

# Recherche littéraire Literary Research



35

Automne | Fall 2019



PETER LANG



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# Recherche littéraire/Literary Research

Automne / Fall 2019



**PETER LANG**

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## **Recherche littéraire / Literary Research**

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En tant que publication de l'Association internationale de littérature comparée, la revue bilingue Recherche littéraire / Literary Research a pour but de faire connaître aux comparatistes du monde entier les développements récents de la discipline. Dans ce but, la revue publie des comptes rendus de livres significatifs sur des sujets comparatistes ainsi que des essais critiques dressant l'état des lieux dans un domaine particulier de la littérature comparée. RL/LR publie de la recherche littéraire comparée sur invitation uniquement.

As a publication of the International Comparative Literature Association, the bilingual journal Recherche littéraire / Literary Research has the mission of informing comparative literature scholars worldwide of recent contributions to the field. To that end, it publishes reviews of noteworthy books on comparative topics as well as review essays discussing recent research developments in particular sub-fields of the discipline. RL/LR publishes comparative literary scholarship by invitation only.

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## Announcement

*Recherche Littéraire/Literary Research* congratulates Diana Looser, winner of the Marlish Thiersch Prize 2019 for excellence in research, awarded by the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies (ADSA), for her essay “Theatrical Crossings, Pacific Visions: Gaugin, Meryon, and the Staging of Oceanian Modernities,” published in *Recherche Littéraire/Literary Research* 34 (Été 2018/Summer 2018): 7–42.



## **EDITORIAL**



## The Polyphonic Voices of Comparative Literary Studies

The 2019 issue of *Literary Research* foregrounds the polyphonic diversity typifying the current configurations of comparative literary studies. Such an array of perspectives can immediately be perceived in the first section of this issue, comprised of three scholarly essays reflecting their authors' cutting-edge research in progress. In the opening essay, "What Does a Classic *Do*? Tapping the Powers of Comparative Phenomenology of the Classic/al," Wiebke Denecke embarks on what she calls a "comparative historical phenomenology of the classic/al and of classicisms" (54). She examines our current anxieties about the classic/al by drawing on examples from ancient Greek, Roman, Chinese, Korean and Japanese societies. She argues that the classic/al may encourage us to come to terms with the nationalisms, fundamentalisms, inequalities and traumas of our age (55). In his contribution, "Poésie diasporique, poésie totale? Devenirs du paradigme avant-gardiste chez Ricardo Aleixo, Ronald Augusto et Nathaniel Mackey," Cyril Vettorato compares Black poets from Brazil and the United States. He subtly shows how their works make it possible to combine representations of Blackness with avant-garde aesthetics. In "Genres as Gateways to the World for Minor Literature: The Case of Crime Fiction in Galicia," César Domínguez focuses on the work of Galician crime fiction author Domingo Villar, whose works can be regarded as instances of world literature. Domínguez carefully examines the thorny translation issues that characterize Villar's crime fiction.

Polyphony also pervades the review essay section of this issue. The two contributions collected here deal with the complex articulations of the growing field of comparative ecocriticism. In "Multiple Convergences: Ecocriticism and Comparative Literary Studies," Jessica Maufort traces how ecocriticism, which originated in American academic circles, has considerably diversified in recent years so as to include studies by postcolonial as well as European scholars respectively. In "La ville moderne et ses mythes: un essai de mise au point," Daniel Acke focuses

on literary depictions of the urban environment, privileging the “myth” of Paris.

The book review section, containing some thirty contributions, includes discussions of titles ranging from the Renaissance to the postmodern period and dealing with various regions of the American and European continents. This section showcases the work of ICLA research committees, as it provides accounts of two recent collections of essays sponsored by the ICLA Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages project: Eva Kushner’s *La Nouvelle Culture*, the second tome in *L’époque de la Renaissance (1400–1600)*, and Thomas A. DuBois and Dan Ringgaard’s *Nordic Literature: A Comparative History, Volume I: Spatial Nodes*. The second volume in the series published by ICLA’s Research Committee on Dreams is also reviewed: Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel’s edited *Theorizing the Dream/Savoirs et theories du rêve*. Further, the titles examined in this section introduce us to Mexican, South African and Filipino material, subjects too infrequently tackled in *Literary Research*. A subsequent cluster of recent books in postcolonial studies is prefaced by a review of Jenni Ramone’s edited *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Postcolonial Writing: New Contexts, New Narratives, New Debates*. By way of conclusion, the book review section deals with two titles in world literature studies, in an echo of Domínguez’s scholarly essay: Delia Ungureanu’s *From Paris to Tlön: Surrealism as World Literature*, as well as Mircea Martin’s edited *Romanian Literature as World Literature*. In the summer of 2019, ICLA will hold its triennial congress in Macau. It is therefore fitting that this volume of *Literary Research* should conclude on several reviews devoted to the 6-volume proceedings of the successful 2013 ICLA congress in Paris.

As of 2019, *Literary Research* will be published by the Brussels branch of Peter Lang. In this regard, I wish to thank Dr. Laurence Pagacz, the publishing director, who greatly facilitated the transition of the journal into its new format. The completion of this issue would not have been possible without the help and encouragements of many colleagues. I am particularly grateful for the useful advice I received from Dorothy Figueira, the immediate past editor, and from the colleagues serving on our advisory board. I owe a debt of gratitude to my dedicated editorial assistants, Jessica Maufort and Samuel Pauwels. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the unflagging financial support of ICLA.

Marc Maufort

Brussels, June 2019

## ÉDITORIAL





## Les voix polyphoniques des études littéraires comparées

Ce numéro de *Recherche littéraire/Literary Research* met en avant la diversité polyphonique qui caractérise les configurations récentes des études littéraires comparées. Une telle richesse de perspectives se manifeste dès la première section de la revue, qui rassemble trois articles scientifiques témoignant de la recherche innovante de leurs auteurs. Dans l'article qui ouvre ce numéro, "What Does a Classic Do? Tapping the Powers of Comparative Phenomenology of the Classic/al," Wiebke Denecke construit "une phénoménologie historique comparée du classique et des classicismes" (54, ma traduction). Elle explore nos anxiétés contemporaines par rapport à la notion du classique, tout en utilisant des exemples issus des sociétés antiques grecque, romaine, chinoise, coréenne et japonaise. Elle défend l'idée que le classique peut nous aider à appréhender les nationalismes, fondamentalismes, inégalités et traumatismes de notre époque (55). Dans son essai, « Poésie diasporique, poésie totale? Devenirs du paradigme avant-gardiste chez Ricardo Aleixo, Ronald Augusto et Nathaniel Mackey », Cyril Vettorato compare des poètes d'origine africaine au Brésil et aux Etats-Unis. Selon lui, les œuvres de ces auteurs associent astucieusement la représentation de l'africanité et l'esthétique avant-gardiste. Dans "Genres as Gateways to the World for Minor Literature: The Case of Crime Fiction in Galicia," César Domínguez se penche sur la production de l'auteur de roman policier galicien Dominguo Villar, dont les œuvres peuvent être considérées comme un exemple de littérature mondiale. Domínguez analyse méticuleusement les questions épineuses de traduction inhérentes à l'oeuvre de Villar.

L'aspect polyphonique caractérise également les essais critiques publiés dans ce numéro. Les deux contributions de cette section traitent des articulations complexes de l'écocritique comparée, un domaine dont l'importance ne cesse de s'accroître. Dans "Multiple Convergences : Ecocriticism and Comparative Literary Studies," Jessica Maufort analyse les tendances actuelles de l'écocritique. Cette discipline, qui vit le jour dans les cercles académiques américains, s'est

considérablement diversifiée ces dernières années grâce aux recherches d'experts tantôt postcoloniaux, tantôt européens. Dans « La ville moderne et ses mythes : un essai de mise au point, » Daniel Acke s'intéresse aux représentations littéraires de l'environnement urbain, tout en privilégiant le « mythe » de Paris.

La section consacrée aux comptes rendus de lecture comprend quelques 30 contributions. Elle est marquée par une grande diversité historique et géographique, incluant des recensions de livres allant de la Renaissance à la période postmoderne, à la fois en Europe et en Amérique. Cette partie du numéro met en exergue le travail des comités de recherche de l'AILC : elle contient des comptes rendus de deux publications récentes du projet d'Histoire Comparée des Littératures de Langues Européennes dirigé par l'AILC: *La Nouvelle Culture*, le second volume du projet *L'époque de la Renaissance (1400–1600)*, dirigé par Eva Kushner, ainsi que *Nordic Literature: A Comparative History, Volume I: Spatial Nodes*, dirigé par Thomas A. DuBois and Dan Ringgaard. Le second volume de la collection publiée par le Comité de Recherche sur le Rêve fait également l'objet d'un compte rendu : *Theorizing the Dream/Savoirs et théories du rêve*, dirigé par Bernard Dieterle et Manfred Engel. Les ouvrages examinés dans cette section nous offrent la possibilité de découvrir les développements scientifiques récents dans les domaines littéraires mexicain, sud-africain et philippin, trop rarement abordés dans ces pages. De plus, la section contient un certain nombre de comptes rendus de monographies relevant des études littéraires postcoloniales, introduits par une recension du collectif de Jenni Ramone, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Postcolonial Writing: New Contexts, New Narratives, New Debates*. En guise de conclusion, la section analyse deux ouvrages traitant de la littérature mondiale, faisant ainsi écho à l'article scientifique de César Domínguez, *From Paris to Tlön: Surrealism as World Literature* par Delia Ungureanu, ainsi que le collectif de Mircea Martin, *Romanian Literature as World Literature*. En 2019, le congrès triennal de l'AILC se tiendra à Macao. Il apparaît donc opportun que ce numéro de *Recherche littéraire* se termine par des comptes rendus des six volumes des actes du remarquable congrès organisé par l'AILC à Paris en 2013.

A partir de 2019, *Recherche littéraire* sera publié par le bureau de Peter Lang à Bruxelles. A cet égard, je tiens à remercier Mme Laurence Pagacz, la directrice éditoriale, qui a assuré une transition des plus harmonieuses. L'achèvement de ce numéro n'aurait pas été possible sans l'aide et les encouragements de nombreux collègues. Je suis tout particulièrement

reconnaissant pour les conseils judicieux qui m'ont été prodigués par Dorothy Figueira, l'ancienne rédactrice, ainsi que par les collègues du comité consultatif. Mes plus vifs remerciements sont destinés à mes assistants éditoriaux, Jessica Maufort et Samuel Pauwels. Enfin, je souhaite exprimer ma gratitude envers l'AILC pour son soutien financier ininterrompu.

Marc Maufort

Bruxelles, juin 2019



**ARTICLES DE RECHERCHE / ARTICLES**



# What Does A Classic Do? Tapping the Powers of a Comparative Phenomenology of the Classic/al

WIEBKE DENECKE

## 1. Variations on a Classical European Question

“What is a Classic?” This question sounds familiar. We might not remember right away what people have said about it, but it is a question that already implies answers. Not any particular one, but a clearly defined arena animated by forces engaged in Titan Wars of cosmic proportions: timeless authority versus historical coincidence or oblivion; the sanctioned canon versus the mere archive; universal relevance versus local parochialism; sanctioned school book text versus ephemeral entertainment tome and so forth. Unlike other big, unanswerable academic questions like “what is philosophy?,” the answer calls for revelations about personal tastes and values, confessions of our innermost cherished convictions. And readers would expect an author with *gravitas*, of a certain age and with a certain life experience, to take on this question. An authoritative author who can equal the authoritativeness of the subject matter. The question is archetypal and highly personal, calling for the autobiographical.

This is at least what three influential grapplings with the question that span the past one-and-a-half centuries have in common. All respondents were literary men of weight at the time, reaching out publicly on this important issue to their contemporaries. The French literary critic, scholar, and writer Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve was in his mid-forties when he published “Qu’est-ce qu’un classique?” in a newspaper column in October of 1850 and was a well-published poet and critic, who had just published his masterly study of the famed Cistercian abbey Port-Royal and its role in the intellectual and religious life of 17th century France. T. S. Eliot was in his mid-fifties and a magnet of literary life in London when in October of 1944 he delivered his presidential address to the Virgil Society on “What is a Classic?,” as German rockets were falling

on London. And J. M. Coetzee was in his early fifties, a celebrated South African novelist, critic, and academic decorated with numerous prizes, when he presented his own “What is a Classic. A Lecture” in 1991 to an audience in the Austrian city of Graz.

Their various answers could not have been more different. One of the most notable points in Sainte-Beuve’s column is that he promotes the concept of a “classic” of European vernacular – rather than classical Greco-Roman – literatures. This is particularly remarkable given his cult of Latinity, his distaste of popular and contemporary literature and his non-democratic views (Prendergast). Taking his readers back to the *locus classicus* of “classicus” as a term for canonical writers, the Latin erudite raconteur Aulus Gellius (2nd cent. CE), he states: “a writer of value and distinction, *classicus assiduusque scriptor*, a writer who is of account, has valuable property, and is not mistaken in the proletarian crowd.” (Sainte-Beuve 39). The Latin root of the word is socio-economic, referring to the land-owning classes of Roman society; it is patrician and anti-proletarian. Gellius applies it to works of publicly acknowledged worth and reputation, literally pieces of cultural capital. Eliot dismisses the European vernaculars and elevates Virgil’s *Aeneid* to the one and only universal classic, a metaphor for the pinnacle of European cultural history. For him, no works in any of the European vernacular traditions deserve the predicate of “universal classic.” Coetzee, visibly uncomfortable with any assumption of inherent timeless worth, finds the classic in the process of social and academic consensus building, in the fact that it has “passed the scrutiny of hundreds of thousands of intelligences before me, by hundreds of thousands of fellow human beings.” He thus clears space for the critic, like himself, who becomes not the foe, but producer of the classic by “interrogating” it (Coetzee 16).

Throughout their meandering reflections on the topic all three engage, with some *gravitas*, in personal confessions of sorts. For Sainte-Beuve, the classic is also biographical capital, accrued over a life time, that unfolds its full powers in a process of ageing, maturation, and ultimate fulfillment:

Blessed are those who read and reread, those who can follow freely follow their inclinations in their reading! There comes a time in life when – all journeys completed, all experiences made – there is nothing more palpably joyful than to study and reexamine the things we know, to truly savor what we feel, as if we see the people we love again and again: pure delights of the heart, of that taste of maturity. It is then that the word ‘classic’ acquires its true meaning... (Sainte-Beuve 54)



The classic becomes a tool to nurture the sublime maturity of the man of “good taste”; and a tonic against the vagaries of life, offering “a friendship which never deceives and could never fail us” (55). Eliot mentions Sainte-Beuve’s essay and says he doesn’t have it at hand – yet some of Eliot’s concepts seem to owe much to or at least resonate with the Frenchman’s. “Maturity,” both of the individual or a civilization and literature, is the backbone of Eliot’s vision. A language and literature need history behind them to *deserve the appearance* of the classic. What in Sainte-Beuve still resonates as a romantic *éloge* on the personal maturation with and through books, has by Eliot’s time become more of a desperate gasp of the waning 20th-century European *Bildungsbürgertum*.

Just how autobiographical and confessional Eliot’s lecture might actually be becomes clear in Coetzee’s merciless dissection of it. In contrast to Eliot’s lack of explicit engagement with Sainte-Beuve, much of Coetzee’s lecture is devoted to unveiling Eliot’s elevation of the *Aeneid* to the universal classic as an allegory of Eliot’s own life and his attempt to bolster his standing as an American who has made it in British letters and espouses a radically conservative political program of European unity (in 1944!), centered around the epitome of Europe’s Latin heritage and guarded by the Catholic Church. An attempt to be the prophet of this vision and remake his identity “in which a new and hitherto unsuspected paternity is asserted – a line of descent less from the Eliots of New England and/ or Somerset than from Virgil and Dante, or at least a line in which the Eliots are an eccentric offshoot of the great Virgil-Dante line” (Coetzee 6). In a “transcendental-poetic” reading Coetzee sees Eliot inserting himself into a venerable lineage, thereby appropriating the weight of the classic himself. In a “sociocultural” reading he sees Eliot’s essay as the “magical enterprise of a man trying to redefine the world around himself – America, Europe – rather than confronting the reality of his not-so-grand position as a man whose narrowly academic, Eurocentric education had prepared him for little else but life as a mandarin in one of the New England ivory towers” (7).

If the autobiographical and confessional are made visible in Eliot’s essay as a deeper allegorical structure, Coetzee makes an explicit personal memory into the capstone for theorizing his own idea of the classic. The date is summer of 1955, the place his Afrikaans family garden in the suburbs of Cape Town, the revelation are melodies from Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Well Tempered Clavier* drifting by. This was “the first time I was undergoing the impact of *the classic*” (9). His own rather

self-referential answer to the question of what a classic is – defined by generations of critics and academic professionals – emerges from his uncertainty about the nature of his fateful encounter with Bach: was it truly an impersonal aesthetic experience, “connecting” with Bach across the ages? Or motivated by ulterior motives, by his status as a postcolonial South African subject, a “symbolic election on my part of European high culture as a way out of a social and historical dead end” (15)? The belief in the *tested* classic allows Coetzee to move away from (colonial) universalist claims and closer to an institutional definition of the classic. It downplays the aesthetic charisma of the object and elevates those of us who are creating this charisma: the critics, commentators, scholars.

Coetzee’s analysis undoes the self-promoting halo of Eliot’s lecture – which, curiously, still maintains the status of a classic on the classic question despite its ensconced brand of Roman catholic imperialism that today is even more foreign to us than it already was in the middle of the 20th century. What is more, Coetzee’s essay carries the seed of undoing the question and the genre of “what is a classic?” as a whole. It becomes a potentially rotten, embarrassing question and he senses it: “Is being spoken to across the ages a notion that we can entertain today only in bad faith?” (13)

Indeed, in what form *can* and *should* the classic question still exist today? The question “What is a classic?” is in some ways a remnant of 19th century European intellectual life. In the 20th and 21st centuries, with the waning of the naturalized, *a priori* status of Greco-Roman classical literature and humanistic education in Western societies, the question has morphed into: “*why* read the classics?” In times of the global humanities crisis which hits historical research and scholars of the premodern world hardest, the value of classical literature and Classics has become debatable, rather than assumed. This is both liberating and devastating. It is a new global *condition des sciences humaines* that has inspired passionate defenses. They range from the convincingly tautological and nihilistic, in the face of the question’s weight as with Italo Calvino in “Why read the Classics:” “I should really rewrite it a third time, so that people do not believe that the classics must be read because they serve some purpose. The only reason that can be adduced in their favour is that reading the classics is always better than not reading them” (Calvino 9); all the way to the rousingly civic, as in Pierre Judet de La Combe’s *L’avenir des anciens. Oser lire les grecs et les latins* [The Future of the Ancients. Daring to Read the Greeks and Romans], where he solemnly invokes a “Right to Read”

and a “Right to History” (Judet de La Combe). The classic has become a world-wide challenge and the new *why* question is recognized as a new global genre beyond the 19th century European roots and limitations of the earlier *what* question. The *what* question arose in Europe increasingly during the nineteenth century when the previously only Greco-Roman definition of the “classic” was opened to works in European vernaculars and formal education in vernacular languages and literatures rather than just Greek and Latin came to be instituted in the newly developing general education systems. The *why* question, along with European concepts of what a “classic” is and why nations need them, has spread around the world. As with *Naze koten o benkyōsuru no ka* [*Why study the Classics?*], published in 2018 by the Japanese literary historian Maeda Masayuki, it is inspiring scholars around the world to take stock of their own literary heritage, in the climate of a pretty much global humanities crisis.

## 2. The “Comparable Classic” and the Classic Question for a New Age: What Does a Classic Do?

It is Italo Calvino’s answer to the *why* question that opens our eyes to a hitherto disregarded dimension of the classic question, namely the question of a “comparative” or “comparable classic.” Calvino first refreshes some of the previous answers to the *what* question: that classics are works to be reread (with special pleasure in maturity), that they are part of collective memory and the social subconscious. He also evokes the magic power of the classic, its mystic unity with the universe: “A classic is the term given to any book which comes to represent the whole universe, a book on a par with ancient talismans. A definition such as this brings us close to the idea of the total book, of the kind dreamt of by Mallarmé” (Calvino 6 f.). Or, inversely, its mysterious power to attract us, even if we resist it or dispute the author and his work. The evocation of the classic’s numinous powers, paired with the nihilism regarding the *why* question, already makes for a potent mixture. But the real punch-line appears in his sudden confession towards the end of the essay:

I notice that Leopardi is the only name from Italian literature that I have cited. This is the effect of the disintegration of the library. Now I ought to rewrite the whole article making it quite clear that the classics help us understand who we are and the point we have reached, and that consequently Italian classics are indispensable to us Italians in order to compare them with foreign

classics, and foreign classics are equally indispensable so that we can measure them against Italian classics. (9)

In a move that seems to blend lingering enlightenment worldliness with a new 19th-century colonial cosmopolitanism, Sainte-Beuve had added Confucius to a row of Europe's ancient sages and evokes "three Homers" who deserve more attention: Vālmiki, Vyāsa, and Ferdowsi, the respective authors of the grand Indian epics of the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, and the Persian epic "Book of Kings," *Shahnameh*. This is far ahead of Eliot, a century later, but the "foreigners" are still inferior and curiously caught in Christian-Pagan allegory as three "Oriental Magi" trailing after the unsurpassable god-like Homer (Sainte-Beuve 51). It is Calvino who for the first time transcends his own national literary filiation (or adopted cosmopolitan Latin tradition, in Eliot's case), urging us to compare our (Italian) classics with foreign ones.

The *what* question is hardly amenable to comparisons: precisely *what* makes Virgil's *Aeneid* or Dante's *Divine Comedy* a classic is too easily only discussed in the context of their respective literary traditions, even if in "universalized" fashion, as with Eliot. At this moment of a global flattening of historical consciousness and the ensuing retrenchment in classical studies, the *why* question can bring scholars and communities around the globe into a dialogue about the value and studies of their canons and strategies to support them (or not) and build them into the future. Yet, this is a question of the *compared* classic or *compared* field of Classics where scholars of Greek or Sanskrit, Classical Japanese, or Persian from their respective locales can strategize together about the challenges of the present moment for classical studies and their visions for the preservation or invigoration of their literary heritage. This is not yet the question of the *comparable* classic.

To make matters more complex, the academic study of classical literatures around the world today are challenged by political and religious instrumentalization, from the state-sponsored Confucius- and Classics fever of the PRC, to the at times violent zeal of Hindu fundamentalists in India. Promoting one's native classics has become a strategy for increasing both domestic reputation and global soft power. The Chinese government's efforts to promote the playwright Tang Xianzu (1550–1616) during the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's passing shows us the urgent desire of non-western cultures for "comparative recognition." On January 14, 2017, *The Economist* reported "*Shashibiya*, meet Tang Xianzu: How

China uses Shakespeare to promote its own bard.” It came in handy that Tang Xianzu died in the same year and happened to be a playwright – no matter that contemporaneity almost never makes for the best comparisons and no matter the fact that drama developed very late and was much less prestigious in the Chinese literary tradition, such that Tang Xianzu, accordingly, gets nowhere even close to being as canonical and influential as Shakespeare. But the Chinese government insisted, and the occasion inspired a lavish program of events and plays (like *Coriolanus* and *Du Liniang*, where Shakespeare’s Roman general encounters the romantic heroine from Tang Xianzu’s most famous play, *The Peony Pavilion*). There were even plans to build a replica of Shakespeare’s hometown, Stratford-upon-Avon, at Sanweng-upon-Min in Jiangxi Province. On a state visit to Britain in 2015 Xi Jinping had described Tang as the “Shakespeare of the East,” perhaps not quite realizing that this label was not just upgrading Tang in Western eyes, but actually also downgrading him by holding him to Western standards.

We might dismiss this as a tragicomic antic out of the bag of tricks of the PRC’s propaganda machine, but we would be wrong in considering this an isolated incident of limited relevance. In the early 21st century the “compared classic” is carrying two faces: it can unite us over the “why read the classics?” question and allow us to develop more global awareness of and strategies for preserving literary heritage under threat; but it can also generate anxious competitiveness and is (ab)used by governments or fundamentalist interest groups as tool of “nation branding” and populist identity building that is part of the rampant nationalisms that mark our historical moment.

Yet, Calvino was probably not thinking of the “compared classic” of “ours” and “their” classics. He seems to refer to the “comparable classic,” the classic (and academic discipline of Classical Studies) that allows us to grasp culturally distinctive traits of the other, and, not the least, our own literary tradition, when productively illuminated in the defamiliarizing light of other traditions. The “comparable classic” demands an entirely new question, beyond the *what* and *why*. Namely the question “What Does a Classic *Do*?” So far there has been surprisingly little debate around the classic and Classical Studies in full-fledged global terms, both geographically and historically.<sup>1</sup> The *what* question severely discourages

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<sup>1</sup> Postcolonial perspectives on the classic, like Mukherjee (2013), are certainly important, but they are still constrained by Western concepts of the classic and their

global comparisons, because it typically focuses only on the works and concepts of one classical tradition. But we can transform it into a question of global scope and relevance by shifting the question from an ontological *what* or utilitarian *why* to a question of *doing*, a question of pragmatic action theory, which examines human behavior as purpose-oriented and action-driven. Examining *doing*, both of the classic and of its creators, of its readers, transmitters, contesters, opens a whole new world of questions hitherto hardly explored: what can we identify as *functions* of the classic – social, political, ethical, religious, psychological, aesthetic, philosophical, literary historical? How did *institutions* shape the creation, specific impact, transmission and transformation of the classic? How did these functions and institutions diverge in different regions and periods around the globe throughout history? How could we capture the phenomenon of the classic in the rich archive of the past five millennia of human historical experience on this planet? What are the benefits of studying these questions in comparative perspective and promoting comparative studies of the classical and of Classical Studies? And to what uses can we further put such a new field of global studies of the classic to inspire deeper cross-cultural understanding, empathy, tolerance, dialogue, and collaboration?

### 3. Semantic and Philosophical Paradoxes of the Classic/al

We can certainly define the meaning of the classical historically, as instantiated in particular works, periods, artistic styles or academic disciplines: Virgil's *Aeneid* is a "classic" of Latin (then European, then Western, then world) literature; the "classical period" of Japanese literature to which later ages would look back with nostalgia is the Heian Period (794–1185); Johann Sebastian Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier* is a collection of pieces of "classical (and, here it gets a bit more complicated, Baroque) music"; "Classical Studies" or "Classics" in the West is the study of Greco-Roman civilization and "classical antiquity" that unfolded in European cultural history. Reference works have typically defined and described the "classical" in its historical instantiations, which have

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impact around the world. Pollock, Elman and Chang (2015) is a pioneering step towards thinking globally about philology, a practice related to the question of the classic.

reached wherever the Latin-derived term of *classicus* spread and was put to further use in new local contexts. Only if we try to conceptualize the term, historicizing it and allowing its meaning to transcend any particular time and place, do we realize how elusive and paradoxical it actually is.

English marks this bifurcation with the suffix “-al.” The “classical” refers typically to the historically instantiated: “classical archeology” (of Greco-Roman antiquity), or “classical works” of Spain’s Golden Age. The “classic,” in turn, carries conceptualized meaning: it is in principle empty of content, a relational linguistic function that contrasts another phenomenon with the “classic,” the originary, traditional, ideally realized and embodied, normative, typical: a “classic stage” of human evolution, “classic cars,” a “classic mistake,” or “that was just classic of him.” While the first, historically instantiated, meaning is strongly value-laden and emphasizes highest standards, values, and accomplishments, the referentially empty, conceptual, relative meaning is typically neutral and only points to the “typical” and “normative” of whatever is at stake: like a “classic” failure that certainly does not represent the pinnacle of accomplishments.

This bifurcation makes definition of *classicus* and its later European incarnations through a conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) less revealing and productive for our understanding what the “classic/al” is, than a conceptual history of “literature,” or even “the canon” would be. There is an interesting grey-area between the purely historically-instantiated and referential and the purely conceptually-relative and non-referential that allows us to locate the (or better “a”) classic/al in an evolutionary model. Whatever the time and place, we know what has to come before: the primitive, the primordial, the archaic. And we know what has to come after (and has done so in European cultural history, if not necessarily in others): the post-classical (such as Europe’s first instantiation of the post-classical: the Hellenistic), the medieval (of the three-step periodization template of Antiquity/Middle Ages/Modernity), the romantic (a 19th century reaction to early modern classicisms), or the modern (which, as the other book-end of our imagined trajectory from classical antiquity to “classical” modernity, is not an antonym but a correlative of sorts; see Damrosch).

Although methods of conceptual history are less helpful to the comparative study of the classic/al, the comparison of its respective etymological networks is more interesting and revealing. This essay takes its cues largely from the Western and the Eastern bookends of the Eurasian

continent: Europe and the regions that grew out of Romanization and Hellenization on the one end, and, on the other, East Asia's Sinographic Sphere, today's China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and all states, which historically relied on the Chinese writing system, scriptural and literary canons, and institutions of governance among others. The guiding metaphors of their respective etymological networks of the "classic" are strikingly different, with one drawing on socioeconomical imagery and the other evoking cosmological and political analogies.

Our Western, and by now global, hyperconcept of *classicus* was originally a socio-economical metaphor, referring to a person of the highest taxation category. Aulus Gellius (and his spokesman Fronto, to whom he attributes the expression of *scriptores classici* ("first class writers" in Gellius *Attic Nights*), seems to have transferred this expression metaphorically to writers and their works. Note that the supposedly comparable Greek term *enkrithentes* has a somewhat different meaning and, unlike its Latin counterpart, did not go viral in world history (Citroni 205–208). Instead, the Latin *classicus*, in Gellius's metaphorical use, was probably rediscovered in the 15th century and has now been adapted to most languages and cultures around the world. Socioeconomic metaphors have played a large role in the Latin conceptions of the workings of the human world: they also underlie the etymologies of "civilization" or "culture," concepts that are broadly related to the "classic." The citizen, "*civis*," of a city makes for *civilization*; and *culture* relies on agriculture and the cultivation of land, again bringing us to socioeconomic metaphors.

In contrast, the Chinese (and East Asian) concept of *jing* 經, a canonical work or authoritative scripture, described originally textile pattern, namely the warp, or the vertical threads on a loom and meant, by extension, "to regulate," "to govern," or the "normative" and "authoritative." During China's Warring States Period (481–221 BCE), the age of China's foundational philosophical masters, it was attached to works believed to have been compiled by Confucius and with the establishment of a State Academy in 124 BCE it came to refer to the sanctioned Five "Confucian" Classics that were part of its curriculum.<sup>2</sup> Much later it was applied to the scriptures and canons of other civilizations, such as the Bible (聖經 *Shengjing*) and the Koran (真經 *Zhenjing*). Like

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<sup>2</sup> For a succinct introduction to the concept of the classic, *jing*, and the Chinese classical canons see Wilkinson 368–72.



the not unrelated concept of *wen* 文 (“pattern,” “human culture,” “L/letters,” “literature” etc.) it is a cosmological concept rooted in textile imagery. “Regulation” through the “warp” was tied to ideas of harmonic response between the heavens, the Son of Heaven (the emperor), and his realm and the people. *Wen* originally referred to patterned fur of animals or human body tattoos and is the center of the extended etymological network of “human pattern/culture” (*wenhua* 文化), “writing/characters” (*wenzi* 文字), “written texts” (*wenxian* 文獻), “literature” (*wenxue* 文學), “civilization” (*wenming* 文明), and “civility” (as antonym to *wu* 武 the “martial”). By the Han Dynasty the resonance between heavenly, earthly, and human “pattern” (*wen*) became a staple of political philosophy. If in the Latin etymological network of the classical is tied to socioeconomic relations in the city and community of citizens, its comparable East Asian etymological network is associated with cosmological and political order, and the place of humans and their civilizational skills within the extended scope of the cosmos.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries East Asian intellectuals began to coin thousands of new terms to absorb and digest Western knowledge. To render the terminologies of European arts and sciences, which they encountered during their monumental translation efforts of thousands of Western books into East Asian languages, they largely relied on the traditional terms of *jing* and *dian* 典 (canon, also in the form of *gudian* 古典 “ancient canon” e.g. of Buddhism or Confucianism) to translate *classicus* and vernacular European concepts of the classical. In Japanese and Korean, where directed phonetic transliteration of Western terms (rather than semantic translation) is way more common and successfully practiced than in Chinese, a two-pronged concept of the classic emerged. First, “*koten*” or “*kojŏn*” (the respective Japanese and Korean pronunciations of the Chinese *gudian*); or, second, *kurashikku* (クラシック) and *k’ŭllaeshik* (클래식) (the phonetic transcription of “classic” into Japanese and Korean, respectively). As we might expect, “*kurashikku*” or “*k’ulleshik*” music refers to Western classical music, using the phonetic transcription of the Western concept; while *koten* or *kojŏn* music (unless supplemented with the term “Western”) typically refers to traditional Japanese or Korean music. In Japanese and Korean the historical bifurcation of the concept of the classic/al, of the “native” versus the “Western-imported” cultural and artistic traditions, which occurred through the large-scale encounter with Western knowledge on the threshold of modernity, is much more clearly marked than in

Chinese, which uses the semantic translation of “*gudian*” for both native and foreign traditions.

Stepping away once more from particular etymologies and their global migration history, which are insufficient to comparatively grasp the phenomenon of the classic/al, let’s return to its conceptual thrust. Philosophically, the “classic/al” is a mercurial, paradoxical concept. It can be ontologically deceptive: classical values and norms generated by a particular cultural and historical constellation are too easily enshrined as timeless, existential truths – as it happens with Eliot’s elevation of Virgil’s *Aeneid* to the universal classic where the historically relative is made into an aesthetically absolute. Ethically, the concept of the classic/al is potentially divisive and exclusionist. Having “classics” is a form of cultural capital of “civilized nations” and thus, like other cultural capital such as “philosophy,” “technology,” or “science,” is often monopolized by hegemonic states at the expense of supposedly less civilized others. Epistemologically, the concept of the classic/al is easily circular. Any claims to the normative and prescriptive value of classical aesthetic programs, popular in neoclassicist movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, can only be derived from a deductive description of actual historical instances.

#### 4. Comparative Phenomenology of the Classic/al

But this is not all. The semantic and philosophical paradoxes of the classic/al requires us to proceed with much caution and critical self-awareness in order to avoid simplifying definitions and skewed comparisons. But the single most hampering obstacle in developing comparative studies of the classic is the severe conceptual underdetermination of the “classic/al.” To make matters worse, it is paired with an engrossed cultural historical overdetermination. Conceptually, the classic is underdetermined in a spatial, temporal, and disciplinary sense. We need to leave the (treacherously) safe haven of conceptual history approaches and move away from the historical unfolding of the particular Latin term of *classicus* and its empirically traceable spread around the world by the 21st century, because it dramatically reduces the concept to a Greco-Roman-European-postcolonial phenomenon. Instead, we need to find functional comparanda, however complex but productive comparables, of classical phenomena and classicisms in other places and times. The challenge is that classicisms have occurred at least over the past three

millennia of human history and are ubiquitous. The earliest historical moment to which scholars have applied the concept of classicism (versus modernism) is the textual culture of Egypt's New Kingdom, during the latter part of the second millennium BCE; among the most recent applications is probably "classical modernism" (think anything from Mussolini's Fascist art to Le Corbusier, Franz Kafka or perhaps Arnold Schoenberg). If it can happen almost *everywhere anytime*, how can we meaningfully distinguish these phenomena, across time, space, media of cultural production, and disciplines of academic research? And how can we identify appropriate and productive comparanda in vastly different cultures? This is compounded by the temporal underdetermination of the "classic" and "classicism." Turning our gaze from the cross-cultural and horizontal scope to the temporal and vertical development within a single tradition, waves of various "classicism" typically come and go once the classical – a body of texts, a period, an aesthetical program, a canon of artists – has been established and becomes accepted and operative in specific institutions and communities. Distinguishing one wave from the next in concept and character is challenging and the suffix "neo-" gives us only one single step after an initial "classicism" and is often more confusing than helpful when considering macroregions, like Europe, whose cultures are distinct enough but develop in complex interaction with each other, though with significant divergences and time lags. For example, France's highpoint of "*classicisme*" (especially in literature) occurs in the 17th and early 18th century, followed in the later 18th and 19th centuries by "*néo-classicisme*," especially in art and the decorative arts. But in the German case, literary "*Klassik*" flourished only in the 19th century, and French "*néo-classicisme*" and "style Empire" in the decorative arts is in German only "*Klassizismus*," while "*Neoklassizismus*" is associated with a range of classicizing phenomena in the arts and culture of the late 19th and earlier 20th centuries. Thus, confusion arises both from schematic chronological counting – the tripartite "classical"/"classicist," "neoclassical/neoclassicist" etc. – and from the need to distinguish the classicizing waves in their specificity and rather different timelines within each tradition and across traditions within the same macroregion, not to mention the global scale.

Lastly, in disciplinary and academic terms, the "classical" and "classicism" appear basically throughout history and throughout the range of the arts and even sciences, but the nature, timing, and scholarly terminology, often rooted in long-standing historical

conventions, diverges vastly from discipline to discipline. This makes interdisciplinary dialogue on the subject of the “classical” confusing and frustrating. The spatial, temporal, and terminological ubiquity and thus underdetermination of the “classical” has led to a situation where specific historically-rooted terminologies have come to dominate our cultural historical understanding, which makes it harder to see similarities between classicizing phenomena. Augustan “Atticism,” “Renaissance,” “Enlightenment,” or, to venture further, Chinese Song-Dynasty (960–1279) “Neo-Confucianism” and Japanese Edo Period (1604–1868) “Native Studies” (*kokugaku* 国学), inspired by contemporary classicisms in Japanese Sinology (Japanese philological studies of China), all carry elements of “classicism.” But the historical terminology that has developed around them and has been picked up by modern scholars to typologize periods and intellectual and artistic developments has made them less recognizable as “classicisms.” This has discouraged bolder comparative research of the classic/al and of classicisms, which could bring to light intriguing similarities in their functional dynamic as well as illuminating differences, both within one tradition and across cultures.

The conceptual underdetermination is all the more tantalizing, because the “classical” is so overdetermined in cultural historical terms. Just as anybody yearns for classical canons, periods, writers and artist in order to lay claim to being a “civilization,” “classicisms,” in a very crude, populist conception, are cultural capital for legitimizing or creating traditions. This is visible in the popular and academic politics around the probably most coveted Western classicist movement, the “Renaissance.” It epitomizes crucial aspects of modern Western cultural identity and is considered a period that laid the foundations for Western humanism, for the scientific revolution and Western technological superiority, and for practices of critical, rational academic inquiry. Stephen Greenblatt’s award-winning bestseller *The Swerve. How the World Became Modern*, which masterfully unveils the far-reaching impact of the rediscovery during the Renaissance of Lucretius’s Latin philosophical epic *On the Nature of Things* (*De rerum natura*), illustrates the powerful aura that the concept of the “Renaissance” still exudes for us today. The concept of the Western “Renaissance” has a long history. In the fourteenth century Petrarch began to lament a *medium tempus* (what we call “the Dark Middle Ages”) and celebrated himself as restorer of antiquity.<sup>3</sup> Leonardo Bruni

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<sup>3</sup> For a succinct account of the genesis of the concept see Rapp and Kraye (2010).

(1370–1444), who revived the study of Ancient Greek texts, Lorenzo Valla (ca. 1407–1457), who connected the humanist revival of classical Latin to the artistic revival of ancient classical art, and Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) whose radical religious and educational reform program empowered Greek and Hebrew, along with many other important figures, followed. The first person to treat the Renaissance as a historical period was Jules Michelet (1798–1874), who applied it to all of Europe, unlike his younger colleague, the Swiss scholar Jakob Burckhardt (1818–1897), who limited it to Italy and a supposed Italian *Zeitgeist* of the 15th and 16th centuries. Charles Homer Haskins's *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (1927) and Erwin Panofsky's "Renaissance and Renascences" (1944) catalyzed a powerful revolt against the idealized and Italophile myth of the Renaissance as "the discovery of the world and man," as Panofsky put it forcefully (Panofsky 1944, 201). Although Panofsky's essay both bolstered the existence of the Italian renaissance and of earlier, but distinct, previous medieval "Renaissances," it contributed significantly to problematizing the term, in particular in art history. Suddenly many more earlier "renaissances" were discovered: the Carolingian Renaissance under Charlemagne (8th and 9th centuries), the Ottonian renaissance of the 10th century that could for example boast the revival of Latin dramas produced for example, in the spirit of Terence, by canoness Roswitha of Gandersheim, and of course, most prominently, the Europe-wide flourishing of arts and sciences during the "12th century Renaissance." Even Byzantium, in whose cultural history accretion and emulation is far more important than reform and innovation – those fixtures of Western European cultural history – has now gained its share of recognized "Renaissances": the Theodosian (380–450) Justinianic (6th century), Macedonian (9th and 10th centuries), Comnenian (11th and 12th centuries), and also Palaeologan (13th and 14th centuries) "renaissances," before scholars flee the faltering Byzantine empire in the 14th and 15th centuries and catalyze the Italian Renaissance.

Thus the "Renaissance" came to be pushed back into the Medieval Period, even Late Antiquity. Nobody was seriously interested in pushing the Renaissance forward, showing how 14th and 15th century Italy was in fact still "medieval." Instead, everybody was trying to push it back in time to get a precious piece of "Renaissance-ness," unearthing ever earlier classical revivals in the medieval period. This is a clear sign of the powerful cultural capital associated with the "Renaissance" still today.

With all these challenges, how can we (and why should we) go from here in developing comparative studies of the classic/al on a global scale? Conceptual history approaches are of only limited value because of the sore underdetermination of the concept and because of the linguistic hegemony that the Western concept of *classicus* has exerted since the late 19th century, often distorting or even erasing indigenous concepts in languages and cultures around the globe. And, philosophically, we see that the concept of the classic is often involved in projects of power building and self-affirmation – of a nation, a religion, a canon, an aesthetic ideology, or an ego and its biography. Its philosophical paradoxality is precisely rooted in the absolutizing, ideological claims of promoters of the classic/al and in particular of classicisms in the face of their real-life relative, limited nature. This is both the dirty truth and the sublimity of the classical. But we can turn it to our advantage, when we study the classical in functional rather than face-value comparisons.

Three assumptions are central to such a functional comparative approach: the intentionality of the subjects (who produce, interpret, revive, propagate, research the classic/al), our ability to discern distinctive traits of a phenomenon (that allow us to recognize it as a comparable classical or classicizing phenomenon), and, lastly, an awareness of the effect of cross-cultural functional comparisons and their power to fundamentally expand our intellectual, spiritual, and emotional ways of being in the world. Put differently, and in terms inspired by Edmund Husserl's phenomenology that tries to capture the world as experienced through our first-person consciousness: first, human actions are always directed towards some goal and this, however complex, "intentionality" depends on the horizon of their particular cultural and historical moment, their *Lebenswelt* or "lifeworld"; second, to find the distinctive features of something we need to bracket our face-value, unreflected understanding of it (Husserl calls this "bracketing" *epoché* as part of the process of "phenomenological reduction") and tease out its distinguishing features – which will allow us to find substantial and productive rather than just random and superficial comparanda for the classic/al; and lastly, this comparative process produces distance to our current consciousness and "natürliche Einstellung," and allows us not just to learn something specifically new but to help our consciousness change, expand, and grow. Husserl's propositions of a "phenomenology" have been phenomenally productive in philosophy. Most of his work was not formally published in his lifetime but he pursues his topics in

the more intimate and stream-of-consciousness medium of extensive philosophical diaries (the posthumously published “Husserliana”). Entering his complex and fluid stream of philosophical theory building requires nothing short of a “phenomenology” in interpreting the great variety of Husserl’s ever-changing arguments, and this will keep academic philosophers busy. But what is more relevant here is the great breadth of disciplines, in particular in the empirical social and natural sciences, where phenomenology has turned from philosophy into method, informing anything from psychology and psychiatry to anthropology and physics. Husserl himself was interested in this purposeful appropriation into practical fields of study and his phenomenology is currently promoted as a method to apply even in nursing and midwifery education and research (Christensen et al.; though I have not checked, it seems less likely that this would happen to Descartes or Kant). Two aspects make phenomenology particularly attractive for the human and social sciences at this moment: first, academically, the urgent need for “translators” (as different from the conventional roles of the “specialists” and “generalists”) between scholars in different disciplines as well as in different area-studies-based fields; and, in the larger world, the challenges of global large-scale migrations that oblige us to develop cross-cultural understanding of people with very different cultural “classical” roots and backgrounds and to succeed in the difficult project of building functional “multicultural societies.” Put simply, for this we need people with the phenomenological ability to create comparisons and connections based on the recognition of distinguishing features and the critical reduction of non-essential or ideological “white noise” (Godina 52–53).

The comparative phenomenology of the classic/al I am proposing here is both a call for us to become better phenomenological “translators” across the many fields and disciplines that deal with the classic/al; and to recognize the urgent relevancy and ethical responsibility that comes with studying the classic/al in this historical moment. Concretely, a comparative phenomenology describes and discerns the way the classic/al has taken shape in concept and practice – as canons, periods, authors, artistic works, aesthetic styles, intellectual discourses – over the past five millennia of human history. This rich archive of documented human experience with the formation and transformation of traditions provides abundant data and source material for comparative assessment. It is a true treasure house, a virtual lab for conceptualizing significant differences and divergences across periods, cultures, artistic media and scholarly

disciplines, which understands the classical and subsequent waves of classicisms as a fundamental vector in the formation and development of cultures.

What does a Classic *do*? will be the fundamental question to capture a phenomenology of the classic/al and promote comparative studies of premodern worlds as an academic and ethic responsibility in an age of nationalist and religious fundamentalisms.

