie 1990-2000* (2017), en passant par des traductions issues de lieux insolites, enregistrées dans la presse roumaine dans la période 1859–1964 et rappelant les débuts de l'hispanisme dans l'espace roumain.

Le chapitre II du premier volume de l'*ITLR* parle du statut et de la condition du traducteur et de l'interprète dans la société roumaine du XX^e^ siècle, en passant en revue la législation roumaine en matière de traduction, mais aussi en se concentrant sur certains aspects liés au bilinguisme, à la biculturalité et à l'autotraduction de certains écrivains bilingues. Certaines contributions remarquables présentent des aspects liés à l'institutionnalisation de la traduction dans les universités roumaines au XX^e^ siècle, des institutions culturelles qui ont soutenu les traductions vers le roumain, comme le British Council Roumanie, les institutions francophones françaises et internationales, Norla ((NORwegian Literature Abroad – Littérature norvégienne à l'étranger), des institutions portugaises et brésiliennes qui ont financé les traductions, du rôle de l'Institut Cervantes de Bucarest dans le soutien des traductions roumaines. Ce chapitre se termine par une galerie de portraits de quelques écrivains-traducteurs comme Eugen Barbu ou Otilia Cazimir, des traducteurs universitaires, des intellectuels roumains réfugiés dans la traduction, tels que Radu Cioculescu ou Gellu Naum, mais aussi des traducteurs vers le roumain du domaine technique et scientifique.

Les maisons d'édition, les collections et les revues de la fin du XIX^e^ siècle et du début du XX^e^ siècle sont également mentionnées, telles les maisons d'édition Soces, Saraga, Muller, Ionnitiu, Alcalay, Ioanid de Roumanie et de Moldavie (Aurora Firta-Marin), les maisons d'édition de l'entre-deux-guerres, les maisons d'édition de l'époque communiste, tout en mettant en exergue l'explosion du marché de l'édition post-communiste (1990-2000). Sont également mentionnées quelques collections roumaines de référence (« Biblioteca pentru toți » – « La Bibliothèque pour tous » (Muguraș Constantinescu) et « Opere fundamentale » – « Œuvres fondamentales », les anthologies de traductions de la littérature universelle, ainsi que certaines maisons d'édition et collections qui ont promu la traduction de la théorie et de la critique littéraire dans la Roumanie communiste dans une perspective étrangère : les éditions Omonia de la perspective grecque et tchécoslovaque. Par ailleurs, une section spéciale est consacrée à la traduction spécialisée, avec un aperçu de la terminologie en Roumanie en référence au *Premier thésaurus terminologique roumain* (Daniela Cățău-Vereș), en passant par les phénomènes traductionnels tels que la retraduction, la traduction canonique (Muguraș Constantinescu).

Les traductions roumaines de textes de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge font l'objet de synthèses spécifiques dans ce volume, à partir des traductions parues en roumain au XX^e^ siècle d'après des textes de l'Antiquité grecque et de l'Antiquité latine. Le chapitre propose également une galerie de portraits de traducteurs classiques célèbres, mais aussi une synthèse de traductions de la littérature française médiévale (« De Roland à Tristan » , *Tristan et Isolde* en roumain, Chrétien de Troyes ou littérature sapientielle, tous ces chefs-d'œuvre bénéficiant de versions linguistiques exceptionnelles). Les synthèses sur les traductions en roumain de la littérature médiévale font référence à des langues sources comme l'espagnol (Mianda Cioba, Anca Crivăț, qui présentent des aspects d'épopées, de prose fictive et de récits de voyage au Moyen Âge hispanique), le portugais (Veronica Manole, avec une synthèse sur la traduction de *Lusiada* par Luis Vaz de Camões), l'anglais, l'allemand (Mihai Draganovici et Mihai Crudu offrent une perspective sur la traduction du *Chant des Nibelungs* en roumain), mais aussi les langues nordiques (les traductions roumaines de la mythologie nordique). Plusieurs portraits de traducteurs complètent le panorama des traductions de textes anciens et médiévaux : George Coșbuc en traducteur de Dante, Eugen Tănase, Virgil Tempeanu en traducteurs de l'allemand médiéval ou encore Romulus Vulpescu.

