JOLCEL

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

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NOTE

This contribution is the inaugural piece to *JOLCEL*, reflecting on core concepts and
questions of the journal. The rest of the issue consists of a larger dialogue of three
articles and one responding piece. The other contributions are "Avatars of Latin
Schooling. Recycling Memories of Latin Classes in Western Poetry: Five
Paradigmatic Cases" by Anders Cullhed (pp. 17-33), "Competition, Narrative and
Literary *Copia* in the Works of Boncompagno da Signa and Guido Faba" by Jonathan
M. Newman (pp. 35–54) and "The Morosophistic Discourse of Ancient Prose
Fiction" by Erik Gunderson (pp. 56–80). The response piece is "Letters, Poems, and
Prose Fictions in Cosmopolitan Latinity" by Roland Greene (pp. 82-86).

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Reconstructing Literature. Reflections on Cosmopolitan Literatures

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By Way of Introduction: Reading the School

> Es ist auf der Albrechtsstraße, jener Verkehrsader der Residenz, die den Albrechtsplatz und das Alte Schloß mit der Kaserne der Gardefüsiliere verbindet—um Mittag, wochentags, zu einer gleichgültigen Jahreszeit. Das Wetter ist mäßig gut, indifferent. Es regnet nicht, aber der Himmel ist auch nicht klar; er ist gleichmäßig weißgrau, gewöhnlich, unfestlich, und die Straße liegt in einer stumpfen und nüchternen Beleuchtung, die alles Geheimnisvolle, jede Absonderlichkeit der Stimmung ausschließt. Es herrscht ein Verkehr von mittlerer Regsamkeit, ohne viel Lärm und Gedränge, entsprechend dem nicht sehr geschäftigen Charakter der Stadt. Trambahnwagen gleiten dahin, ein paar Droschken rollen vorbei, auf den Bürgersteigen bewegt sich Einwohnerschaft, farbloses Volk, Passanten, Publikum, Leute.[1]

With these sentences the unsuspecting reader is introduced into the small grand duchy of Grimmburg, in which Thomas Mann's short novel *Königliche Hoheit* (1909, translated into English as *Royal Highness* later that year) is staged. Only gradually, perhaps even only at the very end, does the reader become aware that what the novel has actually been elaborating is a realistic, even naturalistic kind of fairy tale, not from the traditional point of view of the girl and future princess but from that of the prince, who, moreover, does not appear as the girl's handsome saviour, but as the one who is saved himself through the fortunes of the American millionaire's daughter Imma.

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[1]   Thomas Mann, *Königliche Hoheit* (Berlin: Fischer, 1909), "The scene is the Albrechtsstraße, the main artery of the capital, which runs from Albrechtsplatz and the Old Schloss to the barracks of the Fusiliers of the Guard. The time is noon on an ordinary week-day; the season of the year does not matter. The weather is fair to moderate. It is not raining, but the sky is not clear; it is a uniform light grey, uninteresting and sombre, and the street lies in a dull and sober light which robs it of all mystery, all individuality. There is a moderate amount of traffic, without much noise and crowd, corresponding to the not over-busy character of the town. Tram-cars glide past, a cab or two rolls by, along the pavement stroll a few residents, colourless folk, passers-by, the public—'people.'" Thomas Mann, *Royal Highness*, trans. A. Cecil Curtis, `http://www.gutenberg.org/files/36028/36028-h/36028-h.htm`, Accessed online (Gutenberg project): 2018-12-24, New York, 1909.

Revisiting these opening sentences, the reader might realize that such a reading had been hinted at from the very outset. The opening phrase now becomes a clear allusion to the stereotypical *Es war einmal*. While the scene is moved here from an indefinite past to the present (Es ist) and from an undetermined time and world to an all too specific place (*auf der Albrechtsstraße...*), the indistinctness that characterizes the fairy tale world has not disappeared altogether. Rather, it has been transposed into the description itself. The entire paragraph emanates indeterminacy, haziness, boredom. Everything remains unresolved, vague, in-between (*unbestimmt*). Even the precise location (*auf der Albrechtsstraße, jener Verkehrsader...*) loses its exactness and becomes blurred in the fog of these sentences – which of the many German '*Albrechtsstraßen*'?

The writer achieves this haziness through several techniques. To begin with, these sentences do not have a *true subject*. In three instances, they open with the undetermined adverb that also introduces many a fairy tale: *Es ist, Es regnet nicht, Es herrscht*. If there is a subject, it is in the neuter gender (*das Wetter*), in the plural (*Trambahnwagen*, *ein paar Droschken*), or so generic that it cannot be 'subjectivized' and remains impersonal (*der Himmel, die Straße*). But even that which is described remains undetermined. It is around noon on an unspecified day during one season or another. The weather is dry but grey, nothing out of the ordinary. The streetlights cast a dim glimmer on a road that offers nothing exciting, where everything seems to move in a dull monotony. The 'climax' is reached in the paragraph's final words. The focus falls on the human beings moving along the street. They are a bunch of residents, colourless folk, passing, public, people.[2]