To capture a broad variety of phenomena it is good to avoid defining the “classic/al” through any particular culture or historical manifestation, but analyze it as a cultural function, a strategy of innovation based on claims to ideological, political, religious, artistic, aesthetic, literary, scholarly aspects of the past.

Back, again, to our guiding question: What Does a Classic *Do*? What are the most formative institutions that shape the varieties and development of the nature and concepts of the classic/al and of classicisms? First, and most fundamentally, educational systems are prime catalysts of canonization. What textbooks are used? How do they circulate in society? What is the social background and standing of teachers and who has access to education and can be a student? In what physical and institutional spaces do students learn? Based on what criteria are students selected, how is their learning assessed and how are educational institutions connected to particular professions and social prestige? Who are the money-providers and patrons of these institutions and what is their relationship to power and politics? Second, governments and organs of governance are prime brokers of classicizing movements. How have particular political and religious ideologies embraced by governments contributed to the formation and development of concepts and practices of the classic/al and of classicisms? How have political restoration movements mobilized the classic/al for their agenda? How do governments promote their classical cultural heritage to exert soft power, both domestically and globally? Or, especially today, how does governmental funding e.g. for translation of native classical works sponsored by non-Western governments into Western languages, impact the formation of new canons and tastes globally? Third, throughout much of world history, courts have played a prime role in literary production and aesthetic formation of taste through complex patronage systems, courtly institutions and the creation of a courtly literary class. They have been sites of power-legitimizing rituals and lavish occasions for legitimizing spectacles and popular entertainment. And, fourth, churches



have colluded and competed in this process, while being able to draw on deeper connections with lower classes beyond the elites, as they offer ritual and spiritual support for the main events in human life, such as birth, marriage, and death. Fifth, canon formation, genres and temporal layers of commentarial literature, and interpretive communities are all institutions of sorts, practices of textual culture, that contribute to the preservation, transmission, or recovery of texts and their elevation to authoritative or canonical status. Less visibly, but quite importantly, meta-reflections by post-classical writers about the nature and values of the classical is yet another institution of textual cultures. They might function as feed-back mechanisms, elaborating ideas of the unsurpassable classic and artistically sublime, while at the same time articulating symptoms of a “post-classical hang-over,” the struggle of later-born writers with their sense of inferiority towards unsurpassable classical models, in short, in Harold Bloom’s terms, with symptoms of “the anxiety of influence.” Other typical themes in meta-reflections on the concept of the classic/al include epigonism versus strategic iconoclasm, connoisseurship and antiquarianism (often as an alternative strategy of later-borns to evade anxiety and prove worthy of the classical through consummate expertise), or oblivion-and-sudden-rediscovery narratives.

How can we make this comparative phenomenology of the classical fruitful for both a deeper understanding of the diverse workings and functioning of classicizing phenomena in very particular moments and places of world history and for a deeper appreciation of the impact of these phenomena on human cultures, past, present, and future? Let’s parachute into a few case studies and see what new questions and potential insights could be gained by pursuing this project.

The earliest historical moment for which modern scholars have discerned the appearance of forms of “classicism” (versus modernism) is Ancient Egypt, in particular the “Ramesside Period” of the 19th and 20th Dynasties of the New Kingdom (1292 – 1077 BCE). During not even three centuries, after the (in)famous Amarna period and the trenchant reforms of the iconoclastic and supposedly “monotheistic” pharaoh Akhenaton, we see a brief flourishing of Late Egyptian literature, with a distinctive orthography and syntax, and largely confined to works in hieratic on papyrus. New vernacularizing writings appear and there is a characteristic linguistic variety in the diglossia between the “classical” and the newly emerging “modern” Late Egyptian. Unprecedented genres flourish, such as intensely sensual love poetry, narrative fiction (typically

one copy each, and almost exclusively on papyrus, indicating that they did not enter the later stream of tradition), and fictionalization of genres such as letters and official reports (Baines). This example inspires intriguing questions: does the “classical” typically emerge when distance to a contemporary “modern” is felt? What is the role of the emergence of vernacular writing styles for the classical and for classicisms? Does it typically emerge out of breaks of a long-standing high cultural tradition? What is the role of fiction for the concept of the classical and “modern”? And, in this particular case, what do we make of the unequal development of the “classical” in different areas of cultural production, namely the fact that Akhenaten’s iconoclastic art and provocative monotheistical ritualism was rejected right after his era, whereas the linguistic and literary impulses of the “modern” continued? And why, in this case, did “modernism” lose out so quickly?

A next classical moment happens, again, in Egypt, but this time it is a moment of long-lasting canon consolidation with a radically different phenomenology: the canonization of Homer and the Greek poets in Ptolemaic Alexandria. Unlike the “classicism” provoked by Late Egyptian “modernism,” we have here a form of transplant classicism intent on showcasing the very best of Greek culture in the wake of Alexander the Great’s conquest of Egypt and ensuing waves of Hellenization. Ptolemy I, Alexander’s friend and general, grew up at the Macedonian royal court of Alexander’s father Philip II, and later succeeded Alexander in Egypt. He was intent on showing the superiority of Greek culture, as he tried to recover as many territories of Alexander’s failed empire in his claim to Hellenistic successorship and ruled through the immigrant Greek upper class. To this purpose the early Ptolemies patronized a vibrant intellectual community around the *Mouseion* [museum], complete with the famous library of Alexandria. During the 140 years that Alexandria flourished (c. 285–145 BCE), court-sponsored scholars created new forms of textual scholarship: they compiled texts and sorted out forgeries, corrected mistakes from old scripts (e.g. the old Attic alphabet); corrected titles and speculated on dating issues; and they invented “critical signs,” such as Zenodotus of Ephesus’s “*obelos*,” which marked lines that were considered spurious interpolations. Their main goal of editing and explaining the poets led to the successive development of grammar (as systematized by Dionysius Thrax), of glossing and commentary composition, etymological study and literary criticism, as well as the scholarly compilation of a catalogue of the Alexandrian library by Callimachus (Dickey 3–6).

This case leads to a different set of questions: while Late Egyptian classicism and modernism seems to have only diffusely been tied to state institutions, the Alexandrian canonization of Greek literature and creation of European philology on Egyptian soil was catalyzed by court-sponsored scholarly institutions. What is the relationship between libraries, grammars, and the development of critical philological scholarship? Is the idea of a fixed “complete” canon of a given tradition – here Greek in Egypt – more easily catalyzed in “transplant classicisms” that unfold in a foreign environment, where the culturalist claim to a “canon” helped assert and preserve cultural identity? How specifically was the canonization of “classical Greek literature” and the emergence of philological scholarship impacted by the complex relationship between Egyptian traditions and Greek immigrant culture in the Alexandria at the time? Have we been paying enough attention to this?

Alexandrian classical grammarian scholarship becomes yet more complex when we see it in the light of Hellenistic literary production. The very scholars who created the classical Greek canon often produced hermetically erudite, sophisticated poetry – clearly postclassical or “modern,” as we could say, with Callimachus (ca. 305–240 BCE) being the most famous example. Latin literature, arguably, emerged as a local Hellenistic, post-classical literature, and this suddenly became an issue when during the first-century “Asianism,” a self-consciously elaborate, hyperbolic style associated with the Eastern Mediterranean, became something of an offensive term in oratorical and literary circles, as the opposite of the ideal of “Atticism,” the style of Greek oratory of classical Athens. Cicero, who himself was accused of the practice, makes us aware of this new Atticist “classicism” that came to flourish under Augustus (“*Asiatici*,” as referring to “orators from the East” appear in *De oratore* 3.43, but the polemic only unfolds in the dialogue *Brutus* (46 BCE)). This devaluation of Hellenistic “modern” eloquence was promoted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Seneca the Elder, and Quintilianus, all writers with classicizing agendas. Although “Asianism” remained popular in Rome – Hortensius was one practitioner in his time – the new movement of writing classicist Attic prose inspired “modern” “Neoteric literature” in Rome, such as Catullus’s. It is unclear whether the classicists’ movement started in Greece, but, as far as we can see from extant sources, it became a central debate in Roman literary culture in the later first century BCE. The attention then moved from Alexandria and Greek – textual editing and a mainly scholarly enterprise – to Rome

and Latin – literary production, meta-literary debates, and the creation of manuals for writing classicist prose and oratory.

While canonizing, post-classical, and reactive classicizing movements moved eccentrically through the Mediterranean in the wake of Hellenistic and Roman conquests and their demographic flows, canonizing and classicist movements developed, more centripetally, on the other end of the Eurasian continent at the court of Han China. The comparative study of the Roman and Han Chinese empires has recently become a vivid field of study and can provide a productive frame for exploring the relationship between classicism and empire building.<sup>4</sup> The Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BCE–220 CE) unified several hegemonic states that during the latter part of the Zhou Dynasty (481–221 BCE) had engaged in constant internecine warfare and created a new, strongly centralized imperial system, which also led to the centralized management of books and knowledge production. Librarians of the Han imperial library did pioneering work in ordering and compiling the earlier fluid textual record, transcribing and standardizing scripts, composing prolific commentaries (both the glossing “chapter-and-verse” (*zhangju* 章句) commentaries and the more interpretive “explanatory commentaries (*xungu* 訓詁)), and engaging in textual critical debates about textual authenticity and forgeries (Connery 40–63).

Yet, empire building, canonization, and literary production intersected in very different ways. Just to raise one point for fruitful comparison, the institutional impact of empire on Roman scholarly and literary production and its classicizing tendencies is remarkably small in contrast to Han China. True, the ways in which early imperial ideology figured in the works of Augustan authors such as Virgil, Horace, or even Ovid – as the most famous exilic outcast of empire – has been a long-standing theme of debate. Yet, imperial institutions were central catalysts for canonizing and classicist movements in Han China. In 136 BCE, Emperor Wu of the Han founded an office of “Erudites” for the teaching and transmission of what became the initial Confucian “Five Classics” of the *Book of Changes*, *Book of Poetry*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Rites*, and the chronicle *Spring and Autumn Annals*. In 124 BCE, this office became the State Academy. Court-sponsored schools would eventually become

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<sup>4</sup> See Dettenhofer (2006), Mutschler and Mittag (2008), Scheidel (2015), to name but a few.

the basis for the civil service examination system, which, basically, from the Tang (618–907) to the early 20th century, constituted the main road for tens of thousands of candidates to service in the state bureaucracy, not just in China, but also in neighboring Korea and Vietnam. The courtly competition over interpretation of the classics – also in the form of memorable staged court debates – became a fundamental part of political and institutional culture and contributed, by the latter half of the Han, to the formation of a “literati” class that came to characterize traditional Chinese, and in various forms East Asian, intellectual life from the 3rd century onward into the 20th century (Lu 2013). Exam success (or, frequently, the miseries of failure) and the intellectual networks that were rooted in joint study and success (or the need to deal with failure), collective drinking and poetry composition, the appreciation of poetry, calligraphy, of painting and music, and, by the Song Dynasty (960–1279), antiquarian connoisseurship, were all hallmarks of this culture of poet-scholar-officials, of “literati.” This social class simply has no obvious comparandum in Western cultural history and thus merits thorough comparative attention. The classical education that became the basis for recruitment into government office also required a different material stability of texts: a crucial event in late Han Classicism, reoccurring in later dynasties, was the carving of an authoritative version of the classical canon on stone slabs that were put up in the State Academy around 175 CE. Supposedly thousands of people came to copy the canonical text, creating a commotion and blocking the streets and alleys of the city (*Hou Hanshu* 1981).

Like “Atticism” in Rome, classicist writing styles of various colors emerged, debates over “older” and “more modern” texts and the issues of forgeries developed, but the functional anatomy and phenomenology of these early imperial canonizing and classicist movements in the Ancient Mediterranean and China differs greatly. Accordingly, the phenomenology of later waves of classicisms on the bookends of the Eurasian continent differs ever more significantly, because Chinese dynasties came and went, while the Roman Empire fell (in the 5th and, for the East, 15th centuries), giving way to a multi-state system of European monarchies. In China, the oldest continuous literary tradition, the various Tang Dynasty programs of “Reviving Antiquity” (*fugu* 復古), Song Dynasty nativist reactions against Buddhism and Daoism in the form of classicizing “Neo-Confucianism” with its creation of classical orthodoxy, Ming archaisms, Qing empirical classical scholarship and

classicist “Han learning,” or radical classicist reform programs for an embittered China beleaguered by Western imperialist powers around the turn of the twentieth century (as proposed for example by the Kang Youwei (1858–1927)), occurred largely within the linguistic parameters of Literary Chinese, premodern China’s official cosmopolitan written language. In contrast, the fall of the Roman empire spurred on the emergence of various European monarchies with their own vernacular written literatures. They acquired their own “classical periods” and “classical authors,” be it Dante or Petrarch for Italian, or Corneille or Racine for French. For China and the states in the traditional East Asian “Sinographic Sphere,” vernacular literatures were made into “national classics” only in the twentieth century, through various reformist or revolutionary agendas of intellectuals or governments. This modern myth of the “national classic” expressing a particular people’s “spirit” in the national vernacular language, inspired by 19th-century European romanticism and nationalisms, still dominates the national imagination and education systems in East Asia. It has propelled vernacular works such as Japan’s *The Tale of Genji*, the “world’s first novel” and a sprawling courtly tale spun around the irresistible and flawed male protagonist Genji, and, in Korea, *Hong Kiltong*, a tale of martial prowess of a hero from the class of disprivileged “secondary sons” of Chosŏn Korea’s literati elites, to the top of the canon and reading lists. This is somewhat justified for *Genji*, rather exceptionally, because it enjoyed the status of a classic through its role as a poetry composition manual and provided inspiration for a rich body of commentaries, adaptations, and satires since the 13th century. *Hong Kiltong* certainly had no status in the premodern canon of literary production, but was considered lowly fiction.

Korea, Japan, and Vietnam present particularly stimulating cases for a phenomenology of the classic/al and classicisms. During the first millennium CE, they all promoted state building on Chinese models of governance and their literary cultures are characterized by a distinctive biliteracy, with cosmopolitan Literary Chinese, or the transregional “Literary Sinitic,” blending into a large variety of vernacular inscription styles and genres (Kornicki; Denecke 45–56). In this environment, classicist movements often developed in symbiosis with a nativism that emphasized local needs and cultural sensibility.

Nativist scholars in 18th century Japan harked back to the great works of the Nara and Heian Periods (710–1185), and challenged sinological studies of the Chinese classics with a new form of “vernacular”

classicism: the study, commentary-production, and stylistic emulation of vernacular texts that was strongly empirically founded. The most challenging case in East Asia to study the classic/al and classicisms in depth might well be Korea, not the least because the vast majority of pre-15th-century sources is lost today and the vernacular literary tradition was much less advanced than in Japan. Korea never developed a full-fledged premodern form of classicism, comparable to that which 18<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese nativist scholars like Kamo no Mabuchi and Motoori no Norinaga spearheaded for vernacular Japanese. The reign of King Sejong (1418–1450) has some phenomenological features of a “classical period” of Korean culture. The feverish ordering and compilation of earlier textual records clearly constitutes a historic moment of canonization. It went along with the official invention and promulgation of a vernacular script, today’s *han’gŭl*, and the commissioning of official classicizing texts. These texts created on the one hand new, heavily Sinitified written vernacular styles, but, on the other hand, grounded their philology, historical repertoire and awareness in Chinese texts, as can be seen with the *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven* (*Yongbiŏch’ŏnga* 龍飛御天歌): the first text written in the new vernacular script, it is a heavy-handed panegyrics of the ancestors and founders of the Chosŏn dynasty, glossed by a commentary in Literary Sinitic (which was probably more understandable at the time than the newly created, clumsily written vernacular), and argued through systematic juxtaposition of early Chinese and recent Korean history. Many of the signature texts of Sejong’s reign were propagated in the newly mobilized medium of moveable-type printing, making for a distinctive intersection of so many different, at times paradoxical, elements of “canonization,” “classicisms,” “vernacularization,” “print-based propagation and -popularization,” and a new historical consciousness.

When considering the European vernaculars, Germany constitutes a particularly thought-provoking case for a phenomenology of the classic/al. The classical periods of the vernacular literatures of both France and Germany are both strongly characterized by a creative appropriation of Europe’s Greco-Roman antiquity; this is much less the case for England’s Elizabethan literature or Spain’s literature of the “siglo d’oro.” As the latest “classical age” of the major Western European vernacular literatures, the Goethe-and-Schiller focused “Weimarer Klassik” and other 19th-century German classicisms occurred in an environment radically different from the centralistic 17th-century French classicisms. The German forms of

“Klassik” developed just as academic historicism, in the wake of Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel, gripped Europe’s intellectual life; while modern archeology emerged and classical scholars like Karl Otfried Müller went on expeditions to examine the Greek archeological remains empirically; while Humboldtian humanism was developed, which became the foundation for modern universities in Germany and many places around the world: it contributed to the genesis of the basic humanistic disciplines – history, literature, Classics and philology, as well as “Oriental Studies,” ranging from Ancient Near Eastern studies as an auxiliary discipline for biblical studies, to the Arabic and Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese literary worlds, to comparative linguistics, and the comparative study of religions – which are still with us today. It unfolded against the background of vivid scientific exploration of other botanical, zoological, and cultural worlds, as exemplified by Alexander von Humboldt or Goethe. All these intersecting phenomena make 19th century German classicisms distinctive in the European context. It was a fulminantly cosmopolitan “foreignizing Klassik,” on many levels. Inspired by the early exploits of academic Oriental Studies, Goethe inhabited the poetic persona and genre spectrum of the 14th-century Arabic poet Hafiz and took it to new heights of German literature in his *West-östlicher Divan* (West–Eastern Diwan). (How unthinkable would it have been, for purely historical reasons, to have Dante or Racine write in a voice of cultural impersonation of any oriental literary tradition!). It is thus no surprise that “Weltliteratur,” a concept promoted, if not invented by Goethe, has been inspiring a new form of global literary studies, in particular in North America in the early 21st century: more specifically, the combination of “foreignizing classicism” with forms of cosmopolitanism still resonates with us and “World Literature Studies,” with all the debates this field has created, can provide inspiration for navigating the daunting challenges of socioeconomic globalization.

## 5. Outlook: Benefits and Challenges

A comparative historical phenomenology of the classic/al and of classicisms can help us understand broader patterns in the evolution of societies, past and present. When understood as processes of tradition formation, they become dramatically more important for our general understanding of cultures, past and present. Despite popular prejudices, neither the “classical” nor “Classics” is a dying breed, especially when



considered on a global scale. Comparative studies of the classic/al have tremendously timely critical potential to deal with some of the greatest challenges societies on this planet are currently facing: virulent nationalisms, political or religious fundamentalisms, postcolonial (or neocolonial) inequality, individual and collective traumas inflicted by war and violence and aggravated by failed reconciliation. It is true that classicist agendas have often been advanced for nativist or nationalist purposes, as Melanie Trede laments for example for Japanese art history (Trede). For scholars of classical languages, literatures and culture heritage, this is both a curse and an opportunity, in both good and bad senses. But we can face this challenge through critical comparative phenomenological examination: as scholars we can tap the powers of a comparative phenomenology of classical traditions on a global scale to build respect for differences, shoulder our responsibility to speak truth to power and criticize, or at least historicize, particular abuses of the classical tradition for incendiary populist politics or biased academic discourse.

The questions “What is a classic?” or “Why read the Classics?” became popular as, over the past one and a half centuries, the canonical standing of the West’s Greco-Roman heritage has been fading ever more quickly. They are signposts of fear, which reveal much about our increasing insecurity about the precise nature of the value of premodern worlds and classical cultures in today’s utilitarian capitalist societies. It is about time for a new question. “What does a Classic *Do*?” opens the door into a new world, where a combination of cross-cultural historical comparisons of tradition building and speaking out against fundamentalist abuses of classical heritage in today’s political culture around the globe, can show us the way into a less violent and divisive, and a more shared, empathetic, and cosmopolitan future.

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# **Poésie diasporique, poésie totale ? Devenirs du paradigme avant-gardiste chez Ricardo Aleixo, Ronald Augusto et Nathaniel Mackey**

CYRIL VETTORATO

Formulé dès l'époque romantique mais devenu particulièrement envahissant dans les décennies qui ont suivi la seconde guerre mondiale, le débat entre une approche esthétique (ou textuelle) et une approche historique (ou contextuelle) des textes poétiques, volontiers conçues de façon maximaliste comme mutuellement exclusives, a sans doute fait plus de mal que de bien à la lecture de poésie. Qu'on le croie dépassé, et il ressurgit sous d'autres formes, ici dans l'opposition entre un « lyrisme » réaffirmé contre l'héritage des avant-gardes et une « littéralité » héritière de ces dernières (Collot 24), là dans la tension entre les perspectives critiques « situées » (féministe, postcoloniale, noire américaine) et le « canon » purement esthétique que l'on estime menacé par celles-ci (Bloom "An Elegy").

Un moyen intéressant de prendre en considération les enjeux de cette querelle théorique tenace et polymorphe sans se laisser intoxiquer par ce qu'elle a de réducteur pourrait être d'opérer un retournement de perspective en formulant la question suivante, de façon plus concrète et conjecturale : quelles œuvres rend-on invisibles quand on définit strictement le poème comme un objet esthétique indépendant de son contexte historique et social – et lesquelles, quand on fait l'inverse ? Plus largement, selon quelles modalités les polarisations qui découlent de cette dyade texte/contexte (avant-gardes contre lyrisme, liens aux identités politiques et aux luttes d'émancipation contre canon intemporel) amènent-elles à effectuer une taille dans le maquis des productions poétiques ?

Cette manière de procéder déplacerait notre attention d'une illusoire essence de la poésie qui existerait indépendamment du geste critique pour aller vers quelque chose comme un conséquentialisme appliqué à la lecture littéraire. Procédant de la sorte, on s'apercevrait que le moindre

déplacement du curseur poétologique a vite fait de gommer des multitudes de poèmes peu compatibles avec l'option théorique choisie. Le choix et l'affichage, par les critiques, de partis-pris théoriques qui circonscrivent les contours de « la poésie » a des conséquences très concrètes qui sont d'ordre narratif, désignant implicitement les « personnages » dont l'histoire mérite d'être narrée, et comment. Il n'y a aucune raison de considérer ces conséquences comme intrinsèquement négatives, dans la mesure où le cadre d'un récit et les choix qu'il suppose conditionnent aussi la mise en visibilité positive des auteurs ou mouvements. Toutefois, les conditions particulières de développement et de pérennisation sociales de ces cadres, au sein du monde académique notamment, tout en dépendant largement de facteurs étrangers à la poésie en tant que telle (carrières d'enseignants-chercheurs, choix éditoriaux, dynamiques collaboratives), orientent la pratique de la lecture de poésie et créent un certain nombre d'angles morts qui rendent de nombreux textes poétiques difficiles à recevoir pour le lectorat de poésie – et peut-être, par là même, particulièrement intéressants à explorer pour les questions qu'ils posent à nos habitudes de lecture.

La présente étude voudrait pointer du doigt l'un de ces angles morts. Celui-ci se situe à l'intersection de l'écriture expérimentale des avant-gardes et de la poésie que l'on nomme, selon les cas, postcoloniale, noire, diasporique (et parfois de façon particulièrement pernicieuse, « francophone »), c'est-à-dire la poésie produite par des personnes dont le rapport à la langue et à la tradition poétiques se présente comme affecté d'une manière ou d'une autre par l'héritage historique de l'impérialisme, de la colonisation ou de la traite transatlantique. Ces deux continents poétiques en tant que tels sont loin d'être ignorés par la critique : dada, le futurisme, ou la poésie de montage font l'objet d'études nombreuses, tout comme, dans d'autres cercles, les œuvres d'auteurs comme Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, Amiri Baraka ou Aimé Césaire. Mais à l'instar des subjectivités sociales défendues par les penseuses de l'intersectionnalité (Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins), les poésies qui occupent un espace situé au croisement de ces deux domaines se trouvent invisibilisées. Nous n'entendons pas par-là l'action délibérée d'une hypothétique conscience malveillante et toute puissante, mais un effet de récit – comme dans un roman historique où le choix de personnages principaux considérés comme pertinents pour raconter une certaine histoire relègue les autres au statut de personnages secondaires, voire les évince tout bonnement.

Les spécialistes des avant-gardes ne prennent ainsi pas spontanément en compte les écritures africaines, antillaises, ou diasporiques considérées comme l'apanage des spécialistes de « postcolonialisme » ou de « francophonie », pas plus que ces derniers ne se considèrent spontanément comme concernés par les écritures expérimentales. Quelques études, en particulier au sein du monde anglophone, ont relevé ce biais critique (Nielsen 9–12 ; 39–41 ; Mackey *Discrepant Engagement*; Mackey *Paracritical Hinge* ; Reed). Au-delà de la question noire, il relève d'une « dichotomie entre esthétique et identité qui efface les apports de certains écrivains issus de minorités à l'innovation poétique et obscurcit la dimension sociopolitique des mouvements d'avant-gardes blancs » (Dewey et Rifkin 11).<sup>1</sup> Le poète Ron Silliman, figure centrale de l'avant-garde états-unienne de la *L = A = N = G = U = A = G = E poetry*, exemplifiait bien cette perspective lorsqu'il déclarait en 1988 que « les femmes, les gens de couleur, les minorités sexuelles, le spectre tout entier des personnes marginales — ont un besoin manifeste de raconter leurs histoires. [Pour cette raison] leur écriture apparaît souvent comme beaucoup plus conventionnelle » (Silliman).

L'objectif de cet article sera de réfléchir à la façon dont des poètes situés à un tel point de croisement problématique – en l'occurrence, entre poésie noire et écriture expérimentale héritée des avant-gardes – interrogent et renouvellent la relation entre ces deux catégories de l'histoire littéraire. À travers cette réflexion, nous souhaitons plaider pour la fin du cloisonnement entre l'étude des poésies expérimentales/avant-gardistes et celles des poésies diasporiques/noires ou postcoloniales, séparation d'autant plus artificielle que de nombreux poètes d'Afrique, de la Caraïbe ou de la diaspora africaine explorent à leur manière des questions qui ont animé la pratique avant-gardiste depuis ses débuts en tendant vers cette « poésie totale » dont parlait Adriano Spatola. Plus fondamentalement, nous arguerons que ces poètes, en se plaçant très consciemment dans un état de tension maintenue les deux paradigmes concurrents des pratiques expérimentales et des cultures expressives afro-diasporiques, adoptent une démarche qui est, par excellence, avant-gardiste, puisqu'elle vise à « faire tomber l'une des barrières, surmonter l'une des contradictions qui inhibe la capacité créative », conformément à la formule de Dietrich Scheunemann (43).

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<sup>1</sup> Toutes les traductions sont de notre fait.

Nous appuierons cette démonstration sur les œuvres du poète états-unien Nathaniel Mackey (né en 1947 à Miami) et des Brésiliens Ricardo Aleixo et Ronald Augusto (nés respectivement en 1960 et 1961 à Belo Horizonte et à Rio Grande do Sul). Leurs recherches poétiques, qui comptent parmi les plus originales des Amériques contemporaines, disqualifient toutes les classifications binaires déjà évoquées comme celles qui leurs sont coextensives (poésie noire/ blanche, poésie expérimentale/ engagée, modernité/oralité) tout en renouvelant l'articulation entre le paradigme expérimental issu des avant-gardes européennes et la perspective diasporique héritée – entre autres – des courants de la négritude francophone, de la *Harlem Renaissance* et du *Black Arts Movement* états-unis, ainsi que du *Nation language* de la Caraïbe anglophone. Il conviendra de mettre en résonance les généalogies multiples que ces trois poètes développent dans leurs œuvres, par l'emprunt notamment de techniques expérimentales et de formes orales, et dans leurs discours, en se référant aux avant-gardes de leurs pays respectifs, pour montrer comment le paradigme expérimental et performatif s'articule chez eux à une réflexion sur les rapports de force qui président à l'écriture de l'histoire et à la définition des communautés. Poètes et fortes têtes, extrêmement conscients des rouages historiques qui démarquent leur champ d'action, tous trois ont fait de leur refus salvateur de choisir entre « poésie noire » et « poésie expérimentale » un principe créatif et l'espace de déploiement d'une singularité irréductible.

## Cartographie d'un moment

Ce qui peut motiver le rapprochement des poésies, souvent qualifiées d'« insituables », d'Aleixo, Augusto et Mackey est moins une hypothétique synchronie au sein de « l'Histoire » que ce que l'on pourrait nommer, en empruntant ce vocable aux sciences sociales, leurs « positionnalités », par quoi nous désignons ici le type de relations créatives, poétiques, foncièrement imprévisibles que chacun d'entre eux s'est construite avec l'histoire de la littérature. Nous n'envisageons pas ici l'histoire littéraire comme un « grand récit » universel et linéaire qui donnerait sens à l'intégralité des productions appartenant au champ littéraire, mais comme l'ensemble hétérogène et continu des « espacements d'un *nous* » (Nancy 261) par lesquelles les acteurs du champ littéraire ont pensé et exprimé leur propre historicité.



Pour s'inventer comme poètes, Aleixo, Augusto et Mackey ont dû faire un sort à une situation de liminalité problématique, et transformer cet état de flottement en une ressource créative. Les décennies 1980 et 1990, qui voient l'éclosion de leurs œuvres, sont en effet celles de la transition entre une période de prégnance du paradigme avant-gardiste et une autre marquée par le récit dominant de la « mort des avant-gardes ». On peut considérer qu'au Brésil, le tropicalisme tardif (ou « post-tropicalisme ») s'essouffle dans la première moitié de la décennie 1970, peu ou prou dans les mêmes années que la *L = A = N = G = U = A = G = E poetry* états-unienne. Mackey, Augusto et Aleixo débent en poésie dans ces années de transition, et ils seront à la fois très marqués par l'héritage des avant-gardes désormais qualifiées d'« historiques » mais aussi acteurs de leur dépassement. Mackey en particulier porte de façon très visible l'héritage du *Black Mountain College*, cristallisé autour de la figure de son mentor et interlocuteur poétique majeur, Robert Duncan. Augusto et Aleixo, pour leur part, inscrivent leur travail dans les pas de ceux des concrétistes brésiliens, en particulier les frères Augusto et Haroldo de Campos.

Mackey commence à publier de la poésie sous forme de plaquettes auto-éditées (*chapbooks*) dans les toutes dernières années de la décennie 1970, même si son premier livre au sens strict est *Eroding Witness* (1985) : il débute ainsi à une période où la dynamique collective du *Black Mountain College* est éteinte (le lieu disparaît en 1957, Charles Olson décède en 1970) mais où des figures individuelles comme Duncan continuent à en développer les préceptes esthétiques et philosophiques. Le jeune Mackey consacre d'ailleurs sa thèse de doctorat à l'écriture de la « forme ouverte », en particulier chez les poètes du *Black Mountain College*, dans des années où les idées du mouvement d'avant-garde sont encore dans l'air du temps (il la soutient en 1975), et il peut rencontrer Duncan à plusieurs reprises avant le décès de ce dernier en 1988.

Ronald Augusto fait également ses premières armes dans les ultimes moments des années 1970, avec l'obtention d'un prix de poésie en 1979 dans son état natal du Rio Grande do Sul et un premier livre, *Homem ao rubro*, paru en 1983. Augusto s'inscrit dans sa jeunesse au sein du mouvement de la *poesia marginal* hostile au régime militaire, tout en s'intéressant fortement aux expérimentations formelles des avant-gardes : le jeu sur l'image, la typographie et la dimension concrète de la langue, qui renvoie à l'héritage du *concretismo*, et l'importance de la voix, de la musique et de la performance, qui évoque entre autres l'influence du mouvement *Tropicália*. Dans le contexte politique particulier du

Brésil, la venue d'Augusto à la poésie prend également place dans un temps où la dynamique de groupe prégnante de la fin des années 1950 à celle des années 1970 (*concretismo*, « *poesia praxis* », « *violão de rua* », *Tropicália*) laisse peu à peu la place à des démarches plus singulières, sur fond de détente politique et de transition progressive vers un régime démocratique, à partir des années 1980.

Si l'effet de groupe qui animait les frères Campos et leurs camarades semble appartenir au passé (la revue *Noigandres*, par exemple, cesse de paraître en 1962), le paradigme concrétiste est loin de s'être éteint en tant que tel dans ces années, puisque des œuvres aussi essentielles que *Galáxias* et *A Educação dos Cinco Sentidos* d'Haroldo de Campos, pour ne citer qu'elles, paraissent en 1985. Ricardo Aleixo, quant à lui, publie ses premières œuvres poétiques au début des années 1990. Dans son état natal du Minas Gerais, il se fait connaître comme poète (*Festim*, 1992) mais aussi par des activités publiques qui lui permettent de s'inscrire comme héritier des avant-gardes historiques. Il coordonne ainsi en 1993 à l'Université Fédérale du Minas Gerais un événement destiné à commémorer la « Semaine Nationale de la Poésie d'Avant-garde » qui avait réuni les grands noms de ce domaine trente ans auparavant, au même endroit. Aleixo place en dédicataires de sa première grande anthologie, *Trívio*, son véritable père et Augusto de Campos, symboliquement placé au même niveau que ce dernier. Le critique littéraire brésilienne a depuis consacré en Aleixo l'un des principaux continuateurs du projet expérimental du concrétisme (Kaplan).

L'effort d'Aleixo, Augusto et Mackey n'est du reste que l'une des facettes d'un effort plus général au sein du champ poétique des Amériques, lequel se traduit dans des positions et formulations contrastées entre nord et sud du continent, mais aussi au sein de chaque espace. La manière dont poètes et critiques mettent en récit l'« après » des avant-gardes oscille entre une réaffirmation « néo-formaliste » des conventions que celles-ci avaient déconstruites (Shapiro) et une attitude qui conserve en les déplaçant certains aspects de leur radicalité et de leur ambition critique (Nichols 535). Dans cette dernière optique, on observe par exemple aux États-Unis une popularisation de l'étiquette de « post-avant-garde », utilisée par des poètes importants comme Reginald Shepherd, Ron Silliman et Bob Perelman. Ce dernier définissait ainsi en 1998 la « post-avant-garde » comme un ensemble de pratiques qui tout en leur empruntant certains traits, se sont détournées de l'historicité unique et universaliste

de l'avant-garde pour mettre en avant le champ social dans sa pluralité et ses rapports de force (542).

On peut rencontrer des types de discours analogues au Brésil, comme le montre éloquentement Marcos Siscar dans son ouvrage *De volta ao fim*. Siscar y dépeint l'idée omniprésente de la « fin des avant-gardes » non comme un fait objectif, mais comme « une opération critique et discursive – présente dans des textes essayistiques, littéraires, journalistiques – elle-même productrice d'histoire »<sup>2</sup> (9). Il renvoie notamment à un article de Ricardo Fabbrini, « *O fim das vanguardas* », où l'idée de pluralité des poétiques du présent est opposée au programmatisme et à l'élitisme de la génération précédente – et dans lequel Fabbrini fait usage d'une catégorie, celle d'imaginaire « *pós-vanguardista* » (Fabbrini 111), très proche de celle qui s'est imposée aux États-Unis. Toute une contemporanéité poétique, à la fois chez les théoriciens et les poètes, se serait ainsi inventé une historicité en scénographiant la « fin des avant-gardes » et le refus du genre du manifeste pour affirmer un nouveau paradigme critique adapté au tournant du vingtième siècle, celui de la « pluralisation des poétiques possibles » (Siscar 19).

Pour Aleixo, Augusto et Mackey, l'histoire littéraire n'est pas seulement un grand récit collectif au sein duquel il s'agirait de trouver sa place en se confrontant aux « ancêtres » poétiques, selon le modèle de l'« angoisse de l'influence » chère à Bloom (*The Anxiety of Influence*). C'est une forme de narration indissociablement théorique-poétique, dans laquelle la place que l'on occupe, pense occuper ou aspire à occuper se mêle sans cesse à des interrogations sur le mode d'existence même de cette narration, sur sa légitimité, sur ce qui mérite d'y figurer, sous quelle forme et pourquoi. Le critique américain John Ernest proposait de nommer « chaotique » une forme d'histoire littéraire qui se fonderait sur la critique de l'histoire littéraire hégémonique dans sa prétention à l'universalité, et prendrait garde dans sa proposition d'histoires alternatives à ne pas retomber dans les travers de celle-ci en réinstaurant un fil narratif unique et essentialiste (Ernest).

De fait, l'idée même d'histoire littéraire a pour nos poètes quelque chose de chaotique – de dépourvu de limites, de règles, d'unités de mesure fixes – dans la mesure où les personnages même autour desquels

<sup>2</sup> « uma operação crítica e discursiva – presente em textos ensaísticos, literários, jornalísticos – ela mesma produtora de história »

s'écrit ce récit portent en eux des conceptions qui peuvent le miner (ou « contaminer », dirait Duncan) et le mener dans des directions radicalement nouvelles et imprévues. Au sein des avant-gardes d'après-guerre, l'idée même d'histoire littéraire est repensée à nouveaux frais, dans une démarche consubstantielle à leur écriture poétique. Un bon exemple de cette participation active des poètes à la théorisation de l'histoire littéraire est le débat entre le critique et historien de la littérature Antonio Candido et Haroldo de Campos, retracé avec une grande netteté par Gonzalo Aguilar dans son ouvrage de référence sur l'histoire du concrétisme (Aguilar). Candido se proposait de faire de sa très influente *Formação da literatura brasileira* (1959) une « histoire des brésiliens à travers leur désir d'avoir une littérature » (Candido 25), dans les mêmes années où les concrétistes commencent à intervenir dans le champ littéraire brésilien. Or la position de Campos, typique des avant-gardes, se fonde sur un refus de croire en une dimension « organique » de la littérature nationale comme à son aspect « représentatif » : au contraire, les concrétistes appellent à aller chercher dans le passé ce qu'il est de plus inorganique et de plus discontinu. Haroldo de Campos développe une théorie de l'histoire littéraire comme pratique au présent : dans ses articles de 1967 « Poética Sincrônica » et « Texto e História », Campos propose le concept de « lecture synchronico-rétrospective » – en portugais, « *leitura sincrônico-retrospectiva* » (Campos “Poética Sincrônica” ; Campos “Texto e História”), qu'il présente ainsi :

Nous pourrions ainsi imaginer, alternativement, une histoire littéraire moins comme *formation* que comme *transformation*. Moins comme processus achevé, que comme processus ouvert. Une histoire où ressortent les moments de rupture et de transgression et qui entend la tradition non sur un mode 'essentialiste' mais comme une 'dialectique de question-réponse', une interrogation constante et renouvelée de la diachronie par la synchronie.<sup>3</sup> (Campos *O Seqüestro* 63)

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<sup>3</sup> “Poderemos imaginar assim, alternativamente, uma história literária menos como formação do que como transformação. Menos como processo conclusivo, que como processo aberto. Uma história onde relevem os momentos de ruptura e transgressão e que entenda a tradição não de um modo 'essentialista' mas como uma 'dialectica da pergunta e da resposta', um constante e renovado questionar da diacronia pela sincronia.”

Aux yeux de Campos, sa propre poésie et celle de ses camarades concrétistes est la réalisation parfaite de cette conception active et critique de l'histoire littéraire :

La pensée poétique d'auteurs étrangers bien précis (Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Joyce, Cummings, Pound), qui n'avaient encore jamais été mis en rapport dans un même contexte et avec des objectifs définis, a été agencée de façon critique en fonction des nécessités créatives d'une poésie brésilienne.<sup>4</sup> (Campos *Teoria da poesia concreta* 151)

Au nord du continent, Robert Duncan élabore également une pensée de l'influence qui si elle diffère fort du raisonnement des concrétistes, conçoit bien celle-ci sur le mode de la relation synchronique et, au moins en partie, choisie. L'illustration la plus notoire en est le rapport fusionnel qu'établit Duncan avec H.D., véritable communion gnostique qui se réalisera pleinement dans l'écriture poétique, lieu de « mise en présence » des deux esprits. Il y a chez Duncan une croyance en une pratique de l'hermétisme à travers le poème, qui fait accéder le sujet à une sorte de « société secrète » historiquement anachronique : Freud, H.D., Pound et Duncan lui-même deviennent contemporains dans l'instant poétique (O'Leary 53). Mais la relation d'influence n'est pas nécessairement aussi consciente et volontaire chez Duncan que ce que l'on a pu voir chez Campos : elle prend aussi la forme d'une maladie, d'une contagion, faisant du corps du poète le site et l'emblème de la présentéité poétique (O'Leary 172).

Peter O'Leary propose encore de voir dans Nathaniel Mackey un continuateur du projet de Duncan, à son tour habité par les figures de Duncan, H.D. et Pound – ce que l'étude magistrale que Mackey lui-même a consacrée à Duncan, et qui peut se lire tout autant comme une introduction à sa propre poétique, semble confirmer assez nettement (O'Leary 171–216 ; Mackey *Race in American Poetry*). On notera d'ailleurs que l'une des citations duncanienues fétiches de Mackey, que celui-ci emprunte à son mentor pour penser sa propre poésie jusqu'à faire de ses termes centraux l'un des piliers de son discours poétologique, place la même insistance sur l'idée de rupture que le faisait Campos : “*Praise*

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<sup>4</sup> “O pensamento poético de determinados autores estrangeiros (Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Joyce, Cummings, Pound), nunca antes relacionados num mesmo contexto e para propósitos definidos, foi pôsto criticamente em função das necessidades criativas de uma poesia brasileira.”

*then the interruption of our composure, [...] the juncture in the music that appears discordant” (Duncan Bending the Bow ix-x).*

Parce qu'elle s'inscrit dans le sillage de ces gestes poétiques radicaux, la manière dont Aleixo, Augusto et Mackey vont produire poétiquement leur propre historicité en se mettant en tension avec plusieurs modèles est hautement intempestive, et constitue en tant que telle un geste interprétatif aux riches ramifications philosophiques et politiques. La question de la communauté qu'ils envisagent (communauté de lecteurs, mais plus largement, communauté culturelle) dans le cadre de l'échange poétique est inséparable de l'imagination de sa propre historicité : comme le dit joliment Jean-Luc Nancy, « le 'Nous' vient toujours du futur » (Nancy 266). C'est depuis le futur que permet d'envisager telle ou telle disposition poétique de l'histoire de la poésie qu'il faut considérer la question de l'histoire littéraire comme persistance d'une pratique de récit collectif dans une époque qui n'a plus foi dans la possibilité d'un récit unique et universel. Que gagne-t-on à relire Mallarmé avec Campos, et Campos avec Cruz e Sousa, comme le fait Augusto ? Quelles perspectives nouvelles se dégagent lorsque l'on relit Pound avec Duncan, et Duncan avec Brathwaite, comme le fait Mackey ? C'est à partir de ces questions qu'il faut penser la collision chez nos trois poètes de questions historiographiques qui relèvent d'un axe horizontal (comment cadrer le récit des œuvres du passé, doit-il privilégier des figures exemplaires ou représentatives, ou bien mettre en avant des ruptures radicales), et qui proviennent largement de leur inscription dans l'héritage radical des avant-gardes dites « historiques », et de questions qui relèvent plutôt d'un axe vertical, celui du social comme espace structuré de façon agonistique, et qui proviennent de leur engagement critique avec les littératures de la diaspora africaine.

## **Ipséités suspectes**

« Tout peut coexister avec tout », proclamait crânement Haroldo de Campos dans l'une de ces formules incisives qui ont fait sa réputation (Campos « Da razão antropofágica » 244). Au-delà de la lecture chronologique de la formule, dont nous avons déjà trouvé en route des éléments d'élucidation, il est temps d'explorer sa dimension sociale et communautaire. La revendication d'un pluralisme qui mettrait en défaut les histoires univoques et ouvrirait la porte du champ poétique à toutes les altérités du monde social se retrouve aussi bien dans le *concretismo*

que chez les « postmodernes » du *Black Mountain College*. Cette question affleurerait du reste déjà au cœur de la poésie de la première génération moderniste des années 1920, aux États-Unis (Eliot et Pound citant des langues et religions d'Asie) comme au Brésil (le projet « anthropophage » porté par Oswald de Andrade et mis en œuvre de façon emblématique par Mário de Andrade et Raul Bopp).

Dans les deux cas, les générations d'après-guerre ont dû se positionner, autour de cette question, face à leurs prédécesseurs et leur héritage idéologique ambivalent – sympathies fascistes de Pound et antisémitisme d'Eliot d'un côté, échos entre le projet des modernistes brésiliens et l'idéologie national-populiste de l'*Estado Novo* porté au pouvoir par Getúlio Vargas de l'autre. Cette renégociation a pu prendre la forme d'une prise de distance assez nette avec certains aspects du travail de Pound et Eliot chez Duncan et Olson, ou au contraire d'une forme de continuité mâtinée de prudence dans le « nationalisme critique » d'Haroldo de Campos relisant Oswald de Andrade (Ploegmakers) et affirmant, sans renoncer à la « brésilianité », la nécessité du « polyculturalisme » et d'une « hybridisation ouverte et multilingue » (Campos « Da razão antropofágica » 244).

Nous rejoignons ici l'idée défendue par Ming-Qian Ma d'écriture poétique comme « relecture » et révision critique des textes du passé (Ma). La génération qui nous occupe ici a dû faire à la fin du siècle des choix analogues à ceux de la génération d'après-guerre : réévaluer les poétiques du passé à partir d'évolutions sociales qui les ont amenés à percevoir chez leurs prédécesseurs des contradictions et des dissonances comme autant d'appels à créer et réinventer. Dans ce cas précis, lesdites évolutions ont eu pour conséquence de déplacer la question du rapport entre soi et « l'autre » au sein même de la figure du poète, pour qui la question même de savoir s'il se positionnera comme « autre » ou non de la tradition nationale, en tant que Noir, devient elle-même un site de tension créative.