La deuxième partie du chapitre VI propose des repères dans la traduction du discours poétique, à partir des traductions roumaines du discours poétique du XX^e^ siècle (la poésie espagnole du Siècle d'Or, les sonnets de W. Shakespeare présentés de manière synthétique par Dan Nicolae Popescu, des traductions de la poésie russe, de la poésie américaine, de la poésie britannique) et en terminant par quelques portraits de traducteurs célèbres du texte poétique, comme A.E. Baconsky ou Petre Solomon.

Le volume II de l'*ITLR*, paru en décembre 2022 aux éditions de l'Académie roumaine, coordonné par Muguraş Constantinescu, Daniel Dejica et Titela Vîlceanu, avec un « Préambule » d'Angela Martin, s'avère extrêmement complexe, généreux en synthèses organisées en douze chapitres. Comprenant 2152 pages, le volume fait référence aux traductions réalisées en roumain au XX^e^ siècle dans des domaines tels que la prose fictionnelle et non fictionnelle, d'autres genres littéraires (d'anticipation, fantastique, policier et espionnage, féministe, de voyage), le théâtre, la littérature pour enfants, les traductions de la littérature universelle en République de Moldavie et en Ukraine, les traductions des sciences humaines et des arts, de la philosophie, de la religion, du domaine des sciences et de la technologie, de la littérature de l'exil et d'autres aspects traductionnels situés à la frontière entre les millénaires. Les traductions issues des domaines

non littéraires sont mises en valeur, « ce qui constitue une nouveauté et une preuve de courage, en affirmant qu'une histoire des traductions inclut toutes les facettes d'une culture : littéraire, artistique, philosophique, religieuse, technique, scientifique, etc. » (II, p. 27), comme le soulignent les coordinateurs du volume dans l'Introduction.

Dans le chapitre Ier, 57 collaborateurs, spécialistes en traductologie, traducteurs, écrivains, spécialistes en études littéraires, enseignants, nationaux et étrangers, proposent un aperçu de la prose du XX^e^ siècle et du début du XXI^e^ siècle à travers sa réception en Roumanie. Il s'agit de contextes culturels et historiques diversifiés, tant en termes d'espace d'où proviennent les textes et les auteurs évoqués, qu'en termes de public cible. Les auteurs présentés s'inscrivent dans l'espace européen, « ils sont occidentaux ou orientaux, proches – linguistiquement et géographiquement – de la Roumanie ou exotiques, ils appartiennent à des cultures dominantes, s'exprimant dans des langues de large circulation internationale, ou à des cultures régionales et locales, mais ils sont aussi en dehors des sphères d'influence culturelle occidentale » (Dana Percec, II, p. 42). Ainsi, on y retrouve des synthèses sur les traductions de la prose anglaise (Charles Dickens, d'Edgar Poe ou Faulkner), irlandaise ou canadienne etc. Les traductions de la prose de l'expression française sont présentées par Muguraș Constantinescu (avec une perspective sur les traductions de Proust et de Flaubert), par Alina Pelea et Andreea Bugiac (qui présentent une synthèse sur la traduction du roman français à l'époque communiste), de Valentina Rădulescu (qui écrit sur la traduction du Nouveau Roman en langue roumaine). Quelques études remarquables sont proposées, au chapitre IV, sur les traductions théâtrales, partant du profil particulier du traducteur pour la scène.

La littérature de jeunesse traduite en roumain fait l'objet du chapitre V, où 32 spécialistes du domaine signent des études remarquables, coordonnés par Raluca-Nicoleta Balaṭchi et Daniela Haisan, tout en offrant un aperçu du « véritable phénomène éditorial représenté par la traduction de la littérature pour les enfants en roumain, avec des textes sources issus d'une diversité d'horizons linguistiques (plus de 50 langues sources sont mentionnées), de zones géographiques (pratiquement tous les continents sont couverts), d'époques (on traduit et on retraduit des textes du XVI^e^ siècle jusqu'aux textes contemporains) et de genres (conte de fées, légende, mythe, roman, nouvelle, poésie, récit, fable, bande dessinée) » (Raluca-Nicoleta Balaṭchi et Daniela Haisan, II, p. 871). Le corpus du chapitre est complexe, du fait de l'étendue géographique, les études se référant aux pratiques de traduction d'auteurs britanniques (Defoe, J. Swift, W. Scott, Charles Dickens), américains (H. Melville), auteurs français (Hugo et J. Verne), auteurs espagnols (Cervantes). En outre, les études portent sur la traduction en roumain de contes de fées, légendes