One could say that this ultimate greyness that is evoked here forms the strongest possible opposition to the more typical fairy tale opening. Mann plays with this tension throughout his entire novel. As such, this opening paragraph is a masterpiece of the writer's skill. In fact, throughout this entire paragraph Mann is simply varying on one and the same theme, expressed by the first true adjective that appears: *gleichgültig*. It is immediately echoed in its quasi-synonym, *indifferent*, and then elaborated in almost every sense. As the German word means both 'uninterested' and 'irrelevant', both senses start to overlap, giving the reader the impression that in a place so insignificant and mediocre no story of any significance could ever develop. Not more significant, anyway, than a fairy tale.

Thomas Mann's practice to constantly reformulate the sense of a specific word is nothing more than the highly artistic and sophisticated application of an old school technique, known as *copia verborum*, which for centuries formed a basic constituent of every teaching curriculum. Erasmus dedicated an entire treatise to this technique (1512), intended as a manual for Latin students to develop their language skills, and offering them a huge catalogue of variations on a range of themes, expressions, and words. It is therefore no coincidence that writers who were trained in the technique of *copia verborum* would also apply it within their own writing throughout the centuries, with comparable results. The following excerpt from the second book of Milton's *Paradise Lost* offers another illustration.

> Which when Beelzebub perceiv'd, then whom,
> Satan except, none higher sat, with grave
> Aspect he rose, and in his rising seem'd
> A Pillar of State; deep on his Front engraven

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[2]   The English translation tries to handle this ultimate greyness but fails in doing so as it cannot take over the conscious use of the neuter gender that gives the German its indeterminacy, even where concrete things are described as the telling *Einwohnerschaft* that, moreover, does not just move but 'moves itself' (*sich bewegt*). For this reason, I have referred to the German text only.

Deliberation sat and public care;
And Princely counsel in his face yet shon,
Majestic though in ruin: sage he stood
With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
The weight of mightiest Monarchies; his look
Drew audience and attention still as Night
Or Summers Noon-tide air, while thus he spake.[3]

The passage describes Beelzebub rising from his seat before speaking in Satan's council. As in the excerpt from Mann's novel, it is the first adjective that sets the tone for all the verses that follow. Beelzebub's graveness is elaborated in epic similes ("a pillar of State," "night or summers noon-tide air"), in personifications of his expression ("on his front deliberation sat, princely counsel shon"), in epic allusions ("with Atlantean shoulders"), in the description of his bearings ("he rose, in his rising seemed, sage he stood, shoulders fit to bear the weight of mightiest monarchies, his look drew still") or in more simple descriptors ("deep engraven, majestic, sage"). Even though the genre and function of this text ask for a different approach, Milton's technique is fundamentally the same as Mann's: a descriptive adjective is elaborated upon and spun out over a longer fragment as a variation on the same theme.

Both Mann and Milton use this technique as a subsidiary tool in order to evoke the suggestive description of either a setting or a character. It can be applied also as a more structural element of a text. In the *Anticlaudianus* by Alain de Lille († 1203?), Nature convenes a meeting with her sisters in order to discuss her project of creating a New Human. The text offers extensive descriptions of the different members of Nature's council taking the floor. These descriptions do much more than just framing the narrative; they indicate how the figures embody the meaning of their very names. Prudentia, the heroine of the first part of the epic, is one of the most broadly represented speakers. Everything about her is in harmony: her hair, the arches of her eyebrows, the colour on her face, her breasts and her limbs, her dress.[4] But this harmony is not a natural one as it is in the appearance of her sister Concordia, whose hair remains kempt without any difficulty.[5] Prudentia needs to rely on tools and her own efforts to attain this equilibrium: her hair is submitted to the 'rule' of her comb (*regula pectinis*) and kept in place with a hairpin (*acus*). Prudentia is the personification of discernment, which implies mental action as opposed to Concordia's representation of natural harmony. Every element thus builds upon the sense of Prudentia's name, making the text into the picture of her personality as the central character of the poem.[6]

The example of the *Synonyma* by Isidor of Sevilla († 636) demonstrates that the technique of *copia verborum* can even be the main constitutive element of a text. Starting from a clear Biblical allusion, Isidor develops an extensive dialogue between Suffering Man and Reason, always varying upon the preceding sentence. Consequently, the poem is characterized by

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[3] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1674, repr. 1938), II. 299-309.

[4] *Anticlaudianus* I.270-315. Notably in the opening verses of her presentation, words for modesty and equilibrium abound: *gestus modesti* (I.270), *circumscripta modum* (I.271), *mediata refrenat* (I.272), *regula pectinis* (I.273), *ordo – iusto libramine* (I.274), *nec nimis – nec multa* (I.275). Alain de Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, ed. Robert Bossuat (Paris: Vrin, 1955); see Wim Verbaal, "*discretionis libra*: with the scales of discernment. Allegorical Poetics and Alan of Lille's Concealment of Etymologia," in *Etymology and Wordplay in Medieval Literature*, ed. Mikael Males, Disputatio 30 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 45–81.