Comme nous avons tâché de le montrer ailleurs (Vettorato *Poésie moderne*), la revendication par des poètes états-uniens ou brésiliens d'une inscription au sein d'une histoire poétique noire s'est faite sur un mode lui-même pluriel et contradictoire, dans un dialogue constant avec des champs connexes (musique, traditions orales, langue populaire, musique, militantisme politique, sciences sociales) et avec d'autres histoires littéraires, dont celle des modernismes et des avant-gardes nationales. Aux États-Unis comme au Brésil, l'idée même d'une « poésie noire » ou

africaine américaine/afro-brésilienne a été et est toujours l'objet de débats aussi véhéments que complexes. Et s'il n'y a aucune automaticité pour un poète d'origine africaine à s'inscrire dans ces contre-histoires littéraires, il faut bien constater que leur puissance problématique, au sens d'une capacité concrète, au sein du monde social, à poser des questions vitales à la pratique même de l'histoire littéraire, est devenue trop importante pour être simplement ignorée. C'est ce qu'illustre bien le fait même que des poètes aussi singuliers, indépendants d'esprit, rétifs à toute forme d'enfermement identitaire ou communautaire, et peu désireux de rompre avec les poètes du passé qui appartiendraient à une hypothétique « poésie blanche » que Mackey, Aleixo et Augusto aient néanmoins ressenti la nécessité de se situer à leur façon par rapport à l'idée de poésie noire – ou de leur propre « négritude » en tant que poètes.

Pour ce faire, l'une des stratégies mises en œuvre par les poètes est la revendication de modèles que les habitudes critiques qui nous ont habitué à ne pas faire coexister : aux modernistes et avant-gardistes d'après-guerre (Duncan, Olson, Campos, João Cabral de Melo Neto) ou du début du siècle (Pound, H.D., Oswald de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira) s'ajoutent chez eux des figures de la diaspora africaine comme le symboliste João da Cruz e Sousa ou le poète engagé Oliveira Silveira, évoqués par Augusto, ou encore Amiri Baraka et Kamau Brathwaite, placés par Mackey parmi ses principales influences. Ricardo Aleixo pousse très loin cette logique de l'« inventaire à la Prévert » au sein d'une longue liste qu'il soumet à ses lecteurs, et où se côtoient (et nous en passons) John Cage, Augusto de Campos, Marcel Duchamp, Jean-Luc Godard, Paulo Leminski, Jimi Hendrix, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Spike Lee, Paul Zumthor, Sun Ra, Cruz e Sousa, Fluxus, Aimé Césaire, Kurt Schwitters, Henri Salvador, Haroldo de Campos, Friedrich Nietzsche, Thelonious Monk, Gil Scott-Heron, Luiz Gama, Amiri Baraka, Oswald de Andrade, ou encore Gilles Deleuze (Trielli 30–31). Au-delà de l'effet plaisant de cette galaxie hétéroclite, se dit sans doute une vérité plus profonde : que pour le poète toutes ces références que sépare l'esprit académique et disciplinaire sont en réalité coprésentes, contemporaines au sens fort du terme dans le présent contagieux de l'acte créatif – conformément à l'« histoire littéraire synchronique » d'Haroldo de Campos (Faleiros 108).

Outre cet affichage de filiations multiples, le désir manifesté par nos poètes de décloisonner les champs de la culture expressive noire et des avant-gardes passe par un travail de théorisation personnelle. Tous trois sont acteurs d'une forme de réception spécifiquement noire, à la fois comme



poètes et comme critiques – et sans que ces deux éléments ne puissent jamais être tout à fait séparés. En cela également, ils sont des héritiers de la poésie d'avant-garde qui, comme l'écrit Antônio Mendonça, « est en tant que telle une activité critique » (Mendonça 13). Ricardo Aleixo participe activement de la légitimation d'une perspective « afro » dans les discours sur la poésie, comme lorsqu'il analyse dans la poésie de son ami Edimilson Pereira une écriture de la voix qui trouve ses sources dans la culture orale afro-brésilienne (Pereira 15). Ronald Augusto a également travaillé dans ce sens, comme lorsqu'il écrit un article théorique au sein du volume collectif *A mente afro-brasileira*, véritable pierre de touche de l'affirmation d'une perspective noire au Brésil (Augusto « Transgressão »). Nathaniel Mackey a consacré de nombreux travaux à des poètes africains américains, dont il cherche à rendre manifeste la dimension expérimentale du travail – on songera notamment à ses recherches sur Amiri Baraka et Kamau Brathwaite. La camaraderie littéraire avec des acteurs moins réticents du champ de la « poésie noire » n'est pas rejetée, mais elle est soumise à un régime d'exigence intellectuelle extrême, signe d'un malaise face aux enfermements identitaires quels qu'ils soient (Frederico 300–301).

Plutôt qu'une « angoisse de l'influence » (Bloom *The Anxiety of Influence*), il y a chez nos poètes quelque chose comme une angoisse de la réception. La pression du monde de la poésie et ses attentes classificatoires sont présents à l'esprit des auteurs, et mis en scène au sein de leurs poèmes. Dans son texte intitulé « Exercício de lira maldizente », Ricardo Aleixo fait par exemple défiler sur la page les multiples réactions stéréotypées qu'il imagine voir opposées à ses poèmes. Faut-il se lancer dans des expérimentations formelles ? « Si tu expérimentes, tu n'es qu'une copie d'Augusto [de Campos] » (« *Se experimentais – cópia do Augusto* »), s'entend-il rétorquer comme par une voix intérieure (Aleixo *Máquinazero* 33). Faut-il pour autant se présenter comme un « poète noir » en lutte pour son peuple ? C'est le meilleur moyen de se trouver enfermé dans les stéréotypes primitivistes et complaisants hérités du modernisme que Ronald Augusto soumet à un jeu de collage vengeur dans son poème « Em reposta a uma solicitação que lhe fizeram », raillant entre deux citations importées « cette claire époque durant laquelle/chair blanche de poisson intrépide convertissait les dures peines/éthiopiennes en mussum muscle musique » (Augusto « Em reposta »).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> « aquela época clara em que / cabra seco carne branca de peixe convertia a duras penas / etíope em mussum músculos música »

Il suffit de parcourir les pages de la revue majeure du mouvement poétique afro-brésilien, *Cadernos negros*, pour constater que la réception spécifique de la poésie noire est loin d'être neutre, et que les expérimentations formelles chères à Augusto et Aleixo y sont moins prisées que des poèmes engagés exprimés dans une langue accessible. Cela ne signifie pas qu'aucun poète ne peut transcender ces barrières, mais lorsque c'est le cas, cette « double légitimation » se fait selon des modalités qui portent les marques de critères différents. Ainsi le dictionnaire des écrivains afro-brésiliens d'Eduardo de Assis Duarte, qui contient pourtant cent entrées, ignore-t-il tout bonnement Aleixo et présente-t-il Augusto dans des termes qui, de manière très révélatrice, opposent expérimentation formelle et négritude, la seconde venant en quelque sorte racheter la première. Après avoir expliqué qu'Augusto explore le langage, les « signes » et les jeux formels hérités des avant-gardes, frôlant dangereusement un « risque d'hermétisme », l'auteur se tourne plus particulièrement vers les poèmes où des questions liées au racisme sont abordées, pour conclure que chez Augusto « la poésie est avant tout invention. Mais une invention qui n'est jamais innocente » (Duarte 233). On imagine le sourire du poète face à cet *approbatur* embarrassé...

Le symptôme poétique le plus flagrant du positionnement de nos poètes face aux injonctions contradictoires et chaotiques de l'histoire littéraire est une écriture de l'oralité qui déconstruit la poétique de la présence. L'association de l'oralité, du cri, de l'onomatopée avec les poétiques de la diaspora africaine a joué au vingtième siècle un rôle à la fois moteur et ambivalent dans la revendication de critères esthétiques propres pour la poésie de la diaspora africaine (Vettorato *Poésie moderne*). Signe de ralliement et vecteur de solidarité militante, cette association a aussi pu apparaître comme stéréotypée et limitative sur le plan poétique. Dans tous les cas, elle participe à coup sûr de la construction d'un contexte de réception au sein duquel les expérimentations formelles et la déconstruction du langage deviennent volontiers suspectes de mettre en danger l'assertion vigoureuse et sans équivoque de la négritude. Or Mackey, Aleixo et Augusto manient tous trois les poétiques de l'oralité qui portent la trace des avant-gardes qui les ont inspirés. Le recueil *Puya* (1987) de Ronald Augusto s'ouvre ainsi sur une série de vers qui tendent vers l'onomatopée et l'illisibilité, dans une forme de parodie de la voix et du rythme « nègres » légués par le *modernismo* brésilien et le *negrismo* hispano-américain du début du vingtième siècle: « *zum zum zum golo logo / rum rum rum golo louvo* » (Augusto *Cair de costas* 61). Ce n'est pas tant une

oralité qui imprègne les vers du poète que le matériau historique même de l'oral-négritude-signes-de-la-présence-et-de-l'authenticité comme « mixte mal analysé » (Deleuze 19) qui est mis en poème. Le signe de ce qui devrait dire le plus haut degré d'intensité verbale, de vie, de communion avec « l'être », devient le lieu stratégique d'expérimentations iconoclastes.

On trouve aussi chez Aleixo de tels jeux sur les attentes des « poétiques de l'authenticité » qui se sont trouvées petit à petit associées avec l'oralité et les traditions orales. C'est particulièrement le cas, au sein de *Trívio*, des poèmes « Marcial entre os kuikúro » et « Ñamandu » (48–49). Les deux poèmes sont présentés en vis-à-vis, sur une double page. Le page de gauche contient huit vers qui comportent des marques d'oralité (« claro ») et des mots entre parenthèses semblant interrompre la parole principale (« aposto »). Les attentes primitivisantes appelées par le titre et les marques d'oralité « pour l'œil » viennent buter contre maints effets expérimentaux (syntaxe incomplète, espaces entre les caractères, segments répétés jusqu'à sembler faire signe vers leur propre matérialité). La page de droite radicalise encore ce dispositif en présentant les mots en un bloc de lettres espacées de manière variable, et parfois en gras, ce qui donne au poème un air de composition visuelle difficile à lire. D'une manière qui évoque fortement la poésie concrète des frères Campos, certains mots sont découpés, créant une ambiguïté de sens – par exemple « pétala » (pétale) aux vers 8 et 9, que l'on pourrait aussi être tentés de lire « pé / tala » - pied (humain) et « attelle » ou pied (d'une plante) et « labour ». Certaines suites de mots en gras sont si saturées d'allitérations et d'assonances qu'elles finissent par produire une étrange musique presque mécanique, où se rejoignent l'écriture primitiviste de la voix et les expérimentations de la poésie sonore (« **d e u s / q u e s e d e s / d o b r a a o s o l** »). Dans la partie du livre réservée aux notes de l'auteur – convention paratextuelle avec laquelle Aleixo joue ostensiblement – l'auteur ne cache rien de l'absolue facticité de sa « poétique de la voix marginale » : « 'Marcial entre os kuikúro' est une adaptation **plus-que-libre** d'un mythe des indiens Kuikúro recueilli par l'anthropologue Bruna Franchetto. 'Ñamandu' se base **vaguement** sur un mythe des indiens guaranis du Paraguay, recueilli par l'anthropologue Pierre Clastres » (*Trívio. Poemas* 85, nous soulignons).

Il est fort tentant de dresser une parallèle entre ces aveux et ceux du locuteur poétique du *Blue Fasa* de Nathaniel Mackey, qui s'identifie « en jeu » au peuple traditionnel Fasa découvert entre les pages de Marcel Griaule, et donne pour nom à l'idéal de communauté nomade et plurielle qui se dessine entre ses pages, à la fois comme utopie politique et comme

figuration d'un « moment » (ou d'un « nous ») qui l'unirait à ses lecteurs/auditeurs, celui de « *truly pretend Fasa* » – « des Fasa authentiquement inauthentiques » (Mackey *Blue Fasa* 154). L'identification de la figure poétique avec un sujet unifié et authentique, sous le masque de la « voix noire », se trouve court-circuitée et réinjectée dans des dispositifs expérimentaux où tout est toujours-déjà langage. Le procédé même de la sérialité emprunté à Duncan, avec ses reprises et variations jamais closes de formules, mine la poétique de la voix tout en maintenant son souvenir ou son fantôme, en arrière-plan du papier et de l'encre, créant un sentiment troublant de présence-absence. L'oralité pernicieusement authentique du primitivisme est dépassée par celle, expérimentale et délicieusement discordante, du *free jazz* : l'« ipséité suspecte » (*suspect ipseity*) cède ainsi la place à un « jeu de cache-cache ipséique » – *ipseic / hide and seek* (Mackey *Blue Fasa* 80).

Nos trois poètes poursuivent en les déplaçant les expérimentations des avant-gardes historiques jusque dans leur pratique de la performance. Le moment de la présence, du surgissement du corps et de la voix, font pleinement partie du déploiement chaotique de signes et d'historicités contradictoires qui compose leurs poèmes. Chez eux, la performance se fait avec et au-delà de l'oralité, comme une façon de « faire moment » tout en interrogeant les contours de cette expérience d'être-en-commun. Nous avons montré dans un article précédent comment, au sein de ses lectures poétiques volontiers accompagnées de musiciens, Nathaniel Mackey imaginait des formes contemporaines de performance qui épousent de façon critique l'ambition collective de l'épique (Vettorato « Les éléments épiques africains »). Sa pratique transcende radicalement l'idée de texte pour disséminer l'expérience indivisiblement sensorielle-intellectuelle du poème entre de multiples supports : plaquettes autoéditées, livres, performances seul ou accompagné, ou encore enregistrements musicaux comme avec l'album de 1995 *Strick (Song Of The Andoumboulou 16–25)*, réalisé en collaboration avec le saxophoniste Hafez Modirzadeh et le percussionniste Royal Hartigan. Ronald Augusto associe poésie visuelle, dessins, théorie, chansons et vidéos, et il a collaboré avec le danseur Robson Duarte et la comédienne Ligia Rigo pour créer l'œuvre poético-scénique *Homem ao Rubro*. Ricardo Aleixo est réputé pour ses performances où il lit, chante, joue de la guitare et des percussions, utilise son ordinateur pour manier sons et vidéos, ou encore emploie un accessoire de son invention, le *poemanto* – un grand drap noir couvert de mots dont il s'entoure, comme pour mimer la relation d'inclusion

mutuelle de l'homme et du langage. La voix, y compris comme timbre, comme vibration d'un corps qui éructe, est toujours enroulée de signes, de caractères.

Ricardo Aleixo, Ronald Augusto et Nathaniel Mackey, par leur pratique de la performance et de la mise en tension des médiums, disséminent le poème en mille endroits, rendant inopérante toute imposition d'un sens ou d'une essence du poétique. L'un des pouvoirs de la poésie comme *poiesis*, ou création imaginative, est peut-être précisément de retourner contre eux-mêmes certains horizons d'attente et autres cadrages caducs de façon à libérer l'énergie créative – une démarche, une fois de plus, typique du paradigme avant-gardiste. Mais cette énergie créative n'est pas nécessairement à penser au sein d'un milieu neutre et lisse, loin des catégories du monde social. Le motif duncanien de la « dissonance » peut trouver, relu à l'aune des musiques africaines américaines par Mackey, un espace de déploiement et d'évolution salutaire ; tout comme l'impératif concrétiste de la « transgression » (« *transgressão* »), reformulé par Augusto en « transnégression » (« *transnegressão* ») irrévérencieuse et ravageuse pour toutes les assignations identitaires venues de l'extérieur comme de l'intérieur de sa communauté (Augusto « *Transnegressão* »).

Peut-être gagnerait-on à enjamber les barrières séparant poésies « situées » et poésies expérimentales et à penser ensemble, comme nous y invite Peter Middleton, les manifestations écrites et orales de la poésie, avec tout ce qu'elles peuvent charrier d'imaginaires sociaux – qui nous engagent. Tout comme le texte, le paratexte, la mise en page et autres stratégies éditoriales ou scripturaires, la performance poétique est un moment où tous les acteurs de l'échange « interprètent ensemble » un petit « drame » où les questions de l'auctorialité, du statut du texte, de l'interprétation et de la production d'un « moment » collectif se trouvent mises en jeu (Middleton 74). C'est dans ce moment d'interprétation – dans les deux sens du terme – que nous pouvons peut-être, en tant que lecteurs de poésie, saisir quelques échos de l'historicité du poème en train de se faire, avec nous, à travers nous.

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## Genres as Gateways to the World for Minor Literature: The Case of Crime Fiction in Galicia

CÉSAR DOMÍNGUEZ

In his 1978 lecture “El cuento policial” (“The Detective Story”), Jorge Luis Borges foresaw what world literature scholars (see King, “Crime Fiction”; Nilsson, Damrosch, and D’haen) have recently been discussing, namely, that crime fiction may claim to be world literature – at least in one of its several dimensions – when he stated that “There exists a certain species of contemporary reader: the reader of detective fiction. This reader [...] may be found in every country in the world and ... numbers in millions” (Borges 492). Arguably, it would have been much more difficult for Borges to imagine that one day crime fiction would be so powerful as to make possible the international academic recognition of a peripheral literature, i.e. Galician literature. On May 13, 2014, the Modern Language Association of America approved the creation of a Section of Galician Studies. In their request letter, the signatories made several arguments, among which translations of Galician literary works played a prominent role. The list of translations includes several poetry anthologies – either individual or collective – in accordance with the central role played by this genre in Galician literature since the Middle Ages, while contemporary narratives are mainly represented by two best-selling writers, both in Galicia and abroad, Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar. Rivas has forayed into crime fiction only occasionally, with one short story (“O muíño” [“The Mill”]) and the 2010 novel *Todo é silencio* (*All Is Silence*). Villar, in turn, is a crime fiction writer who has been awarded several crime fiction prizes and has been included by the novelist Ann Cleeves in her list of the top ten crime writers in translation.

Such international recognition, however, is at odds with the situation of crime fiction in both Galician literature and Galician studies. As for the former, Galician crime fiction has met a wide readership whose taste goes beyond Villar’s novels and includes other successful writers such as Carlos G. Reigosa (King, “Reconstructing the Nation”) and, most

especially, Diego Ameixeiras, despite the fact that their works have not been translated into other non-Iberian languages. Furthermore, the success of these writers has resulted in older examples of the genre being republished, along with the translation into Galician of crime fiction from other languages (Ameixeiras, for instance, is a translator into Galician of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler). As for academic attention, with the notable exceptions of the overviews of Stewart King (2003) and Dolores Vilavedra (2010), crime fiction has not been thoroughly analysed, nor have any preliminary or basic steps in this direction been undertaken, for example in the form of a compilation of a list of crime fiction works. The marketplace and academia symbolically meet, then, at what I will call the “May 17 void.” May 17 is the “Día das Letras Galegas,” the celebration of Galician language and literature that has taken place every year since 1963. The 1989 special issue of *Cadernos “A Nosa Terra,”* which was devoted to crime fiction, included a foreword in which it was asked: “If major sales in Galician literature are represented by crime fiction, why not a May 17th devoted to crime fiction?” (“Presentación” 3, my translation). Thirty years after this question was first posed, the reply is still pending.

In this essay, I will focus on Domingo Villar, who is undeniably the most international Galician contemporary writer. His work has been translated into over fifteen languages besides Spanish-Castilian, a number close to that of Manuel Rivas (with twenty languages) and to that of the most widely circulated Galician work, *Memorias dun neno labrego* (1961) by Xosé Neira Vilas, which has been translated into sixteen languages.<sup>1</sup> My analysis will be restricted to the three main translations of Villar’s work, namely, Galician, Spanish-Castilian, and English. It may come as a surprise to talk of a Galician “translation” instead of a Galician original. A key feature of Villar’s writing, however, is that there is no version that may be called “original,” unless, by original, one understands the source language upon which translations into non-Iberian languages are based. In this case, Villar’s originals are in Spanish-Castilian and not in Galician.

As Villar is exclusively a crime fiction writer, his novels are a representative example of what Eva Erdmann has described as a genre which “is developing into the dominating literary discourse of a global

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are only tentative, for there are no reliable sources; neither has the Index Translationum an updated register of translation for these Galician writers.

local knowledge” (278–79). Yet, I do not completely agree with her when she states, on the one hand, that “the genre of the crime novel fulfils the function of a world literature in the sense in which literary history determined this concept in the early nineteenth century” (278) and, on the other hand, that it is assumed that “the internationality of the crime novel, unlike that of world literature classics of single works of genius ... applies to the entire genre” (278). Both statements result, in my opinion, from overlooking the fact that some crime fiction novels come from “minor literatures” (see Domínguez, Di Rosario, and Ciastellardi) and that an opposition between “works of genius” and crime fiction writers is no longer tenable – if it ever was.

In the first part of this essay, I will discuss the treatment of crime fiction in Galician studies and the role it has played within the mainstream narrative of Galician literature. Obviously, my account cannot claim to be comprehensive. Rather, it will be restricted to some key issues which, nonetheless, become essential when the “dissemiNational” systemic constitution of Galician literature is taken into account.<sup>2</sup> In the second part of my essay, I will examine how Domingo Villar negotiates the basic set of crime fiction rules within the Galician context. The case of Villar is exemplary, not only given his role as the most internationally acclaimed Galician crime fiction writer, but also, and more importantly, as a writer who requires to be approached dissemiNationally rather than nationally. Some concluding remarks will follow these two parts, in which I will apply some insights derived from my Galician case study to the understanding of crime fiction as world literature.

## 1. “A bazaar in Vigo, one of those where authentic English objects are sold.”

For the mainstream narrative of Galician literature, the first example of Galician crime fiction was published in 1984 – i.e. Carlos G. Reigosa’s *Crime en Compostela* [Crime in Compostela] –, though some critics opt for Xosé Fernández Ferreiro’s *Corrupción e morte de Brigitte Bardot* [Brigitte Bardot’s Corruption and Death] (1981). Fernández Ferreiro is

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<sup>2</sup> I am obviously drawing here from Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of “dissemiNation,” which in the specific case of Galician society needs to be related to “the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering” (Bhabha 139) as a result of diaspora.

also credited with having written the first Western novel in Galician: *A morte de Frank González* [Frank González's Death] (1975). In either case, the foundations of crime fiction in Galician literature must have been laid in the early 1980s, a hypothesis based upon (at least) two implicit assumptions. First, there are no previous examples of crime fiction in Galicia or, if they exist, they do not comply with the defining rules of the genre and fail to correspond to what is generally understood by "Galician literature." Second, crime fiction in Galician literature emerges later than in Spanish-Castilian literature. I will briefly and separately survey each of these assumptions for the sake of clarity, although they are evidently interlinked.

As for the non-existence of crime fiction in Galicia before the 1980s, my arguments will mainly draw from Maurizio Ascari, who advocates the need for a "counter-history" of crime fiction on the basis that current definitions of the genre are indebted to the foundational 1920s–1930s theoretical and historical approach, which "tended to consign it [the genre] to a space of rigid rules. In their attempt to assert the dignity of the genre, writers and critics emphasised its rational elements at the expense of other components and consequently pushed the more sensational aspects into the background" (3). On the contrary, for Ascari, crime fiction entails a "centuries-long process" of "interaction between realism and fantasy" (xi), the latter having been erased from the definition of the genre for, as suggested by Tzvetan Todorov's reading of the fantastic, fantasy literature reflects "the uneasy conscience of the positivist nineteenth century" (xi).

Interestingly, a Galician female writer, Emilia Pardo Bazán, argued for the relevance of the sensational in crime fiction already in the early twentieth century on the occasion of surveying the reception of Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* novels in Spain. Her opinion on Conan Doyle's realism deserves to be quoted in full:

No cabe lectura más adecuada para *girls* y *boys*. Allí ni por casualidad se desliza una frase, un pormenor escabroso. El terrible elemento pasional, tan frecuente en el crimen, ni asoma, o asoma tan envuelto en pudibundez, que no hay mejor disfrazada máscara. Al lado de este idealismo que produce impresión de falsedad, muestra Conan Doyle un realismo que halaga los instintos de sus compatriotas; realismo puramente epidérmico, local.... En las novelas de Conan Doyle el fondo, los tipos, los personajes, las decoraciones, lugares, muebles, armas (¡qué de armería!) son genuinos y castizos de Albión, y sin embargo, al acabar de leer, no ha penetrado en nosotros ni un átomo

del sentido íntimo del alma inglesa. Creemos salir de un bazar de Vigo, de esos donde se expenden objetos ingleses auténticos. (Pardo Bazán, “Conan Doyle’s Novels” 122)

[There is no more adequate reading for girls and boys. One cannot find a single lurid sentence or event. The horrific passionate element, so frequent in crime, does not show up, or, if it does, it is wrapped up in a mask of prudish decency. Along with this idealism, which produces a feeling of falseness, Conan Doyle uses a realism that satisfies his fellow compatriots’ instincts; a purely epidermal realism, a local one.... In Conan Doyle’s novels, the background, the types, the characters, the decoration, the settings, the furniture, the arms (what an armoury!) are genuinely from Albion; and yet, when one finishes reading the book, there is not a single atom of the English soul. It is like exiting from a bazaar in Vigo, one of those where authentic English objects are sold.] (my translation)

Pardo Bazán not only despises Conan Doyle’s “purely epidermal realism,” which she relates to the wrong “idea that for solving a crime, it is only necessary to have a lot of activity, great power of reflection and insight” (“idea de que para descubrir un crimen hace falta, no solo mucha actividad, sino gran reflexión y penetración”): she also sees in other examples of crime fiction the re-emergence of the Gothic, a “wild power of creation” (“desenfreno inventivo”), a “new form of old horrifying stories in the mood of the English novelist, Ann Radcliffe” (“nueva forma de los viejos relatos espeluznantes de la novelista inglesa Ana Radcliffe”; Pardo Bazán, “Detective Novels” 254, my translation). In short, realism does not clash with the sensational within masterpieces of crime fiction. Realism, on the one hand, is enshrined in the attention to detail that is characteristic of the genre, while sensationalism, on the other hand, is derived from crime itself. Imposing realism over the sensational results in “invented crimes” (“crímenes inventados”) similar to those found in Conan Doyle’s works, i.e. “cerebral or, better, geometric and mathematical [crimes] – so different from human reality and so similar to chess problems” (“cerebrales, o mejor, geométricos y matemáticos – tan distintos de la realidad humana y tan parecidos a problemas de ajedrez”; Pardo Bazán, “Conan Doyle’s Novels” 122, my translation).

In view of this counter-genealogy of crime fiction, the scholar approaching the Galician case faces an additional problem. Indeed, the existence of fantasy as a genre has been denied not only in Galicia but in the whole of Spain in accordance with the centuries-long ideology of realism, as epitomised by Cervantes, which informs mainstream

literary history. Suffice it to mention here that the reconstruction of crime fiction in Galicia during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century would require researching its presence in journalism, both in terms of its rhetorical emplotment as news and the publication of short stories or serial novels. As Pardo Bazán mentions, “[when] I read the story of a crime in a newspaper, I want to see everything, the places, the furniture, for, if I could, I would discover a lot and find the clue to the true criminal” (“leo en la prensa el relato de un crimen, experimento deseos de verlo todo, los sitios, los muebles, suponiendo que, de poder hacerlo así, averiguaría mucho y encontraría la pista del criminal verdadero”; “Conan Doyle’s Novels” 122, my translation). In her contributions to *La Ilustración Artística* between 1909 and 1912, Pardo Bazán evokes famous crimes that took place in both Madrid (the slitting of Vicenta Verdier’s throat) and Paris (Marguerite Steinhek’s murder of her stepmother and husband). Strangely, Pardo Bazán never refers to one of the most brutal crimes in the country’s history which took place in Galicia, near Vilalba, in 1911: Ángel Castro Cabarcos was killed after having his facial skin torn away from him while alive. This specific murder would probably have interested her as result of its blend of realism and fantasy on the one hand, and the fact it took place in her homeland on the other. While some attributed the facial abrasion to an attempt at making the victim unrecognisable, others linked it to folk medicine practices according to which the face skin of a beardless man possesses curative effects. Pardo Bazán, president of the Galician Folklore Society, cherished these combinations of realism and fantasy, as shown by several of her crime fiction works, such as the short story “Rabeno,” in which the inhabitants of a small Galician village kill a man they identify with Rabeno, the criminal who, in Galician folklore, kidnaps and attacks young women to extract their fat. Needless to say, for a feminist such as Pardo Bazán, female revenge against sexual crimes should not be punished in the same way as in the case of men insofar as “women do not completely enjoy their civil rights” (“la mujer no disfrute de la plenitud de los derechos civiles”; “Contemporary Crimes” 762, my translation).

As far as I know, no research has been carried out about the presence of crime fiction in newspapers and periodical publications. Such research should arguably start with *El Heraldo Gallego*, the literary journal founded by Valentín Lamas Carvajal, which played an essential role in the *Rexurdimento* (Galician Renaissance) and to which key literary figures



contributed, such as Rosalía de Castro and Pardo Bazán herself.<sup>3</sup> Published in two instalments in January 1880, the short story “O demo das Rías Baixas” [“The Devil from the Rías Baixas”] – written in Spanish–Castilian by Víctor G. Candamo – offers a perfect example of crime fiction set in Galicia, including a sea storm, a sexual murder, and the revenge of the victim’s brother fifteen years later. Interestingly, Domingo Villar also used all these elements in *A praia dos afogados* (*Death on a Galician Shore*). The case of “O demo das Rías Baixas,” of course, constitutes only an isolated example. Further research would be necessary in order to draw more general conclusions about crime fiction in Galicia.

Pardo Bazán perfectly illustrates the first assumption I mentioned above – there exist no examples of crime fiction in Galicia before the 1980s or, if they exist, they fail to correspond to what is generally understood by “Galician literature.” According to an enduring definition, Spanish crime fiction comprises stories “written by a Spaniard in which some or all of the characters are Spanish, and which [are] usually set at least in part in Spain” (Hart 13). However problematic this definition may sound, let me apply it, for a moment, to the Galician case, so that it would read as follows: *Galician crime fiction is written by a Galician in which some or all of the characters are Galician, and which is usually set at least in part in Galicia*. Though many works of Pardo Bazán’s crime fiction comply with all these requirements, none of them could be fully considered as belonging to Galician literature for the simple fact that they were written in Spanish–Castilian rather than in Galician. And yet, Pardo Bazán’s criminal stories perfectly portray the Galician *Ancien Régime* geography of crime, to which contemporary crime fiction is indebted: they move from the border between Galicia and Portugal (the setting of smuggling and criminals running away from national laws, as in her short story “Santiago el Mudo” [“Santiago, the Mute”]), to a depiction of the increasing number of thefts in the Atlantic cities (as in “La cana” [“The White Hair”]), and the sexual violence of inner Galicia (as in the above mentioned “Rabeno”). All these settings were permeated by the factor which Pardo Bazán identified as quintessential for crime,

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<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it should be noted that during the nineteenth century, the biggest urban concentrations of Galicians were located neither in Galicia nor in the rest of Spain, but in cities such as Buenos Aires, Mexico, and La Habana (Colmeiro 132). As the detective novel can be regarded as an urban genre, this certainly constitutes a relevant issue for its history in Galician literature.

passion, at least from the perspective of the chroniclers of the period. In his 1846–50 *Diccionario geográfico-estadístico-histórico de España y sus posesiones de Ultramar*, Pascual Madoz stated that Galician people “are so vengeful that anybody who causes offence to them may be sure they will be harassed by the eternal revenge of both the offended and their relatives” (qtd. in Iglesias Estepa 415, my translation).

Nevertheless, the exclusion of works from Galician literature on the basis of a philological-national definition (see González-Millán) still dominates mainstream criticism and continues to affect the crime fiction genre. This is illustrated in the omission of Marina Mayoral’s *Cándida, otra vez* [*Cándida, Again*] (1979) – in contrast to her other crime fiction novel, *Case perfecto* [*Almost Perfect*], written in Galician – and of Alfredo Conde’s *Huesos de santo* [*The Saint’s Bones*] (2010).

This assumption I have just dealt with influences the second one, namely, the belated emergence of crime fiction in Galicia in comparison with Spanish-Castilian literature. There is a general consensus about the existence of two groups of crime fiction writings in Spanish-Castilian. The first one includes works from the 1970s, when the genre experienced a boom after the end of Franco’s regime, and works from the transition period to democracy (see Craig-Odders). A defining feature of the works created during this time is that the police have no role at all in conducting an investigation, a logical consequence of the suspicion this symbol of the totalitarian establishment still raised. Furthermore, these works aim to rewrite official history. The second group of crime fiction emerged as the result of the metamorphosis of the hard-boiled model that took place in Spain in the mid-1990s. It addresses issues of the current era of globalisation, including the unprecedented migration flows and global events, such as the Olympic Games in Barcelona as well as drug trafficking and real estate speculation.

Against this background, 1980s Galician crime fiction included a limited number of works that reflected the social and political changes of Galicia. A discussion of the possibilities of creating an authentic Galician crime fiction then ensued. Some critics, such as Silvia Gaspar, doubt that the emergence of crime fiction in Galicia constitutes something “natural” or that it results from publishing strategies (26). Other critics, such as Xesús González Gómez, consider “there does not exist a Galician crime fiction novel as of yet. There are some titles. The number is limited, and quality is nowhere. And this is so because almost all Galician Noir novels are full of stereotypes; they do not know how to avoid clichés” (27, my

translation). Dolores Vilavedra has described the new re-emergence of the genre, of which Domingo Villar's novels are a key example, as "a reaction against the disintegration of the model; hence the success of the new works that are faithful to the traditional hermeneutics of crime fiction" (136, my translation).

## 2. "I don't know from where it got translated."

Domingo Villar's crime fiction novels belong to world literature, at least if one considers that, on the occasion of the 2008 Edinburgh International Book Festival, his novel *Ollos de auga* (*Water-Blue Eyes*) was included in the category "World Literature," reserved for those writers who neither come from an English-speaking country nor write in English. In an interview, Xabier Cid called Villar's attention to the fact that the English translation does not make any reference to the original in Galician. Villar then replied: "I don't know from where it got translated" (Cid 91, my translation). Such a reply accurately describes not only the translation into English, but also Villar's writing process as a whole. So far, his crime fiction works include the 2006 novel *Ollos de auga/Ojos de agua*, the first to introduce the inspector Leo Caldas and his deputy Rafael Estévez; the 2009 novel *A praia dos afogados/La playa de los ahogados*, the second book in the Leo Caldas series; the 2009 short story "Las hojas secas" ["Dry Leaves"], which does not feature Caldas; the 2010 short story "El último verano de Paula Ris" ["Paula Ris' Last Summer"], which provides a prequel to the Caldas series; the 2010 short story "Die Bestie von Oelde" ["The Beast from Oelde"] and the 2016 short story "El Lobo" ["The Wolf"], neither of which feature Caldas. In 2015, a third novel in the Caldas series under the title of *Cruces de pedra/Cruces de piedra* was announced and finally dismissed, while in 2019 his true third novel was published under the title *O último barco/El último barco* [The Last Ship]. His fiction includes, therefore, three novels in Galician/Spanish-Castilian, three short stories in Spanish-Castilian, and one short story in German.

Interestingly, Villar's novels were published almost simultaneously in Galician and in Spanish-Castilian: around one month apart (see Sánchez Zapatero 808–09). While the Spanish-Castilian version of *Ollos de auga* comes with a paratext reading "Traducido del gallego por el autor" [Translated from the Galician by the author], the Spanish-Castilian versions of *A praia dos afogados* and *O último barco* do not

include such information and present themselves as originals. Thus, one might consider that a Galician original has been translated into Spanish-Castilian in the case of *Ollos de auga/Ojos de agua* or that we are dealing with four originals – in Galician and in Spanish-Castilian – in the case of *A praia dos afogados/La playa de los ahogados* and *O último barco/El último barco*. However, the writing process becomes more complicated, if one takes Villar's own description into account. In an interview with María Míguez in October 2010, Villar explains: "I start writing in Galician and translating into Spanish-Castilian the very same day. I finish at the same time in both languages because I use translation to correct.... translating does not consist of switching one word with another. It is about dismantling the text, going down to the substrate and assembling it again, something which makes it possible to see the inner architecture, the details, from a wider perspective" (n.p., my translation.).

Whereas self-translation is usually associated with a consecutive translation, in which the authority of the original survives only in temporal terms, Villar's writing process involves a simultaneous self-translation. In this process, the distinction (even temporal) between the original and the self-translation collapses insofar as the result comprises two variants of a non-existent original. Interestingly, the consecutive translation into a non-Iberian language transforms both variants – in Galician and in Spanish-Castilian – into originals. The paratext informs the reader of both *Water-Blue Eyes* and *Death on a Galician Shore* that the English version has been "Translated from Spanish." Textually, however, the equally important role of the Galician version is undeniable, for, as Rainier Grutman puts it, "each monolingual part calls for its counterpart in the other language" (20). This transfer process has also been reproduced in translations other than the English one.

However creative this kind of rewriting might be, it retains its own contradictions. They strike one as especially acute when the asymmetries of minority situations are taken into account. While the translation into a non-Iberian language (here, English) is based upon a Spanish-Castilian version calling for its counterpart in Galician, such a translation does not rely upon a Galician version claiming a Spanish-Castilian equivalent. Thus, I wish to stress the prevalence of the mediating role of the dominant language (here Spanish-Castilian), in typically bilateral translation flows. In this regard, Stewart King's argument about the sales of originals and translations needs to be qualified when applied to minority cultures. According to King, "Whereas the Spanish original [of

Rosa Ribas' *Entre dos aguas*] has sold between 3,000 and 4,000 copies, the German translation is currently in its third print run and has sold between 15,000 and 17,000 copies, which suggests that her works have had a greater resonance among German readers" ("Don't Forget" 76). The higher sales of Villar's Spanish-Castilian version, however, do not indicate that Spanish-Castilian readers received his works better than the Galician readers. Indeed, that would imply overlooking both the higher number of Spanish-Castilian readers (some of them also Galician), the different sizes of each market, and the monopoly of Spanish publishing houses in Latin America.

Self-translation constitutes a double-edged sword in minority contexts (see Dasilva for the Iberian context). While some minority writers revert to consecutive self-translation to reach a wider audience and gain institutional recognition from the hegemonic culture, they prefer to entrust it to outside translators once their careers have been established in the major culture. This enables them to consolidate their positions within the minority culture. This has been the case of Manuel Rivas in Galicia and Bernardo Atxaga in the Basque country. The fact that Villar has opted for simultaneous self-translation may indicate that the Galician literary system has entered a new phase in which bi-literariness is acceptable. Alternatively, it may suggest that Villar has developed a strategy meant to compensate for the lack of "linguistic visibility" of the minority culture resulting from translation flows not predicated on Galician as a source language.

To conclude this second part, let me briefly touch upon how bilingualism and diglossia are thematically represented in Villar's work, for these issues precisely stand at the core of his writing process. Every chapter of both *Ollos de auga/Ojos de agua* and *A praia dos afogados/La playa de los ahogados* begins with the definition of a term which, either as such or in a derivative form, reappears in the following pages. If one compares the definitions provided by the writer with those found in standard dictionaries, it becomes clear that Villar introduces additional meanings. If one performs such a comparison for a single term in both languages, one can conclude that the consecutive self-translation process I have described above does not affect the linguistic identity of each language. Indeed, the number of meanings attached to a single term in Galician and in Spanish-Castilian varies considerably. As already stated, crime fiction has created a reader of its own that replicates the procedures of investigation. By initiating every chapter with the definition of a term,

Villar transforms the reader into a “linguistic investigator,” who has to trace this specific term within the chapter and evaluate the accuracy of the several meanings applied to the specific situation. In this regard, the suitability of the crime fiction genre for normalisation should not be overlooked, both in linguistic and political terms, especially in the case of minority languages/societies.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, *Ollos de auga/Ojos de agua* and *A praia dos afogados/La playa de los ahogados* have been translated into English by two different translators – respectively Martin Schifino and Sonia Soto – and, yet, in both cases, the definitions have been deleted. Though I do not know the exact reasons for this choice, one can only read it as a reminder that all languages – Spanish-Castilian included – are potentially minority languages.<sup>5</sup>

The couple comprised of Inspector Caldas and his deputy Estévez further posits bilingualism and diglossia as a major feature of Villar’s novels. In *Ollos de auga*, the reader learns that Rafael Estévez has been transferred from Saragossa, his place of birth, to Vigo only a few months ago. The Galician cultural character, therefore, constitutes an excellent tool for exploring the divergent views on Galicia and its language held by Caldas (a Galician and, hence, a bilingual) and Estévez (an Aragonese and a Spanish-Castilian monoglot).<sup>6</sup> Nowhere in the novels can one find evidence that Estévez has learned Galician. So, the reader has to assume

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<sup>4</sup> In the Galician case, it is telling that Reigosa’s *Crime en Compostela* was published in 1984, one year after the Law of Linguistic Normalisation. As crime fiction depicts several sociolects, especially those of low and marginal social classes, it becomes a testing ground for a language fighting for its public use and rights. In terms of political normalisation, Nels Pearson and Marc Singer’s argument concerning the link between detective fiction and self-conscious societies proves relevant: “Much of the current criticism views the genre as formally diverse, flourishing in multiple cultures, and engaged with the production of knowledge and transformation of consciousness within and across societies” (2). For a discussion of the role played by the literary character of the detective and the identity and visibility of marginalised societies, see Soitos; for the specific case of Iberian peripheral societies, see King (“Peripheral Detectives”).

<sup>5</sup> Here, I am interpreting the elimination of the “Spanish lexicon” in the translations into English as a symbol of the hegemonic position of English globally.

<sup>6</sup> “From its inception, the detective genre has been intrinsically engaged with epistemological formations that are not simply those of ‘society’ in the abstract – that is, dominant cultural groups and their hegemonic discourse – but those produced in encounters between nations, between races and cultures, and especially between imperial powers and their colonial territories” (Pearson and Singer 3). Concerning national stereotypes in Villar’s fiction, see Rivero Grandoso.

that the officer somehow can understand people speaking in Galician, while he only interacts with them in Spanish-Castilian. As all the dialogues in *Ollos de auga* and *A praia dos afogados* are transcribed in Galician, the possibility of linguistic conflict is not foregrounded. Instead, the Galician character becomes visible through language:

O axente aceptara sen especial desagrado traballar en Vigo, aínda que había varias cousas ás que lle estaba a custar un pouco máis tempo do previsto acostumarse. Unha era o impredecíbel do clima, en variación constante, outra a continua pendente das rúas da cidade, a terceira era a ambigüidade. Na recia cachola aragonesa de Rafael Estévez as cousas eran ou non eran, facíanse ou deixábanse sen facer, e supoñíalle un esforzo considerábel desenlear as expresións cargadas de vaguidades dos seus novos veciños. (Villar, *Ollos de auga* 16-17)

The officer had accepted his job in the town of Vigo without any visible displeasure, but he was finding it difficult to adjust to some things here. One was the unpredictable, ever-changing nature of the weather; another the steepness of the streets. The third was ambiguity. To Rafael Estévez's stern Aragonese mind, things were this way or that, got done or didn't, so it was only with considerable effort that he managed to decipher the ambiguous expressions of his new fellow citizens. (Villar, *Water-Blue Eyes* 6)

Conversely, the reader of the Spanish-Castilian versions will likely assume that, though all the dialogues are couched in Spanish-Castilian, Inspector Caldas and most characters speak Galician, except for Officer Estévez. An important question, however, still remains: which language will the English-speaking reader assume most of the characters in the novel speak, as the information concerning the "original language" of the work is concealed?

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Whereas Manuel Rivas has been presented to the English audience as a Galician writer who writes in Galician and whose works have been translated into English from the Galician, Domingo Villar has been introduced to the English readership as a Galician writer who now lives in Madrid.<sup>7</sup> While Villar's original language cannot be determined, his works have been translated into English from the Spanish-Castilian. Both Villar's presentation and the choice of the source language for translations

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<sup>7</sup> Compare the paratextual information included in Rivas' *All Is Silence* and Villar's *Death on a Galician Shore*.

are strongly influenced by his writing techniques. Consecutive self-translation makes the Spanish-Castilian version an authoritative one for translations into non-Iberian languages.

Whether consecutive self-translation has been instrumental in securing a wide international readership for Villar or not remains a matter for speculation. Much more influential has been his genre choice – crime fiction – both in terms of artistic emergence and development in post-Larsson times. The Nordic Noir as a global phenomenon (Hedberg; Berglund) seems to be responsible for what Eva Erdmann has described as the evolution from “enigmatic bodies, murders and crime scenes” into “a geopolitical genre that conveys primarily one thing to the general public: an extensive knowledge of geographical orientation” (274). Villar has put Galicia on the map, both literally – as the map of Galicia for English-speaking readers in *Death on a Galician Shore* indicates – and symbolically – by providing the reader with a detailed description of the Galician weather, landscape, cuisine, and character.

However, this leads to a contradiction. Indeed, such a detailed description may have a voyeuristic appeal for foreign and non-Galician readers. But will it affect Galician readers in the same way? Consider here the case of Donna Leon, who has forbidden the translation of her novels into Italian. “That’s my choice,” she says, “because I do not want to live where I am famous.... I don’t like being approached by people in a differential way” (Petrocelli n.p.). I cannot avoid wondering, though, whether the detailed “Italian thickness” of Leon’s novels has played any role in her rejection of translations into Italian. When such a thickness does not constitute the focus of interest for the reader, the success of the work depends only on the uniqueness of the plot. Be this as it may in the case of Leon, the minority situation of Villar’s Galician novels should not be overlooked. In his case, the appeal of his works for the Galician audience may be due to both the gratification of “presentativity,” highlighted by the “external” vision of Officer Estévez, and the return to the “traditional hermeneutics of the Noir” detected by some critics (Vilavedra 136, my translation).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Presentativity” is a term coined by the Slovak comparatist Dionýz Ďurišin (61–62) to refer to those situations whereby peripheral literatures are not limited to aesthetic issues but rather give a prominent place to political aims and ambitions. I extend the definition to embrace an inflation of local details, which in the case of Leon I have called “Italian thickness.”