et mythes (1900-2000) de l'espace norvégien, danois, allemand, britannique, français, belge et hispanique. Des traductions en prose (roman, nouvelle et autres genres) d'auteurs norvégiens (Jostein Gaarger ou Lars Saabye Christensen), danois (Pipaluk Freuchen), suédois (Selma Lagerlof) sont également mentionnées, à côté d'auteurs allemands (Michael Ende), suisses (Johanna Spyri), britanniques (Anna Sewell, Lewis Carroll; A. A. Milne, Dodie Smith, Roald Dahl etc.) En outre, les bandes dessinées traduites du français, mais aussi une série de maisons d'édition et de collections roumaines spécialisées (comme la collection « Contes scientifiques et fantastiques » ou la maison d'édition « Ion Creangă », avec la collection « Biblioteca pentru toți copiii » – « La Bibliothèque pour tous les enfants ») font l'objet de contributions qui complètent l'aperçu des traductions en roumain de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse tout au long du XX^{e} siècle.

Par ailleurs, les traductions des sciences humaines et des arts, traitées au chapitre VII, complètent le tableau traductionnel de ce volume. Les contributions traitent des aspects liés aux traductions des arts, de l'architecture, du domaine de la théorie, de la critique et de l'histoire de la littérature, de la sémiotique et de la linguistique générale, de l'ethnologie et du folklore, des textes anthropologiques, de l'œuvre d'Eliade, de la psychanalyse et de la psychologie, de la gastronomie et de l'écologie. La philosophie bénéficie d'un chapitre entier (chap. VII), de même que les traductions en roumain des textes religieux (chapitre IX), les auteurs d'études, comme Felicia Dumas et Liviu-Marcel Ungurean, passant en revue les traductions de la Bible en roumain, mais aussi les traductions de textes chrétiens-orthodoxes français.

En outre, une place particulière est occupée dans ce volume par les traductions roumaines du domaine de la science et de la technologie. Ainsi, le chapitre X du volume II de l'*ITLR*, coordonné par Daniela Cățău Vereș, met en évidence une riche activité traductive tout au long du XX^{e} siècle dans ce domaine. Les traductions de l'économie, y compris les travaux scientifiques récompensé par le prix Nobel, intéressent les traducteurs et les maisons d'édition roumains du XX^{e} siècle, ainsi que les traductions des sciences physiques, des mathématiques et des sciences naturelles, soulignant une soif de connaissance et un intérêt majeur de la société pour le développement à travers la science, y compris par la traduction. Une analyse remarquable, réalisée par les chercheurs Lucian-Sorin Stănescu et Raluca Onufreiciuc, met en évidence l'intérêt pour les traductions juridiques en roumain tout au long du XX^{e} siècle, y compris à partir du russe dans la période pré-communiste et communiste des années 1940-1970. La terminologie informatique roumaine, située à la frontière entre traduction et emprunt, complète le tableau traductionnel lié à la science et à la technologie.

Le chapitre XI, consacré à la littérature de l'exil, vient compléter les études sur les traductions réalisées sous censure dans les anciens pays communistes, telles qu'elles étaient présentées dans le premier volume d'*ITLR*. En effet, l'exil, en tant que phénomène social rencontré notamment dans les pays à régime totalitaire est étroitement lié à la censure et peut prendre diverses formes, de l'auto-exil à l'exil intérieur ou simplement à l'exil linguistique, comme forme d'expression artistique (Muguraș Constantinescu, II, p. 1783). On fait référence ici à des auteurs roumains qui, pour diverses raisons, ont choisi de vivre, temporairement ou définitivement, dans un autre pays, tels que Panait Istrati, Benjamin Fondane, Ilarie Voronca, Sanda Stolojan, Emil Cioran, Teodor Cazaban et Vintilă Horia. Sont également mentionnées les traductions en roumain de plusieurs auteurs roumains contemporains, mais aussi d'auteurs contemporains du Japon et d'Iran, qui ont choisi l'exil et la langue de l'Autre comme thème de prédilection. Des thèmes tels que l'asymétrie des langues, la situation extraterritoriale de certains auteurs, contraints de vivre en exil ou, dans d'autres cas, qui choisissent de vivre dans un autre pays pour des raisons personnelles, sont également abordés. Le chapitre se termine par une étude mettant en lumière les projets de recherche dans le domaine de la traduction dans les universités roumaines des trois dernières décennies, mais aussi la recherche doctorale contemporaine dans le domaine de la traduction en Roumanie.