[5] *Anticlaudianus* II.169-173.

[6] This is not to imply that her image is vividly evoked in the manner of a more traditional description or *ekphrasis* likewise a school exercise. Alain's figures remain abstract personalities and his descriptions elude all imaginative representation.

an extremely high poetic expressivity and a strong meditative force, as the opening lines illustrate:

> Anima mea in angustiis est,
> spiritus meus aestuat,
> cor meum fluctuat.
> Angustia animi possidet me,
> angustia animi affliget me.
> Circumdatus sum omnibus malis,
> circumseptis aerumnis,
> circumclusis adversis,
> obsitus miseriis,
> opertus infelicitate,
> oppressus angustiis.
> Non reperio uspiam tanti mali perfugium,
> tanti doloris non invenio argumentum.
> Evadendae calamitatis indicia non comprehendo,
> minuendi doloris argumenta non colligo,
> effugiendi funeris vestigia non invenio.
> Ubique me infelicitas mea persequitur,
> domi forisque mea calamitas me non deserit.[7]

It is as if the text unfolds under the reader's eye and during the reading process. The educational work organically grows into a poem, seemingly in collaboration with the reader who starts filling in the new elements and thus meditates along the lines of the poem. From school exercise to poem to meditative self-reflexion: Isidor gets the most out of the technique he had learned as a boy and had also taught at the schools himself.

The World in Literature

Isidor and Thomas Mann have more than one and a half millennium between them. However, *copia verborum* had already been around for much longer, applied for instance by Apuleius (second century CE),[8] discussed by Roman grammarians and rhetoricians,[9]

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[7] Isidor of Sevilla, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Synonyma*, ed. Jacques Elfassi, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 111B (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), I.5, 4. "My soul is in anguish (Baruch 3.1), / my spirit glows, / my heart falters. / The anguish of my heart possesses me, / the anguish of my heart torments me. / I am surrounded by all evil, / enclosed by need, / shut in by misfortune, / barred in by adversity, / immersed in misery, / oppressed by anguish. / Nowhere can I find refuge from all this evil, / discover a reason for all this pain. / I do not touch upon signs that the disaster will pass, / nor perceive any proofs that the pain will cease, / nor do I find the indications that I will escape death. / Everywhere, my misery pursues me, / at home nor outdoors, my disaster leaves me alone." All translations are mine, unless when indicated differently.

[8] His *Metamorphoses* give ample examples of the technique, most of them highly playful and often very complicated. See *Met.* II.8 for a wonderful example on the beauty of hair. Apuleius of Madaura, *Metamorphoses*, ed. J. Arthur Hanson, Loeb, 44/453 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996–2001).

[9] See the probably third-century Aquila Romanus in his *figuris sententiarum et elocutionis liber* 44. Aquila Romanus, *De figuris sententiarum et elocutionis Liber*, ed. Carl Felix Halm (Leipzig: Teubner, 1863), 22–37.

elaborated on by Quintilian (first century CE)[10] and emphasized by Cicero († 44 BCE).[11] Indeed, the technique is one of the most recurrent and enduring elements in the history of European literature. But it is not the only one. Till very recently, school exercises also entailed various kinds of standardized descriptions: of persons, of objects, of art works, of places. Students were also trained in paraphrasing, abbreviating, amplifications, versifications or prosifications (conversion into prose), personifications (*prosopopoeia*), and characterizations through speech (*ethopoeia*). As is the case with *copia verborum*, these techniques had a broad range of applications throughout the centuries and in many literary genres.

All these techniques seem to be of a rather universal nature. For instance, repetition and variation occur in various different poetics. A central feature of Biblical poetry is precisely the repetition of elements with slight variations, which add a slow but steady dynamism to the poetical progression.[12] Old Mesopotamian poetry is characterized by a strong use of repetition that in most versions of the epic of Gilgamesh seems to serve clear poetic exigencies.[13] Likewise, Japanese, Persian and Arabic literature both display repetition and break it down in various highly stylized literary forms.[14]

Yet, in spite of this apparently universal characteristic of repetition as a poetical technique,[15] it would be impossible to define a general rule that might cover all of its different applications and purposes. There may exist some overlap in its use in different literary traditions but the exact way it is applied is always determined by the rules of each individual literary culture. This brings us to the heart of one of the central ongoing debates in literary theory.