Yet, it is important not to forget the caveat about crime fiction identified by Pardo Bazán. Crime fiction's traditional hermeneutics corresponds precisely to what the Galician writer characterised as "something very listless, elaborated with the technique of childish monotony" ("una cosa muy lánguida, desarrollada con procedimientos de monotonía infantil"), while detailed description may result in "a purely epidermal realism, a local one" (Pardo Bazán, "Conan Doyle's Novels" 122, my translation). Therefore, this dangerously encodes a typical paradox of the globalisation process. Indeed, the undoing of crime fiction for worlding Galicia confronts the reader not with a bazaar in Vigo, but rather with Vigo as a bazaar.

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## **ESSAIS CRITIQUES/REVIEW ESSAYS**



# Multiple Convergences: Ecocriticism and Comparative Literary Studies

JESSICA MAUFORT

## I. Introduction

Two decades into the twenty-first century, concerns over the accelerating pace of climate change and its manifold challenges have risen to the forefront of debates both in public and academic spheres. In news broadcasts, for instance, some of the most recurrent topics include the increased frequency of ecological disasters. While the issue of waste disposal and the task of finding more sustainable means of dwelling on Earth primarily retain the attention of scientists and the general public, the interdisciplinary field of ecocriticism in social sciences and the humanities investigates the intricate interface between “culture” and “nature.” In so doing, ecocritical scholars, activists, and artists fulfil a most important task, one that must complement scientific research currently being carried out to remedy the ecological crisis: sustainability must also be achieved through a critical questioning and re-evaluation of sometimes deeply-rooted cultural and epistemological conceptions. Conducting research in the various disciplines of the humanities – such as literature, history, figurative and performing arts, film studies, cultural studies, or political sciences –, ecocritics and ecopoets call for reflections on the philosophical roots of our conception(s) of the environment, the motives underlying human cultures’ (ab)use of natural resources, as well as our shared sense of ethical responsibility. “Can ecocriticism save the world?” some may ask, either genuinely or with a touch of blasé sarcasm. Themselves tormented by this question, ecocritics generally embrace a programmatic self-criticism in such a way as to constantly renew and improve their methodological approaches, discourse, and scope of investigation.

The following pages provide an overview of the ways in which, over the last few years, the critical field of literary ecocriticism has diversified

its geographical and cultural perspectives as regards its choice of textual corpus. By investigating the points of convergences between ecocriticism and comparative literature, this review essay aims to show how numerous ecocritical studies have contributed to expand a field that was originally viewed as a product of American academe and primarily focused on texts written in English. The following two subsections offer to non-specialists a preliminary synthesis of the main definitions and paradigms of ecocriticism.

### ***Preliminary Definitions and Delimitations***

Such versatility can already be detected in the initial definitions of ecocriticism and the various modifications they underwent over the years. First of all, the term “ecocriticism” is in itself problematic. Other formulations are also used, i.e. “green humanities,” “environmental (literary) humanities,” “literature and environment,” and “literary ecology.” As Cheryll Glotfelty remarks in the landmark book, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), “*ecocriticism* was possibly first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert” (xx) in one of the first essays seeking to develop “an ecology of literature” or “an ecological poetics by applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature” (Rueckert 107). The most authoritative definition of ecocriticism is that advanced by Glotfelty herself: “Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). Despite its vagueness, this definition as it stands aptly encompasses the myriad ways in which ecocriticism has developed. Moreover, the analytical methods and critical paradigms of ecocriticism also prove difficult to define. As Richard Kerridge claims, the “starting point for the ecocritic is that there really is an unprecedented global environmental crisis, and that this crisis poses some of the great political and cultural questions of our time” (5). The issues of scarcity and management of resources, pollution, global warming, toxicity, and species extinction constitute some of the well-known problems discussed in cultural debates over environmental crisis. However, unlike ecologists, ecocritics delve deeper into these questions by re-examining the basic principles underlying Western, rationality-based, philosophy: i.e. they interrogate our very conceptions and perceptions of “nature,” “culture,” “the environment,” the “human,” the “animal,” and “the world.” As Glotfelty states, “ecocriticism takes as



its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature” (xix). The ultimate aim, it would seem to Kerridge, is “to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (5).

Ecocriticism can neither be simply amalgamated with nor be reduced to the philosophy and practice of environmentalism. As I shall explain in further detail below, the first stage of ecocriticism – deep ecology – precisely developed in reaction to what was termed “shallow environmentalism”: while the latter indicates concern about environmental issues, its proponents do not challenge “the ruling socio-economic order” and Western values, such as “liberal democracy, human rights, Christianity, and notions of historical or scientific progress” (Garrard 22). “Shallow environmentalism” is thus characterised by a non-radical and technocratic human management of the Earth, a project which Martin Lewis calls “Promethean environmentalism” (15–17). This persisting human-centred focus is denounced by more subversive forms of environmentalism: this is precisely where ecocriticism begins.

### ***The Vexed Question of Theory: Ecocritical Methodologies and Principles***

In his *Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (2011), Timothy Clark stated that “no distinctive method defines environmental criticism” (4). Glotfelty’s and Kerridge’s preliminary definitions of the field highlight the strong interdisciplinary drive of ecocriticism, as its dual focus on “nature” and “culture” aims to de-cluster scientific disciplines and to foster enriching dialogues between the “hard sciences” (e.g. biology and physics) and the social sciences (e.g. literature and philosophy). As a result, major ecocritical “trends” or approaches comprise: deep ecology, ecofeminism, animal studies (zoocriticism) and posthumanism, social ecology and eco-Marxism, Heideggerian ecophilosophy, ecophenomenology, social and environmental justice, postcolonial ecocriticism, urban ecocriticism, material ecocriticism, ecopoetics, studies of the Anthropocene, and the very recent field of energy humanities. Thus, the choice of ecocritical method and reading of texts will significantly vary according to the selected type of conjoined critical concepts from these fields.

As in other literary movements, some ecocritics favour a thematic approach, focusing on materials with a clear environmental focus.

Many of such studies are overtly eco-political (activist) and ethical in scope. While some critics do balance thematics with aesthetics, others exclusively investigate the question of form, genres, and modes, sometimes scrutinizing artistic works that do not necessarily feature any ecological concerns. Finally, a third cluster of scholars, such as Freya Matthews, Lawrence Buell, Patrick D. Murphy, Timothy Morton, and Serenella Iovino seek to lay down the theoretical and philosophical premises of ecocriticism. Nevertheless, ecocritics' diverse research methods are informed by the same major principles: a rejection of dualistic binaries rooted in anthropocentric (human-centred) and speciesist (favouring one species over others) epistemologies and cosmologies. Instead, an ecocritical study strives to adopt an ecocentric or biocentric perspective in its analysis of themes, poetics, aesthetics, and even teaching pedagogy.

Finally, in addition to its core transdisciplinary outreach, ecocriticism has also progressively come to study a wide range of artistic processes and products, historical events, as well as political, philosophical, and sociological concepts and issues, "in which, and through which, the complex negotiations of nature and culture take place" (Garrard 5). Most importantly, the notion of "nature" or the "world" has now been expanded "to include the entire ecosphere" (Glotfelty xix). Such amplification not only reflects the area of expertise from which the critic approaches ecological issues: it has become increasingly apparent that this diversification also depends on the local culture that informs both the text under scrutiny *and* the critic's methodology and concerns.

To illuminate the current multifariousness of environmental criticism, this review essay first re-examines its early iteration as "deep ecology" and its development as an academic field of research, an impulse particularly noticeable in America. Subsequently, insights from Indigenous and (post) colonial studies broadened the field's cultural and geographical scopes. The most recent developments have to do with Latin American, African, Irish, and Asian branches of ecocriticism, which extend postcolonial ecocritical debates into world literature. Finally, ecocritical studies have been booming in Europe these last few years, with a myriad of studies examining and theorising localised European material. Postcolonial and European contexts show strong affiliations with the field of comparative literary studies.

## II. Keystones: Deep Ecology and “American Ecocriticism”

Although some might disagree, the flourishing of ecocriticism as an organised academic field mostly began in the United States. Because ecologically-minded scholars in literature “did not organize themselves into an identifiable group,” the field of literary studies was mistakenly considered as behind the times when compared to other humanities disciplines that had been “‘greening’ since the 1970s” (Glotfelty xvi). The first association specifically devoted to environmental criticism was founded in 1992, i.e. ASLE: The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, with Scott Slovic as its first President. Its journal, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, was subsequently created in 1993 by Patrick D. Murphy. Literary ecocriticism also gained in visibility around that time in academic curricula and programmes (see Glotfelty xvii). However, in Glotfelty’s synthesis of this “birth of environmental literary studies,” one can detect a predominantly American orientation foregrounded in subject matters and cultural issues: the wilderness narrative and the genre of nature writing as practised by American authors were recurrent topics of investigation. These issues may evidently be linked to the time-honoured concepts of the frontier and the pastoral, as well as the American transcendentalist tradition that have marked the American ecological consciousness over the centuries. To understand the reasons for privileging these artistic genres and cultural issues, one should relate them to the wider philosophical and methodological orientations that characterised this “first-wave ecocriticism” (Buell 8). The latter was largely marked by the movement of “deep ecology,” which articulated the foundational concepts for ecocritical thinking.

Deep ecology arguably constitutes the most radical and influential critique of the shallow environmentalism hinted at above. This movement advocates for a drastic shift to a nature-centred, i.e. an ecocentric or biocentric, system of values (Garrard 23–24). A subversive form of philosophical ecocriticism, deep ecology emerged in the Sixties, notably under the guidance of philosopher Arne Naess, who identified the founding tenets of the movement (Naess 68). The ecocentrism as developed by deep ecologists is in stark opposition to the hierarchical dualism between the non-human and the human that has been deeply embedded in Western philosophy and culture since the Enlightenment.

This humans-nature “hyperseparation” harks back to Descartes’s polarisation between mind (humans and thinking species) and body (animals and nature as unconscious machines) (see Plumwood *Feminism* 115). This hierarchy resulted in the objectification of (allegedly) non-thinking entities and the elevation of the human cogito as the centre of the world. This commodification was aided by the advent of modern science and technology in Western Europe. By contrast, the crucial key concept of ecocentrism is predicated upon an egalitarian stance towards all life forms – a “recognition of intrinsic value in nature” (Garrard 24) and of the web-like interrelations between earthly creatures. In the long term, biocentrism pleads for “a return to a monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere” (Garrard 24).

First-wave ecocritics are further characterised by their exclusive examination of natural environments and their endeavour to devise a possible “environmental literary canon.” The primary focus on natural locations stems from the “earthcare” agenda of the field, while a redefinition of “the concept of culture itself in organicist terms” is sought so as to defeat the humanity-nature philosophical hierarchy (Buell 21–22). Typically, the genre of nature writing – i.e. “the bringing together of science and the *belles lettres*” (Cranston 363) – constituted the main interest of many scholarly works in the first stage of ecocriticism, alongside Romantic poetry and wilderness narratives (Garrard 5). Interestingly, unlike factual “nature history writing,” nature writing was already a hybrid, interdisciplinary and subjective form from the start: as CA. Cranston explains, it is “concerned with the relationship between the human and non-human, expressed through data (the language of scientists) and metaphor (the language of poets)” (363). The taxonomy of nature writing initially encompassed many types of non-fictional texts (e.g. diaries recounting country life, field guides, natural history essays), but remained within the “conventional genres of the pastoral or of the mimetic rendition of nature” (Bellarsi “Ecocriticism” 163).

Deep ecology and Naess’s ecocentric theory also sparked numerous debates, especially as regards the exact nature of “intrinsic value” and of the “entities” and “forms” endowed with it (Garrard 24–25). The appeal to a “greater scientific literacy” by first-wave ecocriticism also relies on questionable premises, as it presupposes the assumption of a stable “human condition,” praises “the scientific method’s ability to describe natural laws,” and envisages science “as a corrective to critical subjectivism and cultural relativism” (Buell 18). Most importantly, criticism about

the potential misanthropy of biocentrism was raised when “advocates such as Dave Foreman and Christopher Manes [...] made inhumane and ill-informed statements about population issues” (Garrard 25). The misanthropic tendencies of deep ecologists resurface in their “pursuit of an ‘aesthetics of relinquishment,’” i.e. an aesthetics of “environmental writing” whose non-anthropocentric viewpoint occasionally verges on “wholly eliminating human figures from its imagined worlds” (Buell 100). From this derives the potential slippage of deep ecology into a pastoral vision of nature, which is not only free of the polluting presence of humanity, but which also privileges the harmonious balance of the environment instead of its inherently fluctuating quality (Garrard 65).

To put it in a nutshell, in reaction to the early stages of the field, the “revisionists” of the “second-wave ecocriticism” integrated into their ecocritical approaches a “sociocentric perspective” which acknowledges the critic’s embeddedness into social institutions, and thus into the political sphere (Buell 8). These scholars have reinforced the emphasis on the complex interlocking between given cultural frameworks and the representation of the non-human world in artistic production. In this regard, significant contributions emanated from the trends of ecofeminism, the social and environmental justice movement, postcolonial ecocriticism, and animal studies. Branches such as social ecology, urban ecocriticism, ecopsychology, and ecophenomenology further examined the cultural constructions of space as well as the individual’s navigation and perception thereof.

### **III. Decolonizing “Nature”: From Postcolonial to World Ecocriticism**

Significantly, these social-oriented ecocritical branches marked an increase in transnational and transcultural perspectives within the field. In “second-wave ecocriticism,” the deep ecological notions of bio-egalitarianism and of earthly life as an interconnected system were further nuanced in the light of cultural and epistemological specificities. Indeed, the logic of domination of the Earth is predicated upon more factors than just an anthropocentric worldview. For instance, ecocritics with a (post) colonial and/or feminist focus respectively denounced the fact that Naess’s critique of anthropocentrism in favour of a bio-egalitarianism overlooked the racist and male-centred underpinnings Western rational culture. Thus,

“anthropocentrism” denotes but one kind of rigid hierarchical duality, as the term suggests that all human beings equally share a philosophical/cosmological separation from the environment. Instead, everyday and institutionalised forms of discrimination based on gender and ethnic, religious, class, or cultural differences, both in past and present times, reveal that many human beings were associated with a “natural” world viewed as an inferior, unintelligent, and disposable object. These oppressive associations typically concerned women, Indigenous people and other marginalised communities, children, animals, and disabled individuals. They also served as legitimising arguments during the colonisation of the “New Worlds.” The concepts of wilderness, the pastoral, and nature writing were revised in the light of these loaded pairings: in his famous article, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” William Cronon unveils the ideological constructedness, or “cultural invention” of wilderness in the United States (79), a myth which is closely linked to the sublime and the frontier imaginary. These supposedly “virgin,” uninhabited, and remote natural places – as in many an American national park – were actively tamed, re-organised, and emptied of their prior Indigenous dwellers by early settlers and subsequently by many conservationists.

As the subject matter of Cronon’s study shows, just as in postcolonial studies, the critique of the first environmental premises of ecocriticism emerged from the American “centre” itself. A turning point was Joni Adamson’s book, *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism* (2001), which opened up the initial literary canon of ecocriticism to texts by and perspectives of Native Americans. This study helped bring to the fore an analysis of the various struggles experienced by these long-marginalised communities, especially in relation to environmental questions and conceptual revisions of the notion of “nature.” Such a project also tied in with the correlated insights from activists, writers, and scholars researching the combined phenomena of environmental and social injustice (e.g. Di Chiro). Concomitantly, the introduction of a Native American corpus reinforced deep ecology’s interest in non-dualist epistemologies. Indeed, many of these Indigenous cosmologies nurture a dialogue with the non-human biosphere that fundamentally differs from Euro-American anthropocentrism and its propensity towards a consumerist and progress-based control over the Earth (Dreese 6). On the other hand, much work was done to debunk the controversial stereotype of the “Ecological Indian,” which derives from the notions of the “primitive” and “noble savage,” as well as colonialist

perspectives (Krech III; Harkin and Lewis). While “[t]he assumption of indigenous environmental virtue” (Garrard 129), predicated upon the Natives’ animistic beliefs, may potentially improve the general perception and the status of these communities (135), it actually tends to reinforce the myth of “the non-European ‘other’” (129).<sup>1</sup> Following in the wake of Adamson’s book, the major contributions specifically studying the representation of Indigenous and other ethnic minorities in relation to the environment in American literature include: Adamson, Evans, and Stein’s *The Environmental Justice Reader* (2002), Dreesé’s *Ecocriticism* (2002), Schweningen’s *Listening to the Land* (2008), and Ray’s *The Ecological Other* (2013). A recent collective work of note in this specialised field is Monani and Adamson’s *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies* (2016).

However, as today’s ecological crisis forces us to think in terms of combined local and global scales, ecocritical studies of Indigenous cultures and literatures favour transcultural approaches as well as transnational corpuses. For instance, Monani and Adamson’s edited book juxtaposes contributions discussing a vast array of texts, artistic production, and practices by Native Americans, Māoris, First Nations people, Sámi people, Indian Indigenous people, the Zoque people, as well as Latin American and Amazonian Indigenous people. In the field of postcolonial environmental criticism, such cross-cultural conversations often exceed a trans-Indigenous scope: given the polysemous nature of the term “postcolonial,” ecocritics in this area may choose and compare texts emanating from the former settler or occupation colonies around the world, or, in the case of English-speaking regions, from countries belonging to the Commonwealth. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous narratives may be examined. The term “postcolonial ecocriticism” has arguably been popularised by Tiffin and Huggan’s seminal work, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010). The turn of the twenty-first century saw the flourishing of similar endeavours to place the two fields in a mutually-enriching dialogue. The most notable monographs within literary studies examining this alliance are Huggan and Tiffin’s co-authored book, DeLoughrey and Handley’s *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2011), Wright’s *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes* (2010), Roos and Hunt’s *Postcolonial Green* (2010), Crane’s *Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Narratives* (2012), and more recently, DeLoughrey, Didur, and Carrigan’s *Global*

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<sup>1</sup> See Garrard’s summary of how these different concepts crystallise in the myth of the “Ecological Indian” (129–45).

*Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities* (2015). Predating these publications, the important milestones in the history of postcolonial ecocriticism include Helen Tiffin's *Five Emus to the King of Siam* (2007), and several monographs focusing on the landscapes and literatures of the Caribbean (e.g. DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley (2005); Campbell and Somerville (2007)).

The interdisciplinary field of postcolonial ecocriticism developed in reaction to the strong biocentrism and "claims to universality" of deep ecology (Guha 71), to the notion of a dehistoricised nature (Guha; DeLoughrey and Handley), to the arguably "elitist" and "whiteness" of mainstream American environmentalism (Guha; Huggan "Greening" 703), as well as to the prevalence of an Anglo-American national framework (DeLoughrey and Handley 20). These last two aspects implied that some environmental issues were overlooked (such as American militarism), and that the ramifications of some philosophical, cultural, and epistemic concepts (e.g. wilderness as pristine areas devoid of human presence) were not envisioned outside a particular socio-cultural and geographical point of view (Guha). Indeed, an excessively biocentric and elitist conception of wilderness which forcibly removed Indigenous, marginalised, or poor populations from the "targeted conservation wilderness area" (DeLoughrey and Handley 21) is often complicit with a discriminating economic tourism, in which "the enjoyment of nature is an integral part of the consumer society" (Guha 79). As another example, Huggan and Tiffin discuss how some fictional works by writers from Africa, the Pacific islands, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Canada denounce the environmental racism pervading the decision-making process of their governments and/or of foreign polluting companies. Indeed, their destructive effects on the environment and Indigenous people in particular are overlooked in the name of economic development. In exploring the multiple ramifications of such events, postcolonial ecocriticism shows its indebtedness to social ecology's critique of capitalist and institutionalised systems of domination as contributing to alienated intra-human relationships and human/nature interactions.

Evidently, these postcolonial, transcultural, and transnational approaches to environmental issues as well as their literary representations raise questions of comparative methodology, whether ecocritics opt for a dialogue between American and non-American corpuses, or for a juxtaposition of narratives from the Commonwealth, Third-World, and/or postcolonial regions only. In any case, Rob Nixon warns against



merely “diversifying the canon” of texts: not only should predominant paradigms, such as the centre-periphery, be re-imagined, but Euro- and American-centric reference systems must also be avoided. Accordingly, the concepts of wilderness, the pastoral, and the genre of nature writing as deployed in Anglo-American philosophy and literature may not be simply transposed to other cultural, social, human and non-human contexts if one wishes to avoid perpetuating “an unthinking and self-defeating form of cultural imperialism” (Cronon 82). On the one hand, non-Euro-American artists revise and adapt these notions and literary forms; on the other hand, they may rely on different system values, historical backgrounds, and aesthetic experiments in order to transcribe their distinct relation to the environment as informed by local knowledge and practices. Indeed, the very specific connotation of “wilderness” as designating “empty,” virgin lands is inconceivable for non-dualist, non-anthropocentric, and/or Indigenous cosmologies, in which the entire ecosphere is full of agential presences manifest in plants, animals, the natural elements, and spirits. Furthermore, utilitarian agendas of working the land, pastoral conceptions of gardening, as well as purely Western or rational versions of natural science at large must similarly be “decolonised,” i.e. attuned to the specificities of native flora, fauna, and cultures (Plumwood “Decolonising”; Kincaid’s *My Garden*).

At the same time, these postcolonial ecocritical projects do not aim at establishing binary comparisons that would categorically exclude formerly established, Western modes of dwelling in and representing the non-human world. For instance, Huggan and Tiffin show how selected texts by writers from Australia, South Africa and the Caribbean may be understood as offering a “*partial rehabilitation of the pastoral*, either in terms that are self-consciously ecocentric or that work towards a re-appraisal of more pragmatic, though not necessarily non-idealised, pastoral modes” (85, my emphasis). Rose and Davis’s *Dislocating the Frontier* (2005) and Dixon and Birns’s *Reading Across the Pacific* (2010) similarly engage in a cross-pollinating dialogue between American and Australian concepts (e.g. the frontier) and artistic/philosophical movements (e.g. transcendentalism). Therefore, these transnational juxtapositions and exchanges take into account Nixon’s early prediction: namely that the most important challenge in bridging postcolonialism and ecocriticism lies in the negotiation between the local (“literature of place,” a nationalised critical framework) and the global (e.g. issues of displacement and cosmopolitanism) (Nixon 235–45).

Recent studies in postcolonial ecocriticism, comprising Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), DeLoughrey, Didur, and Carrigan's co-edited volume, and Monani and Adamson's edited work, rise up to that challenge.

Most importantly, transnational discussions indicate how the traditional theoretical paradigm of the "postcolonial" is currently morphing into that of globalisation and world literature. Slovic, Rangarajan, and Sarveswaran's pioneering edited collection, *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development* (2014), deserves a special mention. The editors pursued their endeavour towards a "global ecocriticism" of sorts in another volume entitled *Ecocriticism of the Global South* (2015). It offers an impressive bundle of international contributions by scholars "living in, coming from, or in other ways deeply familiar with regions of the world (even in the Northern Hemisphere) that have traditionally been un- or under-represented in [...] ecocritical scholarship" ("Introduction" 2). Through these multicultural voices, the editors aim to show that "[t]he North American and Western European 'centrism' of ecocriticism and environmental artistic and journalistic expression is an illusion – or rather, a delusion on the part of scholars based in North America and Western Europe" (9). In addition, what recurs in these discussions is "a critique of the impacts of global capitalism, a force largely transplanted from the Global North to the developing world" (9).

In terms of geo-cultural scope, some contributions in *Ecocriticism of the Global South* represent two innovating developments in the field of environmental criticism, i.e. the rapid emergence of scholarship devoted to Irish and Asian artistic/literary production respectively. In the last few years, the dialogue between ecocriticism and Irish studies has intensified, with the most recent monographs comprising Flannery's *Ireland and Ecocriticism* (2015), Potts's *Contemporary Irish Writing and Environmentalism* (2018), and Wenzell's *Woven Shades of Green* (2019). In these book-length studies, Irish culture, ecologies, and literature are at least in part examined through the lenses of (eco-)imperialism and/or postcolonial ecocriticism. The other flourishing trend – Asian ecocriticism – decidedly opens the postcolonial to world literature. Among the numerous contributions in that area, Estok and Kim's edited collection, *East Asian Ecocritisms* (2013), proves an indispensable tool for the neophyte: its remarkable multicultural scope not only introduces the reader to key ecocritical concerns and challenges specific to Taiwan, Japan, China, and Korea, but also enables him/her to juxtapose these

regions and their “eco-literatures” as a way to establish both differences and similarities between them. And yet, one can only hope to gain but “partial visions” of the “enormous” field that is East Asian ecocriticism (Estok 2). The impossibility to acquire a vision of totality is also due to “matters of distortion and of how we see” (2). The editors and some contributors evoke the potentially imperialist or centric aspects characterising Anglo-European ecocritical perceptions. This book reacts to “the one-sidedness of information flows, a one-sidedness that predictably and dangerously reiterates colonialist dynamics and structures” (2). Thus, Estok and Wim’s volume takes “the question of carrying across, [of] translations” as one of its core concerns (Estok 2). So far, most of the literary texts discussed in the monographs mentioned in this review essay are written in English. Moreover, only a minority of ecocritical scholarship compares linguistically mixed corpuses, in the manner of Hoving’s book, *Writing the Earth, Darkly* (2017), which examines literary works from both the English-speaking and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. Certainly, such linguistic comparative projects pose a number of methodological challenges. Nevertheless, they could substantially enrich ecocritical investigations.

To conclude this section on the ever-expanding map of postcolonial or world ecocriticism, let me mention a few titles from the booming array of ecocritical publications that concentrate on the regions of Latin America and Africa. For the former, one could cite McNee’s *The Environmental Imaginary in Brazilian Poetry and Art* (2014), Anderson and Bora’s *Ecological Crisis and Cultural Representation in Latin America* (2016), and Murphy and Rivero’s *Written in the Water* (2017). Book-length investigations of African ecologies and green literature and aesthetics include: Caminero-Santangelo’s *Different Shades of Green* (2014), Moolla’s *Natures of Africa* (2016), and McGiffin’s *Of Land, Bones, and Money* (2019).

#### **IV. The Mosaic of “European Ecocriticism”**

In a manner that perhaps some will find unusual, from the “New Worlds” we now turn to the “Old Continent.” The last few years have seen an extraordinary growth in research and publications that examine the very modalities of ecocriticism in non-Anglophone regions and academic circles. If “the very active branch of British ecocriticism” is “the one most visible to non-European eco-scholars across the Atlantic” (Bellarsi,

“European” 129), national trends from the continent increasingly receive attention, thanks to innovative work by ecocritics, such as Serpil Oppermann in Turkey, as well as localised research groups, such as The Nordic Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies (NIES). The principal ecocritical journal in continental Europe, *Ecozon@*, is a joint initiative of GIECO (Grupo de Investigación en Ecocrítica, Universidad de Alcalá) and EASLCE: the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and Environment. As such, the journal has published several issues exploring regional European trends of ecocriticism and environmentally-aware artistic production. Furthermore, the journal actively promotes linguistic diversity, as it accepts contributions in English, Spanish, French, German, and Italian.

This sense of multiplicity precisely constitutes one of the central challenges for European ecocriticism and scholars researching European material: more precisely, the complexity of such ecocritical research lies in the sheer diversity of languages, as well as of cultural, political, and geo-physical contexts that characterise the continent. It suggests a sense of fragmentation, which is more deeply felt by European practitioners than their North American, and perhaps even British, colleagues (Bellarsi, “European” 126–28). Taking Canada as a point of comparison, Franca Bellarsi observes that “[a]s reductive these concepts may be, Northrop Frye’s “garrison mentality” [...] and Margaret Atwood’s focus on survival [...] at least confer some degree of national/continental identity on non-indigenous Canadians” (127). These notions have of course been interrogated and adapted, but Bellarsi points out that, from an outsider point of view, “they at least appear to offer, as in the U.S. with its past Frontier, some shared human experience of Nature from shore to shore (if only as a mere hypothetical starting point), and therefore to hold some confidence-giving, potential promise of federating a community of ecoscholars spread over a huge landmass the size of a continent.” There is simply no such “common denominator” (127) which would make up a European “ecological identity” (Bellarsi 126).

In an illuminating panel discussion coordinated by Carmen L. Flys in 2010, prominent ecocritics from Europe shared their perspectives on the development of the field in their home regions. Very interestingly, the questions posed by Flys for the panel were rooted in a comparison with the state of the discipline in the United States. For example, the first question was “is ecocritical theory and practice understood the same way in Europe as in the United States?” The second question asked: “Do

key concepts such as nature, pastoral, and wilderness mean the same in Europe in the United States?” (Flys 109). In relation to linguistic multiplicity, the question of terminology constitutes a major concern: the very terms “nature,” “wilderness,” “environment,” and “sense of place” often cannot be readily translated into some European languages. Some eco-scholars even contest the label “ecocriticism”: José Manuel Marrero Henríquez (Flys 111) and Hennig Fjørtoft (114) argue that it may not be necessary for the researcher to explicitly refer to that term to qualify his/her environmentally-aware research in the humanities: “environmental history and environmental justice are examples of neighbouring fields where quite similar research is produced without any connection with ecocriticism whatsoever” (Flys 114).

The reluctance to employ the term “ecocriticism” also stems from differences in theoretical sources (111) as well as in localised cultural, political, and historical backgrounds. Axel Goodbody states that this term “is not popular in Germany: the ‘öko-’ prefix sounds ugly, and is associated with a purely thematic approach, one reinforcing the instrumentalization of culture for political ends” (Flys 111). Similarly, the notion of “sense of place,” denoting the individual’s “knowledge of and commitment to a particular locale,” is a “prerequisite for environmental ethics” in the American tradition (Heise 3). Yet, in the German context, this concept is not only difficult to translate (*Heimat* might be the closest term), but after the second world war *Heimat* was also “doubly tainted by its association with a bourgeois tradition [...] and by its abuse in Nazi propaganda focused on reconnecting to ‘blood and soil’” (3). This example illustrates how, in Europe, “nature” has generally been dissociated from the idea of national identity (Goodbody and Rigby 3).

Another reason for these terminology and epistemic issues has to do with the various topographies of European landscapes and the Europeans’ relations with them, which fundamentally contrast with the American experience of the terrain: Iovino points out that the concept of cultural landscape “is more extensively researched in Europe than the concept of place,” place being “more susceptible to interpretation in philosophical, sociological or anthropological terms [...] than a typically literary category” (Flys 112). Indeed, in the German variant of ecocriticism, *Heimat* could be substituted with *Landschaft*, which “plays a central role that might seem comparable to the American emphasis on place, yet *Landschaft* in this context usually means humanly transformed landscapes that combine culture and nature rather than the wild landscapes that

typically inspire conservation in the American context” (Heise 3). This concern is also true for the Italian territory, as Patrick Barron observes that “Italy is rife with overlaying human and nonhuman signs of residence and alteration” (Barron xxiv). The Italian rural landscape is characterised by “an overlapping, long-evolved spatial organization of land and housing.” Therefore, although “in Italy there is plenty beautiful ‘wilderness,’” “in the Italian language there is no equivalent of the word” (xxv).<sup>2</sup> Expanding these reflections to the Mediterranean regions, Elena Past argues that ecocritical investigations focused on these locales necessarily include the issues of human-engineered modification, the urban, “impurity” and dirt, as well as a strong human/non-human “cohabitation” (Past 370–71). Therefore, as Goodbody and Rigby summarise, ecocriticism in Europe “is likely to be primarily concerned [...] with the pastoral rather than wilderness, given the shaping impact of relatively dense populations on the land over the centuries, and hence with a largely domesticated and, in places such as the low countries, even ‘artificial’ nature dependent for its survival on human agency” (2–3).

However, there seem to be some exceptions to the “commonplace” idea that wilderness “has long been surpassed in European imagery,” as Lovino suggests (Flys 112). Indeed, in Nordic countries, the environment is still linked with a wilderness imaginary, which incidentally recalls the myth of the Great North in Canada. Werner Bigell is quick to show its constructedness: “The North too is a cultural projection screen, perceived as the last frontier, a space for adventurous explorers, a pure land never touched by industrialization, a treasure chest of resources, a setting of naturalistic tales, and an empty land” (Bigell 1). Arguably, these regions appear to be located on the margins only in the eyes of those residing in Western Europe’s metropolises. Instead, the landscapes of northern Scandinavia, northern Russia, northern Canada, Alaska, Greenland, and Iceland are all interconnected by the “seascape of the Arctic Ocean” (2). Interconnection also characterises the long history of cohabitation and exchange between European and Indigenous populations dwelling in these cold areas unamenable to agriculture (2). Nowadays, common challenges such as climate change and the economic and technological exploitation of resources also bind these regions and their inhabitants together. To counter outsider perspectives on this “Northern imagery of

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<sup>2</sup> As in German, one must rely on approximate Italian expressions, such as *regione selvaggia* [wild region] or *territorio incolto* [uncultivated territory] (Barron xxv).

white emptiness,” Bigell and other scholars call for a “platial perspective,” which implies “seeing the North and its complicated interactions from the inside [...] as well as seeing people as part of their ecosystems” (Bigell 4).

Such projects anchored in comparative interconnectedness between different geographies and cultures are also of paramount importance for continental European eco-scholars. Europe must find its own ecocritical tradition (Flys 119)—albeit one rooted in mosaic-like, “*bioregional networks of thought and research*” (Bellarsi, “European” 128, emphasis in original). At the same time, Marrero Henríquez highlights that ecocriticism in America developed thanks to “Humboldt’s geography, Haeckel’s ecology, Stuart Mill’s idea of a stationary state of the economy, or Spinoza’s ethics” (Flys 114), thereby alluding to a long cross-Atlantic theoretical dialogue. Another instance of this cross-Atlantic conversation is provided by the Spanish branch of ecocriticism, in which Marrero Henríquez sees “more critical interest in the study of Latin American literature,” despite a potentially rich Spanish environmental literature (118). Beyond institutional compartmentalization, the differing methods of academic circles, the notorious funding issue, and gaps between academic and public spheres, or between public awareness and government policy making regarding ecological problems, the participants in Flys’s panel discussion remain determined. They exhort researchers to engage in comparative work between the regional branches of European ecocriticism, as well as between their various internal human cultures, environments, languages, and literary traditions (119–21).

Finally, taking place almost ten years ago, this pioneering panel discussion led by Flys commented on the absence of any existing ecocritical conference in French (110). Today, this situation has changed, as illustrated by a recent international conference in Perpignan (University of Perpignan, Via Domitia, June 2019) in which a good deal of the contributions were presented in the French language. Moreover, the remarkable flourishing of “French ecocriticism” should be noted. I specifically refer here to critical investigations of environmentally-aware, eco-poetic artistic and/or literary work that is published in French, or that examines Francophone territories.

Interestingly, this branch of ecocriticism has gained prominence not thanks to France-based critics only: Stephanie Posthumus from Québec, Daniel Finch-Race from the United Kingdom, and Pierre Schoentjes from Belgium recently published groundbreaking volumes attempting to theorise and federate critical voices around this subject. French academe,

however, has a strong comparatist tradition: numerous French ecocritics, such as Bertrand Guest and Alain Suberchicot, put Francophone literature in conversation with that of other geographic, cultural, and linguistic regions. In his book entitled *Ce qui a lieu: Essais d'écopoétique* (2015), Schoentjes first offers an overview of the difficulties of including the discipline of ecocriticism into the French institutional system (22–24). Importantly, comparative studies played a crucial role: for instance, Americanist Suberchicot's *Littérature et environnement* (2012) not only included Francophone fictional works alongside non-Francophone ones, but, as the book was written in French, it also reinforced the visibility and relevance of ecocritical approaches to French literature inside French academe itself. Indeed, the first problem proved to be the linguistic barrier: “as none of the major [ecocritical] studies have been translated into French, the framework remains inaccessible to the majority of critics here” (Schoentjes 22, my translation). Second, the foundational figures of ecocriticism appeared – at least at the beginning – “less theorists than excellent readers of American, and then British, literature” (22, my translation). Finally, the difficulties also stem from the painstaking inclusion of cultural studies in French academe and curricula “where they are frequently condemned as too specific to a community and as displaying a naive commitment” (22, my translation). In France, cultural studies were also criticised for their inclusive literary canon that transcends the *belles lettres* (22–23). Significantly, Schoentjes prefers the term *écopoétique* (ecopoetics) to ecocriticism, which retains too much of its American cultural, ideological, and activist framework (24). Ecopoetics, instead, foregrounds the importance of form and aesthetics: thus, it refers to the writing as well as reading processes (Schoentjes 24). However, it is an *écopoétique* that brings back “the real” into these reflections: although “referential literature” and realism have been devalued in France for their “association with regionalism,” and thus “the negation of the literary itself,” the scholar argues that it is vital to regain a concrete and direct contact with the environment in today's context of ecological crisis (41, my translation). As regards the recurrent question of wilderness, as its Italian and German neighbours, the French landscape proves a cultural and urbanised one. Areas of wilderness exist but in liminal degrees: for example, one speaks more of a “spectacular” than a “wild” kind of nature in certain places (30–31, my translation).

Lastly, in her book, *French Écocritique* (2017), the bilingual scholar Posthumus makes a powerful commitment to “build a French ecocritical



on the premise of cultural difference” (Posthumus 3). As she writes in English, the Québec-based critic feels in a unique position to take advantage of “the central and productive tension at the heart of [her] method, which is to hold together the cultural specificity of French textual ecologies and the ways in which they extend beyond their linguistic and cultural boundaries” (3). Posthumus thus conjoins ecocritical theories in both French and English (3) and adopts the cultural studies tendency of “reading fiction and theory together” (7). In her conclusion, Posthumus refers to the article by Dennis Chartier and Estienne Rodary, “Globalizing French *écologie politique*,” which “describe[s] some of the potential problems of insisting on difference and diversity in terms of intellectual traditions and linguistic communities” (Posthumus 166). Posthumus takes stock of their reflections and argues that, in her monograph, she “avoid[ed] exoticizing these [French] approaches by acknowledging the ways in which the concepts [she] consider[s] are already part of cross-cultural dialogue” (166).

## V. “Glocal” Juxtapositions: Open Conclusion

As this review essay has hopefully demonstrated, the dialogue between comparative studies and environmental humanities is stronger than ever. It could be said that some artists and scholars, in Europe and multicultural countries, have become more aware of how comparative approaches enrich ecocritical debates. These researchers more directly engage with and question the methods of comparative literary perspectives, whether they involve differing linguistic, cultural, and geographic realities. Anglophone critics researching postcolonial ecocriticism are implicitly adopting comparative approaches thanks to their frequent transcultural and transnational points of view. In this manner, they follow in the wake of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back*, which already favoured an epistemic juxtaposition of the cultures and texts from the various nations of the Commonwealth. Today, we witness a double movement: on the one hand, with the inclusion of ecological issues in their postcolonial or neocolonial discussions, such studies continue to reinforce their transcultural and interdisciplinary focus. On the other hand, an incredible amount of volumes seeks to develop more localised ecocritical approaches.

In the current age of climate change, global warming, species extinction, unequal access to resources and services, environmental

and social injustice, the acidification of oceans, the Anthropocene, and geopolitical tensions between North and South, ecocritics generally agree that the most important challenge in pragmatic, theoretical, imaginary, and cognitive terms is to address both global and local issues. In an ideal world, human beings must find a way to associate both “situated knowledges” (Haraway) and a non-homogenising world vision that is not confined to human-made or natural borders. Whether one opts for the term “comparative” or not, this practice of juxtaposing miscellaneous realities in a cross-pollinating conversation is necessary to keep up with today’s “glocal” ecological challenge. Perhaps this approach to reading and writing has always been “green,” as it reflects the interconnection pattern of the earthly ecosystem, in a dynamic web-like movement linking all forms of life and artistic “texts,” from the non-human to the human, the inert to the mobile, the body to the mind, the microscopic to the colossal.

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# La ville moderne et ses mythes: Un essai de mise au point

DANIEL ACKE

## La ville moderne et le mythe : une alliance problématique

Le lien entre la ville moderne et le mythe n'a rien d'évident, et ce pour plusieurs raisons. Tout d'abord, la multiplicité des significations attachées au concept de « mythe » déroute. On peut rapidement illustrer celle-ci en rappelant la diversité des usagers du mot : les ethnologues scrutent les mythes des peuples non-occidentaux; les philosophes conçoivent le mythe comme un outil de pensée, de Platon et son mythe de la caverne à Albert Camus, qui reprend à son compte le mythe de Sisyphe ; de manière générale, depuis la Renaissance, les écrivains n'ont cessé de recycler les mythes légués par l'antiquité ; à leur tour, les critiques littéraires « mythographes » scrutent les textes charriant des mythes<sup>1</sup>; enfin nous n'hésitons pas à qualifier de mythe tout phénomène au statut incertain (« tout cela est un mythe »). Les spécialistes du mythe en conviennent, il est très difficile de savoir ce qu'est un mythe (Higonnet *Paris, capitale du monde* 13), tout comme il l'est de faire la distinction entre l'objet mythe et les théories qui essaient de le cerner, l'un et l'autre s'imbriquant étroitement (Spineto 226–28). Le domaine d'extension du mythe semble infini : Roland Barthes prétendait que « Tout peut être mythe » (Barthes 215), pour la bonne raison que le mythe est une affaire de langage. Parler du mythe exige donc d'abord qu'on se soumette à un exercice de salubrité intellectuelle, et qu'on fasse le point sur les différents sens et les usages attachés au mot.

La deuxième difficulté tient à l'association du mythe et de la ville moderne. Certes, la ville est une réalité fort ancienne, et quelques villes mythiques comme Babylone, Sodome et Gomorrhe, évoquées

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<sup>1</sup> Voir les dictionnaires dirigés par Pierre Brunel et cités dans la bibliographie.

dans la Bible et dans quelques autres textes de ce genre, nous viennent sans aucun doute spontanément à l'esprit,<sup>2</sup> mais le développement galopant des villes est une réalité plutôt récente dans l'histoire de l'Humanité, accompagnant en Occident l'essor d'une économie où la richesse mobilière (les biens de commerce, l'argent) l'emporte progressivement sur la richesse immobilière (la terre). Bref, dans l'esprit des contemporains, la ville est avant tout associée au développement de la modernité et du capitalisme.<sup>3</sup> Or, qui dit modernité dit aussi rationalisation et « désenchantement du monde » (Max Weber), c'est-à-dire un mode de pensée qu'on situerait plutôt aux antipodes du mythe, ce qui à première vue rend plus difficile encore à comprendre l'association de la ville moderne avec le mythe.

On ne doit cependant pas oublier que la rationalisation occidentale a suscité des réactions dès la fin du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle, sous la forme d'une volonté de réenchanter le monde, de lui rendre sa densité affective, voire son sacré.<sup>4</sup> Réenchanter le monde signifiera, pour certains, à partir du romantisme, se tourner à nouveau vers la nature, et concevoir celle-ci autrement qu'un simple matériau à exploiter dans des buts utilitaires ou des visées économiques, c'est-à-dire comme un espace où vivre authentiquement et qui a chance de s'ouvrir à l'invisible ou au transcendant. On aura reconnu la démarche du promeneur solitaire de Jean-Jacques Rousseau et de nombreux écrivains du dix-neuvième siècle. Or pour d'autres esprits, pour la plupart postérieurs aux premiers, c'est au cœur même des villes et par la confrontation avec les âpres réalités de cette société industrielle conspuée que pourra s'ouvrir une profondeur insoupçonnée. C'est dans certains quartiers de Paris qu'André Breton ou Jacques Prévert connaissent leurs émois, c'est dans les villes que l'objectif d'un Cartier-Bresson ou d'un Robert Doisneau tente de fixer le moment magique transcendant le quotidien. D'une certaine manière, cette rencontre inattendue entre les dissonances de la modernité et les exigences du cœur et de l'imagination n'a pas cessé depuis, et l'art du vingtième siècle tout comme celui qui

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<sup>2</sup> A ce sujet, voir le livre éclairant de Jacques Ellul, *Sans feu ni lieu. Signification biblique de la grande ville*.

<sup>3</sup> Fernand Braudel le formule de façon abrupte : « En Occident, capitalisme et villes, au fond, ce fut la même chose » (voir chap. 8 ; « Les villes », vol I, 421–96 ; voir 453)

<sup>4</sup> Voir l'interprétation du romantisme par Michael Löwy et Robert Sayre dans leur *Révolution et mélancolie*.

nous est contemporain n'ont cessé d'exploiter et de recycler au profit des visées subversives de l'esthétique les ustensiles et les déchets de la vie moderne, tout comme les espaces les plus ordinaires et les plus ingrats de notre quotidien.

C'est donc au croisement du besoin de réenchâtement du monde et de l'investissement de l'existence la plus banale par les poètes et les écrivains, et au-delà, de la collectivité tout entière, qu'on doit comprendre la naissance d'une *mythologie moderne* autour de la ville industrielle. Dans ce qui suit, j'aimerais d'abord présenter les caractéristiques les plus larges du mythe et les différentes significations attachées au concept de mythe, avant de montrer par la suite en quoi l'association entre le mythe et la ville représente une des réponses productives aux défis majeurs que pose la modernité. C'est tout particulièrement sur le terrain de la littérature que je voudrais examiner l'alliance entre la ville et le mythe.

## Les constantes du mythe

Les constantes du mythe peuvent être envisagées sous six angles différents : anthropologique, épistémologique, sémiotique, psychologique, normatif et historique.