Le III[ème] volume de *l'Histoire des traductions en langue roumaine*, publié par la Maison d'édition universitaire « Ștefan cel Mare » de Suceava (intitulé *O istorie a traducerilor in limba româna secolele XVI-XX/ Domenii literare și non-literare ITLR– Une Histoire des traductions en langue roumaine XVI-XX siècles/ Domaines littéraires et non littéraires ITLR*) complète le projet d'envergure initié par Muguraș Constantinescu. Préfacé par Yves Chevrel, ce volume est un plaidoyer pour des traductions considérées comme ouvrant les voies de la modernité, éclairant les esprits et la raison. Ce que les coordinateurs du premier chapitre, Muguraș Constantinescu et Daniela Haisan, appellent ici « modernité » est « l'état, le stade de civilisation et de culture d'une nation et d'une langue et la comparaison implicite ou explicite, sous cet aspect, avec d'autres nations » (III, p. 47). Composé d'environ huit cents pages et couvrant quatre siècles (XVI-XIX), cet ouvrage présente une synthèse des traductions de la culture roumaine ancienne, prémoderne et moderne – sur laquelle s'appuie l'activité de traduction littéraire et non littéraire des XX[e] et XXI[e] siècles. Organisé en six chapitres, le volume III de l'*ITLR* propose une synthèse sur l'évolution des traductions vers la langue roumaine à partir du XVI[e] siècle et jusqu'au XX[e] siècle, tout en soulignant

leur rôle dans le développement du peuple roumain et de la culture roumaine.

Le chapitre I^er^, intitulé « XVI^e^ siècle. Le début de l'écriture en roumain », présente d'abord les conditions et les causes extérieures (une forte influence byzantine) et intérieures (la nécessité d'autochtoniser l'éducation) ayant déterminé l'apparition des traductions en roumain. Dans l'espace roumain, à partir du XV^e^ siècle, mais surtout au XVI^e^ siècle, parmi les principaux promoteurs de la traduction, outre les dirigeants, se trouvaient les représentants de l'Église. Couvrant le XVI^e^ siècle, les études présentées dans ce chapitre se concentrent sur les traductions religieuses et les débuts de l'écriture en langue roumaine (les estampes bilingues slavo-roumaines, puis des traductions hongroises comme *Palia de la Orăştie* de 1582). En outre, l'apparition des imprimeries et des imprimeurs (le diacre Coresi) crée un contexte de plus en plus favorable à la diffusion des traductions. Une place spéciale est réservée au *Codex Todorescu*, au *Codex martien* et au manuscrit de Ieud. Par ailleurs, les traductions réalisées au monastère de Putna, mais aussi les traductions en lettres latines et en orthographe hongroise font l'objet d'études remarquables appartenant aux chercheurs Liviu-Marceal Ungurean et Attila Imre.

Intitulé « La fin du XVI^e^ siècle et la première moitié du XVII^e^ siècle », le second chapitre met en lumière les traductions des livres populaires en traduction roumaine, tels que le *Codex Strudzanus*, le *Codex Todorescu*, le *Codex Kohalm*, le roman populaire de Varlaam et Ioasaf. La chercheuse Cristina-Maria Drahta Turac signe ici une étude sur la *Bible de Bucarest* (1688) ou la *Bible de Şerban Cantacuzino*. Ce chapitre regroupe également des synthèses sur la traduction comme moyen d'enrichissement philosophique et culturel de la langue, telle que perçue par l'érudit Dimitrie Cantemir. En Transylvanie, à la fin du XVIII^e^ siècle, Samuil Micu est un remarquable traducteur de littérature théologique qui avait offert une nouvelle traduction complète de la *Bible* grâce aux frères Greceanu, en publiant *La Bible de Blaj* (1795).