It is clear that the field of literary studies has undergone a radical paradigm shift. Over the last half of the previous century, a predominantly text-focused approach (in New Criticism, Structuralism, Narratology, and Deconstruction to a certain degree) gave way to more contextualized readings (in Deconstruction, New Historicism, Post-Colonialism,

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[10] In his *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian dedicates the first paragraph of the tenth book to the *copia verborum*. It contains a famous list of books to read. Quintilianus, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

[11] Cicero's attitude is somewhat more difficult to understand. In his *De oratore* III.125, he makes Crassus explain how the topic itself has to evoke the words in all their abundance, while in his *Tusculanae* III.30 he attacks the Stoics for their toying around with *copia verborum* without ever explaining what they exactly mean. Cicero, *Tusculanes*, ed. Georges Fohlen, trans. Jules Humbert (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1931); Cicero, *De oratore*, ed. Kazimierz Feliks Kumaniecki (Leipzig: Teubner, 1969).

[12] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

[13] Mostly assumed to be the remnants of oral traditions, the repetitive fragments in the Gilgamesh epic actually seem quite deliberate, well-chosen and clearly embedded within the storyline. The most striking examples are the two travel stories, the first to the Cedar Forest characterized by its repetitive order (preparation of the resting-place, sleep, dream, awakening, recounting the dream, explanation) and the second through the Twin Mountains in continuous darkness, that is described in ten identical strophes in which only the hours of walking change.

[14] Makoto Ueda, "The Taxonomy of Sequence. Basic Patterns of Structure in Premodern Japanese Literature," in *Principles of Classical Japanese Literature*, ed. Earl Miner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 63–105; David Bialock, "Voice, Text, and The Question of Poetic Borrowing in Late Classical Japanese Poetry," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54, no. 1 (1994): 181–231; James T. Monroe, "Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry," in *Early Islamic Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009), 1–53; R. Khabazha, "Repetition and the Style of Sheikh Bahayi's Poetry," *Journal of Stylistic of Persian Poem and Prose (Bahar-e-Adab)* 7, no. 1 (2010): 141–56; Mohammed Amir Masshadi and Zahra Taheri, "Repetition and Association, Nezami's Style Feature in Khosrow and Shirin," *Journal of Stylistic of Persian Poem and Prose (Bahar-e-Adab)* 6, no. 2 (2010): 363–81.

[15] Anna Christina Ribeiro, "Intending to Repeat: A Definition of Poetry," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 2 (2007): 189–201.

Feminism, Gender Studies, Ecocriticism, Critical Discourse Analysis) with a focus on power relations and the manipulation of the (textual/literary) message. Rather than being a true revolution that shook the foundations of the field of literary studies, this shift entailed a change in focus from the object (text) to its users (readers) and surroundings (societal mechanisms and positions). The research topic remained what it still is, namely that what is traditionally called 'literature' in its Western European definition. To this day, Western European notions of what constitutes 'literature' still very much inform and dominate literary studies, even if it is the target of critical or violent reaction. Whenever it is opposed to other, non-European traditions and confronted with other, non-European concepts, these were already often redefined in order to meet the Western concept of literature.[16]

This is not to say, however, that the privileged position of Western European literature is taken for granted in academic and literary debates. Critics have doubted whether it is still possible to speak of 'literature' as an innocent (Western) European conceptual category.[17] In a similar way, criticism has brought to view of the concept of 'world literature', a translation of Goethe's concept *Weltliteratur*,[18] which has entered the field of literary studies in the past two decades, in the wake of the traumatic events of 9/11,[19] mass migrations, and digitalization, and in direct response to the problems of climate change and global warming. More than ever, the study of 'world literature' implies the critical investigation of the notion of 'literature' itself,[20] questioning the supposed 'Europeanness' of literature, which is still too often taken for granted as "a tautology in terms."[21] This implies the redefinition, if not reinvention, of the concept of 'literature' and its connection to if not altogether its incorporation of Europe.

The discussion usually concentrates on the first element in the category: what is meant by *world* literature? Is it the same as transnational literature?[22] This would oppose it to national literatures, which seems to be implied by Casanova's notion of a 'world literary space.'[23] But

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[16]   "In this respect (i.e. regarding "the ideological agenda of the notion of literature, whose worldwide diffusion follows the route mapped out by nation-states"), the resemantization in the course of the nineteenth century of Arabic *'adab*, Japanese *hungaku*, Russian *literatura*, or Greek *logotehnia* in order to translate the European concept of literature is eloquent." César Dominguez, "Medieval Literatures as a Challenge to Comparative Literature. A Reflection on Non-National Cultural Formations," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 31, no. 4 (2004): 407, n. 17.

[17]   Roberto M. Dainotto, "World Literature and European Literature," in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), 425.

[18]   Letter to Streckfuss on Januari 27, 1827: "Ich bin überzeugt daß eine Weltliteratur sich bilde, daß alle Nationen dazu geneigt sind und deshalb freundliche Schritte thun. Der Deutsche kann und soll hier am meisten wirken, er wird eine schöne Rolle bey diesem großen Zusammentreten zu spielen haben." (I am convinced that a world literature is in process of formation, that all nations are inclined to it and for that reason take friendly steps. The German is capable and even ought to do most in this respect; he will have a nice part to play in this great gathering.) Goethe's preoccupation with the concept of *Weltliteratur* in these years becomes clear from several sources, among them Eckermann's conversations: David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton/London: Princeton University Press, 2003), 6–14.