Le mythe apparaît comme une *construction mentale* (statut anthropologique). Deux questions se posent de ce point de vue : tout d'abord, le mythe est-il de l'ordre du donné ou du construit, est-il un phénomène naturel ou un artefact ? Ensuite, celui de son extension : le mythe est-il collectif ou peut-il aussi être individuel ? Pour ce qui est du premier problème, selon le point de vue scientifique, le mythe n'est pas simplement donné, mais créé, et apparaît comme un artefact humain. Cette thèse est affirmée avec le plus de rigueur dans l'approche du mythe de la part du philosophe Ernst Cassirer. En accord avec le principe général de la philosophie de Kant selon lequel les objets ne sont pas simplement donnés à la conscience, mais constitués par elle (Cassirer 49), le mythe apparaît comme une construction mentale du monde, ou encore comme une « forme de pensée » (Cassirer) ayant son intelligibilité propre. On le sait, le mérite revient à Claude Lévi-Strauss d'avoir analysé, dans une perspective structurale, la logique sous-jacente aux mythes. Si une telle optique est forcément celle du scientifique, qui soumet le mythe à une analyse objective, elle ne saurait être partagée par l'usager des mythes lui-même, comme l'indigène, pour lequel ceux-ci sont trouvés, ou plutôt communiqués par des Êtres Surnaturels.

Du point de vue de l'analyse, les mythes représentent une création collective, commune à un peuple ou à une culture. Cela vaut d'ailleurs aussi pour les mythes modernes (par exemple le mythe de Napoléon). Ces mythes peuvent être collectifs en deux sens, d'abord en ce qu'ils agissent sur un vaste public, ensuite en ce qu'ils ne sont pas l'œuvre d'un seul, mais de plusieurs, l'initiateur du mythe se trouvant relayé par d'autres qui diffusent son message (Citron I, 250). L'approche de l'art et de la littérature nous oblige cependant à faire une place à des mythes propres à un seul individu, écrivain ou créateur, comme nous l'expliquerons plus loin.

Le mythe est une *création de l'imaginaire* (statut épistémologique). Pour le scientifique, le mythe doit être distingué de la vérité scientifique. Il représente une « structure de l'imaginaire » (Lévi-Strauss) ou il crée des « figures imaginaires » (Karlheinz Stierle). Tandis que pour le scientifique, le mythe constitue une « fiction », en revanche, pour l'indigène, il représente « la vérité par excellence » (Eliade « MYTHE » 138).

Le mythe est une *création langagière* (statut sémiotique). Si le mythe représente une structure de l'imaginaire, celle-ci doit trouver obligatoirement sa réalisation concrète, sa garantie et les conditions de sa durée à travers le langage, qu'il s'agisse des mots, ou de tout autre système de signes. Le mythe peut donc être véhiculé par la littérature orale, la parole écrite, des textes journalistiques, des peintures, des sculptures, etc. Parmi les aspects langagiers privilégiés pour l'expression du mythe, on sera particulièrement attentif au rôle des images et de la narration.

Le mythe *structure notre compréhension du monde* (statut psychologique). Il a une valeur explicative car il se rapporte essentiellement à une « création », et « raconte comment quelque chose est venu à l'existence » (Eliade « MYTHE » 139), d'où l'importance qu'y occupe la dimension narrative. Plus concrètement, il explique la création du monde (mythe cosmogonique) ou son commencement, éclaire la condition humaine sur sa finitude inéluctable et sur son caractère sexué. Le bénéfice psychologique de cette démarche est évident: le mythe présente le monde de façon ordonnée et empêche qu'il soit considéré comme impénétrable. Selon Lévi-Strauss, le mythe garantit l'intégration de ce qui, dans l'immédiat, semble contradictoire ou incompréhensible.

Cependant, on doit ajouter immédiatement qu'il ne s'agit pas de n'importe quel ordre, mais d'un ordre qui rompt d'une manière ou d'une autre avec l'immanence : le mythe produit de l'ordre, mais en

postulant une instance qui excède ce dernier. C'est la raison pour laquelle il véhicule le sacré ou la transcendance.<sup>5</sup> Cela est tout à fait manifeste dans les sociétés archaïques où les mythes conservent leur caractère de réalité vivante : les différentes créations rapportées par les mythes sont explicitement attribuées à des êtres surnaturels, aux dieux en particulier. Toutefois, il faut y insister, au-delà de ce cas spécifique, le mythe inscrit de toute manière l'homme dans un ordre qui le dépasse, quelle que soit par ailleurs la façon dont on conçoit ce dernier (d'origine divine ou non). Higonnet a donc raison de tenir les mythes autres que ceux des peuples archaïques pour une version sécularisée des mythes religieux (voir *Paris capitale du monde*).

Le mythe offre une *orientation pratique* (statut normatif). Outre le fait qu'il explique le monde, lui confère un ordre et le dédouble en ménageant un pan de réalité qui le dépasse, le mythe offre aussi des directives pour l'action. Il procure aux activités humaines tant profanes que sacrées leur modèle exemplaire et leur justification (voir Eliade « MYTHE » 139). Bref, il a valeur normative. Eliade donne des exemples significatifs. Un rituel tibétain archaïque précise : « Comme il a été transmis depuis le début de la création de la terre, ainsi nous devons sacrifier [...] » (*ibid.*) ; un autre, hindou : « Nous devons faire ce que les dieux ont fait au commencement » (*ibid.*). Le mythe a donc une dimension pratique, voire performative : *dire, c'est faire*. Réciter le mythe sur l'origine des choses signifie réactualiser ces dernières, les ramener à l'existence, en dégager la productivité. L'exemple est d'Eliade : « A Timor, lorsque la rizière végète, quelqu'un se rend dans le champ et, pendant la nuit, récite le mythe de l'origine du riz » (*ibid.*). Du reste, cette dimension performative permet aussi de comprendre le lien étroit entre le *mythe* et le *rite*, ce dernier assurant précisément la réactualisation productive du mythe. A nouveau, insistons sur le fait que cette fonction pratique du mythe ne doit pas être limitée aux peuples archaïques.

Le mythe doit être *situé dans l'histoire* (statut historique du mythe). Pour celui qui croit au mythe, ce dernier ne s'inscrit pas dans un parcours historique ; au contraire, situé à l'avant de l'histoire, il rappelle opportunément ce qui rend le déroulement des événements possible ou leur assure un nouveau départ. En revanche, pour le scientifique qui

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<sup>5</sup> « Le mythe véritable explique le profane par référence au sacré, par la transcendance. C'est par ce côté qu'il est cosmogonique » (Higonnet *Paris, capitale du monde* 15).

analyse les mythes, se pose évidemment la question de leur histoire et de leur transformation dans des contextes différents.<sup>6</sup> On verra que toutes les constantes du mythe mentionnées ont leur importance pour le mythe de la ville.

## Le mythe : une réalité multiple

Or, si nous passons maintenant de ce qu'il y a de commun à tous les mythes à leur manifestation concrète, il s'avère que celle-ci peut prendre quatre formes différentes, autrement dit que le terme de mythe peut avoir quatre sens distincts.<sup>7</sup> D'abord il peut se référer à un *récit légendaire expliquant les origines*. Tels sont les mythes des peuplades non-occidentales qu'étudie l'ethnologue ou encore les mythes gréco-romains. Ce premier sens peut être quelque peu élargi. Dès lors il renvoie à « tout récit fondé sur des croyances fabuleuses, et qui éclaire un trait fondamental des conduites humaines » (Bordas 387).

En un second sens, on considère ce même *récit légendaire*, mais « *intégré à un système religieux ou poétique* », autrement dit tel qu'il fonctionne dans une pratique religieuse (avec ses rites, ses conventions...) ou est mis à profit par la littérature.<sup>8</sup> On n'a plus à l'esprit le mythe de Sisyphe en tant que tel, mais ce même mythe mis en scène par Albert Camus dans son essai éponyme.

Dans un troisième sens, le mythe représente « *une conception collective, sorte de croyance vague, de goût, de culte ou d'adoration laïque spontanée* ». Entendu ainsi, le mythe recouvre une variété de phénomènes, comme en témoigne précisément le *Dictionnaire des mythes d'aujourd'hui* de Pierre Brunel (1999), qui reprend des personnages historiques ou politiques (Kennedy, Mitterrand...), des personnalités du monde de l'art et du spectacle (James Dean, Serge Gainsbourg, Glenn Gould...), des phénomènes historiques (le nazisme, mai 68), des objets modernes (l'ordinateur), des phénomènes sociaux et culturels (le rêve américain), des croyances (le péril jaune, le mythe du progrès), et ... précisément des villes (Paris, New York).

<sup>6</sup> « C'est l'histoire humaine qui fait passer le réel à l'état de parole, c'est elle seule qui règle la vie et la mort du langage mythique » (Barthes 216).

<sup>7</sup> Nous reprenons la subdivision à Pierre Brunel, lequel la reprend lui-même à Henri Morier (Brunel *Dictionnaire des mythes d'aujourd'hui* 9–12).

<sup>8</sup> Les mythes entendus en ce sens ont fait l'objet d'un premier dictionnaire des mythes dirigé par Pierre Brunel (Brunel *Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires*).

Enfin, en un quatrième sens, le mythe désigne *un récit invraisemblable ou mensonger*. Morier donne l'exemple de la légende selon laquelle Verlaine écrivait en état d'ivresse. Les sens 3 et 4 recouvrent à peu près les mythes tels que Roland Barthes les analysa dans les années cinquante dans ses *Mythologies* (Brunel *Dictionnaire des mythes d'aujourd'hui* 10). Rappelons que, selon Barthes, la « parole mythique » vient se greffer sur « une matière déjà travaillée en vue d'une communication appropriée » (Barthes 217). Le mythe est un « système sémiologique second » qui « s'édifie à partir d'une chaîne sémiologique qui existe avant lui » (221). Pour prendre un exemple de Barthes (datant évidemment des années cinquante) : une photo dans *Paris-Match* montrant un soldat noir faisant le salut militaire devant un drapeau français qu'on devine hors de l'image signifie simplement : « un soldat noir fait le salut militaire français ». Quant au sens mythique, il prend appui sur le sens premier, et correspond à peu près à l'idée suivante : « Il est évident que les colonisés sont de fidèles serviteurs de la France, qui est un grand Empire, etc. ».

Il semble donc tentant de faire le partage entre, d'une part, les mythes qui se présentent d'emblée comme tels, en leur qualité de récits légendaires gravitant autour d'une création ou d'un être lié indissociablement à certaines actions (sens 1 et 2), et, d'autre part, les mythes qui doivent leur existence au fait qu'ils se greffent sur une réalité préexistante non mythique (sens 3 et 4). Certes, les premiers sont sujet à des transformations : Lévi-Strauss y a insisté, chaque mythe appartenant aux sociétés archaïques doit être considéré dans ses rapports complexes avec des mythes connexes (Lévi-Strauss 227–55). Quant aux grands mythes occidentaux (pensons aux plus célèbres d'entre eux, comme celui de Don Juan, de Faust), ils s'avèrent d'une grande plasticité, et n'ont cessé de se transformer et de se renouveler tout au long de l'histoire. Il n'en demeure pas moins que nous restons dans une réalité de part en part mythique. Bien entendu, on pourra sans doute ramener ces mythes à des tendances profondes de la nature humaine; pour autant que celles-ci ne soient pas apparentes, le travail de l'interprétation permettra de les exhumer.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Voir la remarque de Paul Diel : « Les figures les plus significatives de la mythologie grecque représentent chacune une fonction de la psyché, et leur relation entre elles expriment la vie psychique de l'homme, partagé entre les tendances opposées vers la sublimation ou le perversissement » (*Le Symbolisme dans la mythologie grecque: étude psychanalytique*, 40; cité par Higonnet *Paris, capitale du monde* 420).

Le cas des mythes qui se greffent sur une réalité préexistante est différent. A l'évidence, l'image mythique de Napoléon ou de Mitterrand ne correspond pas à la figure historique de ces hommes d'Etat, même si ces derniers peuvent en avoir favorisé la création par leurs faits et gestes ; de même, la représentation mythique de Paris ne se confond pas avec la ville réelle que nous connaissons. Entre l'objet et son mythe demeure un écart inéluctable.

A durcir cette distinction, on risque cependant de simplifier les choses. Car, comme l'ont constaté les contributeurs au *Dictionnaire des mythes d'aujourd'hui*, les mythes modernes, au sens où les entendait Barthes, se nourrissent eux aussi des mythes traditionnels, et recèlent des « résidus des mythes classiques » (11). Pour reprendre un exemple à Pierre Brunel, le mythe de la vitesse peut s'exprimer par le biais du mythe d'Icare. Il existe donc une continuité relative entre les mythes au sens 1, 2, d'une part, et au sens 3 et 4, de l'autre.

On le verra par la suite, lorsqu'on envisage le mythe de la ville, il est important de tenir à l'esprit à la fois les ressemblances et les différences entre ces différents types de mythe. A première vue, le mythe de la ville semble relever du mythe au sens d'une image, d'une « croyance vague », mais un examen plus attentif nous montrera que le mythe dans son sens fort (sens 1 et 2) peut nourrir de façon substantielle le mythe de la ville.

## De la ville décrite à la ville imaginée

Ces données générales sur le mythe étant posées, examinons maintenant ce qu'il en est du mythe dans la littérature, et par la même occasion de l'expression littéraire du mythe de la ville. Il est évidemment souvent question de villes dans les romans, dans la poésie, etc. Toutefois, et pour nous limiter pour le moment aux villes qui existent réellement (Paris, Londres...), c'est-à-dire les villes *avec référent*, demandons-nous sous quelles conditions la ville familière acquiert un statut mythique. Pour comprendre cette transition, il est indispensable de s'arrêter brièvement aux conditions générales de la représentation littéraire. Quand une ville réellement existante est évoquée dans un roman, un poème, un récit de voyage..., ces textes peuvent-ils en offrir une image fidèle ? L'imitation du réel figure au programme de nombreuses écoles littéraires, du classicisme, avec son impératif d'imitation de la nature, jusqu'au réalisme, qui entendait concevoir le roman comme un « miroir qu'on promène le



long d'une route », selon les mots de Stendhal. Evidemment, nous ne sommes pas dupes, et nous savons que les textes transfigurent le réel plus qu'ils ne le reflètent, et que chaque école littéraire a ses conventions. Ce principe général vaut naturellement aussi pour la représentation littéraire de la ville. Si minutieusement que celle-ci soit décrite, elle ne peut en aucun cas être conçue comme une copie fidèle de la ville existante. Dans l'absolu, la ville dans la littérature s'écarte de fait toujours si peu soit-il de la ville réelle. Jean Roudaut saisit cet écart à travers la catégorie de *l'imaginaire* : « toute ville géographique devient en partie imaginaire dès qu'elle est saisie à l'intérieur de la littérature » (Roudaut 33). Elle le devient par le contexte immédiat, les pages, le livre où elle est citée, tout comme par le contexte au sens large, c'est-à-dire le corpus global des textes littéraires, voire des productions culturelles en général (39) : les noms de Bruges ou de Venise cités dans un texte charrient avec eux les associations de ville de marchands, de ville morte, etc., pour l'une, de ville du décadentisme, du carnaval, etc., pour l'autre. Du reste, en évoquant une ville, un écrivain peut exploiter de façon volontaire ce fonds culturel en s'inspirant davantage de textes d'écrivains antérieurs que de la réalité : le plagiat, l'intertexte, le stéréotype peuvent donc jouer un rôle déterminant. De plus, l'espace de la ville en littérature n'est jamais neutre mais coloré par les valeurs propres à l'écrivain,<sup>10</sup> ni homogène, mais structuré selon des oppositions symboliques (la capitale corrompue s'opposant à la campagne vertueuse, la ville de la passion à celle de l'ennui, celle du Nord, laborieuse et sérieuse, à celle du Sud, lascive et adonnée aux plaisirs, etc.) (32).

D'un autre côté, il faut bien en convenir, la littérature réussit indéniablement à nous renseigner parfois sur l'état réel des villes existantes. Quelques exemples suffiront à illustrer ce fait. Selon Karlheinz Stierle, le *Tableau de Paris* (1782–1788) de Louis-Sébastien Mercier marque une étape cruciale dans la constitution du mythe de Paris (on y reviendra). Néanmoins, les historiens cherchant à mieux connaître le Paris à la veille de la Révolution ont abondamment puisé dans cet ouvrage. De même, si la *Comédie humaine* de Balzac passe pour un autre monument clé du mythe de Paris en littérature, Marx et Engels la fréquentaient volontiers,

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<sup>10</sup> « L'existence d'un texte littéraire a pour résultat d'affecter les faits de la géographie urbaine d'une charge affective qui peut être positive ou négative » (Chouillet 71–81, voir 72; voir aussi Pike 1981 : IX-X, 11).

y goûtant en sociologues une fidèle représentation des structures sociales et politiques de l'époque.

Il semble donc plus indiqué d'envisager de façon toute relative la transfiguration de la ville réelle par la littérature, comme nous y invite par exemple l'usage que fait Pierre Citron de la catégorie du *poétique*, dans son approche du Paris littéraire. S'il existe une « poésie de Paris », c'est qu'

Il semble possible de considérer en gros comme poétique tout texte où l'auteur n'a pas prétendu reproduire la réalité de Paris – je veux dire la réalité matérielle [...] – mais où il a cherché à exprimer cette réalité à travers autre chose, à en présenter une vue transformée, déformée, systématisée, le plus souvent embellie, parfois aussi enlaidie comme chez certains romantiques. (Citron I, 7)

Cette démarche implique divers procédés, notamment l'emploi d'images ou d'épithètes diverses qui vont au-delà de la simple description, le rapprochement de Paris avec d'autres villes ou l'évocation de monuments ou de sites parisiens, qui donnent à la ville une couleur particulière. Ainsi, on arrive « à la formation de nombreux Paris différents du Paris existant : ville imaginaire, ou fantastique, ou douée d'une vie propre ; Paris passé [...] Paris futur [...] » (8).

Or, Citron lui-même admet que ce critère poétique ne permet pas une sélection rigoureuse.<sup>11</sup> De fait, il vaut mieux, quant à la représentation de la ville dans la littérature, envisager un continuum où à, un des deux extrêmes, le texte (ou du moins certains des passages de ce dernier) fait figure de document fidèle quant à la ville représentée, et où, à l'autre extrême, celle-ci se voit complètement transfigurée, tandis qu'existent entre les deux toute une gamme de formes intermédiaires. Une telle variété dans la représentation de la ville vaut tant pour l'évocation de la conduite des habitants de la ville, leurs mœurs si l'on veut, que pour la description du milieu urbain matériel où ils évoluent. Tandis que la première peut osciller par exemple entre la satire grossière et l'observation minutieuse, la seconde varie entre la déformation fantastique et une topographie exhaustive et fidèle.

Du reste, une telle variété dans la figure littéraire de la ville réellement existante, tendue entre la représentation fidèle et l'affabulation, existe aussi pour les villes imaginaires. Un romancier réaliste peut évoquer une

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<sup>11</sup> « Certes, la limite est parfois difficile à établir entre le pittoresque, l'histoire, la description de mœurs et la poésie » (*ibid.*).

ville imaginaire de telle façon qu'elle paraît tout à fait conforme aux villes que connaissent les lecteurs ; à l'inverse un écrivain utopiste peut inventer une ville qui étonne par la plupart de ses aspects. Du point de vue de la fidélité de la représentation, on peut donc envisager en tout quatre types de villes dans la littérature (voir Roudaut 23; 33) :

- a) les villes qui existent réellement (c'est-à-dire qui possèdent un référent) (Paris, Londres...) et que l'auteur décrit en maintenant l'illusion de la réalité ;
- b) les villes qui n'existent pas (qui n'ont pas de référent) et que l'auteur décrit en conservant l'illusion de la réalité (Verrières chez Stendhal, Yonville chez Flaubert, Balbec chez Proust) ;
- c) les villes qui existent réellement et que l'auteur tend à nous faire prendre pour imaginaires en les modifiant (par exemple le Paris de Balzac, le Paris magique des surréalistes) ;
- d) les villes qui n'existent pas mais qui sont décrites comme totalement étrangères aux nôtres.<sup>12</sup>

Remarquons qu'un même texte peut combiner les catégories a et c : nous reconnaissons bien un Paris familier dans les romans de Balzac, impliquant souvent une exactitude topographique indéniable, tandis que l'atmosphère particulière et le destin des personnages peuvent suggérer un Paris mythique.

## De la ville imaginée au mythe de la ville

Jusqu'à présent nous avons montré sous quelles conditions une ville représentée dans un texte littéraire pouvait relever plus ou moins de l'imaginaire. Celui-ci implique des associations tant intellectuelles qu'émotionnelles, des valeurs variables, en rapport avec la ville. Comment s'effectue la transition vers le mythe ? Lorsque l'imaginaire prend une certaine fixité, une certaine constance pour une ville en particulier, au-delà d'un seul livre, au-delà d'un seul écrivain, on parlera de mythe, lequel apparaît comme une représentation imaginaire relativement stable. Tel est à peu près le point de vue de Pierre Citron, lorsqu'il fixe à un

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<sup>12</sup> Comme le remarque Roudaut, cela ne les empêche pas d'apparaître parfois comme le négatif des villes existantes, l'utopiste corrigeant tous les défauts dont pâtit la ville réelle.

moment précis de l'histoire de France (qu'il situe vers 1830, au début de la monarchie de Juillet), la cristallisation du *mythe de Paris* :

les thèmes poétiques parisiens, prenant un développement nouveau, sont étroitement soudés ensemble par une idée-force qui les polarise ; et ce mythe s'exprime en un langage particulier, fait avant tout d'un réseau d'images à valeur dynamique, et qui est partie intégrante du mythe. (Citron I, 250)

le mythe soude en un bloc, sous un nom, une série de concepts, d'intuitions, de thèmes, de vocables très divers (251).

La ville envisagée comme un tout (« un bloc homogène ») associée à un thème ou une idée dominante (« une idée-force ») prime par rapport aux détails et aux particularités. On pourrait donc dire que le mythe constitue le degré le plus poussé de la transfiguration de la ville par l'imaginaire, et qu'il offre de ce dernier une vision hiérarchisée.

Karlheinz Stierle, un autre éminent spécialiste du mythe de Paris, exprime à peu près la même idée quand il parle des « formules d'identification » (*Paris. Son mythe* 10) du mythe de la ville: « nouvelle Jérusalem pour l'humanité en progrès », « città dolente », « enfer », etc. Ces connotations immémoriales attachées aux villes anciennes servent l'identification propre au mythe<sup>13</sup> : « Toutes ces formules d'identification sont des formules de mythisation où Paris entre dans la grande chaîne des villes du monde en s'appropriant leur prestige et leur mythe. Tous les mythes de toutes les grandes villes du passé s'unissent pour donner à Paris une superstructure mythique » (*ibid.*). Pour montrer que le mythe urbain peut se cristalliser autour d'une idée clé, mentionnons l'exemple, cité par Stierle (5), du mythe du rôle européen de Paris, en quoi la ville est censée succéder à Rome, ancienne incarnation de la puissance de l'empire romain, de la culture et de l'Eglise. Paris peut d'autant plus facilement prétendre à ce rôle de nouvelle Rome, qu'en Allemagne, après la mort de Charlemagne, nul ne peut lui faire concurrence. Contre cet arrière-plan doivent par exemple se comprendre les commentaires de Pétrarque dans ses *Lettres familières* : « Il visite Paris tout exprès pour voir si son mythe de ville unique en Europe et de vrai successeur de Rome correspondait à la réalité » (7). Au-delà d'une certaine image ou idée de Paris, peut exister

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<sup>13</sup> Rappelons ces connotations anciennes, bien connues : présomption (Babel), corruption (Babylone), perversion (Sodome et Gomorrhe), pouvoir (Rome), destruction (Troie et Carthage), mort et le fléau (ville d'Is), révélation (la Jérusalem céleste) (voir Pike 6–7).

une constellation riche de connotations diverses, ou en filigrane un récit, une manière de préciser la direction que prend le temps de l'histoire, dans le sens d'un progrès, d'une décadence. Nous reviendrons plus loin sur ces ramifications du mythe.

Quoi qu'il en soit, le mythe de la ville est globalisant et identifiant. Autrement dit, il ne se contente pas de qualifier l'un ou l'autre aspect de la ville, mais vise celle-ci dans sa totalité ; il identifie une certaine vision de la ville, et par la même il en exclut d'autres. Le mythe dessine un sens clairement reconnaissable.<sup>14</sup>

## La ville réelle face à la ville mythique

Limitons-nous dans ce qui suit aux villes réellement existantes, parce qu'elles permettent le mieux d'examiner l'articulation du mythe et de la modernité. Dans cette perspective, la ville mythique apparaît comme une construction secondaire qui vient se greffer sur la ville réelle. Roger Caillois, interprète du mythe de Paris dans un chapitre fameux de son essai classique *Le Mythe et l'homme*, exprime très bien cette idée : « le Paris qu'il [le lecteur] connaît n'est pas le seul, n'est pas même le véritable, n'est qu'un décor brillamment éclairé, mais trop *normal*, dont les machinistes ne se découvriront jamais, et qui dissimule un autre Paris, le Paris réel, un Paris fantôme, nocturne insaisissable » (Caillois *Le Mythe et l'homme* 188–89). Dans *Paris, capitale du monde*, l'historien Patrice Higonnet entend étudier, au-delà de l'histoire de Paris de 1750 à 1930, une histoire de la ville « au second degré pour ainsi dire », portant sur « la nature des *représentations* de cette aventure » (12). Dès lors se pose évidemment la question du lien précis entre la ville réelle et son image mythique, entre le Paris existant et le Paris mythifié. Il va de soi que la nature de la ville réelle n'est pas indifférente à la constitution de son mythe, et que certaines cités, grandes et célèbres pour la plupart, semblent être prédestinées à acquérir une figure mythique, en raison du pouvoir politique qui s'y concentre, de la richesse

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<sup>14</sup> Jean Pouillon affirme que « le mythe n'est que sens » ; sur ce plan, le mythe pratique l'« excès constitutif ». Les mythes en tant que tels ne laissent aucun doute quant au sens à donner au réel. C'est plutôt leur pluralité qui rend le réel indécidable. On peut en effet concevoir les mythes comme des « outils servant à penser, de façon indéfiniment provisoire, une réalité que leur pluralité même rend équivoque et qui peut-être ne supporte pas autant de sens qu'on le souhaiterait » (Pouillon « La fonction mythique » ; voir 97).

culturelle qui en émane ou de la prodigieuse diversité de leurs habitants. Le ou plutôt les mythes de New York reposent à l'évidence sur le dynamisme économique, la diversité infinie de la métropole américaine, qui en font un concentré du monde entier, mais aussi sur sa beauté intrinsèque, son caractère photogénique. De plus, la vitalité d'une ville peut aussi nourrir le désir de celle-ci de se constituer en mythe. Stierle le constate à propos de Paris, dont il souligne le génie et la domination culturelle (*Paris. Son mythe* 10) : « Dès le début, mythe de Paris et volonté de mythe se correspondent. Le mythe est une partie essentielle de la réalité de Paris et de son énergie » (13) ; « Paris ne démentira jamais son identité profonde qui est celle de la volonté de mythe » (14). De ce point de vue on doit aussi tenir compte de la conscience et de l'affectivité des habitants qui participent à cet élan vers le mythe. Le romancier Michel Tournier déclare que « les Parisiens sentent dans leur cœur une mythologie de Paris [...] Les Parisiens croient en Paris » (cité par Stierle 4) ; ils cultivent le « fantasme mythologique de la supériorité de Paris » (*ibid.*). Dans la même veine, on a dit que certains événements marquants de l'histoire de New York relèvent d'une autosacralisation de la ville, comme par exemple la construction, à l'occasion de l'Exposition internationale de 1939, d'un diorama sous la forme d'une maquette animée de la ville (Pinçonat 556).

En outre, l'image de la ville mythique peut avoir un effet en retour sur la ville réelle et sur la manière de la percevoir : « si le concret engendre le mythe, le mythe forme aussi la réalité à son image » (Higonnet *Paris, capitale du monde* 22). On peut déjà en faire l'expérience lorsqu'on se promène en tant que simple touriste dans une ville qui fait l'objet d'un mythe. A New York, par exemple, le regard du promeneur est influencé par ses souvenirs culturels, sinon littéraires, du moins photographiques et cinématographiques. Tel ou tel monument, le Chrysler building, le pont de Brooklyn est perçu à travers les connotations mythiques véhiculées par les arts (Pinçonat 557). Toutes ces images stéréotypées qui s'interposent entre le réel et nous peuvent stimuler l'inspiration et la flânerie, comme elles risquent aussi d'avoir l'effet inverse : ainsi s'explique le mouvement d'humeur de Régis Debray *Contre Venise* (Debray); infiniment de souvenirs, de livres, de films se sont ajoutés à la réalité de la célèbre ville de la lagune comme autant de strates culturelles superposées encombrant la mémoire, si bien que le philosophe français se promenant à Venise cherche en vain à y retrouver la fraîcheur de son regard, et les conditions de la virginité de l'expérience.

## Mythes faibles et mythes forts

Nous avons dit que le mythe urbain se cristallise autour de certaines images et idées dominantes: ainsi se développent par exemple autour de la capitale française les mythes de « Paris, capitale des lettres », « Paris, capitale de la Révolution », « Paris, capitale de la modernité haussmannienne », « Paris, capitale de la sexualité », « Paris capitale de la mode », etc. (Higonnet *Paris, capitale du monde* 12). Dès lors, tout se passe comme si toutes les grandes réalisations historiques et culturelles qui ont eu Paris pour théâtre, voire tout ce qui véhicule une idée de la ville tant soit peu tangible pouvait devenir objet de mythe. Il faut l'avouer, à lire certains commentateurs, la frontière paraît parfois mince entre le mythe et le réel, et le terme mythe semble à l'occasion pris simplement au sens d'image triviale du réel ou de simple représentation. C'est l'impression que donne Pierre Brunel, pourtant grand mythographe s'il en est, lorsqu'il cherche des preuves du mythe du « Gai Paris » dans... les pages roses du *Pariscope*, l'hebdomadaire consacré aux spectacles (Brunel *Dictionnaire des mythes d'aujourd'hui* 613).

En réalité, tous les mythes de la ville ne se valent pas. Les images qui condensent le mythe de la cité peuvent se limiter à quelques significations élémentaires, ou au contraire se révéler extrêmement riches en connotations, en récits implicites ou explicites, en thèmes divers. Or, il nous paraît que la présence de la narration est décisive pour conférer au mythe une figure forte et un impact certain. Encore l'implication du récit dans le mythe de la ville ne se présente-t-elle pas toujours de la même manière. Les grands mythes urbains se rapprochent le plus des mythes traditionnels au sens étroit lorsqu'ils racontent la fondation de la ville. Comme le rappelle Stierle, « Le mythe de la ville, c'est le plus souvent le mythe de sa fondation qui remonte dans un passé lointain et légendaire. Ainsi *l'Enéide* de Virgile est le mythe de la fondation de Rome où l'essence de la ville présente, telle que Virgile l'aperçoit, est projetée dans le moment imaginaire de sa fondation, comme si, dans ce moment mythique, l'essence de la ville et de sa destinée se montrait à l'état pur » (Stierle *Paris. Son mythe* 5). Mais les mythes modernes de la ville, complètement laïcisés, peuvent eux aussi prendre une allure « cosmogonique ». Higonnet établit une distinction utile entre *mythes* et *fantasmagories*, qui départage les vrais mythes, autrement dit ceux qui assument la fonction qui était propre aux mythes traditionnels, de leur rebut. Le mythe authentique offre un paradigme de lecture de l'histoire, lui trace une direction, et par

conséquent contribue à l'orientation de l'action, bref, il remplit tout à fait la fonction normative du mythe, distinguée plus haut. En tant que récit, le mythe permet de se situer dans le temps, et de comprendre le présent par rapport au passé et à l'avenir : « Des innombrables définitions de ce qu'est un mythe, celle qui convient le mieux à l'histoire de Paris serait sans doute celle qui fait du mythe une narration cosmogonique, qui se crée d'elle-même, et qui explique le présent par le passé et par le devenir » (Higonnet *Paris, capitale du monde* 261). Par la même occasion, en donnant sens aux événements, le mythe les inscrit dans un ordre de nature transcendante ou sacrée, soustrait aux simples volontés humaines : « ces mythes [parisiens] expliquaient le présent – le profane, si l'on veut – qu'ils insèrent dans une narration qui allait d'un passé lointain vers un avenir inconnu mais néanmoins prévisible et quasiment sacré » (21). Deux exemples concrets tirés de Higonnet permettront de mieux comprendre cette démarche. Le premier concerne le mythe haussmannien de Paris capitale de la modernité : ce mythe permet d'interpréter la modernité de l'époque présente comme une étape sur un long chemin allant du moyen âge rétrograde vers une société harmonieuse où les valeurs bourgeoises seraient partagées par tous. Le deuxième exemple concerne la Commune de Paris, en 1871 : les insurgés parisiens sont entraînés par le mythe sécularisé, de « Paris, capitale de la Révolution » (15), et peuvent ainsi situer leur action entre passé et avenir : « le communard de 1871 meurt parce qu'il comprend 1789 et sa propre vie comme autant d'étapes vers un monde meilleur » (261). L'insurgé de 1871 se comprend également par rapport à l'avenir, la révolution millénariste, censée survenir bientôt.

A l'opposé de tels mythes qui structurent la compréhension du vécu, guident l'action et impliquent une dimension collective, se situent les fantasmagories, qui relèvent plutôt de ce que Marx appelait l'idéologie ou Barthes improprement le mythe,<sup>15</sup> c'est-à-dire des constructions mentales qui contribuent au maintien de l'ordre établi : « le présent s'excuse en déformant et simplifiant le passé » (16), « le mythe nous aide à connaître; la fantasmagorie à reconnaître seulement » (*Ibid.*). Higonnet donne comme exemple le spectacle illusionniste à l'époque du Directoire mettant en scène un Robespierre soi-disant revenu des morts. Higonnet projette sa typologie des mythes urbains dans l'histoire quand il émet l'hypothèse selon laquelle la montée des grands mythes parisiens se situe

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<sup>15</sup> Selon Higonnet le mythe théorisé par Roland Barthes relève plutôt de la fantasmagorie (15).



entre 1750 et 1889, pour être suivie de leur déclin et du triomphe de la fantasmagorie. On peut rapprocher de ces grands mythes distingués par Higonet certains aspects de l'interprétation du mythe de Paris par le romaniste Karlheinz Stierle, sur laquelle nous reviendrons plus loin, et qui montre notamment que pour des écrivains comme Hugo et Vigny, Paris devient le centre névralgique de la modernité machiniste en marche, pour le meilleur et pour le pire (voir Stierle *La capitale des signes* 381–82).

On le voit, dans le meilleur des cas, la narration offerte par le mythe présente donc une interprétation – mythique évidemment – de l'histoire : l'originalité du mythe de la ville consiste alors à conjuguer un lieu qui est une grande ville – Paris, New York... – et une interprétation de la destinée humaine. Si le mythe de la grande ville peut prendre une telle ampleur, c'est évidemment aussi dû à deux phénomènes connexes, tenant à la logique propre du mythe. Tout d'abord, les mythes de la ville se greffent souvent sur des mythes plus généraux : ainsi le mythe de New York réactualise à l'évidence plusieurs mythes typiquement américains : le mythe primitiviste de l'âge d'or, le mythe de l'Amérique comme nouvelle terre promise, etc. (Pinçonat 552). Le mythe de la modernité haussmannienne est porté par le mythe du progrès, fort répandu au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. Toutefois, les mythes de la grande ville ne vont pas seulement se greffer sur d'autres mythes contemporains. Ils peuvent aussi réactualiser des mythes beaucoup plus anciens. Ainsi le roman-feuilleton du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle va-t-il s'inspirer des Mystères du Moyen Âge, des drames allégoriques centrés autour de deux protagonistes, Dieu et Satan, pour transformer Paris en le lieu du combat allégorique où la destinée de l'humanité est en jeu (Stierle *Paris. Son mythe* 13). Enfin, une autre particularité des mythes est leur capacité à se transformer et à s'inverser : la ville de New York, terre promise, peut devenir terre de larmes (voir Pinçonat 553).

Ces grands récits organisateurs qui constituent le cœur des mythes de la ville prennent souvent une forme concrète à travers des récits mettant en jeu des héros imaginaires, les Rastignac et Goriot de Balzac par exemple ou les figures qui peuplent les poèmes parisiens de Baudelaire : la passante, les petites vieilles, les sept vieillards. Comme l'a montré Stierle (*Der Mythos von Paris* 364–75), par rapport à la somme de remarques dispersées du *Tableau de Paris* de Louis-Sébastien Mercier, l'imaginaire et les récits propres aux romans de Balzac confèrent une puissance supérieure à l'expression du mythe de Paris. En racontant le destin de ses protagonistes, Balzac assure la liaison de réalités parisiennes séparées

dans l'espace (des quartiers éloignés les uns des autres) ou du point de vue de moral ou social (richesse et pauvreté par exemple), l'un et l'autre se recoupant d'ailleurs souvent. Par une plus grande concentration des données le mythe de Paris atteint une meilleure réussite esthétique. Enfin, si le mythe de la grande ville qualifie celle-ci dans sa totalité, comme nous l'avons souligné plus haut, certains lieux précis de la ville peuvent acquérir tout particulièrement une charge mythique : pour s'en tenir à l'exemple de Paris, pensons au Palais-Royal chez Louis-Sébastien Mercier, à la cathédrale Notre-Dame chez Victor Hugo, aux Halles chez Emile Zola, au passage de l'Opéra chez Louis Aragon.<sup>16</sup> Il existe donc tout un habillage concret du mythe qu'il incombe à l'analyse littéraire de mettre au jour.

## Le mythe de la lisibilité de la ville

Nous avons insisté sur le fait que le mythe de la ville était habité par une volonté de totalisation : dans les meilleures de ses réalisations, il imprime une identité précise à la ville, tout comme il lui trace un avenir indubitable. Or de ce point de vue, Karlheinz Stierle a profondément renouvelé l'analyse et l'histoire du mythe de Paris, en y ajoutant une dimension supplémentaire. Dans *Der Mythos von Paris*, il n'était pas question pour lui de faire à nouveau l'inventaire des récits et des constellations d'images qui constituent Paris en ville mythique : il estime que ce travail a été déjà excellemment fait par Pierre Citron (Citron). Il s'agissait plutôt de montrer, dans une perspective historique, que la visée de la totalité, qui est simplement supposée dans chaque mythe comme son ambition cachée, et qui garantit aussi son efficacité, devient dans le mythe de Paris tout à fait manifeste et explicite au point de définir l'essentiel du mythe lui-même. Voici comment Stierle définit le mythe de Paris :

à Paris seulement, le mythe de la ville s'est créé un discours pour rendre consciente la grande ville dans sa totalité, tâche impossible comme telle, selon Lévi-Strauss, de tout mythe véritable (Stierle *Paris. Son mythe et son discours* 18).

[le] projet de rendre la ville consciente d'elle-même, de la saisir dans la totalité de ses structures et activités et d'en déduire l'esprit (*ibid.*).

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<sup>16</sup> Respectivement évoqués dans *Le Tableau de Paris* (1781–1788), *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873) et *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926).

Dans son mythe ou son discours, la ville se reflète elle-même comme ‘une totalité de l’expérience possible’ (Blumenberg) et accède à la conscience » (Stierle *La capitale des signes* 561).

Contrairement à ce qui se passe chez d’autres théoriciens du mythe de la ville, le mythe de Paris n’est pas ici défini principalement par un contenu spécifique, autrement dit par une image, une narration, une identification précise à propos de la capitale française (Paris corrompu, Paris savant, Paris galant, Paris impérial, etc.) mais plutôt par la prétention à saisir le tout de la ville à travers une image ou un discours, autrement dit par le désir d’identification et de totalisation lui-même. Et c’est de ce désir, de cette expérience plutôt que Stierle retrace l’histoire. Tout se passe comme si le mythe de la ville se haussait par là à un niveau réflexif. Pour bien comprendre l’originalité de la vision qu’offre Stierle du mythe de Paris, on doit être attentif à ses concepts les plus importants, qui se rattachent à des filiations intellectuelles diverses dont il assure la synthèse.

Premièrement il y a l’ordre du discours, des signes, du langage. Si les sciences humaines du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle envisagent la possibilité d’une « sémiotique de la cité » (Barthes) et d’une lisibilité de la ville (Stierle *La capitale des signes* 19), laquelle est associée à un texte à déchiffrer, la compréhension du mythe de la ville selon Stierle implique plutôt le rapprochement avec la métaphore traditionnelle du Monde associé à un livre. Selon l’idée du philosophe Hans Blumenberg, reprise par Stierle : « Dans le monde comme livre, se révèle ‘la totalité des expériences possibles’ » (2).<sup>17</sup> Autrement dit : « L’infinité des expériences possibles prend, en se métamorphosant en livre, une dimension saisissable » (*ibid.*). Toutefois, la métaphore absolue du Monde-livre contient aussi son revers : « Mais le livre n’est-il pas lui aussi un monde qui s’ouvre vers l’insaisissable ? » (*ibid.*). De façon analogue, la ville constitue métaphoriquement un livre à lire, pas n’importe comment, mais comme ‘une totalité de l’expérience possible’, c’est-à-dire selon l’ordre du mythe. L’association, chez Stierle, de la ville avec un texte à déchiffrer doit d’ailleurs aussi beaucoup à Walter Benjamin et son monumental ouvrage resté inachevé sur Paris, capitale du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, le *Passagen-Werk*.<sup>18</sup> Bref, le mythe de Paris équivaut au « mythe de sa lisibilité » (Stierle *La capitale des signes* 386 ; voir 12, 14, 18). C’est bien cette thèse spécifique qui fait toute l’originalité du point de vue de Stierle par rapport à celui d’un Caillou ou d’un Citron, par

<sup>17</sup> Stierle se réfère à *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*.

<sup>18</sup> Etant donné sa complexité, la question des rapports entre la ville moderne et le mythe chez Benjamin demanderait un traitement séparé.

exemple. Dans cette perspective, le critique allemand peut envisager une série de discours sur Paris qui donnent corps au mythe de la ville, au sens où ils représentent tous autant de tentatives pour exprimer la lisibilité de la totalité de celle-ci.

Ensuite, la théorie de Stierle mobilise l'ordre de la conscience. Le désir de totalisation de la ville par les discours est envisagé par le critique comme une sorte de prise de conscience de la ville par elle-même. De façon analogue avec ce qui se passe dans l'odyssée hégélienne de l'Esprit, la ville apprend à se connaître à travers ses objectivations : « Paris n'est pas seulement l'objet de son mythe ; la ville est bien plutôt le sujet qui a engendré le mythe » (Stierle *La capitale des signes* 561).

Troisièmement intervient l'ordre de l'histoire. Cette prise de conscience n'opère pas dans un vide intemporel mais doit être située dans l'histoire occidentale, et représente une dimension essentielle (ou une relecture) de la modernité. Le mythe de Paris au sens où l'entend Stierle possède une histoire, et ne remonte pas plus loin que le dix-septième siècle. C'est à cette époque qu'apparaissent quelques textes qui renouvellent foncièrement le discours sur la ville, qui jusque-là avait été essentiellement soit descriptif soit satirique. Les guides de voyages se présentent comme une description atomisée du milieu urbain, une liste non close de particularités architecturales, vestimentaires, d'habitudes et de curiosités, tandis que les écrits satiriques se moquent à loisir des *embarras de Paris*. Ces deux discours dissemblables ont cependant en commun leur approche atomisée et parcellaire, l'absence complète de conscience de la totalité. En revanche, les textes qui inaugurent le mythe de la ville se montrent soucieux d'appréhender l'esprit de la ville dans sa totalité, comme les *Caractères* (1688–1696) de La Bruyère, lesquels, au-delà de leur charge satirique évidente contre les nouveaux riches de l'époque, saisissent la ville comme une réalité de signes en mouvement, en particulier à travers l'analyse de la mode et de la consommation somptuaire qui lui est propre. En ce sens, ils réalisent la pénétration des structures de la ville. Toutefois, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, avec son *Tableau de Paris* (1781–1788), est le premier à consacrer un ouvrage exclusivement à la ville de Paris, non dans une perspective descriptive ou satirique, mais dans le but d'exhiber « tous les contrastes de la grande ville » (Mercier), autrement dit toute sa complexité. La place manque ici pour rendre compte de toute la richesse des lectures de Stierle, qui suit le mythe de Paris jusqu'à Baudelaire. Qu'il nous suffise de dire que chez la plupart des écrivains pris en compte par le critique allemand la conscience de la totalité de la ville ne va jamais

sans le sentiment de l'impossibilité d'embrasser celle-ci : le mythe de la lisibilité est aussi celui de son débordement infini ou, dans les mots de Stierle, de son « illisibilité lisible » (385), laquelle semble la signature de la sensibilité propre à la modernité.

## Du mythe collectif au mythe personnel

Pour finir, nous voudrions brièvement évoquer une autre expression possible du mythe de la ville. Dans ses versions les plus fortes et les plus convaincantes, le mythe urbain nous est apparu comme une construction dotée d'une forte objectivité et d'une validité collective. Qu'il indique un sens pour l'avenir de l'humanité ou manifeste l'ambition d'une lecture totale de la grande ville, le mythe semble bel et bien se présenter comme le prolongement laïcisé des mythes traditionnels, qui ancrent fortement l'homme dans le collectif. Même si chaque écrivain colore le mythe des particularités de son imaginaire propre, au travers de sa contribution au mythe de la ville, il participe néanmoins à une aventure commune. Toutefois, il reste à se demander s'il existe une appropriation mythique de la ville qui ne partage pas cette ambition collective.