Par ailleurs, le chapitre IV^ème^ du volume III de l'*ITLR* présente la période pré-moderne (1780-1830) et les événements se déroulant dans le contexte culturel roumain des Lumières. Coordonné par Ana-Maria Minut et Ion Lihaciu, ce chapitre décrit le chemin de l'altérité dans les principautés roumaines à l'époque pré-moderne, en rappelant les traductions de l'Ecole d'Ardeal (en roumain, Şcoala Ardeleană) des classiques latins comme Virgile et Ovide, les traductions et compilations de l'allemand élaborées par des savants transylvaniens pour transmettre, de manière accessible, des connaissances provenant de divers domaines d'activité, afin d'« éclairer » les masses. Les traductions de Ioan Piuariu-Molnar, dans le domaine de l'apiculture et de l'histoire, sont mentionnées également ici. En outre,

les traductions d'Ion Budai-Deleanu, qui ont contribué à l'introduction de lois et de règlements adoptés au sein de la monarchie des Habsbourg sont également évoquées.

Le Vème chapitre, intitulé « Les traductions à l'époque moderne. Grandes accumulations, sélections et décantations » (1830-1900), coordonné par Muguraș Constantinescu et Daniela Cătău-Vereș, met en lumière l'intense activité de traductions de l'époque moderne, encouragée et pratiquée par Heliade-Rădulescu, mais aussi par de nombreux autres traducteurs. Le chapitre commence par l'étude signée par Carmen Man sur les repères historiques et culturels du XIX^{e} siècle, considéré comme un siècle de transition, mais aussi d'orientation vers la modernité, une place particulière étant réservée à la société «Junimea». Une série d'études signées par Mircea Diaconu fait référence à des traductions dans le domaine de la philosophie (sur des auteurs tels que Xénophon d'Athènes, Théophraste, Aristote, Cicéron, Sénèque le Jeune, Epictète, Marc Aurèle, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant ou Schopenhauer), à la formation d'une terminologie philosophique et à la création néologique moderne, à travers la traduction. Plusieurs portraits sont par ailleurs consacrés à des traducteurs emblématiques de l'époque: George Barițiu, Gheorghe Asachi, Grigore Alexandrescu, Costache Negruzzi, Ion Heliade-Rădulescu, Mihai Eminescu.

Ce volume contient également une galerie de portraits d'écrivains-traducteurs roumains (Vasile Alecsandri, George Coșbuc, I.L. Caragiale, Alexandru Odobescu, Titu Maiorescu). En outre, une contribution particulière à la définition du rôle des traductions sur la langue roumaine est apportée par Rodica Nagy, qui parle de grammaires bilingues pour étudiants (roumains/étrangers) et de néologisation par emprunts. De même, d'autres contributions importantes en fin de volume font référence aux outils du traducteur au XIX^{e} siècle et à la lexicographie romano-allemande/germano-roumaine. Le volume III d'*ITLR* s'achève ainsi par l'invitation adressée par Muguraș Constantinescu, l'initiatrice de cet ouvrage, à une « lecture flexible », étant donné les trois volumes qui totalisent plus de 4000 pages de matériel riche en synthèses sur les cinq siècles de traductions vers le roumain.

Daniela Cătău Vereș

Magda Dragu, *Form and Meaning in Avant-Garde Collage and Montage*, London and New York: Routledge, 2020, 256 p.

Magda Dragu's work, originally a doctoral thesis, aims for an important and refined goal: the analysis of montage and collage techniques in the arts of the avant-garde. This interdisciplinary work examines text, image, music, and film, seeking to establish various correspondences between these arts.

The first part of the volume, titled "Theories of Intermediality: Form and Meaning," presents the diachronic concept of intermediality, starting with Aristotle and Plato, and then commenting on recent theories, such as formal and semiotic theories and those regarding hybrid media. The author refers to the concept of transmediality, which she describes and examines in relation to the connection between form and meaning.