[19]   Schoene in César Dominguez, "World Literature and Cosmopolitanism," in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), 246.

[20]   It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that the concept of world literature is lacking in Bertens' concise but excellent introduction to literary theory. Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory. The Basics* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008).

[21]   Dainotto, "World Literature and European Literature," 425.

[22]   Sandra Bermann, "World Literature and Comparative Literature," in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), 172.

[23]   Pascale Casanova, "Literature as a World," *New Left Review* 31 (2005): 72.

it could also be understood as a conglomeration of all national (and regional and ethnic) 'literary' activities, through which individual groups try to guarantee their existence. On the other hand, 'world literature' may also be understood as 'global' or 'globalized', i.e. something that is subjected to 'globalization' and therefore 'a global phenomenon.' This would imply that 'literature' has become a worldwide event, something like a global 'postcolonial bazaar.'[24] It is unclear to what extent 'world literature' should be understood in its initial meaning conceived by Goethe, namely in its universalist sense,[25] or should be taken in its cumulative meaning as used by others.[26]

Be that as it may, the discussions on how to define or delimit the 'world' in 'world literature' are clearly distinct from the debates that dominated the last decades of the previous century. In the latter, the common denominator, one could say, was anti-imperialistic. At stake was the liberation from what was commonly seen as the dominant *habitus* that had itself imposed upon or 'colonized' the 'other': the non-male, the non-heterosexual, the non-white, the non-Western, the non-productive. At the same time, the goal was to achieve the right to express one's individual identity (as opposed to the common 'norm'). The result was a diversification of literary identities.[27]

The 'world literature' discussions, on the contrary, betray to a certain extent an opposite dynamic: how could the ever-increasing diversification of voices in 'literature' be ascertained in a time of globalization, in which it simultaneously runs the risk of being subjected to uniformization, thanks to mass production and mass consumption? How could polyphonies and polyvalences in 'literature' be preserved without the loss of the common ground, the *raison-d'être* that makes them recognizable as belonging to 'literature'? Essentially, these questions all relate to the quintessential problem of literary studies: what to make of the cultural category that we are used to label as 'literature'? Are we allowed to see literature as 'European' in terms of the tautology mentioned above?

Literary Universes

> The standard fate of an influential literature is to be naturalized and, often, surpassed in other lands. What is unique about the present is the playing out of this phenomenon on a world-wide scale. Hence the central irony of European literary history. We can accordingly return to the admittedly maddening definition of the dynamic of European literary history [...]: *European literature may be defined as the literatures of medieval Latin Christendom's self-constitution as such, of their chosen predecessors, of their successors, of those successors' chosen predecessors, of the cultures deeply influenced by those successors, of their chosen predecessors, and so on.* [...] This formulation has the potential for infinite extension that eventually issues in the self-abolishing

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[24] Bishnupriya Ghosh, *The Postcolonial Bazaar: Thoughts on Teaching the Market in Postcolonial Objects*, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/27687, Accessed online: 2019-04-14, 1998; quoted in Russell McDougall, "The 'New' World Literature: A Review Essay," *Transnational Literature* 6, no. 2 (2014): 8.

[25] Monika Schmitz-Emans, "Richard Meyer's Concept of World Literature," in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), 50; Christopher Prendergast, "Negotiating World Literature," *New Left Review* 8 (2001): 100.

[26] Sarah Lawall, "Richard Moulton and the 'Perspective Attitude' in World Literature," in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), 32–40.

[27] The resurgence of right wing identitary movements during the last decades fits with this tendency. They identify themselves, however, with precisely the identity that was previously dominant but is now under attack.

contradiction we have just observed. If everything is European literature, what is European literature?[28]

The closing question in the quotation above can also be posed from the opposite side: if everything is European literature, what should then be understood as Japanese or Lebanese or Bengali or Australian or... literature?[29] Must we consider this apparent lack of identity/ identities as the inevitable consequence of the emergence of what we have come to call 'world literature'? This, however, would contradict the observation that we made in the beginning, namely that certain literary techniques are used in a distinct way within the tradition that is normally seen as European and within those traditions that are considered to be 'different'. A similar distinction between 'European' and 'other' literatures seems to conflict with the general notion of world literature.[30] It brings us in a state of aporia, resulting from the fact that we might have overlooked something in our discussions on the concepts of *world* (and) *literature*.

Indeed, most of the discussions attack the problems from a more or less contemporary point of view, leaving aside the vertical dimension, i.e. a form of historicity.[31] Even if the historical dimension is taken into account, discussions usually convey a predominantly evolutionary perspective, suggesting that literary history implies somehow a unilinear natural ramification ("the phylogenetic tree derived from Darwin"[32]), based upon the central trunk that is formed by the undefined concept of 'literature'. More 'systemic' approaches, on the other hand, seem to be characterized by a rigidity, overlooking the elasticity that literature and literary history exhibit through their continuous dialogues with earlier and other traditions, contexts and themselves.