Le cas des surréalistes parisiens semble tout à fait approprié pour aborder cette éventualité. Sans aucun doute, Louis Aragon, André Breton et leurs amis ont profondément renouvelé le mythe de Paris dans les années vingt du siècle passé.<sup>19</sup> Des récits comme le *Paysan de Paris* (1926) et *Nadja* (1928) sont devenus des classiques de la mythologie parisienne. Tournant le dos à la nature, livrés à leurs flâneries diurnes et nocturnes à travers Paris, les surréalistes ont envisagé le milieu urbain comme un lieu truffé de signes à déchiffrer. En ce sens, ils se situent dans le mouvement de lecture de la ville initié par La Bruyère au 17<sup>e</sup> siècle, dont Stierle a retracé l'histoire. Toutefois, cette lecture des signes a pris pour les surréalistes un sens différent. Il ne s'agit plus pour eux de faire l'impossible inventaire de la ville, de tenter de la saisir dans sa redoutable complexité. Les particularités de la rue frappent nos écrivains au cours de leurs promenades notamment en raison de leurs résonances affectives, comme c'était déjà le cas chez Baudelaire.<sup>20</sup> Soucieux de donner libre cours à leurs

<sup>19</sup> Sur ce sujet, voir l'ouvrage incontournable de Marie-Claire Bancquart.

<sup>20</sup> A propos de cette filiation, voir Michael Sherringham, "City Space, Mental Space, poetic Space : Paris in Breton, Benjamin and Réda," 88. Pour l'étude approfondie de cette dimension affective chez les surréalistes, voir Bancquart.

tendances irrationnelles et inconscientes, les surréalistes vont découvrir dans le milieu urbain un écho à leurs obsessions et à leurs fantasmes. Si leurs textes suggèrent qu'ils trouvent au coin de la rue l'objet, le passant, le décor qui leur fait signe, en réalité ils ont projeté au préalable sur le monde urbain les impulsions de leur vie intérieure et affective. La grande ville se transforme en une immense caisse de résonance de leur monde intérieur. De cette manière la promenade dans la ville se meut en une quête de l'identité propre. Les surréalistes contribuent sans aucun doute à façonner le mythe de la ville, puisque derrière la métropole apparente, triviale, ils mettent au jour une cité cachée, secrète aux sollicitations érotiques et occultes. A travers le moment éphémère arraché au quotidien ils saisissent la merveille, qui se hausse au niveau du sacré.

Cette démarche peut cependant être interprétée de deux manières. On peut y voir, comme Patrice Higonnet, un abandon de la véritable vocation universaliste et collective du mythe laïque de la ville moderne : les surréalistes se replieraient sur leurs fantasmes et manqueraient d'insuffler à la capitale française une véritable vie mythique. Dans les termes de Higonnet, les surréalistes sont tombés dans la « fantasmagorie ». <sup>21</sup> Toutefois, on peut aussi déceler dans leur manière de faire un modèle en vue d'une appropriation personnelle de la ville, notamment par la marche. A travers leurs flâneries, les surréalistes ont sans doute subordonné Paris à leur mythe personnel, mais ainsi ils ont montré comment l'exploration de la ville hors des sentiers battus des contraintes sociales, rationnelles et économiques permet aussi un approfondissement de l'identité individuelle, voire une réappropriation toute personnelle de la ville, un projet qui conserve aujourd'hui encore toute son actualité. <sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> « Le surréalisme marqua-t-il la fin ou le renouveau des mythes de Paris ? Et n'aurait-il pas été au fond bien plus fantasmagorique que mythique puisque axé sur l'exclusion, le particulier, l'ésotérique et l'argent que sur l'inclusion, l'universel et l'imaginaire collectif » (Higonnet *Paris, capitale du monde* 355).

<sup>22</sup> On trouve un beau plaidoyer pour une telle réappropriation dans le livre récent de Jean-Christophe Bailly, *La Phrase urbaine*, Seuil, 2013 ; voir notamment les chapitres sur « La grammaire générative des jambes » et sur « La ville buissonnière ». Dans le même sens, l'anthropologue David Le Breton, réfléchissant à ce que signifie « Marcher en ville », écrit : « Chaque marcheur porte en lui une mythologie, il est le seul à la connaître, même si bien entendu elle croise parfois la géographie intérieure des autres » (Le Breton 123).

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## **COMPTES RENDUS/BOOK REVIEWS**



**Eva Kushner, dir. *La nouvelle culture (1480–1520)*. Tome II de la série « L'époque de la Renaissance (1400–1600) » de *l'Histoire comparée des littératures de langues européennes*. Amsterdam-Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2017. Pp. 544 +viii. ISBN : 9789027234674.**

Ce volume est le dernier à paraître des quatre que compte « L'époque de la Renaissance (1400–1600) », seule série chronologique un peu ample de la très ambitieuse *Histoire comparée des littératures de langues européennes*, lancée il y a un demi-siècle. C'est le deuxième tome d'une série dont la publication a été très échelonnée dans le temps : le premier (« L'avènement de l'esprit nouveau (1400–1480) ») est paru il y a trois décennies (1988), le quatrième douze ans plus tard (« Crises et essors nouveaux (1560–1600) », 2000), le troisième (« Maturations et mutations (1520–1560) ») en 2011.

Les volumes ayant été mis en œuvre à peu près simultanément, la lenteur de la publication est due, au moins en partie, au fait que le comité éditorial s'est amenuisé au fil du temps et des disparitions. Composé au départ de plusieurs membres (Tibor Klaniczay, Eva Kushner et, suivant les volumes, André Stegmann ou Paul Chavy) le comité de direction s'est trouvé réduit à Eva Kushner, restée seule pour mener à bien la publication des volumes 3 et 2. L'entreprise dépassait les forces d'une seule personne car il fallait harmoniser les contributions d'une équipe internationale : pour ce volume, 35 auteurs d'une dizaine de nationalités (ils sont américains, anglais, canadiens, français, hollandais, hongrois, italiens, polonais, tchèques, etc.). On ne peut que se réjouir que la réalisation parvienne à son terme et en être reconnaissant à celle qui n'a pas ménagé ses efforts pour que cette entreprise colossale ne se perde pas en chemin.

Comme dans les autres volumes de la série, le propos se veut global et synthétique. Il ne s'agit pas de suivre le développement chronologique des littératures nationales entre 1480 et 1520 mais d'analyser les

bouleversements opérés dans l'Europe entière, même si les différentes aires culturelles ne reçoivent pas toutes la même attention. Cela n'a rien d'étonnant : pour une telle période, il est normal que l'Italie, et plus généralement l'Europe de l'Ouest, soient plus attentivement scrutées que l'Europe du Nord ou de l'Est. Mais celles-ci sont loin d'être ignorées : différentes sections abordent ces aires, comme celle où Jan Malarczyk analyse les nouvelles législations en Bohême, Hongrie et Pologne (70–78). L'ambition de couvrir toutes les littératures européennes a néanmoins rencontré d'inévitables limites, car les spécialistes ont rarement des compétences européennes. Les chapitres sont donc composés de sections qui couvrent des aires très inégales. Ainsi, dans le chapitre 8, « Découverte et recherche de la nature », les sections sur « astrologie et astronomie », « les grandes découvertes maritimes », « la naissance de la magie naturelle » s'efforcent de couvrir des aires larges tandis que celle portant sur « les inventions techniques » ne traite que de l'Italie et la section finale, la seule portant sur des textes littéraires au sens actuel, affiche un domaine restreint, italo-franco-espagnol (John F. Winter, « Exaltation de la nature dans la littérature de l'Italie, de la France et de l'Espagne », 435–43, qui évoque aussi brièvement le Portugal).

Autre caractéristique marquante de l'entreprise : la volonté de replacer la « littérature » dans son contexte culturel, au sens le plus large, en faisant une notable place non seulement aux systèmes de pensées mais aussi aux bouleversements artistiques, politiques et sociaux. Cette « Histoire des littératures » élargit donc notablement ses limites : c'est d'histoire culturelle qu'il s'agit, car les contributions ne se penchent pas seulement sur les formes considérées aujourd'hui comme « littéraires » mais interrogent, par exemple, les modalités d'écriture du droit, de la théorie politique ou de la théologie. Un tel élargissement s'impose d'autant plus que la « littérature » au sens où nous l'entendons aujourd'hui, n'existe pas à l'époque. On ne peut, assurément, que se louer de cette volonté de ne pas s'en tenir à notre conception actuelle de la littérature, tout en regrettant un peu que la question ne soit pas vraiment abordée et que l'introduction manie les notions de « littérature » et de « littéraire » sans expliciter ce qu'on peut entendre par là et sans s'interroger sur les catégories qui, à l'époque, régissaient la distribution des régimes discursifs.

Une des principales difficultés, pour une telle entreprise, est la périodisation, car les différents domaines de la culture et les aires culturelles ne se développent pas au même rythme. Curieusement, le choix des bornes chronologiques n'est pas expliqué : si le *terminus ad*

*quem* de 1520 se passe de commentaire (c'est manifestement le schisme religieux), le *terminus a quo* de 1480 est moins évident et il est étonnant que ces bornes ne soient pas justifiées : si elles l'ont été dans le premier volume, il eût été bon de faire un rappel ou un renvoi.

Il était assurément indispensable de découper des tranches chronologiques. Mais il est sain que ces limites ne soient pas fétichisées et que, à l'occasion, certaines sections les débordent. C'est le cas dès la première, qui porte sur « 'concordance' et différences religieuses » : Matteo Soranzo en traite dans la longue durée ; il remonte à la culture judaïque et gréco-romaine, ainsi qu'aux débuts du christianisme, et il les met en perspective avec le schisme à venir, pour déborder ensuite largement l'année 1520 en évoquant des penseurs qui, comme Las Casas, relèvent chronologiquement du tome III. Pareil débordement ne présente aucun inconvénient, puisqu'il permet de mieux resituer la question traitée dans une diachronie plus large.

L'ouvrage se développe en neuf chapitres. Le premier pose les bases idéologiques, sous l'égide des « visions du monde », avec des sections consacrées aux différences religieuses, à l'aristotélisme, au platonisme, au lullisme et à l'ésotérisme. Le second porte sur les « transformations politiques », avec des sections sur les formes du pouvoir, les législations et la théorie politique. Le troisième examine les transformations culturelles (académie et mécénat, rôle de l'Eglise, expansion de l'imprimé, renouveau universitaire). Le quatrième se penche sur « le renouveau des bonnes lettres », dans les études bibliques, dans les poétiques savantes, dans les pratiques épistolaires, dans la pratique oratoire et ses usages politiques. Le cinquième est consacré au « combat contre les 'hommes obscurs' » : ceux des humanistes (dans une section qui envisage une longue série de cas, de Pétrarque à Luther, en passant par Reuchlin et Erasme), la critique du cléricalisme, l'expression artistique et littéraire de ce combat dans une série d'œuvres célèbres de Brant, Geiler, Murner et Erasme, et, pour finir, les polémiques entre poètes et théologiens. Le sixième chapitre traite de la « civilité nouvelle », en commençant par ses « fondements », c'est-à-dire les ouvrages qui, comme le *Courtisan* de Castiglione, ont contribué à définir de nouvelles normes de comportement et un nouvel idéal de vie en commun, pour explorer ensuite le *paragone* et le débat sur les arts, avant d'étudier les manifestations concrètes de cette nouvelle civilité dans les fêtes, tant princières qu'ecclésiastiques, au théâtre (édition, traduction et adaptation du théâtre antique et leur exploitation scénique) et dans la musique (tant la création musicale que la théorie de la musique). Le

chapitre suivant réunit sous le titre « Exaltation esthétique de la vie » un ensemble un peu plus composite de sections consacrées à l'hédonisme philosophique (essentiellement la postérité de l'épicurisme), l'hédonisme poétique (l'adjectif est un peu trompeur, car on croise à nouveau Castiglione et l'épicurisme), l'art de bien vieillir, les mutations de la lyrique courtoise (chez les pétrarquaisants) et « l'héroïsation des passions humaines » dans *Amadis*, *La Célestine*, chez Boiardo et l'Arioste. Le huitième chapitre porte sur les découvertes et l'exploration de la nature ; comme je l'ai dit, il examine successivement l'astronomie et l'astrologie, les découvertes maritimes, les inventions techniques et la magie naturelle, pour finir sur la littérature à proprement parler. L'ouvrage se clôt sur un chapitre consacré aux « mythes d'une parfaite harmonie » qui aborde les « rêves d'une église rénovée » (avec Erasme, Thomas More et Luther), l'utopie sociale et politique, ainsi que la philosophie de l'amour (en Italie, mais aussi en France et en Espagne). Le chapitre s'achève par une section au titre un peu énigmatique – « la théorisation finale » – qui, à propos de l'idée d'harmonie universelle, envisage successivement le Cusain, Ficin, Pic de la Mirandole, Francesco Giorgio pour donner le mot de la fin à Léonard de Vinci.

Cet ensemble est impressionnant à tous égards. Même si toutes les sections sont loin de couvrir la totalité de l'Europe, c'est bien un tableau de la culture européenne que le volume brosse. Si bien qu'il intéressera aussi bien les spécialistes, qui auront l'occasion d'élargir leur horizon culturel en découvrant des aires qu'ils ne maîtrisent pas pleinement, que le public cultivé, qui y trouvera une information sûre, puisée aux meilleures sources.

Dans une entreprise d'une telle envergure, il est inévitable qu'il y ait quelques recoupements. Ainsi le *Narrenschiff* de Brant est évoqué au chapitre V, à propos de l'expression artistique et littéraire du « combat contre les hommes obscurs » (215–18) et au chapitre IX, à propos des utopies sociales et politiques (463). De même, l'astrologie, qui est examinée dans une section qui lui est largement consacrée (« Astronomie et astrologie : entre tradition et rénovation », de Sylviane Bokdam, 381–403), est à nouveau abordée par Cesare Vasoli, dans sa section sur la magie naturelle (notamment, 424–26). Ces reprises, heureusement, ne sont pas très gênantes car la maîtresse d'œuvre a visiblement veillé à les limiter.

Il est inévitable aussi qu'il y ait des disparates. Des choix ont été faits, qui tiennent aux concepteurs de l'ouvrage mais aussi à la disponibilité



des spécialistes. Ainsi, dans le premier chapitre sur les nouvelles visions du monde, aristotélisme et platonisme sont examinés successivement, mais dans une optique curieusement déséquilibrée. La section sur l'aristotélisme met fort bien en valeur la diversité des aristotélismes à la Renaissance qui sont loin de cette philosophie arriérée que les historiens de la philosophie se sont longtemps plu à dénoncer (Cassirer, entre autres). Elle est flanquée d'une section, par le même spécialiste, qui ne porte pas sur le développement du platonisme mais se focalise sur la fortune des hymnes platoniciens et leur influence sur la spiritualité chrétienne. D'un côté, un point de vue assez large sur l'aristotélisme ; de l'autre, un aperçu assez particulier sur le platonisme. Que les deux soient éclairants et convaincants n'empêche pas un certain flottement dans l'approche, qui va du très synthétique au très particulier.

Si vaste qu'elle soit, une telle entreprise est forcée de laisser quelques aspects de côté. On peut donc regretter, par exemple, que le volume consacre une section à la magie naturelle mais fasse silence sur le développement de la démonologie et la question de la sorcellerie, à l'époque de la publication du *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487). Mais la richesse de l'ensemble est telle que de pareils regrets sont de peu de poids. On peut aussi noter certaines absences, dans la table des matières, mais elles peuvent être trompeuses. Ainsi, on peut être surpris de ne pas trouver, dans un volume qui prend 1520 comme *terminus ad quem*, de section sur les prodromes de la Réforme, quand le premier tome de la série leur consacrait des sections entières (une sur le « hussitisme », une autre sur « l'appel à la Réforme »). Mais ces prodromes ne sont pas ignorés, car on en retrouve les éléments dans différentes sections. Outre la section la plus explicite à cet égard (« Les rêves d'une église rénovée » de Marco Cavarzere, 447–60) on en retrouve certains éléments dans une section sur la satire ecclésiastique (« Critique du cléricalisme » de Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci, 209–14).

La présentation matérielle de l'ensemble est excellente. Par rapport à d'autres volumes de la même série, quelques changements ont été opérés ; ainsi, les bibliographies, au lieu de figurer après chaque section, ont été rejetées à la fin du volume. On ne peut déplorer que de rares inconvénients : certains auteurs ne datent pas les textes dont ils parlent et n'en signalent en bibliographie que des éditions modernes, ce qui oblige le lecteur à chercher l'information ailleurs s'il veut les situer plus précisément dans le temps. Plus délicat est le fait que les renvois de l'index ne sont pas toujours justes ce qui, dans un ouvrage de ce gabarit, ne rend

pas la tâche du lecteur très facile. La longueur de la gestation du volume fait que les textes ont été rédigés à des dates sensiblement différentes (certains des auteurs sont disparus depuis longtemps, d'autres sont des chercheurs encore jeunes). Pour limiter les disparités, les bibliographies ont été généralement mises à jour, sans empêcher l'omission de livres importants (comme le *Perpetuum mobile* de M. Jeanneret, pourtant paru en 1997, aussi éclairant pour les visions du monde que pour les conceptions esthétiques).

D'une manière générale, le volume tend à mettre l'accent sur les « progrès ». On peut le comprendre, mais non sans regretter que le revers du tableau soit moins visible. Certes, les lourdeurs et les résistances (surtout ecclésiales) ne sont pas ignorées mais certains ferments négatifs sont passés sous silence, comme l'amorce des crises sorcières. Du coup, le volume donne de la période une vision qui peut paraître un peu trop euphorique car, à gommer les zones d'ombre, on risque d'affadir les lumières. On y est peut-être plus sensible aujourd'hui, à l'époque où de vieux démons se réveillent et où l'Europe semble marcher à reculons. Mais peut-être cette volonté de gommer les ombres est-elle à prendre comme un signal à saisir ou une raison d'espérer.

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**Anna Livia Frassetto. *The Metamorphoses of Lucretia. Three Eighteenth-Century Reinterpretation of the Myth: Carlo Goldoni, Samuel Richardson and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.* Bern: Peter Lang, 2017. Pp. 247. ISBN: 9783034320580.**

As its title suggests, this critical text provides a cross-cultural, panoramic exploration of the Roman Lucretia, a matron whose tragic death by suicide in 509BC prompted the advent of Rome's Republican Era, as an object of myth, making particular note of her reconfiguration in eighteenth-century European literature. Frassetto's study is as systematic as it is insightful.

Beginning with the early narrativization of Lucretia's life and death in classical, myth-rich works by writers such as Livy, Ovid, and Petronius, Frassetto examines Lucretia's near-ubiquitous presence and manifold transformations throughout the ages. She nods toward the matron's consecration not only in literary artifacts, but also in the visual arts, music, and in a film as recent as Kinugasa Teinosuke's *Gate of Hell (Jigokumon)*, (1953). Leaning upon this wider base, Frassetto's book carefully examines three key writings of the eighteenth century, each of which belonging to distinct linguistic and cultural contexts: Carlo Goldoni's *Lugrezia romana in Constantinopoli* (1737); Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1747–1748); and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* (1772).

Of seminal import to Frassetto's text are what the author identifies as two "thematic cores" (12) common to Lucretia's myth throughout its metamorphoses: the public and the private. These twin cores relate to the historico-cultural circumstances of Lucretia's passing during the time of Rome's monarchical rule under Tarquinius Superbus, as the figure's suicide came as the direct result of her rape by Superbus' son, Sextus Tarquinius, and concomitant feelings of matronly duty as a married woman of Rome, wed to her assailant's cousin, Tarquinius Collatinus.

Using this binary – along with a number of other dichotomies pent up in it – Frassetto’s book charts the myth of Lucretia’s adaptation. The critic surveys the various ways by which the narrative’s importation into new temporal and geographical contexts has led to the modification of its larger dynamics. However, Frassetto finds that the story’s re-tellers have maintained the public/private dualism as a thematic constant. In terms of structure, Frassetto divides her text into two discrete parts.

The first, “The Myth of Lucretia and its Components,” provides a detailed overview of the myth’s origins and outlines a number of its transformations. In the second, “Three Eighteenth-Century Lucretias,” Frassetto concentrates on the aforementioned case studies and concludes with a comparative analysis of the three texts.

Following the text’s introductory remarks on the functions of myth and metamorphosis, the first chapter of Part I, “The Myth of Lucretia,” addresses the historical context surrounding Lucretia’s assault and suicide, paired alongside the cultural and political impacts her death soon prompted. The author then places the story of Lucretia in conversation with that of Virginia – briefly describing the ways in which they both resemble and importantly differ from one another – and surveys Lucretia’s varied appearances in classical and European literatures, musical compositions, theatre pieces, and works of art. Significantly, this panoramic point of departure also acknowledges the myth of Lucretia’s widespread presence in eighteenth-century literary writings apart from the triad Frassetto’s text discusses in greater detail, positioning the three works in a larger network of the myth’s exchange across media and milieux.

Chapter II of the book’s first half, “Constants and Thematic Cores in the Myth of Lucretia,” introduces the critical text’s guiding framework. Frassetto invites us in scholarly commentary on the function of myth and foregrounds the comparative hermeneutic method by which her study of Lucretia will proceed. The critic then further contextualizes Lucretia’s position within the Roman social structure of her day, noting the prevailing legal and cultural ideals relevant to the circumstances that befall the matron. From this vantage, Lucretia’s ultimate suicide, Frassetto reasons, is an act that, while tragic, allowed her to exercise autonomy and preserve her dignity.

The chapter closes with a short discussion of the myth’s flexibility, in the context of the aforementioned cores Frassetto finds pivotal to Lucretia’s narrative. Frassetto underscores how individual deviations can

reveal their respective authors' "personal and original approach to the myth" and "reason" for retelling Lucretia's narrative (47).

The three initial chapters of the book's Second Part address successively the literary (and theatrical) trio of her argument's central constellation, beginning with Goldoni's *Lugrezia romana in Constantinopoli* (1737). Foretelling the formula that will guide the text's following sections, Chapter I, "Carlo Goldoni, *Lugrezia romana in Constantinopoli* (1737)" opens with a summary of the author's life, any documented, presumed, or potential influences on his delivery of the narrative, the state of the writing's genre – the drama *giocoso per musica* – at the time of his work's composition, and a broad-strokes account of the writer's national context, Italy, during the same period.

Frassetto, having established this sketch of Goldoni's background, then turns to a more formal, structural critique of *Lugrezia romana in Constantinopoli*. The critic then brings the writer's use of language, perceived tone, and overall "style" to the fore, all the while deftly navigating the stark transformation of Lucretia's mythical narrative in Goldoni's hands (78). The opera Goldoni weaves from the myth's foundations, per Frassetto, inevitably proves a densely parodic and meta-mythical retelling. The original story's hallmarks (Lucretia's rape and subsequent suicide), for example, are conspicuously ellipted or purposefully upended, leading the critic to describe Goldoni's *Lugrezia* as one who "intends to rebel against the role assigned to her by history, by legends, by tradition and by the many that have told her tale" (88).

The following chapter, "Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1747–1748)," adopts the same argumentative structure as the text's preceding case study. The author principally positions Richardson and his reworking of Lucretia's myth within a relatively detailed contextual frame. When dealing with the writer's biography, Frassetto underlines the high esteem in which Richardson was held among the English writers of the eighteenth century. An epistolary novel of England's Enlightenment era, *Clarissa*, as Frassetto highlights, emerged during the birth of the literary production as a commercial field in the country, being situated between the rise of the novel proper and the decline of the more aristocratic romance.

This contextual consideration, Frassetto makes clear, weighs upon – and is likewise reflected in – Richardson's handling of Lucretia's myth at the levels of genre and theme alike. What is more, the critic also detects

in Richardson's novel elements of the *larmoyante*, a comedic genre of the French and Italian stage that often pandered to the middle class through a certain sentimentality toward their social station. These features are blended with the author's trademark realism. The combination of these two generic components makes of *Clarissa* a sort of bridge between the reinterpretations of Lucretia's myth encountered in the work of both Goldoni and Lessing.

Frassetto ultimately finds in Richardson's *Clarissa* an "efficient" mode of retelling the myth of Lucretia within the norms unofficially ordained by the author's social milieu and concomitant context of literary production, as it appears "almost silently" throughout the novel, as an understated thread that runs the course of Richardson's narrative and enriches it (136).

Chapter III of the book's second part, "Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Emilia Galotti* (1772)," contains the final of Frassetto's case studies. It explores the return of Lucretia's myth to the stage, this time as a piece of bourgeois tragedy. Frassetto draws attention to Lessing's rather unique approach to dramaturgy, as she charts the writer's biography alongside an abbreviated history of German stagecraft at the time of his formal education. For some time of the mind that *Mitleid* ("compassion," "sympathy") was the highest, most palpable tragic sentiment a dramatic work could convey, as evidenced by the overarching themes at play in his *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755) and *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767), Lessing progressively shifted toward a theatrical approach informed by *Verfremdung* ("alienation," "distancing"), and his reconfiguration of the myth of Lucretia in *Emilia Galotti* betrays a curious mix of each thematic-cum-stylistic principle.

As Frassetto lays bare, Lessing's interpretation of Lucretia's tale carries the myth's most salient narrative elements, while also endowing it with a variety of renovations appropriate for the sociocultural context of its first production and new aesthetic. Significant to this adaptation, too, is Lessing's drive to prompt reflection on the part of the spectator/reader. Encoding the Lucretia material into the larger fold of his piece, Lessing invites his audience to mull over the range of ethical values the base story presents, Frassetto notes, chiefly through the use of a far more ambiguous ending than that of the myth's original.

Frassetto's book reaches its greatest heights in its final chapter, "A Comparison of the Three Authors," in which the author skillfully contends with the three texts that she has, to this point, considered individually. To accomplish the task, the critic structures her argument around a trio of key themes – "Family," "Violence," and "Death" – which appear in varying forms and under respectively unique circumstances, depending on the new contexts (cultural and medial) into which each author imports the myth. The comparative perspective allows Frassetto to delineate how the three reinterpretations of the myth harmonize and depart from one another, revealing through the process the texts' unique features.

Frassetto's analysis concludes with a discussion of the above-mentioned pair of thematic cores she finds common to every retelling of Lucretia's tragic tale: that of the public and the private. In this respect, the critic characterizes the figure as a "rebel" in the eighteenth-century context, a woman who shirks the restraints placed upon her by both society (the public) and family (the private) alike (204). While the myth of the Roman matron certainly exhibits this same feature, it assumes a considerably larger scale, as her rape and ultimate suicide – a relatively radical expression of agency for her time, to be sure – occasioned a historico-political paradigm shift within one of the world's most expansive and enduring empires to date. Frassetto's closing remarks thus point to Lucretia's lasting presence in the transnational, mythical cultural imaginary of the eighteenth century as proof of her story's import across time and space. This is made abundantly clear in the myth's mutability in the hands of writers such as Goldoni, Richardson, and Lessing.

In sum, Anna Livia Frassetto's *The Metamorphoses of Lucretia* is a compelling and perceptive study of the myth of Lucretia as it surfaces throughout the work of three eighteenth-century European writers. The text's variegated critical framework, structured upon biographical considerations, medium-specific insights, and more general understandings of myth as a cultural property endowed with an array of potential functions, provides a well-reasoned foundation for Frassetto's central argument, in many ways free from the theoretical jargon that might characterize other interpretations. The book's only discernable blemishes take the form of minute, inconsequential grammatical errors, which in no way inhibit the reader's comprehension of its arguments.

This work is a must-read for students of Lucretia's myth, of course, and would likely be of great assistance to those interested in the three texts Frassetto analyzes in detail as well.

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**Larry H. Peer, ed. *Transgressive Romanticism*.  
Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars,  
2018. Pp. 207 + viii. ISBN: 9781527503618.**

The concept of “transgression” feels like a natural companion to the one of “Romanticism.” Indeed, the intermingling streams that informed this revolutionary sensibility sought to move from an “Old Regime” to a new one at many levels, since such currents “privileged the imagination as a faculty higher and more inclusive than reason, [...] replaced theological doctrine with metaphor and feeling, [...] and rebelled [...] against both aristocratic and bourgeois social and political norms in favor of values more individual, inward and emotional” (Ferber 10–11). In so doing, the various strands within Romanticism redefined the way in which the human subject experiences the self and the self’s cognitive engagement with the surrounding world shaping it. Thereby too, Romantic re-inventions (re)modelled how humans perceive the links binding the individual to society, the sacred, nature, sexuality, and art, simultaneously always (re)fashioning the notion of personal freedom as well. As Larry H. Peer, the editor of *Transgressive Romanticism*, percussively puts it in his “Introduction,” “the very *need* to transmute the given, the traditional, the status quo, is central to Romanticism, and, more importantly, is the essence of its process across languages and disciplines” (9).

Yet, if still two hundred years later, the question of what exactly constitutes the Romantic and its multiple, fluid challenges to established political, religious, philosophical, and aesthetic norms remains a difficult one, the same holds true when it comes to identifying with greater precision the nature of transgression and its modes of operation. What proves transgressive in one culture may not be so in another, to which other thorny questions add themselves: how much rebellion is needed to produce effective violations of norms? Can transgression ever constitute a pure phenomenon, or is it inevitably mixed, iconoclastically smashing certain conventions whilst at the same time re-affirming others, be it consciously or unconsciously? Is yesterday’s trespass bound to become tomorrow’s stultified convention? Furthermore, in the scrutiny of an international phenomenon like Romanticism, explaining in systematic

fashion how different boundaries and limits are gone beyond and transmuted becomes complicated by the need to include different cultural traditions and creative genres in order to understand an intellectual and aesthetic revolution whose inherently cross-cultural circulations reached expressive heights in a variety of media, from literature and architecture to music and painting.

This is why, with its coverage of Romantic challenges to notions of self and aesthetics in a “dialogic mode of enquiry” (5) that makes philosophy, literature, and music interact, on the one hand, and that brings together territories as diverse as England, Germany, Ceylon, and Denmark, on the other, *Transgressive Romanticism* initially comes across as a much promising title that triggers the reader’s appetite and curiosity. Beyond a daring interlocking of disciplinary fields and geographies, the volume also seems at first to hold another tantalising promise: that of a systematic exploration that might fill an important gap in Romantic studies, which, as curious as this may seem, do actually not abound in volumes addressing the concept of transgression in an exhaustive and panoramic way. Admittedly, due to the proximity of Romanticism to the Gothic and its excesses leading to moral trespass, articles and books on particular Romantic authors sooner or later will touch upon the transgressive politics, ethics, or aesthetics of a Blake, Byron, Shelley, and others. All the same, if the concept of transgression often gets incorporated in the study of other topics in relation with individual Romantic writers and artists, it constitutes only but too rarely the first and major object of scrutiny addressed and buttressed, as is the case here, by an array of individual case studies of different authors and creators operating in a variety of cultural traditions and aesthetic practices. In this respect, *Transgressive Romanticism* and its contributors begin to redress an important imbalance and to fill a space, surprisingly enough, still left too vacant in Romantic studies.

However, if one must give due credit to the genuine audacity of its complex endeavour, *Transgressive Romanticism* does not fully deliver on the double promise foreshadowed by its alluring title. Nowhere is there really a sufficient effort at a more systematic and comprehensive reflection on what transgression in general and Romantic transgression in particular entail. Granted that “Romanticism finds that the very essence of identity rises from fragmentary interaction, where the necessity of living in perpetual ambiguity about the self and the external world marks the beginning of understanding” (4). However, even if one accepts to

work on the premise formulated by Peer in his “Introduction,” one could have expected more of a striving to enlist the fragmentary into a more systematic exploration and eventual synthesis. A study may choose to be an “open-ended conversation feeding on academia’s dialogic mode of enquiry” (5), but the moment it also decides to foreground a particular concept – the transgressive – as a cornerstone, it no longer exempts itself from having to tend towards the scholarly ideal of an intellectual edifice truly held together by a keystone and in which the whole meaningfully exceeds the parts.

The book certainly offers striking examples of different types of Romantic transgression in action, and the reader will – albeit too often implicitly – detect that the contributions are linked by Hegelian dialectics as well as by the Romantic foregrounding of *emotion* as the vehicle for a “powerful and irresistible transfer of feelings from a creator into the psyche of the receiver as though the feelings originated there” (3). But apart from the binding elements afforded by emotional transfer and Hegel’s influence on aesthetics, the reader is otherwise not offered sufficiently clear fundamental premises that elucidate how the different pieces collected here indeed might form a true *conversation*, and an open-ended – but not *discordant* – one at that, with the logic of the fragment paradoxically leading to a potentially emerging order instead of a simply loose, sometimes even jarring kind of juxtaposition.

The fact that the monograph does not clarify enough its own fundamentals and foundations is already obvious in the “Introduction,” which, after general considerations on Romanticism itself, does not preface the overview of the book’s contents with a deeper preliminary reflection on the kind of approach(es) the volume actually takes to transgression. Beyond crossing the boundaries of cultures and intellectual disciplines or creative practices, should readers here expect a privileging of aesthetic over political transgression, or vice versa, or will they be shown how it is impossible to dissociate them from one another and why? Or is philosophical transformation given centre-stage, with political and aesthetic violations seen to derive from it as sub-currents? Does the ongoing unveiling of Romantic trespass in unexpected quarters constitute the main orientation of the volume? Or is the main objective to tackle the problem in reverse, foregrounding how Romanticism actually surprisingly fails to live up to its transgressive ideals? Will the volume mainly immerse readers in Romantic transgressions of former conventions, or will it, in equal measure, explore Romanticism’s self-contained seeds of its own

displacement and rejection by future generations, subsequent waves this time intent on smashing Romantic assumptions themselves? Alternatively, might readers be repeatedly exposed to transgression understood first and foremost in terms of destabilising reading practices? Each of the possible approaches listed here in fact constitutes a line of enquiry that would already amply deserve a separate study by itself. The book actually embraces all these orientations without ever clearly stating that it does, the inevitable result being that it never exhaustively can deepen and delve into any one of these strands of transgression in particular. Hence the volume's loose structure, which derives from its very eclecticism that simply tries to do too much at once.

Moreover, though the arguments contained in this book are certainly not for newcomers to Romantic studies, it would also have been useful to know how exactly, beyond a crossing of the boundaries assumed to divide genres, cultures, and physical geographies, the book sees itself as building upon former, more disparate and isolated illustrations of Romantic transgression. Even the Romantic studies specialists who constitute the target audience of this collection for advanced readers in the field, would have found it illuminating to have some overview of how precisely the debate on the transgressive nature of Romanticism has been evolving over the years. Yet this overall contextualisation is sadly lacking.

Despite its structural looseness and incomplete clarification of its own foundations, the book is, however, well worth reading, as it contains a number of individual gems, often offering an appreciable quantity of new information, and at times doing so with undeniable argumentative brio. The first, very dense piece by Richard Eldridge, "Texts of Recovery: Post-Hegelian Reflections on the Work of the Romantic Lyric," takes the reader on a philosophical journey which re-explains how Hegel's *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* transformed the notion of self-consciousness by understanding it as an active, participatory phenomenon. The piece challengingly (re-)awakens our jaded sensitivities to the revolutionary aspects of the Romantic lyric, which are, too often, no longer readily perceptible to many contemporary readers. Eldridge makes us aware of a double kind of transgression: the one actually performed in the past by the participatory nature of a lyrical form rooted in this Hegelian view of an active individual consciousness, combined with the one that each reader now needs to perform in the present in boldly moving beyond the expectations of postmodern taste through an adequate recontextualisation of what might at first, if wrongly so, appear as an antiquated and,

therefore, dead and inert form. One must, incidentally, deplore that this very thought-provoking piece, which also encourages a broader reflection on aesthetics as a tool of conscious distancing from socially imposed norms through a re-activation of the senses, is unfortunately not done justice to at the level of copy-editing: the subsisting typos in the many direct quotations from the German are simply unforgivable for an academic press.

To return to poetry proper, the second piece, “‘Utterance Sacrilegious’: Poetic Transgression in Keats’s *Hyperion* Fragments,” will greatly stimulate Keatsian specialists: James H. Donelan goes against the interpretation which sees the two fragments as drafts of one and the same poem. Instead, Donelan demonstrates how the second version of *Hyperion* had better be understood as radically transforming the first in the sense that “poetry is no longer about the immortality of a particular poet, but about the creation of something eternal outside himself” (40). In showing how Keats recast his own understanding of the link between art and immortality, Donelan also offers sharp insights into how the second *Hyperion* fragment illustrates the functioning of poetry itself as that of a sacred space (37), which will interest any reader attracted to the wider spiritual implications of Romanticism.

The third contribution, also devoted to Keats, represents one of the high points in the volume: in terms equally accessible to the layperson and seasoned musicologist, Lloyd Davies brilliantly conflates Keats’s “To Autumn” and Beethoven’s “Cavatina” (String Quartet in B-flat Major, op. 130). In this instance, Davies’s detailed, masterly structural analysis of each piece performs a comparative reading that transgresses both some of the expectations created by the boundaries of genre and by the exercise of comparative literature itself. In this case study in which the question of influence does not apply as such, Keats’s “autumnal style” acquires unsuspected dimensions thanks to Beethoven’s own version of *Beklemmtheit* or oppression, and vice versa. Even readers well-read about “To Autumn” will be electrified into a renewed, fresh appreciation of Keats’s ode by Davies’s limpid Beethovenian adumbration of it.

Another climax in the collection coincides with its fourth chapter, “‘Too Anglican Altogether’: Benjamin Bailey’s Transgressive Conservatism in *Poetical Sketches of the Interior of Ceylon*.” In this essay devoted to the missionary and which teems with a wealth of factual information about this one-time friend of Keats, Thomas H. Schmid explores this non-canonical voice and corpus in today’s Romantic curriculum so as

to unfurl a highly complex case of joint preservation and transgression of models. On the one hand, Bailey's celebration of Ceylonese nature remained highly indebted to Wordsworth, including in what Schmid sees as its elision of political tension and conflict (64). However, if in their sublimity, Bailey's *Sketches* led to an expression of ecopiety, his letters reveal that the latter did absolutely not combine with an appreciation of Buddhism and with the emerging openness to non-Western beliefs which characterised Romantic voices in other quarters. In his staunchly militant Anglicanism and anti-Buddhism, Bailey did not only widely diverge from the spiritual hybridity pervading Romanticism: Schmid also extensively demonstrates how, ironically enough, Bailey's positions clashed with the contemporary directions taken by imperial policy on Ceylon at the time. Bailey's *Sketches* and correspondence thus resound with a voice that both cultivates and trespasses on prevalent colonial norms and Romantic spiritual syncretism. Beyond its solid documentation of a paradoxical case of transgression mingling with its very opposite, Schmid's essay is truly a must-read for a much broader audience, one that includes both postcolonial scholars and anyone interested in the religious aspects of Romanticism on either side of the Atlantic.

With the fifth essay, the volume very abruptly shifts to the contemporary French novel and to an instance of rejection of Romanticism's cult of individual freedom, on the one hand, and assertion of the cognitive value of subjectivity and emotion, on the other. Hollie Markland Harder explores all these aspects in "Finding Fulfillment through Submission; or How the French Should Stop Worrying and Learn to Love Islam: Michel Houellebecq's *Soumission*." On account of some of the very elements of Houellebecq's plot, the article probes into the links between the 2015 novel and Joris-Karl Huysmans's 1884 novel, *A Rebours*, thereby initiating an interesting dialogue between Romanticism and *décadence*. However, as original as this essay may be, it did not, personally, convince me as strongly as others in the book, leaving me somewhat perplexed. First, the argument unfolds on the implicit assumption that there are only continuities between *décadence* and Romanticism, whereas it could be argued that the former's *ennui* perhaps also distorted and trespassed against the latter in certain respects. Second, Harder's essay does not at all consider the controversies surrounding Houellebecq's novel and the divergent ways in which its depicted submission to a highly conservative brand of Islam might be decoded. As if it were unproblematic to do so, the argument here proceeds on the basis of a literal understanding of *Soumission*, not even

remotely mentioning the possibility of seeing it as a *satire*, in which case the hero's relinquishing of Romantic ideals in favour of a life regulated by the simplicities of religious dogmatism would require a rather different interpretation of the novel's relationship to Romanticism.

Without any further warning, the next contribution again inflicts on the reader an acutely abrupt shift, as we not only switch from French to German culture, but also from contemporary prose to Romantic music and philosophy. Matt Kershaw's "Transgressive Dialectic: Kant, Hegel, and Beethoven's Late Piano Sonatas" is a highly technical piece which will make arduous – if fascinating – reading for anyone who is not a musicologist or highly literate musically. Yet even those who, like myself, are very ill at ease with musical scores and notation will find Kershaw's essay highly rewarding if they go to the trouble of reading his high-flying demonstration over and over again with their headphones on playing Beethoven's opus 109, 110 and 111. Even approached intuitively like this, Kershaw's argument convinces: under his guidance, one can indeed detect this move from "a coherent musical whole" reflecting a more Kantian conception of synthesis (95) to a more Hegelian type of synthesis in which "the positive result of a seemingly negative process is [...] a 'realization' of a fuller, greater reality" (99). Beyond music and philosophy illuminating one another in spectacular fashion here, Kershaw's piece, when buttressed by the Beethoven originals playing live, also brilliantly brings home Romanticism's belief in the "irresistible transfer of feelings from a creator into the psyche of the receiver," as emphasised by the editor, Larry H. Peer, in his "Introduction."

The last five contributions to *Transgressive Romanticism* constitute a somewhat thematically more unified part of the volume, though the sum of their respective explorations still covers highly heterogeneous materials. In these final essays, transgression is, this time, mainly understood in terms of the re-invention of former literary models, ones that nevertheless remain foundational in this very act of transmutation. The first illustration of this paradoxical blend of partial preservation and massive infringement is offered by Kevin M. Saylor in "Future Founding: The Romantic Transformation of Epic." In a masterful yet beautifully limpid synthesis of the characteristics and twists of the genre, Saylor discusses how the English Romantic epic both breaks with former sources and eventually ends up violating its own re-inventions of them too. On the one hand, Blake, Shelley, and Wordsworth shift away from Virgil's and Milton's conception of the epic as the effort to describe and

preserve the memory of a founding that emerges from history (115–16). By contrast, with an increasing turn inward and a refusal of “any immutable *donnée*” of the world (129), Romantic epics, Saylor reminds us, “place their account of creation in the future rather than in the past” (116) and become “prescriptive for how the human person and society should be, not descriptive of how we came to be” (116). In the final analysis, however, Keats’s *Hyperion* – “Miltonic in shape, Wordsworthian in theme, and Virgilian in tone” (127) – can sustain neither this new orientation of prophetic apocalypse nor its radical hopes for the individual and society alike. Both exhaustive and accessible, Saylor’s *tour-de-force* synthesis must, in my opinion, be put on the compulsory reading list of any course engaging with the English Romantic epic.

Nothing again prepares the reader for the sudden and bewildering shift from grand-scale apocalyptic prophecy to the legend of the zombie, the focus of the next chapter in which Lori Yamato examines a Danish poetic adaptation and renewal of the tale. “Freed by a Zombie: Limitations of Art in Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘Det har Zombien Gjort’” will again, I suspect, allow many readers to travel off the beaten tracks in the Romantic canon. With its scrutiny of how the zombie legend becomes transformed into a poem about the power of art that cannot easily negotiate the tensions between art and history, the article abounds in data outside the mainstream. However, those, like myself, unfamiliar with Danish culture would have appreciated some additional information on how this poem positions itself in the wider context of a specifically Danish articulation of the Romantic sensibility. Moreover, the novelty value of this chapter is ill served by its odd position in the volume, infelicitously “sandwiched” as it is in between two major essays devoted to substantive discussions of the English Romantic canon.

Indeed, the next contribution again offers a masterful survey of how Byron’s play *Cain* is anchored in a complex intertextual web in which both fidelity to models and blasphemous infringement of them simultaneously operate. In “Byronic Indictments: Opposing Transgressions in Byron’s *Cain*,” Richard Johnston produces a reference article surveying how Byronic defiance of the shackles of divine tyranny is inspired from an array of sources that it equally subverts, from the Bible and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, on the one hand, to William Warburton’s theology and naturalist theories of Catastrophism like Baron Cuvier’s, on the other. Johnston prefers to use this web of paradoxical intertextuality to demonstrate a case of romantic irony, through which *Cain* “as a work of political protest [...] anticipates its own failure” (168). However, what Johnston does not seem



to realise, is how close to an ecocritical analysis in embryo the detailed section linking *Cain* to the natural sciences of Byron's day comes. Any full-fledged ecocritical development of Byron's play would need to build on Johnston's highly stimulating chapter, with its wealth of information on Catastrophism and its view that in pre-human times "the surface of the Earth had been subject to a series of creations and destructions caused by unimaginably violent physical upheavals" (159).

The penultimate chapter takes us from the theatrical defiance of religious authority to the defiance of earthly law in prose. In "Taming Wild Readers: *Caleb Williams* and the Outlaw Tradition," Cassandra Falke examines how William Godwin's novel both borrows from and subverts the contemporaneous genre of criminal biography. Abundantly contextualising the latter, this essay not only provides a wealth of factual data that will serve any historian of English literature well, but it also convincingly shows the ambiguities and tensions involved in having to negotiate the romance with realism as well as Romantic social rebellion with Enlightenment rationalism (184). As an aestheticising of violence (185) that "transfer[s] the freedom originally allotted to the highwaymen onto readers themselves" (184), Godwin's novel, so Falke argues, simultaneously challenges the social order and tames any attempt at social radicalism.

*Transgressive Romanticism* concludes with an equally informative piece devoted to the margins of German Romantic drama and how its theatrical aesthetics were overturned from within. In "The Work's the Thing: Materializing the Romantic Play-Aesthetic on Zacharias Werner's Stage," Amy Emm explains the atypicality of Werner: not only did he upset the conventions of Romantic closet drama by really writing for the stage, but his aesthetic challenge to "atheatrical play" (192) went much further, since he refused to relinquish sensual experience in a manner directly running counter to the Romantic "sublimat[ion of] the real work of stagecraft into the ideal play of the imagination" (191). On this basis, Emm exemplifies the various material and linguistic techniques through which Werner actually re-anchored Romantic drama in physical representation for both actors and audience.