The second part of the work is dedicated to analyzing the technique of collage, focusing on the arts of the avant-garde. The author traces the history of the term "collage" from Picasso to Kurt Schwitters and Carlo Carrà, and into the novels of Max Ernst, then analyzing the relationship between word and image in the works of Apollinaire and Marinetti. For Magda Dragu, collage is a technique that defines avant-garde style and also serves as a means to explore intermediality: "Closely sharing some features with the avant-garde artistic preoccupations for non-sense, verbal collage, the most immediate transposition of the technique into another medium distinguishes itself as a conceptual play upon the means of artistic expression, in virtue of the non-medium-specific (conceptual nature) or the technique of collage." (p. 63–64).

In the third part of the work, the author discusses the relationship between collage and montage. Starting with photomontage in the works of Dadaists and Russian Constructivists, she examines this artistic process, defining it as an artistic technique distinct from collage. She pays attention to photographic art, focusing particularly on artists like Cindy Sherman and Cerise Zelentz, as well as works in this category, such as those by K. Malevitch and Raoul Hausmann. To distinguish between these techniques used by avant-garde artists, the author emphasizes the defining role of photography: "If Surrealist photomontage allows for displacements and re-arrangements of pieces, Surrealist photographers exploited the 'transparent' nature of the photograph primarily by capturing reality from unusual angles, especially through the technique of close-up, which creates the defamiliarization and disorientation of the viewer of the respective photograph." (121–122). From here, the author transitions to film analysis, exploring how the photomontage technique is utilized in cinematic art, referencing the films of Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Moholy-Nagy, and others.

The analysis of examples of collage and montage in music is particularly interesting, which the author discusses at the end of the second and third parts of the book. In this way, the evolution of the two procedures is traced through different lenses and across different arts, as concluded: "I have based my understanding of the larger transmedial concepts, collage and montage, across other media on this core definition of visual collage and photomontage" (197). By adopting a formal method and focusing her research on avant-garde arts, Magda Dragu succeeds in offering both a new and exciting vision of the arts from the early decades of the 20th century and a serious contribution to theories on intermediality.

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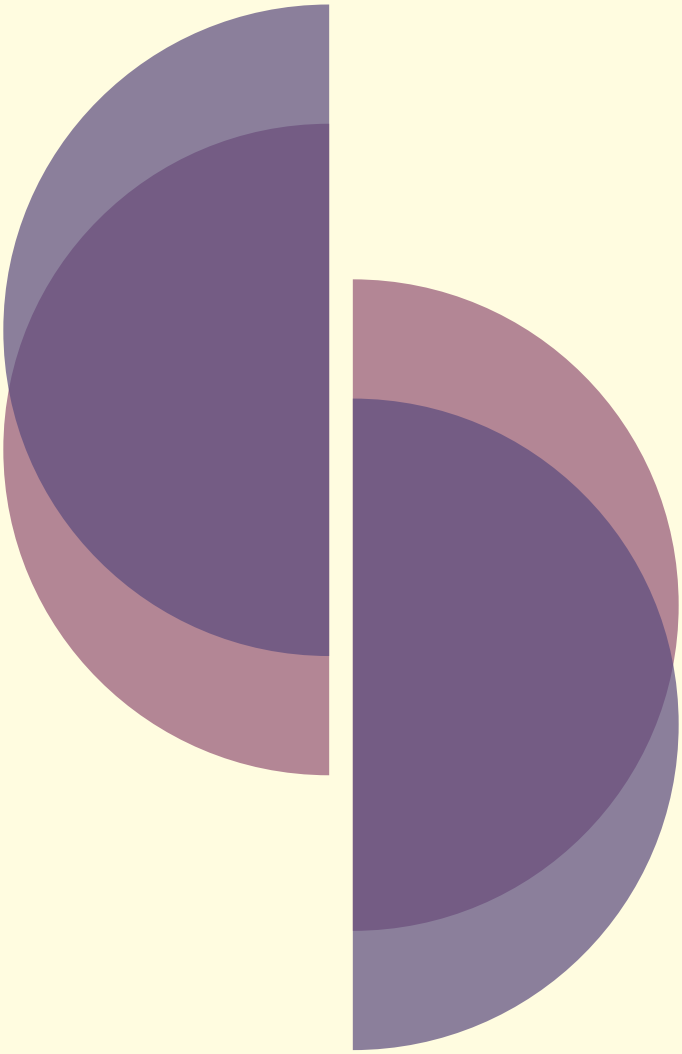

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