Cohen's 'maddening' definition, on the contrary, brings in dynamics that are, in fact, very similar, both on a vertical and horizontal axe. It captures the fact that literature can never be considered as a network of fixed relationships. Neither can it be understood as a unilinear historical evolutionary movement. Literature does not behave as a system within which everything passes through connections that are somehow preconditioned or calculable. If I should compare it to anything, I would rather refer to the literary field as resembling a universe, or even better, a universe of universes, perhaps even a 'multiverse'.

Approaching 'literature' as a universe has several implications that might help us to get out of all too rigid predetermined conceptualizations. A universe is a unit of space and time or an amount of energy that consists of or contains elements that might be considered smaller sub-units or sub-universes. These sub-universes, however, may also be seen as openings towards other universes that display similar characteristics but that can also be entirely different. Moreover, a universe is no rigid or stable unit but rather expands and contracts with time according to forces that can undergo fundamental changes themselves or that can change

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[28] Walter Cohen, *A History of European Literature. The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 492, emphasis by the author.

[29] "Other literatures have had to try to reposition themselves in world literary space, for other reasons, with varying degrees of success. Time will tell whether Australian Literature can make the difference, either to World Literature, or to itself." McDougall, "'New' World Literature," 10; for Japanese, Russian and Arabic, see also Dominguez, "Medieval Literatures," 407, n. 17.

[30] This seems to be the background of the criticisms by Apter when she posits the untranslatable as literary category and criterium in Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (New York: Verso, 2013).

[31] Helena Carvalhão Buesco, "Pascale Casanova and the Republic of Letters," in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), 131.

[32] Ibid.

within the constellation they belong to. Because of similar internal dynamics and because of the potential of the parallel existences of distinct or alternate ones, the concept of universe lends itself very well to the study of literature(s) on a level that transcends but simultaneously incorporates the individual concrete works.[33] The metaphor of the literary universe may help to define and distinguish some crucial elements that in recent discussions on world literature have tended to coalesce into an incomprehensible amalgam.

As mentioned above, a universe obeys to a coherent constellation of laws, rules and forces that may be typical for this particular universe and do not need to overlap with those that rule another, parallel or even crossing one. Although such a view may lead to a nihilist perspective with the danger of ending up with an understanding and application of the term 'globalization' in its uniformizing aspect, it may be illuminating to conceptualize 'literature' as a unit that is submitted to rules and forces of which each individually need not be typical for this literary universe. In their specific constellation, however, they may delineate its possibilities and form. Thus they can help literary scholars to get a firmer grip on what actually happens in the domain of literary history and literary interactions. The metaphor points first of all to the necessity of gaining insight into the forces that determine the literary tradition under study. Besides, it posits the element of dialogue at the meeting points of different universes and thus at the interfaces of different constellations of forces.

Therefore, when focusing upon a specific literary universe, the literary scholar might explore its properties in depth, i.e. the formative forces/rules/laws which contributed to make this literary universe into a literature that distinguishes itself from other literary universes. One has to confront the problem of the formative forces within a literary universe: which are the rules/laws/forces/aspects—whatever name might be preferred in order to characterize them, either more inclined towards the applied sciences or more towards an open approach without any attempt to prescriptive abstraction—that create and form the specific literary universe of a language?[34]

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[33] I take the concept of universe from the introductory chapter to Marinus Burcht Pranger, *Eternity's Ennui. Temporality, Perseverance and Voice in Augustine and Western Literature* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 1-2. The multiverse-theory that posits the existence of parallel universes and/or multiple worlds has been applied frequently in literary genres, most notably science fiction and fantasy, and thus also in studies of these literary forms. But it seems to have been neglected in theories and studies on literature itself. The following is a first concise attempt, distilled from a more elaborate treatment that I plan to publish in a work on the literary history of medieval Latin literature.

[34] The focus on language may help to disrupt the still prevalent national perspective. The identitary link between literature and nation was born and expressed repeatedly in the early nineteenth century. As an example may count Wolfgang Menzel's statement from 1832: "Die Philosophen sagen so: keine Literatur ohne Volk, kein Volk ohne Geschichte, keine Geschichte ohne Philosophie." (The philosophers say: no literature without nation, no nation without history, no history without philosophy," with 'Volk' clearly in the meaning of 'nation'.) Wolfgang Menzel, "Literatur-Geschichte 4: Lehrbuch der Literaturgeschichte von Dr. Ludwig Wachler. Zweite verbesserte Auflage. Leipzig, Barth, 1830," *Literaturblatt* 100 (1832): 400. Remarkably enough, a post-modern literary historian as Denis Hollier expresses a similar opinion in the introduction to his *A New History of French Literature*: "National borders are not the only ones dividing literature. [...] literature's production and consumption remain for the most part shaped by the nonuniversality of languages." Denis Hollier, ed., "A New History of French Literature" (Cambridge, MA/Londen: Harvard University Press, 1989), xxi. This was formulated in an even stronger way in the French edition of 1993: "Il en va de même pour la littérature, qui exige un espace divisé par des frontières. [...] Cet ancrage linguistique est à l'origine du postulat selon lequel un historien de la littérature doit partager la lange de son objet: l'histoire d'une littérature doit être écrite 'de dedans'." (The same is true for literature that needs a space divided by borders. [...] This linguistic embedding of literature leads to the statement that a literary historian must by necessity share the language of his object: the history of a literature has to been written 'from inside'.) Denis Hollier, ed., "De la littérature française" (Paris: Bordas, 1993), xxi.