As will have become clear by now, *Transgressive Romanticism* contains genuinely inspiring and innovative essays that will not leave the reader indifferent. Regrettably, though, despite the high quality of scholarship that pervades the volume, just as it misses the opportunity to better clarify some of its fundamental assumptions at the outset, it also fails to seize the chance of producing a final synthesis of the book's findings and of the

avenues they outline for future research. A summative overview would have been all the more useful as none of the individual contributions – as interesting as they are in their own right – truly moves from the conclusions of its particular case study to a broader consideration of their import for Romantic studies at large. A comprehensive, final extrapolation of results would have done a lot to remedy the already-mentioned sense of structural fragmentation, which unfortunately persists for the reader to the very end of this otherwise valuable collection of individually fascinating articles.

Since Larry H. Peer's *Transgressive Romanticism* often relies on music for its analysis, I may perhaps be forgiven for striking a final note in the form of a musical analogy. Reading through this eclectic, non-linear and heterogeneous volume illustrating transgressions both *by* and *of* Romanticism in different media and genres, I really did learn a lot and savoured the multiple unveiling of new vistas. This being said, due to the many abrupt changes in direction disrupting the lines of enquiry, I also repeatedly felt like the concert-goer listening to Henri Pousseur or John Cage when she had been promised Beethoven, and when the *Ninth Symphony* might have better suited the occasion than experimental dissonance. Whilst not in the least regretting this experience of having to push my way through stimulation and irritation alike, I nevertheless enjoyed the parts more than the whole. And despite the many surprising and interesting movements that hit my brain and senses, despite the repeated discoveries and rewarding climaxes, I still miss a finale as well as a set of sufficiently clear and mutually supporting leitmotifs leading to and fully delivering on the overarching theme promised by the title. Assuredly, *Transgressive Romanticism* opens up intriguing and innovating paths of investigation more than well worth treading upon, but these qualities aside, it remains for others to take up the eclectic fragments and their findings so as to make them cohere into a symphonic whole.

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**Michelle Witen. *James Joyce and Absolute Music*.  
London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018.  
Pp. 299. ISBN: 9781350014220.**

This monograph has grown out of Michelle Witen's 2013 Oxford dissertation "Perceiving in Registers: The Condition of Absolute Music in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*." It boldly ventures to reopen one of the most trafficked areas of Joycean studies, his deep personal involvement with music and the pervasive presence of music in his life's work as a novelist. There are two main tracks Witen follows: the complete trajectory of Joyce's cumulative creativity as an author; and within that span, the special peakings of musicality in the "Sirens" and "Circe" parts of *Ulysses* (*U*), but then a further major shift in his approach to music in *Finnegans Wake* (*FW*). Along the way, as background, Witen reminds us of key European writers and critics involved in often intertwined longer-term efforts to attain to a "pure" music and/or to marry music and language in poetry.

Crucially, she cautions against imposing on Joyce's own earlier aesthetic orientation the increasingly austere views of others during Modernism regarding pure or absolute music. That carefulness greatly helps to prepare today's readers of Joyce for rethinking the complicated development whereby, on the one hand, *FW* is radically experimental in its use of language, yet on the other hand arrives at an independent, more flexible view of music in relation to language. In order to focus on the issues surrounding music, Witen chooses to screen out a myriad of tangentially interlocking structural, thematic, and motivic features of Joyce's works which spring to mind. Unavoidably, however, her surgical avoidance of the amazing Joycean repertory of co-extensive competing directions in his narratives tends to blur the line in much of the monograph between how the relevant enthusiasts, above all Joyce, felt about the role of music during the apogee of Modernism and how more sober analysts today perceive in retrospect what the actual pieces of older art produced by Modernists demonstrate. But Witen's "Conclusion" to her book then distinctly pulls her use of terms back into stricter historical perspective and avoids the threat to critical independence.

Her “Introduction” lays out neatly the critical context which obtained in Joyce studies until the recent availability of hitherto neglected materials, above all an outline by Joyce in Italian detailing his idea of a “Fuga per Canonem,” which Witen designates “A genetic turning point” (Witen 126) in his development as a writer. She provides a very useful broader history in ch. 1 of the broader trend in Europe “Toward a Modernist Condition of Absolute Music” and then in ch. 2 focuses specifically on “Joyce’s Early Use of Music,” before proceeding with a detailed application of Joyce’s terminology to “Sirens.” This analysis copes with structure in ch. 3 and with effect in ch. 4.

Witen follows a long tradition in crediting Walter Pater’s famous statement about poetry aspiring to the condition of music as a kind of standard and loadstar among the illustrative variety of nineteenth to early twentieth century opinions which she cites in ch. 1 in outlining literary attempts at, and critical promptings in favor of, a melding of music and language. And in juxtaposition to that train of cultural history she rehearses the aspirational march within newer music during Modernism toward its complete independence as a medium. Her weaving of pertinent materials is so skillful that the reviewer wishes (of course, unfairly!) that she would violate her tighter focus on music and writing and would expand judiciously in ch. 1 to areas such as attempts at radical synesthesia (e.g., “painting” in Impressionistic poems and prose; “narrating” story development in musical scores; creating a cinematic rather than operatic Gesamtkunstwerk by the 1930s; multi-media “happenings”; etc.). Likewise, it would be good to hear in abbreviation about attempts at radical independence in a few other arts during Modernism (e.g., non-representational sculpture; abstract expressionism in painting; pure aleatory movement in dance; etc.). Witen lends due attention to the unfolding disaccord of Wagner and Nietzsche, so important to the moment when Joyce’s *U* comes on the scene. In the reviewer’s opinion, nonetheless, it would have been more helpful if, first, she had expanded on Schopenhauer’s seminal importance for both Wagner and Nietzsche and for Modernism at large. Schopenhauer theorizes in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818) not only that music is an evolutionary product which encompasses all levels in the human psyche as eventually known in the annals of time – what Marx will crudely rewrite in positivistic terms as the material basis of life, the class struggle, and dialectical movement in history, and Freud as the interrelating id, ego, and superego. But in addition, Schopenhauer specifies that music contains and conveys

all developmental levels of the total cosmic structure and reflects all correlated levels exhibited in the hierarchy of all the other arts whether material or linguistic, ranging from architecture over sculpture and painting to poetry, epic, and finally tragedy at the pinnacle of human consciousness. Schopenhauer's radical reframing of Kantian rationalism and of the successor Romantic model of the psyche, with his emphasis on music's universality of reference, attained its epochal impact in high Modernism.

Witen turns in ch. 2 to Joyce's early poetry and prose in order to provide a contrastive backdrop for her intensive scrutiny of his more extensively elaborated uses of music in *U* and *FW*. Unsurprisingly, she finds the strong thematic presence of music from his start and even true experimentation to musicalize language as in *Chamber Music* (2007) and *Pomes Penyeach* (2013), lyrical collections which indeed have attracted composers. She neatly identifies the many ways – for example, as a core activity depicted in various social settings, as a force or theme, as a favorite topic in Irish society, as intrinsic to the identity of a specific figure – in which music makes a frequent appearance in the stories of *Dubliners* and the novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In detailing Joyce's special relationship to music from his earliest days, Witen aims not only to reconfirm his impressive expertise in general, but to buttress her claim that he had a firm intellectual grasp specifically of the intricacies of the fuga per canonem, an older, lengthy, and very complicated musical structure. In the absence of fuller “external” documents, many talented Joyceans earlier doubted the direct relevance of its specific mention by him.

In order to establish her analysis in ch. 3, Witen must grapple with the heady mix of other meritorious views of the musical character of “Sirens” and with the dating of its textual layers. After first having offered us “A brief history of the fugue as absolute music,” she dares to assign specific passages in the completed *U* to compositional features that reflect Joyce's sense of how to exploit an older fugue rooted in the traditions of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This moreover is complicated by her hypothesis, in the course of rejecting “Critical (mis)interpretations,” that Joyce, in outlining a double fugue in “Sirens,” incorporated a canon as well. Witen's exposition involves a bold step-by-step assemblage of passages in an order which she thinks exhibits the specific named fugal categories and stages of Joyce's “Sirens” chapter, where in her reading the fugue as a whole conducts readers through Bloom's psychological

struggles, as a modernist avatar of classical Ulysses, toward ultimately safe passage. In a tour de force about 50 pages long, she marches through the text of “Sirens” on two levels, marking the extent of each named fugal section and summarizing each segment’s plot contents. Under space constraints the reviewer must forgo any replication of this very astute, but voluminously detailed close reading, but he feels it is obligatory to note a natural problem.

Witen announces that she is tracing “absolute music” at a high point in Joyce’s artistic development – and assuredly, recalling the brilliant language of “Sirens” as a vivacious tour de force is downright thrilling. However, the reviewer notes the language also includes moments of poetic synesthesia, as in the chromatic-metallic marking of the two barmaids’ hair; as colors these motifs surely amount to more than surrogate musical tones. Moreover, Witen’s (overall excellent) readings of the motifs in each fugal section in terms of story employment essentially show that a powerful narrative drive is everywhere at work; and that, in the hard light of reality, we do not actually have any pure medium before our eyes and our observant minds, even though our ears are certainly enchanted with a kind of music by delegation (unless perhaps we or someone reads “Sirens” to us out loud). As so often elsewhere, Joyce the magician is doing several things at the same time. In the late hours of Modernism, without Joyce specifically in mind, Susanne Langer explained the actual situation in general in *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (1942). She realized that, unless it devolved into random neutral noise, language could never shed its doubleness as a medium combining structures that were both auditory and discursive, whether spoken or read.

Witen acknowledges that there is a looser correlation of fugal markers in the vast “Circe” or “Hades” chapters. Many commentators have noted that by its girth and recapitulation of motifs using “hallucination” as method, “Circe” seems virtually synecdochic vis-à-vis the whole novel. As she asserts, this would not in itself militate against associating Joyce’s continuing fascination with fugue construction observable in some elements in “Circe.” But when Witen eventually turns to *FW*, she indicates that, as Joyce began a new phase of creativity beyond *U*, he was drifting away from any simplistic wish-dream about music as a pure medium. In considerable measure, his statements about some new way “music” will reign amounts to cheerleading. Her ch. 4 intimates that that direction is already underway beneath the wonderfully composed “music” of “Sirens,”

insofar as she offers us a very attractive argument about how in its totality the enacted fugue is a device to replicate Bloom's psychological temptation and recovery as an avatar of Odysseus. Consonant with that pattern, ch. 5 argues that in "Circe" Bloom's reorientation in freeing himself from the enchantment of absolute music also suggests Joyce's increasing realization that "literature can be adapted into 'music for the eye' and 'music for the ear'" (212), as we will experience this pairing in *FW*.

Understanding this relationship in *FW*, to which ch. 6 turns, is complicated by the fact that Joyce clings creatively as well as metaphorically to music. Although it is clear he is reaching for a symbiosis of sound and sense, on a grander scale he is also creating the copious text and references of *FW* as the surrogate for a multifarious universe. These are dimensions which Witen largely must screen out to maintain focus on her topic. She acquits herself well in balancing between her own critical conclusions and the heady metaphoricity of Joycean terms. There are many points Joycean critics supportively could add on: for example, that Stephen's earlier "hearing" the murmur of nature in *U* as it strives toward speech was already a venerable idea in late Renaissance writing and was happily appropriated in Romanticism; or that citing music in print as a written score, notably the ballad of Pearse O'Reilly in *FW*, is an almost ostentatious reminder of the moment in *Tristram Shandy* when Sterne prints out the musical score of a popular song; and so forth. For its relevance to her focus, Witen quite usefully singles out in *FW* (within Joyce's own colossal evolutionary timeframe!) the historical theme of a very recent transition from oral to written literature. Recognition of this larger developmental trend indeed undergirds Joyce's marked interest in bringing forward the eye and ear motifs which he detects in the mentioned ballad among other places. The densely packed section on this topic which Witen offers from p. 218 to p. 223 is a sparkling cornucopia, admirably assembled. It cites the brilliant crisscrossings of nostalgic yearning at a much later date by great modernist spirits for a lost era or redeemable future which was/is ruled by "music," but which inevitably has ceded to the power of the eye and prose. It is no accident that the finest critics of Joyce's work are virtually unable to describe his great prose masterpiece *FW* without resorting to metaphors dependent on the modernist characterization and developmental history of music! The important fact which Witen emphasizes is that Joyce accepted the medium of an exponentially re-imagined *prose* in *FW* as the best option for the future.

Witen very openly and fairly addresses the plethora of critical opinions regarding the degree of Joyce's dedication to musically linked experimentation in "Sirens." She demonstrates a remarkable gift for formulating a range of high-level propositions that bear on a very complex event, the creation of "Sirens" within the bigger story of the creation of *U* and in relation to the partially overlapping story of the creation of *FW*; and she does so while presenting her own findings in a very nimble and lucid way. This monograph bodes well for the health and vigor of Joyce studies as a worldwide pursuit now on the threshold of its second century!

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**Olga Soboleva and Angus Wrenn. *From Orientalism to Cultural Capital: The Myth of Russia in British Literature of the 1920s.* Oxford et al.: Peter Lang, 2017. Pp. 337 + xi. ISBN: 9781787073951.**

The two volumes of Franco Moretti's *The Novel* (2006; English translation of *Il Romanzo*, 2001), which features a judicious selection of essays by experts in the many literatures involved, demonstrated the editor's program of "distant reading," as applied to prose fiction and related narrative kinds over three millennia worldwide. Within this long perspective on the genre, the nineteenth-century Russian novel was assigned a pivotal position. Appearing at the end of a unit on "The European Acceleration," which sketched the novel's trajectory from breakthroughs in Spain to a fuller realization in France and England, it looked ahead to a unit ambitiously titled "The Circle Widens," with essays (among others) on Japan, India, and Africa.

The monograph reviewed here, by two comparatists at the London School of Economics, provides what could be called a contrasting "close reading" of one important aspect of this transition. In considering how some leading British writers of the 1920s responded to Russian culture, especially to Russian fiction from Turgenev to Chekhov in counterpoint with the much-heralded performances of the Ballets Russes beginning in 1909, it circles back to a European sphere. Within English literature, it tends to validate one of the points made by the layout of Moretti's book, that nineteenth-century Russian fiction represented the culmination of European fiction as it had developed up to that time. On the other hand, it should be recalled that the translations of classic Russian novels into English during this period also furthered awareness of those novels in India and Africa. They contributed in that way to reconfiguring the novel as a world literary genre, or in Moretti's title to another unit, "Toward World Literature."

After an introductory chapter on the British image of Russia prior to 1900, *Orientalism/Cultural Capital* turns to how six writers and well-placed opinion makers during the 1920s helped to transform that image.

A country that for centuries had been dismissed as a cultural outsider, subjected in its own way to the relentlessly repeated clichés of Saidian orientalization (here as a “far east” of Eastern Europe rather than as an Asian “Near East”), started in the 1890s to gain cultural prestige in a manner described by Bourdieu. Ultimately, for a brief interval in the twenties, “Russia” seemed to have risen to a certain insider status.

Scare quotes are needed here because, as the figures studied by Soboleva and Wrenn suggest, at least three different Russias were at stake. First, there were the achievements of Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky during the golden age of Russian fiction (from the 1850s to 1881), which became widely known in English translation only decades or even a near half-century after their novels came out during the relatively liberal reign of Alexander II. Then, there was the Soviet Union, which soon after it came into being late in World War I abandoned the Russian alliance with Britain. Still, the new regime’s darker tendencies were not yet fully understood, at least by H. G. Wells, whose views are presented in Chapter III of this book. Finally, there were the Russian exiles, at this point still mainly fugitives from imperial Russia. Their allegiances were as diverse as those of the anarchists gathered in London who tutored Constance Garnett in Russian (she was long the best-known translator of classic Russian fiction into English), or of Diaghlev, the impresario for the Ballets Russes, whose aesthetic credo broke sharply with ballet patronized by the Russian court. Or, again, there was S. S. Koteliansky, who translated Chekhov for the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press and introduced D. H. Lawrence to Shestov and Rozanov as exemplars of Russian thought in the turn-of-century decades before the Bolsheviks placed strict limits on philosophy.

The book’s last three chapters chronicle the evolving and distinctive Russian involvements of Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot. Among the many insights into these now-canonical British modernists, we are invited to reflect on the affinities in *The Rainbow* between the Ballets Russes and Ursula’s impulsive dancing, on a Russian in *Orlando* with the gender-neutral name of Sasha, and on the implications of the note to *The Waste Land* that cites Hermann Hesse on *Brothers Karamazov*. At the same time, however, some ingenious intercultural close readings indicate that, even with these authors, the prestige assigned to “Russianness” could lead to outcomes with some of the superficiality marking the commonplaces of orientalism. At stake are errors involving Russian names, which reveal that none of them knew enough Russian to be aware of their mistakes.

With Woolf attention focuses on “Lappin and Lapinova,” a story of uncertain date dealing with a young couple’s fantasies about rabbits, where the wife’s Russian-sounding nickname should properly be “Lapina,” as Woolf could have deduced from having read *Anna Karenina*. Perhaps she was misled by John Maynard Keynes’s marriage to Lydia Lopokova from the Ballet Russes, whose last name, derived from a masculine counterpart with a final “v” rather than an “n,” may have suggested the Lapinova coinage. A similar situation arises with the temptress Grishkin, with “her Russian eye,” who dominates the second half of Eliot’s “Whispers of Immortality.” That name (if it actually existed) would properly be “Grishkina,” unless it should be considered a twisted memory, via Ezra Pound who also toyed with the name, of Grushenka in *Brothers Karamazov* (280, 286–87). In reality this woman was a ballerina for the Ballets Russes, whose performances Eliot had found deeply stirring in Paris ten years earlier. But in this poem the connotations of Russianness (or perhaps of avant-garde art or even of femininity) have become decidedly more ambiguous.

With Lawrence attention focuses on the divided heritage of the Brangwens, the family at the center of both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, the loosely linked novels that he wrote during and immediately after World War I. This farm family’s rootedness in the English countryside swerves abruptly into a remote cultural context when Tom Brangwen marries a Polish refugee, and then, in the next generation, when her Polish daughter from an earlier marriage marries a Brangwen nephew. Ursula, a daughter from that marriage, will herself have an affair with a young man of Polish extraction; but later, in the second novel, she and her sister Gudrun pursue relationships with Englishmen. Yet, oddly, the family name that Lawrence chose for the Brangwens’ initial Polish connection is Lensky, who was the young man killed in a duel in Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*. Soboleva and Wrenn hesitate to push this irony further, but do note that at the time much of Poland was an integral part of the Russian Empire (213), perhaps facilitating the formation of a “pan-Slavic” outlook in Lawrence’s mind that could blur the lines between the two cultures. Be that as it may, the tempestuous vacillation of sympathies in the emotional lives of the three Brangwen generations, both toward and away from intimacy with this brand of “easterness,” carries over to Lawrence’s on-off, love-hate responses to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

Before the chapters on these three younger writers, who were in their thirties when the 1920s began and now enjoy much more cultural authority, Soboleva and Wrenn treat three figures from an older

generation who were then better known to the British public. Their point of departure is a 1929 poll in the *Manchester Guardian* that asked which contemporary novelists would still be read in 2029, to which the respondents chose, by large margins, John Galsworthy (to be awarded a Nobel Prize in 1932) and H. G. Wells. Along with Arnold Bennett in third place, these were the very novelists Woolf had targeted in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” a manifesto-like essay that drew a sharp line between an “Edwardian” generation from before 1910 and younger “Georgians” like herself, who came of age under George V. However, even though *Orientalism/Cultural Capital* mentions Bennett’s striking judgement that the “twelve best novels of the world were all written by Russians” (65), here Galsworthy and Wells are joined by J. M. Barrie, listed fifth by the *Guardian*, who is represented by a little-known short play or sketch, “The Truth of the Russian Dancers.”

This project, which was revised many times, faced a variety of staging issues, and was left unpublished by the author, raises questions about the depth and/or spirit of Barrie’s interest in the Ballets Russes or even in “Russianness” in general. Thus the text can suggest that he may have created either “a skillful parody of *or* [emphasis added] a tribute to the unrelenting Russian craze” (145). This chapter also gives considerable background, from a British rather than a Russian or French viewpoint, on Diaghlev, the dancers in his troupe, and the composers and set designers who worked with him. As a result, it brings out the freshness and power with which the Ballets Russes had exposed British audiences to this special, only marginally domestic facet of Russian culture. In this conjuncture, novels that had been written many decades before but only recently translated into English could take on new life, never mind any specific connection with the ballets.

As indicated earlier, the Wells chapter focuses on his response to conditions in the Soviet Union, mainly on the basis of a week-long visit in 1920. His sympathy for the collectivist plans of the Bolshevik elite is interpreted largely in terms of what could pass through “the prism of his own attitudes and political concepts,” though he did admit that “everyone is shabby on the street” (139, 133). As these words suggest, this chapter is where the book is the most explicit about the potential for cultural capital to reveal some intercultural myopia of its own. Of some literary interest are citations indicating how Wells addressed the presence of socio-historical factors in the novel, both in Turgenev (“a group of typical individuals at the point of action of some great social

force,” 111–12) and in *War and Peace*, with its “animation of history by fictitious moods and scenes” (113). During his 1920 visit he was enthusiastic about Gorky’s efforts to sponsor a book series devoted to world literature in Russian translation (135).

This reviewer must admit to lacking much exposure to the writings of John Galsworthy, the first of Soboleva and Wrenn’s authors. By the 1960s in the United States, he had practically vanished from the British literary curriculum, at which point the question posed by their chapter title, “Is It Possible to ‘De-Anglicise the Englishman?’” (cited from a Galsworthy essay) would have applied more directly to D. H. Lawrence. It had also become easier for readers to go directly to the great Russian novels, so that, having read some Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, I could be puzzled when I learned of British readers who preferred Turgenyev. This chapter indicates that Galsworthy probably had a hand in forming this attitude. Having read widely in the Russian novel, he admired Turgenyev as its leading figure for having brought an artistic sensibility and deeper psychological insight into the realist fiction of his time. For Galsworthy Tolstoy was insufficiently “suggestive and intuitive” despite his “vigour” and “freshness” (77), while Dostoevsky’s “insight was deep” but marred by “incoherence” and “verbiage” (71).

These points have their weight, of course. But one could cite J. M. Coetzee’s *The Master of Petersburg*, written as *apartheid* was ending in South Africa, as a basis for objecting that the relative stability of Galsworthy’s England kept him from registering the full force of Dostoevsky’s insights. For a dissenting opinion on Tolstoy, consider Vladimir Nabokov, who has memorialized his youthful affection for the art movement out of which the Ballets Russes had sprung. To be sure, in his autobiography *Speak, Memory* he names other figures than Diaghilev when he recalls “the ‘Art World,’ *Mir Iskusstva* – Dobuzhinski, Alexandre Benois – so dear to me in those days” (236). Here, clearly, is an early source for this author’s pronounced artistic sensibility. As for Tolstoy’s “suggestive and intuitive” powers, this master of fiction in both Russian and English chose, in his *Lectures on Russian Literature*, to invoke the incandescent lyricism of William Blake when he honored Tolstoy’s writing for being “so powerful, so tiger bright, so original and universal” (138).

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**Simone Celine Marshall and Carole  
M. Cusack, eds. *The Medieval Presence in the  
Modernist Aesthetic: Unattended Moments.*  
Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018. Pp. 194.  
ISBN: 9789004356108.**

Edited by Simone Celine Marshall and Carole M. Cusack, *The Medieval Presence in the Modernist Aesthetic* targets an important yet paradoxical aspect of (pre)modernist literature. Modernist authors were ostensibly eager, as Ezra Pound famously put it, to make it new, yet they were also fascinated by the culture of a presumably dark and barbaric period of the distant past, the Middle Ages. Marshall and Cusack's volume collects papers presented at a conference held at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. It deals with the various expressions of medievalism as they manifested themselves in the works of authors ranging from the late nineteenth century to the late 1970s. The volume builds upon two intertwined assumptions. First, late-nineteenth and twentieth-century authors used medieval culture as a countertype for the alienating realm of modernity. Secondly, this revival of medieval values, belief systems, themes, and styles yielded no single pattern of modernist medievalism: it produced instead a gamut of diverse, sometimes contradictory appropriations.

Marshall and Cusack's introduction to the volume highlights the surprisingly broad impact of medievalism on modernist writing, and clarifies the logic according to which the volume is structured: contributions are ordered according to the chronological sequence of their object of study. This choice helps readers perceive how medieval subject matter has been recontextualized at various stages of the development of modernism. Thus, the volume's first essay, Carole Cusack's study of Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, investigates how this key figure of musical premodernism turned to medieval themes in order to remedy "the ills of modernity" (24). She describes Wagner's opera, based on Wolfram von Eschenbach's medieval poem, as a lyrical work meant to be approached quasi-religiously. The thematics of the sacred in Wagner, she points out, is even more rigidly

developed than in the musician's medieval sources. In particular, Wagner represents a community of Grail Knights acting as a masculine monastic order. Female figures, apart from the loathsome Kundry, are conspicuously absent from the German composer's opera. Cusack also examines the immediate impact of Wagner's *Parsifal* on fellow (pre)modernists like Paul Verlaine and T. S. Eliot. Another great figure of premodernism, William Butler Yeats, is the object of Joseph A. Mendes's essay. Mendes focuses on Yeats's treatment of the Irish medieval Ulster cycle in poems such as "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time" and "Fergus and the Druid." His argument examines how Yeats reworks the mythological material in order to reflect on the dilemma posed by the choice between the life of action and the life of contemplation. Mendes thereby brings out Yeats's ambivalence toward the mystical and magic. On the one hand, the poet expects anti-Enlightenment wonder to redeem the banality of modern everyday life. On the other, he implies that surrendering to the mystical entails giving up the pleasures of the active life. The figure of Fergus mac Róich illustrates the resulting loss: the former king, in Yeats's poems, comes to regret his embracing of druidic wisdom.

Several essays in the volume describe the Middle Ages less as an historical period than as the foundation of an alternate epistemological model. Thus, Gro Bjørnerud Mo's study of Proust points out how the narrator of *In Search of Lost Time* appeals to medieval theories of the dream experience in order to make sense of several occurrences of the *oneirôgmos* – in plain English, wet dreams. Likewise, the two articles devoted to Ezra Pound – Jonathan Ullyot's "Ezra Pound's Medieval Classicism: *The Spirit of Romance* and the Debt to Philology" and Mark Byron's "The Aristotelian Crescent: Medieval Arabic Philosophy in the Poetics of Ezra Pound" – argue that the American poet was looking toward the medieval not only as a political and esthetic utopia but also as an anti-contemporary mode of thinking. Ullyot argues that Pound, disregarding the stereotype of medieval gothic, discerned in the Middle Ages a paradigm of cultural classicism precious for turn-of-the-twentieth-century intellectuals seeking to overturn a century of romantic cultural hegemony. Ullyot's main object of study is Pound's *The Spirit of Romance*, a 1910 essay in which the American poet develops his concept of medieval classicism on the basis of the scholarship of French and British philologists – Gaston Paris, Joseph Bédier, and Walter Kerr. Ullyot's text provides in the process a survey of medieval philology at the turn of the twentieth century. On this basis, Ullyot demonstrates that Pound felt a



kinship between medieval literature and his own modernist art because the two idioms, however distant in time, endorse stylistic austerity, authorial depersonalization, and the effort to compose texts by means of recontextualized fragments. Pound's *Cantos*, Ulliyot points out, indeed appeal to the medieval technique of *translatio* – the adaptation of ancient texts and their transfer to a contemporary context. This is a practice philologists have scrupulously documented. Marc Byron focuses on an aspect of Pound's poetry that developed only in the later instalments of *The Cantos* – the impact of Islamic philosophy on medieval thought. The primary corpus for this discussion is Pound's transposition of late-medieval Italian poet Guido Cavalcanti's *Donna Mi Prega* in *Canto XXXVI*. Byron first provides a well-informed survey of Islamic philosophy (*falsalifa*). He goes on to argue that Pound's poem reflects on the reappropriations of Aristotle and Neoplatonism by Muslim philosophers like Avicennes and Averroes. Pound revisited this intellectual tradition not only because he wished to situate the Islamic legacy in the sequence of postclassical civilizations but also because it provided him with a conceptual model allowing him to map the multiple ways of linking the human and the divine.

Two articles in the collection – Holly Phillips's "Whoroscope: Samuel Beckett's medieval machine" and Rina Kim's "Melancholy Matters": Robert Burton and Samuel Beckett" – venture into the period we now call late modernism: they focus on lesser-read works by the author of *Waiting for Godot*. Phillips's reading of "Whoroscope" – a hermetic early poem often criticized for its display of erudition – pursues the study of the modernist appropriation of medieval epistemologies broached in previous essays of the collection. Phillips shows how Beckett uses references to medieval scholarship in order to distance himself from the high modernist aesthetic of his master James Joyce. For the author of *Ulysses*, medieval scholasticism offered a mechanism aiming toward transcendence: it was part of the epistemological machinery meant to deliver modernist epiphanies. In "Whoroscope," on the contrary, the machinery of scholasticism yields no deeper knowledge. The poem's protagonist – French modern philosopher René Descartes – is shown struggling with philosophical and personal issues. Instead of acting as a modern Prometheus breaking free from the corset of medieval paradigms, he awkwardly struggles with scholastic thought in a dynamic offering no hope of revelation. Rina Kim's argument, by comparison, is closer to psychology and gender studies. She surveys several of Beckett's early prose

works, providing a detailed analysis of the short stories “Echo’s Bones” and “First Love.” Her object of investigation is the emotional complex linking melancholy, masculinism, and misogyny – a psychological nexus informing many major modernist works. This type of misogyny, Kim argues, had been a key concern of the medieval and Renaissance discourse on melancholy, including Robert Burton’s famous early-seventeenth-century essay *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Chronic sadness in this tradition is attributed to love rejection and castration anxieties, and it elicits, by way of psychological defense, representations of womanhood under the guise of abjection. Beckett’s early works, “First Love” offers a grotesque reworking of this thematics as its narrator depicts a short-lived love story characterized by cynical distancing and self-loathing.

Three contributions to the volume – Octavian Saiu’s discussion of Ionesco; Anna Czarnowus’s analysis of Evelyn Waugh; and Chris Ackerley reading of Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker* – tackle material outside the high modernist mainstream. Saiu’s “Between the ‘Machinery of Transcendence’ and the ‘Machinery of War’: The Unattended Moments of Eugene Ionesco” focuses on *Rhinoceros*, a central text of 1950s French neo-modernist absurdist theater. Saiu contends that Ionesco’s antitotalitarian play is informed by the dramatist’s Romanian Orthodox Christianity. On the one hand, as he composed this play, Ionesco meant to dissociate himself from the Romanian far right’s appropriation of Christianity in the 1930s. On the other, Saiu shows that Ionesco’s protagonist resists the contamination of totalitarianism because his humanistic values are informed by the Orthodox Christian concepts of the Eucharist and the experience of illumination. This Christian background keeps him from degenerating into a wild beast. Anna Czarnowus’s “Lancelot and Guinevere in the Inter-War Period: The Medievalisms of Evelyn’s Waugh’s *A Handful of Dust* and Ezra Pound’s *Canto VI*” contrasts Pound’s erudite take on medieval religion with the more superficial medievalism of Waugh’s non-modernist novel. Czarnowus indicates that Waugh’s references to the Middle Ages – an adultery narrative modeled on the Lancelot-Guinevere story, unfolding in a neo-medieval mansion – resonate with the nostalgia of Victorian medievalism and with Catholic religiosity. In this, Waugh’s novel of manners fails to emulate Pound’s imaginative exploration of medieval Christianity, which refused Victorian sentimentality. Chris Ackerley’s “Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker*: The Eusa Story and Other Blipful Figgers” addresses a text that might be labeled postmodernistic: *Riddley Walker* was published in 1980s, beyond

the chronological end point of modernism, and entertains a close relation to popular culture. The novel depicts post-apocalyptic southern Britain reduced to Iron-Age conditions after a nuclear holocaust. Hoban wrote his text in the broken idiom of Riddley, his first-person narrator, which confers to it a modernistic, experimental texture reminiscent of the first section of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* or William Golding's *The Inheritors*. Ackerley reads *Riddley Walker* as a fable lending itself to the four-level allegorical reading of medieval interpretation. This reading brings to light the interplay of barely remembered Christian values, pagan worship, and an underlying pessimism originating in the awareness of an irreducibly destructive force in history. In this perspective, Hoban's *Riddley Walker* sketches out the outline of a medievalism of the future.

Overall, Marshall's and Cusack's *The Medieval Presence in the Modernist Aesthetic* achieves the goals implicitly stated in its subtitle. Intervening in a field that has already been the object of abundant scholarship, it shines a light on unattended moments – works and thematics that had not been properly researched so far. In this, the collection sketches out the complex relation of modernism both to novelty and to the past: it reveals the insistent presence of past aesthetics and epistemologies in the very idiom of literary experimentation. Still, the volume might have developed a more consistent reflection on the political dimension of this interplay of past and present. The politics of modernism – notably its predominantly conservative orientation in Anglo-American high modernism – deserves more attention than it receives here. This issue, with its attendant themes of antisemitism, is admittedly not ignored in *The Medieval Presence* altogether, yet it is not discussed as an offshoot of what stands as the main focus of the volume – medievalism itself. Simultaneously, most essays tend to take for granted the existence of a specifically modernist variant of medievalism, distinct from conservative Victorian nostalgia. A different type of the argument might on the contrary have sketched out the presence of a continuous antimodern tradition from Victorianism into the twentieth century. In this political perspective, authors would have been better able to gauge to what extent medievalism may serve as anything else than a regressive utopia.

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**Walter Moser, Angela Ndalianis & Peter Krieger,  
eds. *Neo-Baroques. From Latin America to the  
Hollywood Blockbuster*. Leiden & Boston: Brill/  
Rodopi, 2017. Pp. 327 ISBN: 9789004324343.**

This collection of essays seeks to address the many valences of the “Neo-Baroque” as both a veritable artistic (and literary) movement of the postmodern age, characterized by a pronounced return to the aesthetics of the historical baroque, and as a larger conceptual paradigm that informs certain baroque-allied elements encountered in present-day works of art, architecture, and literature.

Seven years of international scholarly collaboration between 2007 and 2013 resulted in the contents of this book, comprised of ten localized case studies and three “artist’s essays” by writers based across the world. As such, this text enters into key debates within the existing critical literature on the neo-baroque—an admittedly contested term, even among this collection’s contributors—and offers several distinct approaches to its understanding, exhibited through the individual pieces of focalized criticism and wider theoretical meditations that make up the book’s thirteen chapters and three section introductions.

The collection’s three parts, “Neo-Baroques,” “Religion,” and “Cities” offer a systematic overview of the neo-baroque’s most salient aspects on a transhistorical and transcultural scale. The first part, as its very title indicates, functions as something of a general survey of the topic at hand, underscoring the inherent formal plurality of the neo-baroque both from critical and intermedial perspectives. Following Walter Moser’s introduction, Bolívar Echeverría’s “Mediations on the Baroque” draws upon writings on the European baroque by Miguel de Unamuno and Theodor Adorno in an effort to characterize the movement’s logics, which he subsequently describes as part of a curious, anti-colonial “survival strategy” mobilized by indigenous Americans throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries (34). For Echeverría, these indigenous populations adhere to a certain “baroque ethos,” predicated upon theatricality and excess, that affords them a degree of cultural agency in the sphere of

religion, despite their near-total annihilation under colonial rule (36). Citing epistolary writings by colonial church officials in the Americas, the critic frames “*Guadalupanism*” as a baroque form of indigenous resistance to Catholicism and creolization (43; emphasis in original).

The book’s next chapter, “Reconsidering Metatheatricity: Towards a Baroque Understanding of Postdramatic Theatre” by Karel Vanhaesebrouck, approaches the question of the neo-baroque from a radically different perspective. Vanhaesebrouck presses the reader to consider the potential for “baroque” to operate as a transhistorical mode of understanding, to shy away from its application in the service of mere historical periodization. The author proactively distills the baroque’s mixture of aesthetic qualities into a single contradictory pair: metatheatricity and immersion.

Vanhaesebrouck traces the return of the conventional representational norms of the historical baroque in more recent works of postdramatic theatre, which is to say, theatre of the postmodern era that routinely invites the audience to consider its self-reflective structuring *as a performance* while simultaneously luring them into the experience of its performance. This strange – and at times purposefully disconcerting – interplay, as Vanhaesebrouck makes clear, is as common to baroque representation historically as it is to the much more recent advent of postdramatic theatre, which effectively underscores the baroque as an aesthetic paradigm recurring through the ages transhistorically and in a variety of cultural contexts.

In the following essay, “Fabricating Film – The Neo-Baroque Folds of Claire Denis,” Saige Walton methodically studies films by Claire Denis. The critic explores the appearance and thematic functions of baroque forms throughout the director’s oeuvre. Walton’s essay focuses on a single artmaker and a single aspect of the neo-baroque, “the fold,” as extrapolated by Gilles Deleuze, presenting what the critic terms “a materialist account of the baroque” in Denis’ films through the visual motif and its semiology (76). Her findings, bolstered by the use of embodied film theory, accentuate the fold’s textural quality as it appears in Denis’ film and the concomitant affective issues it may create for her works’ viewers. Walton’s essay highlights – if only through this single auteur, this single image – neo-baroque cinema’s sensuous and thought-provoking qualities, which are in constant dialogue with the historical baroque’s similar aesthetic sensibilities in other visual media.

Reda Eser's essay, "Baroque Affinities: Wölfflin, Visconti, and the Baroque and the Films of Glauber Rocha," offers a thoughtful analysis of Glauber Rocha's cinema through the lens of Heinrich Wölfflin's mediations on the historical baroque. Eser's essay carefully examines Rocha's *Terra em Transe* (1967), from the perspective of Wölfflin's work as well as Rocha's own writings and influences. The writer identifies the aesthetic and political "affinities" between *Terra em Transe* and the baroque (121), listing among them a deliberate break with ordained medial conventions, excess theatricality, and the purposeful engineering of a space for dialogue with its viewers.

The first of the book's artist's essays, "Artist's Essay: The Neo-Baroque and Complexity" by Richard Reddaway, testifies to how the author sees the influence of the baroque in his own dynamic sculptural work and to what degree he (un)knowingly plays with its conventions, albeit on terms quite different from those prevailing during the time of the historical baroque.

The text's second part, "Religion," concentrates on religious imagery as a focal element of the baroque and the neo-baroque. It includes essays on a number of distinct topics, underlining the persistence of such an aesthetic preoccupation unto the present and describing its affective capabilities. In the first piece of this section, Hugh Hazelton provides a nuanced examination of religious exchange and play in two literary texts of the late-20th century, in an essay titled "Afro-Caribbean Belief Systems and the Neo-Baroque Novel." Hazelton's analysis, dense with close-reading, shows how syncretic-religious representation in his case studies – both of which set in the Caribbean – are characterized by *lo real maravilloso* and magical realism. For Hazelton, this feature, while not unique to the texts he focuses on, shares close ties with baroque religious representation, which prompts him to consider these novels as examples of the neo-baroque.

In "Temporal and Local Transfers: The Neo-Baroque between Politics, Religion and Entertainment," Jens Baumgarten dissects the neo-baroque's religiosity through an examination of the aesthetic paradigms of a single São Paulo church, the Nossa Senhora do Brasil, unveiled in 1940. Baumgarten's visual analysis of the space, informed by the neo-baroque's generally nationalist, modernist characteristics in the Brazilian context, underlines the Brazilian neo-baroque's ties to neocolonialist thought and urges its reader not to dismiss the political and affective aims pent up in neo-baroque configurations of religious material culture.

In “The Religious Shines through: Religious Remnants and Resurgences in 90s Cinema,” Walter Moser, a long-time contributor to the field of neo-baroque studies, develops a compelling reading of 1990s films thematically united by a similar preoccupation with one central question: “What is real?” (179). While noting the theme’s endurance throughout the decade and across national borders, Moser limits his discussion, here, to *The Matrix* (Wachowski and Wachowski, 1999) and *eXistenZ* (Cronenberg, 1999), and examines the “ontological instabilities” characteristic of their narrative structures and dense commentary upon modern life as a whole (ibid). Despite the religious imagery and prophetic language which permeates the films’ staging of virtual realities, Moser finds that the spiritual sentiment shining through them is observably, even curiously undermined by more despair than hope, more complications than true resolutions. This places their playful representation of reality’s constructed nature in conversation with – but staunchly *against*—historically baroque portrayals of the same existential bent.

Patrick Mahon’s artist’s essay, “Towers, Shipwrecks, and Neo-Baroque Allegories,” closes the book’s second part. He stakes Walter Benjamin’s writing on baroque allegory as the foremost source of the artistic principles that guide his aesthetic, drawing our attention to the reflexivity with which he imbues his highly symbolic pieces, whether photographic or sculptural. His self-appointment as a social critic, as he suggests, aligns his practice with that of certain historical baroque artmakers, and he accordingly finds the neo-baroque as an aesthetic-*cum*-conceptual framework useful for the critical interpretation and creation of his art.

The third and final of the collection’s sub-sections, “Cities,” centers on architectural instances of neo-baroque aesthetics in the modern day, posing urban centers as loci in which “visual or imaginary effects overshadow social and cultural decline” in an encoded, yet decoratively excessive, manner (227).

“Symbolic Dimensions and Cultural Functions of the Neo-Baroque Balustrade in Contemporary Mexico City,” collection-coeditor Pieter Krieger’s contribution, considers the balustrade, an architectural element with roots in the historical baroque, as an ornamental, standardized commodity peppering the cityscape of Mexico City. In spite of the megalopolis’ overall “heterogeneity” (230), the balustrade proves a recurrent fixture throughout the city, one which – according to Krieger – emblemizes cultural and historical aesthetic exchange in a supremely “fetish[ized]” fashion (231). The design element, for Krieger, is indebted



to Las Vegas' commodified use of the same device, which serves to erect a superficial spectacle of history paradoxically divorced from its bourgeoisie origins. Its multiple symbolic functions in the context of Mexico City, rife with modern, urban architectural schemas, (pre-)colonial design elements, and buildings lined with protective iron bars, all point to the balustrade's fundamentally performative nature, as a piece of what Krieger pithily calls "cultural fiction" (251).

Monika Kaup's essay, in turn, "Mexico City's Dissonant Modernity and Marketplace Baroque," complements Krieger's analysis of the city. She adopts a different methodology to arrive at her conclusions, all of which point to the urban zone's use of baroque aesthetics as a "successful blueprint for secondhand creation," a means to create the semblance of posh modernity (255). In this vein, Kaup's essay maps the discursive space between two writers' rendering of the city: one of the early 17th century, Bernardo de Balbuena, as well as one of the 20th, Salvador Novo. Kaup's argument lays bare, through this juxtaposition and the intertextual dialogue it spurs, the neocolonialist (and even *re*colonialist) undertones at work in the idealization and imitation of historically European aesthetic paradigms such as the baroque, while also indicating the (neo-)baroque literary style of the writers she analyzes.

The last critical case study of the collection, Angela Ndalianas' "Baroque Theatricality and Scripted Spaces: From Movie Palace to Las Vegas Casinos," deals with the construction of spaces designed to generate a neo-baroque aura, analyzing the baroque-informed notion of *teatrum mundi*, "theatre of the world," as a design principle central to the US architecture devised throughout the 20th century. Buttressing her deft argument with concepts such as the "Experience Economy," Ndalianas sheds light on the theatricality and excess of such architectural enterprises as well as their ambition to manufacture spatial spectacles through the visual language of the baroque (302).

Marjan Colletti's artist's essay, "Post-digital Neo-Baroque: Reinterpreting Baroque Reality and Beauty in Contemporary Architectural Design," concludes the collection on a provocative note. Colletti's insightful reflections on the capabilities of modern architectural-design technologies to render baroque aesthetics are nicely echoed in the artist's own productions through digital means. The latter emphasize and exhibit recent avenues for producing dynamism, excess, and theatricality in digital artworks as well as for developing the groundwork for material projects.

This collection of essays, in sum, delivers a range of approaches valuable for our contemporary understanding of the neo-baroque as a conceptual paradigm with multiple facets, manifold definitions. It offers, on the whole, various critical lenses through which we may interpret baroque-aligned productions of the modern day (as well as their constitutive elements). Moreover, through its three artist's essays, it provides the viewpoints of those practicing artmakers who identify the influence of the baroque in their own craft. While it gathers an array of distinct voices, each of whom pursue such ambitions on his or her own terms, this critical text is a balanced and cohesive anthology that raises a number of new, provocative questions for scholars of the neo-baroque. It similarly points to the shortcoming of the field's earlier ideals. It is a delight to read, and its detailed attention to the neo-baroque's many forms across media well illustrates the neo-baroque as a cultural phenomenon of the present day.

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**Nathaniel Wallace. *Scanning the  
Hypnograph: Sleep in Modernist and  
Postmodern Representation*. Leiden and  
Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2016. Pp. 343 + xxvi.  
ISBN: 9789004316188.**

Current interest in the cultural history of the sleep may not be as big as in that of its sibling, the dream, but it is still astonishingly widespread. The most important publications in the field can be found on the website [www.sleepculture.com](http://www.sleepculture.com), where one can easily see that the dominant approach is a sociological or social-historical one. So most researchers are concerned with what might be called the ‘politics’ of sleep, i.e. social rules, practices and conventions which shape and control sleep.