When dealing with a literary universe that displays not only a spatial but also a temporal magnitude, however, it is impossible to get a restricted number of aspects/forces/concepts that are invariably formative for the literary universe of a specific language. Changes, shifts of emphasis, even inversions that often result from the interaction and dialogue with other literary universes, have to be taken into consideration either in the past or in the present. Yet, some features seem more fundamental to the literary universe of one language than to other ones. They are not unchangeable but constitute the *cruces* around which a specific literary universe is formed. In my opinion, the identification and analysis of these *cruces* for the literary universe of a language seems to constitute the most important task of the modern literary historian. A comparative approach, then, seems inevitable in order to understand the different forces at work in different literary universes. But is the actual field of comparative literature not focused too specifically on the comparison of narrative developments or the use of universal themes, to the relative neglect of the formative forces that produce each individual literature, as also suggested for instance by Longxi?[35]

Literature, Schools and the World

Considering the concept of 'literature' as referring to the interactions between different constellations of formative forces will open a scholarly perspective that tries to analyse how each individual literary work takes its form within the specific constellation it belongs to. Does it so by obeying or, on the contrary, by opposing the specific 'laws'? An approach such as this might help to entangle some of the terms and concepts that often obscure discussions within the fields of literary studies. One of the most complicated terminological questions that is essential to our objective is the problem of the equation of world literature and cosmopolitan literature.

The confusion surrounding the meaning of the concept of world literature is a constant in scholarly literature. Neither Damrosch's very readable and sympathetic treatment of the topic nor the highly sophisticated collection in the *Routledge Companion* offers a satisfactory solution. Alongside many valuable insights into the features of the concept of world literature, Damrosch's treatment ultimately leaves one confused. For world literature is taken "to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" but "is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discourses alike."[36] In Damrosch's view, world literature thus comprises both the sum of all literary works that have been translated (and are then effective in their new surroundings) and a way of reading. It is both a product and a reception, both a thing and an attitude. Moreover, it is vast and indeterminable and yet not infinite and ungraspable.

In addition, Damrosch defines world literature as highly subjective and personal: "I have given you *my* world literature, or at least a representative cross-section of it, while recognizing that the world now presents us with material so varied as to call into question any logic of representation, any single framework that everyone should adopt and in which these particular works would all have a central role. A leading characteristic of world literature today is its variability: different readers will be obsessed by very different constellations of texts."[37] The *Routledge Companion* does not do much better. It does not

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[35]   Zhang Longxi, "The Relevance of *Weltliteratur*," *Poetica* 45, nos. 3-4 (2013–2014): 242.
[36]   Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, see specifically 4 and 5.
[37]   Ibid., 281, my emphasis.

offer an attempt to define or circumscribe its central concept.[38]

Studies in world literature ought to focus, in my opinion, not only on those works that have the luck of being translated, which in our globalized economical and politic world strongly depends on power relations.[39] Its primary object should be the interactions and dialogues between different literary universes. What are the interfaces, the intersections, and the overlaps? How do the formative forces of each literary universe collapse, collaborate, and break up? What is the result of the confrontation of literary universes? Does it result in a new constellation, obeying to a new set of forces that create a new literary universe? The study of world literature should be an analytical science that surpasses the national one on which it is founded. Ideally, it combines both close and distant reading in order to uncover the forces that determine a specific literary universe while also tracing its changes over time and in space.

A fundamental task for the scholar in world literature, or rather in the literary field itself, must therefore be to gain a better understanding of the nature of specific literary universes. And here I return to the observations made at the beginning of this article. When perceiving the various appearances of *copia verborum* throughout the centuries of (Western) European literature and noticing 1) the similarity of the technical rules that seem to govern them and 2) their distinctive application in various other literary traditions, some kind of common background may be hypothesized - in this case, one that gives (Western-)European literature its unmistakable identity. Although the literary universe of each individual writer is ultimately clearly different from that of other ones, there is something that links Thomas Mann to Isidor of Sevilla, Alain de Lille to John Milton and makes them all go back to similar literary techniques. This common background is, of course, the school.

Since the instalment in Roman Antiquity of the school as a public institution, even to a certain degree supervised by the state, school practices in the West, implying both curriculum and exercises, show a remarkable consistency. After it had disappeared together with the Roman Empire, Charlemagne reintroduced classical education on the continent in its British form. Mirroring ancient times, Charlemagne's concern was political and thus essentially secular. Even though teaching came to be provided in religious institutions and by monks (later bishops and canons), the curriculum remained rooted in the classical, constituted by classical pagan texts, mostly the poets, and built upon classical exercises. In spite of the manifold changes and adaptations in the school systems during the centuries that followed the Carolingian re-instalment of classical education (the expansion and academization of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the humanist return to the basics, the Jesuit unification), its fundament does not seem to have undergone any radical change till the last century. The particularity of the school system (with its pagan and Christian aspects, its secular and religious institutions, its poetical means and practical goals) and its impact can be considered the spine that runs through the history of Western European literature and somehow connects the most different and diverse writers and texts.

This unity is reinforced by the fact that schooling in Western Europe was not only based upon a fairly continuous curriculum and text corpus but was also provided until quite recently in one classical language, Latin. As a language that was nobody's mother tongue, Latin had to be learned at school. Knowing Latin and being schooled became synonymous. Moreover, Latin was almost the only written language for centuries. Consequently, writing, school and

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[38] Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir, "Preface. *Weltliteratur, littérature universelle, Vishwa sahitya...*," in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), xviii.

[39] Apter, *Against World Literature*.

Latin came to form an inextricable unity. This gave rise to a literary universe that was closed in itself and that shaped to a large extent the literary universes that emancipated themselves from it. Discussing the effect of a school exercise such as *copia verborum*, we have to realize that we are dealing with a Latin school exercise.

Latin has to be considered the *cosmopolitan* language of the literary universe of Western Europe, which implies that Latin literature is a *cosmopolitan* literature. The same goes for classical Arabic in the literary universe of the Islamic world, Sanskrit in Southern Asia, classical Chinese in Eastern Asia and (Byzantine) Greek in Eastern Europe. French certainly took over in Western Europe (and beyond) from the thirteenth to fifteenth and from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. English is doing it today, perhaps. Importantly, 'cosmopolitan' language or literature is not equivalent to a 'world' language or literature, as many scholars seem to imply, heaping together notions of world, globalization and cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan is the language and the literature that forms a literary universe in itself, that obeys to its own rules and forces, but that at the same time is also formative to other literary universes. To explain what I mean, I return to an example from the literary universe of Latin.

As a language of both schooling and liturgy—which may have been the actual reason for establishing a Latin curriculum in Anglo-Saxon Brittany—Latin almost inevitably became 'a language of truth,' both the didactic truth in the context of schools and the religious truth in the hands of the Church. Writing in 'a language of truth' has some significant implications. One could wonder, for instance, if it is possible to 'lie' in a language of truth, i.e. to tell things that are 'untrue'? Typically, Latin literature of the Early and High Middle Ages is characterized by the complete absence of fiction and wherever fictive topics are treated, they are almost always presented as truthful, either explicitly or implicitly by the literary form they take (epic, history, treatise...).[40] Remarkably, simultaneously with the emergence and bloom of literatures in the vernaculars (all of them 'mother tongues', unlike Latin) during the twelfth century true fiction appears as well. Apparently, the new vernacular literatures adopt a space that was not covered by the Latin universe. It is from here that they start to rival and to conquer the cosmopolitan universe of Latin. Thus, only with the rise of new literatures, fiction begins to penetrate the Latin universe.[41]

A last concise example may suffice to demonstrate how a more flexible and open approach to literature as a dynamic constellation of forces allows one to have a less rigid view on literary changes, both as they took place in the past and are occurring before our very eyes. An approach such as this may help scholars to transcend the comparatist dead end as soon as it limits its focus to influence and reception because this perspective is mostly defined by a nationalist point of view.[42] It could also challenge and undermine the almost inherently Eurocentric approach in all literary studies, which is tacitly implied by the aforementioned tautology 'European literature.' For, although my approach is inextricably linked to my own scholarly background as European and Latinist, it should be evident that its underlying principles are not restricted to a Eurocentric point of view. On the contrary, all literary universes have to deal with the aspect of schooling, certainly those that were influenced by literature(s) in a cosmopolitan language in one or other stage of their history, because every cosmopolitan language is a language that needs to be acquired through study. Schools

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[40] Wim Verbaal, "Medieval Epicity and the Deconstruction of Classical Epic," in *Structures of Epic Poetry Poetry III: Continuity*, ed. Christiane Reitz and Simone Finkmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), forthcoming.

[41] Dennis Howard Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150-1220* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[42] Longxi, "Relevance of *Weltliteratur*," 242-243.

are therefore essential to understanding the literary constellations that proceed from it. But school systems differ for each of the aforementioned universes. A clear insight into the impact of school curricula and its literary exercises will yield a deeper understanding of how literary universes are formed and how they react to external influences. It might help us as scholars to see both what happened in the past and what is happening right now. In addition, it can prevent us from getting lost in the complex dynamics of globalization and uniformization, or from getting stuck in reactionary nationalism, which looks for identities where they ought not be found.

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