Nathaniel Wallace is interested in the history of sleep in literature and the arts, with a special focus on the 20th and 21st centuries. Readers who may wonder what a ‘hypnograph’ is (just as I did) will search in vain for a concise definition. In the Preface we are told that it is “a postmodern quasi-genre [...] that exploits the many enigmatic and evocative qualities of dormancy” and that it is “widespread in contemporary verbal and visual culture” (XII). Much later we learn that Robert Rauschenberg’s combine *Bed* of 1955 was “the first hypnograph” (118), although it shows the space of sleep – made up of Rauschenberg’s bed quilt, sheet and pillow attached to a vertical frame and partly painted over with oil colour – instead of the sleeper (to actually *perceive* this the reader will have to consult the internet as the black-and-white figure given in the book is – like many others – tiny and of a deplorable quality). And many pages later, we are told that a hypnograph is “a curious postmodern form entailing a highlighting of sleep, a combining of text and image,<sup>1</sup> interruption or blocking of circadian rhythms, and especially a resistance

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<sup>1</sup> As there is no text in Rauschenberg’s *Bed* (nor in the other hypnographs discussed) I suppose that ‘text’ must be a reference to (implied) ‘discourses’ – but still keep wondering where the ‘image’ in literary hypnographs can be found – perhaps in a reference to paintings?

to and/or of narratives” (248). And it is not before the Conclusion that we receive any information on the second half of the term (‘glyph’, derived from the Greek verb *glyphein*, i.e. carve, engrave), which, however, poses more questions than it answers: “The ‘glyph’ in the hypnoglyph signals a *via negativa* that can lead to unpleasant (or at times reassuring) self-knowledge or to a cultural critique or to nowhere at all” (305).

This anxiety of definition is, I am afraid, a basic principle of Wallace’s study which some readers may enjoy – and others deplore. I must confess that I belong to the latter group. I am perfectly willing to put up with any hardship in trying to understand a work of literature or art – but not when reading a piece of secondary literature from which I expect clear and elucidating comments rather than ‘glyphs’ needy of glossary.

For the time being we can content ourselves with assuming that a ‘hypnoglyph’ is a literary text or work of art dealing with the subject of sleep in a postmodern way. But this only means a displacement of the problem, as Wallace is equally unwilling to provide us with a/his definition of Postmodernism and, for that matter, Modernism, although both terms are key-words in his subtitle. Of course, I could try again, as I did for the ‘hypnoglyph’, to put together the puzzle-pieces of definition/s which are scattered throughout the book and even attempt to organize them into a coherent whole. But, as I said, I am simply not willing to do this for a critical study. I will merely refer to one of the less expected (and less plausible) of the bits and pieces and pieces of information which have to serve as a substitute for a coherent definition: At one point in his study Wallace approvingly quotes Fredric Jameson’s ‘definition’ of Postmodernism as “‘late-phase capitalism’” (100). Does this mean that Modernism could be adequately defined as ‘high capitalism’ and, given the astonishing tenacity of capitalism – in spite of the even more astonishing expectation, shared by so many intellectuals, of its imminent decease – that ‘very late capitalism’ might be the appropriate definition for a post-postmodernist period?

Obviously, the search for concise definitions of the basic terms of Wallace’s study is not an appropriate approach. We will, however, be more successful when we look for the systematic foundations and the historical presuppositions of the study.

The systematic basis is sketched in chapter 1. Wallace firstly posits a connection between “sleep and narrative resistance” (11) which is almost too obvious to be discussed. In fact, sleep – dreamless sleep, in which

Wallace is primarily interested – not only *resists* narration, it simply *defies* it. For dreamless sleep is a non-event, apparently devoid of all mental activities. One could, of course, describe the sleeper from the outside – which is sometimes, but rarely, done in literary text, and the normal case in painting. But one should also be aware that portraying a sleeper does not *necessarily* involve a thematizing of sleep – looking at a motionless and defenceless sleeper always includes a strong element of voyeurism, which may quite often be the dominant subject and interest. In longer narratives sleep will, quite often, be used as a key *motif* rather than as a *subject* – an important distinction which Wallace ignores completely. He is, however, quite right in observing that dreams can “provide a re-entry into narrative” (35), although in themselves (due to the fluidity of the dream world and its neglect of space and time) they also offer a strong resistance to narration.

Wallace’s second point is a strangely essentialist one. Based on cognitive studies and, perhaps inevitably, Freud and Lacan, he posits a double way in which sleep affects the cognition of the young child and, consequently, modes of sleep depiction: (1) “primary narcissism” (25) as a feeling of “all-embracing inclusivity” (306), and (2) “separation anxiety” as a feeling of “vulnerability” resulting in “a desire for either independence or renewed dependence” (306). As a literary critic, I have absolutely no competence to make authoritative statements about sleep, and as a cultural historian, I consider all propositions about sleep as objects of my research and not as a meta-theory on which this could be based. But one can easily concede that these two feelings are indeed important elements of the sleep discourse (or discourses), together with, as Wallace rightly notes, associations with “sin, death, dreams, [...] sexuality” (306).

Wallace’s concept of a history of sleep, at least so far as I can reconstruct it, starts in the Early Modern period. The era before remains only vaguely contoured. Though a hypnophobic tendency seems to have dominated in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (15), there were also strong countertendencies. In the Early Modern Period, however, hypnophobia became universal. Firstly, because with the rise of capitalism sleep was considered as a sorry, or even sinful, waste of time which was to be minimized. Secondly, because of Descartes’s denegation of dreamless sleep, which he deemed impossible as the soul or mind could never sleep completely. This is perfectly true for rationalistic thinkers of the Enlightenment; empiricists and, even more, sensualists, however, by no

means shared this conviction. And many Romantic writings on sleep and dream postulated that the oscillation between sleep and wakefulness – with the dream as a median and mediating third state in-between – was the natural way in which the soul took part in the polaric rhythm of the universe. But as Romanticism remains a blind spot in Wallace’s study,<sup>2</sup> this extremely important threshold in the cultural history of sleep is never discussed. The next main phase in Wallace’s history of sleep is Modernism, “in which sleep-states, typically, are serenely aestheticized” (XV), in most cases mainly because sleep is “an irrepressible conveyor of dreams” (90); here Proust is Wallace’s principal and almost only example.

The main part of Wallace’s study is divided into four chapters, each centred on a key aspect: “vertical slumber” (meaning quite often simply that the sleeper is shown in an extreme high-shot and therefore in a vertical position) which is interpreted “as an expression of the constraints placed on the modern and postmodern subjects” (145); the ‘narcissistic’ type of the depiction of sleep; the – alternative – second type which stresses the vulnerability of the self. The last chapter is devoted to “gender inflections” in the depiction of “gay, lesbian, or androgynous” sleepers (238). This chapter is the weakest in the book, not only because the examples are not very convincing – it may be my fault, but often I am unable to detect the gender ambiguities which Wallace describes – but mainly because the author tends to lose sight of his main subject, sleep, in his gender discussions.

In these four chapters Wallace analyzes – to name only the main examples – poems by Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell and Richard Wilbur, narratives by Anne Sexton, Marguerite Duras and the Japanese author Yasunari Kawabata, works of visual art by Vincent Desiderio, Anselm Kiefer, Fran Gardner and Marc Tansey, and Andy Warhol’s film *Sleep*. The discussion of these examples is always illuminating, sometimes even based on first-hand information acquired in interviews with the artists themselves. As is to be expected, there is a heavy accent on intertextuality and interpictoriality, although Wallace is well aware of the fact that “perceived similarities between works of literature are legion and often misleading” (229). And, as is to be expected from a study on Postmodernism which is itself firmly based on postmodern values, there

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<sup>2</sup> There are only passing references to Shelley, Keats, and Victor Hugo; German Romanticism is completely ignored.

is a strong resistance to interpretive closure (which, as one should always be aware, rests primarily on the interpreter's decision not to 'close' and not on qualities inherent in a text or work of art).

To sum up: I have to confess that I sincerely doubt that there is anything like the hypnoglyph as a distinct genre; in fact, I am not even sure if the subject of sleep is more prominent in Postmodernism than in earlier periods. Wallace's list of examples from literature and the visual arts is certainly impressive, but their number remains limited and their origin is mainly restricted to the USA, France, and (solely with Anselm Kiefer) to Germany. Yet the book contains a wealth of information on the sleep discourse and an impressive number of examples from texts and paintings depicting different aspects of sleep and expressing different attitudes to it. So anybody interested in the cultural history of sleep will profit from its perusal. And I am perfectly ready to admit that much of my criticism may be due to the fact that I simply am not the ideal (postmodern) reader for whom this study was written.

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**Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel, eds.**  
***Theorizing the Dream / Savoirs et théories du***  
***rêve.* Würzburg: Köningshausen & Neumann,**  
**2018. Pp. 424. ISBN: 9783826064432.**

*Theorizing the Dream / Savoirs et Théories du Rêve* is the second volume in the series of academic research work conducted under the auspices of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA/ AILC) Research Committee on Dreams. The first volume, *Writing the Dream / Ecrire le rêve*, appeared in 2017. As far as I know, at least one more volume in the same series “Cultural Dream Studies / Kulturwissenschaftliche Traum-Studien / Études culturelles sur le rêve” – all of them coordinated and edited by Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel – is to be published soon.

In her review of Volume One, Dorothy Figueira underlines the great merit of the work accomplished by that particular ICLA research committee under the supervision of the German scholars Dieterle and Engel (Figueira). I can only share her admiration for the strong German academic tradition in comparative literary research displayed in this volume. Furthermore, before the present dream studies project, Dieterle and Engel had also edited (with the American comparatist Gerald Gillespie) a substantial international research volume, *Romantic Prose Fiction* (Benjamins, 2008, 733 pp.)

The recent postmodern zeal of deconstruction has flooded cultural and literary scholarship with all kinds of metaphoric and witty re-writings, as if trying to revive the fashion of the early seventeenth-century French *littérature précieuse*. This phenomenon undoubtedly had its initial spell, but as we have entered the twenty-first century, with its all-potent digital copying-machinery, the wide reading public reveals signs of getting bored with the artistry of ambiguities. On their part, academic publishing houses, which have to earn their daily bread in the context of an ever tenser world-wide rivalry, can hardly afford puzzles in book titles. Instead of *préciosité*, their expectancy is “preciseness.”

In a similar way with a number of Western international organizations, the official working languages of ICLA / AILC are English and French.

In the particular case of these volumes on dream studies, the inclusion of the German version of the series title is surely justified, as German scholars have been the main architects of this impressive intellectual project. In Volume Two, *Theorizing the Dream / Savoirs et Théories du Rêve*, the article authors come overwhelmingly from German universities (12). Five authors represent French institutions, while one author only is American.

Among the series' title versions, the most explicit is the German. *Wissenschaftliche* leaves no room for doubts: the purpose is scientific research. Even without "science," the title in French is clear enough. In humanities, "studies" is mostly understood as a synonym for "research." The English title of the series, "Cultural Dream Studies," on the contrary, does contain a shade of ambiguity. Thus, "cultural dream" may well signify the dream of that (supposed) minority of people who nowadays have the courage of disagreeing with the pervasive trend of understanding culture as a kind of entertainment. (Needless to say, this is a different topic, which will need to be treated in future dream studies.)

I doubt that the title of Volume One has met the expectations of the German publisher. If one searches on the Internet for "Writing the Dream," the first results would indicate sites in which quite a different book of exactly the same title, *Writing the Dream* (published in 2016), is advertised. It is a collection of 24 Australian short stories featuring a dream of some kind. The fact indicates that, for the greater reading public, primary literary creativity tends to overshadow critical metatexts.

Quite on the contrary, the choice of the title of Volume Two of the dream studies series is highly successful. When searched on the Internet, the title appears immediately. Yet, *Theorizing the Dream* does contain some ambiguity. Introducing the terms of "theory" and "theorizing" creates an illusion of analogies with natural and physical sciences. As a matter of fact, in humanities theories for the most part work *a posteriori*. They have very little practical value for the economy of the world's house – for establishing rules and laws that govern our daily life. Ambivalences are hard to translate: the French *Savoirs et Théories du Rêve* captures much more explicitly the essence of that volume. It conjoins the already existing knowledge (episteme) and theories – in the sense of a philosophic discussion – without any definite and concrete results.

The editors and all the individual authors of the volume, as agile erudite minds, have assimilated a truly impressive mass of references

and sources not only in the languages of the Western “centric triangle” (English-French-German), but also in ancient European as well as in some Oriental languages. Vast cultural areas of the West and the East have been covered. The impression is, however, that after what has been said about dreams by ancient Western or Eastern sages and the “fathers” of modern psychoanalytical thinking, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, there is little room left for any genuine breakthroughs in theory. Medical peoples’ statistical analyses and conclusions can provide interesting details, but the topic clearly escapes their reach, as sooner or later, dealing with dreams, one enters the reign of the “otherworld” and the domain of the existential condition of human beings – the border-zone of non-existence.

Hence, the “theorizing” of Volume Two seems to derive its value above all as a “close commenting” on and a process of consci(enti)ously accumulating all the basic data and sources that were available to the authors (i.e. in languages they could read). To find fault with the fact that the volume does not include any contribution from the vast East-European linguistic-cultural area, would obviously seem unjustly exaggerated. Instead, the present volume could be viewed as a challenge and a call to intellectuals, writers and scholars from other (non-centric) areas to follow the example of the volume’s editors and authors and try to assemble a similar series on dream philosophizing from the traditional “periphery.” The latter could be stimulated by important ideas about dreams coming from the “periphery” itself, such as can be found, for instance, in Yuri M. Lotman’s writing about the “semiosphere” particularly in his last book, *Culture and Explosion*. Lotman’s metaphoric assertion, “dream is a semiotic window,” is at least for me one of the most successful images catching and conveying the quintessence of dream philosophy.

Another highly symbolic metaphor related to dreams (which can to some extent be associated with Lotman’s interpretation of “semiosphere”) has its origin in another vast Western “periphery.” The title of one of the best-known *Caprichos* by Francisco Goya, “*El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*,” should not be translated as “the sleep of reason produces monsters” (as has been done in most foreign languages). Instead, it could more profitably glossed as: “the dream of reason produces monsters” – a prophecy foreshadowing our “postmodern” and “posthumanistic” days. In Spanish, *sueño* means both “sleep” and “dream.” A lot of stimulating discussion on the dream could be derived from the signifiers of “dream” and “sleep” in a number of languages beyond English, French and German. Thus, the Latvian word for dream, *sapnis*, resembles both the

Sanskrit *svapna* (dream) and the Latin *sapientia* (good taste and sense, wisdom).

In his opening article in Volume Two, “Towards a Theory of Dream Theories,” Manfred Engel dedicates the final chapter (“Excursus”) to the dream theory of Carl Gustav Jung. Engel proposes a classification of all dream theories under four types: 1) Supernatural Theories, 2) Epistemological/ Ontological Theories, 3) Rationalist Theories, 4) Natural supernaturalism / Romanticist theories. Dorothy Figueira concludes her essay “Dream in Ancient Indian Literature and Philosophy” by observing that “[i]n the West, dreams are thought to be not real. In India, dreams can be seen as representing true reality” and “are understood as purveyors of another reality” (57). Marion Eggert’s article “Beyond Prognostication” traces the repercussion of Neo-Confucian ideas (influenced by Buddhist and Taoist tranquilism) in the work *Dream Explication* of the Korean writer Hō Kyun (1569–1618). Ideas about dreams in Ancient Greece are summarized in Christophe Chandezon’s essay “Comprendre et classer les rêves d’Homère à Artémidore.” In the volume’s only article in German, but with a title in Latin, “Aut anima intellegit, et verum est; aut, si verum non est, non intellegit,” Stefan Seit discusses the “intellectualization” of visions and dreams by St. Augustin and their subsequent “rationalization” by Thomas Aquinas. Under the main title “Fontaines perpétuelles,” Gilles Polizzi detects parallels between Freud and the French writer Béroalde de Verville. (In the subtitle to this essay, the years 1556–1626 surely do not attempt to define the limits of the Baroque era, as one might misconstrue, but relate to Verville’s lifespan.) In one passage, Polizzi mentions (as a “Baroque commonplace”) the phrase “la vie est un songe” (161). Incidentally, it is one of the very few occurrences of the word “songe,” the French synonym of “rêve.” I could not notice in the volume any mention of the great European Baroque writer Pedro Calderón de la Barca – perhaps the only equal to Shakespeare – whose drama, above all, made world-famous the phrase that “life is a dream.”

In “The Dreams of Athanasius Kircher SJ,” Andreas Bähr describes the dream journey of the Jesuit priest and polymath (1601/2–1680) in his *Itinerarium exstaticum* (1656/57). Murat Ares’s essay “Dubious Perceptions” synthesizes the attitude to dreams of the Enlightenment philosophers John Locke and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, as well as of their intellectual forerunner René Descartes. More views of German

philosophers situated at the border between Enlightenment and Romanticism (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher, as well as the Dane Baggesen) are described and commented in Paul Ziche's article "Dreams as Transitory States." "Romantic Anthropology" (a term coined by Manfred Engel) is explained through the work of German physicians and medicine professors Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert, Carl Gustav Carus and the political activist Paul Vitalis Troxler, in an article by Christian Quintes. The double attitude to dreams by E. T. A. Hoffmann, one of the greatest German romantic writer whose work is saturated with all kinds of dreams and fantasies, is examined by Ricarda Schmidt in her essay "Lovers' Dreams – the Path to Heaven or Hell," as an "attempt to throw light on the dark recesses of the human mind, and challenge narrow-minded shallow rationalism as much as woolly mysticism" (269). Patricia Oster provides an overview of the source and role of dreams in the work of French romantic writers Victor Hugo, Gérard de Nerval and Charles Nodier, in an essay titled "Le XIXe siècle, 'observatoire' du rêve."

The transition to modernist sensibility in literature, with the emergence of French theories of erotic dreaming (in relation to nocturnal emissions), is described by Jacqueline Carroy in "Le sexe des rêves," while Bernard Dieterle, in "Construction et maîtrise du rêve dans la modernité" deals with the role of dreams in the work of Charles Baudelaire and Lautréamont. Sigmund Freud's main ideas in his foundational work *Interpretation of Dreams* are revisited by Joachim Pfeiffer ("Comprendre des textes vides de sens. La théorie du rêve de Freud"). Manfred Engel's article "Dream Theories in Modernist Literature" is the most extensive individual contribution of this volume. Yet, length is justified, as Engel deals with the giant trio of writers of the modernist breakthrough in Western prose fiction – Marcel Proust, James Joyce and Franz Kafka. Tania Collani investigates the presence of dreams in the work of European avant-garde (futurist, Dadaist, surrealist) poetry. The volume closes with an article by Michael Schredl, a social scientist, head of research at a sleep-laboratory. Among other observations, he speaks of the effects of the dream on "waking life" (416–17).

Reading Volume Two has deepened my personal conviction that dreams, though totally useless in the world's economy, have a truly incommensurable and irrefutable presence in the world's spiritual-mental and moral being – through myths, folklore, religion, arts, and above all, creative literature.

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**Luigi Gussago. *Picaresque Fiction Today. The Trickster in Contemporary Anglophone and Italian Literature*. Leiden and Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2016. Pp. 305. ISBN: 9789004311220.**

Like the baroque, expressionism, or, better, the fantastic, the picaresque is a twofold category: on the one hand it is strictly linked to a specific historical and geographical context; on the other hand, it can be applied to different periods and authors, becoming a cross-cultural concept: a mode (or type), rather than a literary genre. According to some Iberian scholars (Gustavo Correa, Francisco Rico), the picaresque should be labelled as an exclusively sixteenth-century Spanish phenomenon, whose reverberations to other countries and ages must be considered variations on the same archetype. On the contrary, scholars of comparative literature, such as Alexander Blackburn or Robert Alter, are more inclusive and highlight the dialectic between continuity and transformation throughout the history of this narrative form, which can be found in classical antiquity (Petronius, Apuleius, the Aesop novel) as well as in contemporary postmodern fiction. In particular, since the return of the picaresque has been extremely intensive in the 20th century, one could refer to a New Picaresque, as R. A. Sherrill does in a study devoted especially to American literature of the Eighties.

Gussago's book offers compelling evidence of this contemporary flourishing of the picaresque, as it analyses, through a series of four parallel close readings, eight novels from Anglophone and Italian literatures. The first chapter focuses on history and its rhetoric construction, examining Umberto Eco's *Baudolino* (2000), a semi-picaresque historical novel on Frederick I Barbarossa, and Peter Carey's *Parrot and Olivier in America* (2009), which revolves around the figure of the famous historiographer Alexis de Tocqueville. Exploiting De Certeau's cultural theory and Greimas' semiotics, the analysis deals with some key concepts, such as historical irony, de-familiarisation, and the connection between power and language. The second chapter presents two different kinds of rogue characters: a social outcast who keeps changing jobs and social

relationships, Carlo Marozzi, the protagonist of Cesare De Marchi's *Il talento* (1997); and a doctor who was active in the Auschwitz concentration camp, Odilo Unverdorben, the central character of Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow and the Nature of the Offence* (1990), both read through the lens of Lotman's semiotic of culture, as examples of a picaresque counter-culture. Gender is the dominant perspective in the third chapter: Aldo Busi *Vendita galline km. 2* (1993) and Angela Carter's *Wise Children* (1990) deal with female protagonists, "willingly infertile, atypically anti-motherly rebels against the laws of nature" (277), and with other related issues, such as lesbian love, mistaken identities, male sexual exuberance and sexual/political dispossession. Finally, the last chapter is devoted to some crucial stylistic categories, such as irony, humour, satire and the carnivalesque (strangely Bakhtin did not profoundly engage with the picaresque). *Saltatempo* (2001) by Stefano Benni and *A Star Called Henry* (1999) by Roddy Doyle are the two case studies which allow the author to treat a large variety of expressive techniques, often related to some significant cultural turns (for example, the link between irony and the Enlightenment).

Combining rhetorical and formal analysis, semiotic patterns, cultural and gender studies, Gussago's eclecticism offers a rich and profound picture of contemporary picaresque fiction in English and Italian, including the manifold transformations of the trickster, an anthropological figure strictly linked to this literary tradition. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the author does not provide the reader with a satisfactory sense of the picaresque, because the family resemblances between the analysed texts are sometimes too weak and vague. At the end of the book, we still ask ourselves how the picaresque can be defined in today's literary world, is it: a literary mode or a genre? A narrative structure? A myth? A theme? Of course it is probably a mixture of all those components, but a wider and more careful methodological reflection still seems necessary.

The last section of the concluding remarks briefly alludes to the future developments of the studies in the picaresque; the extension to non-European literatures, and "the themes of alienation and otherness, the emergence of sexual 'minorities', the renewed battle for civil rights in many areas of the world, global mobility, migration, the debate on the question of *ius soli* as a first stage toward integration in countries like Italy" (281); themes that the picaresque incisively establishes as the "watchtower of human life" (281). I would add a third point to these suggestions: the intermedial perspective. Picaresque fiction has played a



very important role in the history of the movies. We should only think about the 'on the road' genre, whose Italian masterpiece is Dino Risi's *Il sorpasso* (1962); Gus van Sant's camp masterpiece, *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), a kind of modern *Satyricon*, also comes to mind. Comparative literature nowadays inevitably implies comparing the different realizations of myths, themes and literary modes in different media.

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**Helga Mitterbauer & Carrie Smith-Prei,  
eds. *Crossing Central Europe. Continuities  
and Transformations, 1900 and 2000.*  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017.  
Pp. 290. ISBN: 9781442649149.**

*Crossing Central Europe. Continuities and Transformations, 1900 and 2000* gathers texts by twelve scholars from Canada, the United States, and Europe to focus on the complex networks of transcultural interrelations in Central Europe from 1900 to 2000. This ambitious and pioneering volume edited by Helga Mitterbauer and Carrie Smith-Prei proposes to defend the thesis that “the Central European networks of artists, writers, and musicians were shaken by the world wars and then wrecked by the Cold War, but that after the fall of the Iron Curtain, memories of the nineteenth century formed a solid base for re-establishing transnational relations” (viii). The book’s theoretical frame is set by the editors in the introduction, which considers “the instability of national borders and the permeability of transcultural identity” (xi) typical of Central Europe. This region is thus decoded as “a fluid structure with blurred edges” (xi). This structure is analysed in the following contributions, which intertwine historical and transnational perspectives on the arts. Assembled in two parts, the eleven contributions to this volume examine transcultural phenomena in the long twentieth century in literature and literary circulation, music and its reception, architecture and interior design, and media. Thus, the book invites us to explore the labyrinth of Central European history in which, in spite of the traumatic history of the last century, cultural exchanges continue to develop across borders. In view of the current socio-political evolution of numerous countries in the region, such a critical examination of the Austro-Hungarian legacy in the long term is the most inspiring, as well as somewhat reassuring, aspect of Mitterbauer and Smith-Prei’s volume.

Fruitfully elaborating on the processual and communicational perspective on Central Europe initiated by the studies of Moritz Csáky and the Austrian school of Central European history, Helga Mitterbauer

develops the theoretical background of the introduction in Chapter 1 by emphasizing the concept of cultural transfer. The scholar also draws from postcolonial studies and network analysis to expand the initially bi- or triangular model set by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner into a hybrid model of “dynamic networks” in which “processes of cultural transfer occur on the levels of spatial distance, internal difference, time and power” (9). She then explores the concept of “multipolar and potentially endless” (9) exchanges in the case study of Rudolf Lothar’s play, *König Harlequin* (*King Harlequin*, 1900).

The following chapters illuminate the crossing of cultures in Central Europe thanks to numerous interdisciplinary tools, some of which have only seldom been applied to the region’s history. Relying on the concept of “geomodernism” which emphasizes the importance of location and interconnections, Agatha Schwarz and Helga Thorson examine in Chapter 2 the significant role of plurilingual female writers representing the different languages and parts of the Austro-Habsburg Empire, i.e. Grete Meisel-Hess, Terka Lux, Olha Kobylianska, Nafija Sarajlić, Zofka Kveder. Addressing the “complex notions of modernism, feminism and Jewishness” (37) around 1900 Schwarz and Thorson’s goal is to take into account hitherto “marginalized voices of women in addition and next to the established canonical writers” to “discover common modernist threads in their works across existing political, linguistic, and intellectual boundaries beyond the dominant narratives of national imagined communities” (44).

In Chapter 3, Gregor Kokorz builds on the recent developments of border studies, such as those elaborated by Berg and Van Houtum, to develop a constructionist approach to nationalism and modernization. The critic shows how music problematized the notion of border in the *Vormärz* decades. For example, despite the differing cultural/national backgrounds of his Hungarian or German audiences, Franz Liszt played a kind of music that encapsulated the shared European aesthetics of the time. Thus, music “mediates not only between the national and the international, but also between different ethnicities and conflicting concepts of national identity [i.e. based on language or birth]” (60). Recalling the figure of Chopin (as analysed elsewhere by Jolanta T. Pekacz, Jim Samson and myself), Liszt “represented both the national and the international, but could become a national icon only because he was the admired representative of the modern European world” (57).

Imre Szeman adds to these reflections on the pre-1848 period in Chapter 4 by analysing of Imre Madách's closet play *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*, 1862). Unlike similar texts by Goethe, Flaubert, Joyce and Karl Kraus, this work was forgotten for a long time. Examining the relation between a literary genre and political and economic contexts, Szeman argues that this type of play reflected "in both form and content, the ways in which capital made reality ungraspable and unsteady, thereby producing a literary space that mirrored – or, at least, had the potential to mirror – the fantastic form that social relations had taken within capitalism" (96). The political dimension of literary creation and analysis is thus once again underlined through this example of a cultural production that anticipated the traumatic events of the 20th century. Echoing each other, these chapters devoted to the *Vormärz* period reveal its highly inspiring potential to problematize unilateral political and cultural notions. This also recalls Xavier Galmiche's observations on the role of the heroicomic tradition in counterbalancing the formation of more and more rigid and exclusive national communities in the Central European region.

Closing the first part of the volume, Sarah McGaughey completes those observations in Chapter 5 by offering another shift in perspective. As she discusses the representation of the modern kitchen in literature during the interwar period, the critic comments on texts by Franz Kafka, Ernst Weiß, Joseph Roth, Kurt Tucholsky and Jakob Wasserman in an international context. She amplifies discourse analysis with data on how modern aesthetic imagination resonated not only in the arts, but also in everyday practice. However, Central European texts (and contexts) in languages (and milieus) other than German should be taken in account to further reinforce the proposed conclusions.

All in all, the studies of the first part of the volume sketch an inspiring vision of the transcultural circulation networks of the pre-national and pre-totalitarian period. These essays focus on a time preceding the growing exclusiveness of modern national communities. The latter led to world conflicts, which – as the famous quote by István Bibó reminds us – both began in Central Europe. The second part of the volume examines the region's post-totalitarian (yet not solely post-national) realities, which are complicated by the issue of traumatised cultural memory, in the contexts of European integration and globalization after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the late capitalism take-over of Central European countries.

In Chapter 6, Irene Sywenky analyses the peripheral space perception of the Ukrainian city of Lviv (Leopol/Lemberg/Lwów/Lvov) in texts by Zbigniew Herbert, Adam Zagajewski, Stanisław Lem and Iurii Andrukhovych. The poetic notion of “unhomeliness,” Sywenky suggests, captures the mirage location of a bounded cultural identity. However, the concept could be amplified and placed in conversation with the concepts of “phantom borders” (recently explored in Ukraine by Sabine von Löwis) as well as the “toponymic declination” symbolizing the historical volatility of empires and the geographical fluidity of borders. The latter are also expressed from a rhetoric point of view through the addition of linguistic equivalents approaching the form of litany or the antique “ars apodemica” (as theorised by Xavier Galmiche).

In the following chapters, the destabilised, fluid, or “homeless” cultural identities of the region facing local, national and global concerns are set against the transcultural aspects of interconnectedness in Central Europe beyond historical ruptures. By exploring Jewish transcultural collective memory in works by Doron Rabinovici, Julya Rabinowich and Vladimir Vertlib, Sandra Vlasta claims in Chapter 7 that such works exceed chronological and spatial divisions in order to express an “idea of transcultural Europe characterized by migration, exchange and cultural transfer” (164), of which Jewishness is one of the strongest transnational parts. Similar conclusions are formulated by Michael Boehringer through the example of Dimitré Dinev’s work. In Chapter 8, he observes how “post-war Austrian literature played a pivotal role in the creation of the Austrian nation; today, literature has again taken the lead, by rising above national identifications and mapping a transcultural imaginary” (170). This phenomenon gives way to the contestation of “national and originary myths of being” through the fundamental experience of migration and hybridity resulting in “existential homelessness that stands in stark contrast to our desire of a ‘home’” (171). Boehringer’s thesis inspiringly resonates with the conclusions of the newest studies on Polish contemporary literature, despite the fact that symbolic geographical orientation thoroughly shifted – according to Przemysław Czapliński – towards a “shaken map” of references. In a word, the famous quotation from Alfred Jarry’s *Le Roi Ubu*, “En Pologne, c’est-à-dire nulle part” (1896), is still perfectly relevant today. This idea could even be extended to the whole region of Central Europe caught in between more and more numerous points of reference.

“In remixing Russian, German, English and Slovene layers of popular and elitist high culture [...], the Slovene band Laibach reflects the situation of cultural plurality at the beginning of the twentieth century but has also reshaped it in a highly specific and confusing manner” (201), Stefan Simonek states in Chapter 9. His analysis of the intertextual and musical provocative trans-aesthetic montages in the work of the Slovene band Laibach interestingly echoes Gregor Kokorz’s observations on Franz Liszt. However, the logics of cultural production now seem related to those of late capitalism, as detailed by Frederic Jameson. The sudden and often chaotic flooding of late capitalism in the region’s realities is another complex transnational chapter of Central European history that must be taken in account. In other words, as Matthew Miller concludes in Chapter 10 in his analysis of the 2003 film *Donau, Dunaj, Duna, Dunav, Dunărea* by the Vienna-based ex-Yugoslav filmmaker Goran Rebić: “first, [...] reformulations of identity lead to questions of agency; and second, [...] predications of the new Europe cannot remain merely cultural, but also demand translation (*Übersetzung*: a setting over to other banks) into the economic and political tasks faced by the continent” (244). Indeed, if the river can be conceived not only as a geophysical and trans-border connector but also as an open metaphor of the (Central) European future, this figure is also a reminder of the common, transnational ecological and economic basis determining the fate of cultural superstructures. The last chapter of the book by Carrie Smith-Prei is devoted to the Bulgarian-born German author Ilija Trojanow. It suggests committed conclusions through its analysis of the contemporary role of the public intellectual “uncovering the inequity and chaos caused by global confluence, but in a manner that displays cosmopolitan awareness and empathy for the other while not claiming to provide ways out of crisis” (265). In this manner, as the editors state, “the continuities and transformations between and among nations historically belonging to Central Europe since the nineteenth century help us grasp the aesthetic repercussions of globalization in the twenty-first century” (xvi-xvii).

While they are often essentialised to satisfy immediate political, economic or identity claims, transcultural networks and their relevance in transcending historical divisions are effectively explored in this volume. In contrast to the still dominant national historiographical scope of current literature studies in the region, the contributors to Helga Mitterbauer and Carrie Smith-Prei’s collection stress the permeability

of borders and the significance of transcultural circulation observed in Central Europe in the best tradition of openness typical of Austrian Studies. Further research could include transcultural approaches in other contexts, such as the French scholarship quoted in this review. And if the idea of “border-izing” remains one of the main research trends in current analyses of Central European cultures, a common practice in Old Continent scholarship, I would like to conclude by paraphrasing the title of Hastings Donnan, Madeleine Hurd, and Carolin Leutloff-Grandits’s recent volume: today, a sustained conceptualization of migrating borders not only reflects our “moving times,” but proves as necessary as ever.

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**Thomas A. DuBois and Dan Ringgaard, eds.**  
***Nordic Literature: A Comparative History.***  
***Volume I: Spatial Nodes.*** Amsterdam and  
Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2017. Pp. 747.  
**ISBN: 9789027234681.**

*Nordic Literature: A Comparative History. Volume I: Spatial Nodes* is the thirty-first volume to appear in the series *A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages* since 1967, when the Coordinating Committee for the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages (CHLEL), which oversees the series, was founded by the International Comparative Literature Association. This volume is the first installment of an anticipated three-volume set devoted to Nordic literary history and overseen by U.S.-based scholars Steven P. Sondrup and Mark B. Sandberg. The guiding logic for all of the volumes in the larger series has been a broadly comparative approach; unlike traditional literary histories organized according to nation, language, or period, these comparative histories purport to “draw attention to a region defined by geographic proximity and allied but not necessarily identical processes of literary production” (xv). Previous volumes in the series have drawn these boundaries in a wide variety of ways, such as the cultural and geographical (e.g. the literatures in the Iberian Peninsula); the sociological (e.g. orality, literary hybrids and multimedia); the philosophical and stylistic (e.g. modernism, Romanticism); and the critical and conceptual (e.g. literature of the Caribbean). While all of the volumes attend to literatures in European languages, these comparative studies necessarily push well beyond the geographic and cultural boundaries of continental Europe to all areas of the world where European languages have taken residence. At first blush, one might wonder: How does the Nordic region, often imagined to be culturally insular and homogeneous, and whose languages have not taken over far-flung literary cultures, fit into such an ambitious and comparative series?

Perfectly, as project editors Steven P. Sondrup and Mark B. Sandberg patiently explain in their general introduction. In fact, the Nordic region

proves an ideal subject for a comparative literary history project with such dynamic and fluid perimeters, and making this case is arguably one of the volume's greatest contributions. As long as literary histories remained mired in national contexts, Nordic literatures were perpetually designated as "minor" outliers that were mostly of interest to those within the Nordic region except when they made the occasional outsized contribution to world literary history, such as the sagas and epic poetry of the Vikings written in Old Norse during Iceland's Middle Ages, or the work of individual modern writers (e.g. Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg) who had broken through to the world stage. This three-volume set eschews the "great works" approach entirely by examining Nordic literatures through certain "nodes," or points in a network where lines or pathways cross, branch, or intersect. "Each of the three volumes will concentrate on new ways to model literary historiography through spatial, figural, and temporal frameworks," Sondrup and Sandberg write in their introduction, resulting not in complete or encyclopedic coverage, but rather "an ongoing process of narrative reframing" (2). This process is not intended to replace or supersede previous, more traditional approaches to telling literary history, they insist, but rather to complement these foundational works and provide dynamic new ways – in keeping with current trends in comparative literary study – to think about literary history. Volumes II and III of the set, then, will presumably be devoted to figural and temporal nodes. Thus rather than provide a broad survey, or a bird's eye view, of the scope of Nordic literature, this study instead zooms in on key points of intersection – and perhaps more importantly, through a multiplicity of lenses – in order to reveal the processes that shape, and are shaped by, Nordic literature in the modern era. The individual essays in the volume provide fascinating windows into these processes, and together they weave a nuanced and complex picture of the cultural and linguistic landscape of the Nordic region. As Sondrup and Sandberg assert, this change in method does not dispense with the literary canon, but rather promises to enhance it: "This healthy reshuffling of the canon and introduction of unexpected literary examples for each volume also reveals indirectly the ways in which a less visible (but still present) frame exists for canonical, encyclopedia literary histories as well" (3).

Linguistically speaking, the Nordic region is far more diverse than commonly known, and this poses a challenge for such a comparative project. Sondrup and Sandberg note that while 80 percent of those inhabiting the Nordic region speak either Danish, Swedish, or

Norwegian – which are fairly mutually comprehensible, particularly in written form – the Nordic region is also home to three distinct language families: Indo-European (the three dominant languages above, plus Icelandic, Faroese, and official minority languages Yiddish and Romany), Finno-Ugric (Finnish, North Sámi, South Sámi, and Meänkieli) and the Inuit's Kalaallisut language (native to Greenland, a Danish colony for three centuries and now, since 2009, a self-governing nation within the Danish kingdom). Today, English has become a *lingua franca* for research, commerce, and diplomacy in the region, as well as “a vehicle of popular culture” (13). The political geography of the region is similarly complex. As Sondrup and Sandberg point out, despite the Nordic states' significant cooperation on cultural, educational and political issues via an intergovernmental body, the Nordic Council of Ministers, “*Norden* as a self-referential concept has not been consistently fostered, nurtured, or appreciated” (9). This is surely in large part due to historical power imbalances in a region dominated, for hundreds of years, by the imperial kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden, which also operated colonies overseas for a time. Finland, Iceland, and Norway, on the other hand, were bound to these two kingdoms, achieving full independence only in the twentieth century. Finland and Iceland became republics, while Norway – whose royal family served as a symbol of national culture during the years Norway was first in a forced union with Denmark, then with Sweden – followed Denmark and Sweden's example and established a constitutional monarchy. *Norden* is also home to some significant, distinct territories with their own languages, cultures, and local governing bodies. These include the Faroe Islands, still part of Denmark; the Åland islands, a Swedish-speaking island in the Baltic that remains part of Finland; and Sápmi, the ancestral homeland of the indigenous Sámi people, which spans the Arctic regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Culturally speaking, a sharp rise in immigration over the past few decades, particularly from places outside Western Europe, has transformed much of the Nordic region into a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-racial society and sparked endless debate about “national” culture. Finally, and with particular significance for this volume focused on spatial nodes, the topography and biodiversity of this geographical expanse known collectively as *Norden* is staggeringly diverse, from the lowlands and marshlands of provincial Denmark, to the mountains of western Norway, to the volcanoes and geysers of Iceland, to the forests and lakes of Sweden and Finland.

Ironically, the Nordic region's diversity is precisely what poses the greatest challenge for those crafting such an ambitious set of comparative volumes devoted to Nordic literary history. While there are exceptions, scholars of modern Nordic literature and culture still today tend to be trained in a particular national context, for example as Norwegianists with particular intellectual skill sets (e.g. cinema, critical theory, folklore, poetry and poetics) as opposed to pan-Nordic scholars who study certain literary or cultural phenomena throughout the region. While this is slowly changing, and the embrace of theoretical models has proven a useful bridge into "post-national" scholarship for many, the fact remains that truly comparative research on Nordic literature remains daunting, given the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Nordic region, its vast and variable geography, and traditional staffing decisions in Nordic studies programs and departments. Sondrup and Sandberg acknowledge as much in their general introduction – "Contributors have been asked to stretch their expertise in order to ask more broadly 'Nordic' questions" – but at the same time, contributors were invited to explore points of comparison that emerge naturally from asking these questions, rather than impose a predetermined "Nordic-ness": "The interest here in Nordic literary voices is to find both their occasional harmonious blends as well as their sometimes dissonant contestations; the project does not take regional coherence for granted any more than it does national coherence" (3).

Herein lies this volume's greatest strength. Its theoretical framing is coherent and clear enough to allow for the perimeters of individual essays to be porous and dynamic, providing contributors with both the framing they needed to explore new points of connection and the freedom to pursue them wherever they may emerge. This volume is devoted to spatial nodes, and in their 10-page introduction, editors Dan Ringgaard and Thomas A. DuBois provide an eloquent and admirably succinct overview of the concept of place, the relationship of place and literature and place and region, and critical definitions of scapes and practices related to place. Their introduction places in dialogue with one another the work of important theorists on space and place from a number of fields, such as Gaston Bachelard, Edward S. Casey, Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger, Yi-Fu Tuan, and Christian Norberg-Schultz. Their discussion of Arjun Appadurai's concept of "global flows" demonstrates that this volume stands firmly in the fluid realm of the post-national, underscoring literature's potential to imagine, or create, new spaces and places through connections forged among actual people and places. But

even while the volume focuses on spatial nodes, Ringgaard and DuBois acknowledge in their introduction that the figural and the temporal always intersect with the spatial to produce meaning: “A spatial node [. . .] can be a significant location, a type of location, or a use of location that can assume the same sort of formative resonance within literary culture, but across history rather than within a single moment. If the primary extension of the temporal node is horizontal (i.e. through the dissemination of the effects of a particular historical event across the entire Nordic region), then that of the spatial nodes is vertical (i.e. through the spread of the effects of a given understanding of place over time)” (19). Nordic literature has long exploited the dramatic features of the region’s natural and built environments in producing meaning and – as Ástráður Eysteinnsson’s opening essay on Iceland’s volcanic glacier Snæfellsjökull exemplifies – the meanings of particular places have also been amplified and reconstituted through literature over time.

This theoretical framing continues into the organization of the volume and its essays. The volume is divided into two titled parts: Scapes, or types/kinds of places, and Practices, or the use of these places. Each part is further divided into five titled sections: Scapes consists of Landscapes, Waterscapes, Cityscapes, Lightscapes, and Milleniumscapes (all of them nouns, becoming increasingly abstract); while Practices consists of Settling, Dwelling, Exploring, Sacralizing, and Worlding (also moving from the more clearly concrete to the abstract, and all of them present-participle verbs, evoking a practice both captured in the moment and continuing in the present). Each section has its own introduction, in which one of the editors provides a critical orientation of its conceptual framing. Ringgaard’s section introductions for the Scapes portion of the volume are relatively short, ranging in length from two to ten pages, while DuBois’ section introductions for the Practices portion of the volume run up to 23 pages long. In many instances, these section introductions function not only to set up the selection of individual essays for each section, but they also stand alone as cogent explications of important critical concepts in literary studies. This is particularly true of Troy Storfjell’s 11-page section introduction – the only one not written by the volume editors – titled “Worlding,” in which he describes “the process whereby a local space is situated within a larger world system and inscribed as marginal and as distant from the source of its own meaning” (651) and cites the work of postcolonial theorists to demonstrate how “worlding” operates in diverse geographical and temporal contexts,

from Danish baroness Karen Blixen's memoir of her years in Africa to colonialist discourse in the writings of Nobel Prize-winning Norwegian author Knut Hamsun. Taken as a whole, *Nordic Literature: A Comparative History. Volume I: Spatial Nodes* makes a powerful argument not only for the importance of Nordic literature to comparative literary studies as a whole, but also for the high-caliber, comparative Nordic literary scholarship that experts in the field are producing today.

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**Claire Hennequet. *Nation, démocratie et poésie en Amérique. L'identité poétique de la nation chez Walt Whitman, José Martí et Aimé Césaire.* Paris : Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2017. Pp. 257. ISBN : 9782878547085.**

Version remaniée d'une thèse de doctorat en littérature comparée, dirigée par Jean Bessière et soutenue à l'université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle en 2014, l'ouvrage de Claire Hennequet met en regard trois poètes qui ont en commun d'être reconnus comme des « poètes nationaux », explicitement reliés par la mémoire collective à l'identité de la nation : le Cubain José Martí (1853–1895), le Martiniquais Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) et l'Américain Walt Whitman (1819–1892). Le but est d'établir un lien « entre le devenir national des œuvres des poètes nationaux et leur contenu » (14), de rechercher si de telles œuvres ont en commun des qualités poétiques susceptibles de répondre à un besoin spécifique d'une société donnée en un temps donné, tout en se prêtant à une lecture bien plus large que ce que leur caractère national (et volontiers nationaliste) pouvait laisser prévoir.

Après avoir justifié le choix d'un corpus qui, illustrant les trois pôles du « Nouveau Monde » (le continent nord-américain, les Antilles, l'Amérique du Sud où Martí a séjourné en exil), doit permettre de travailler sur une notion cohérente de nation, du fait des caractéristiques communes données aux différentes collectivités de cette vaste aire géographique « par leur constitution récente, par leur rapport à la métropole ou à l'ancienne métropole coloniale, par le statut des créoles et des indigènes et par l'héritage de l'esclavage et des tensions raciales » (23), tandis que l'échelonnement temporel sur une centaine d'années « offre une vision diachronique de la manière dont ces problèmes furent abordés, ce qui s'avère particulièrement intéressant concernant la question de l'esclavage » (*ibid.*), l'introduction présente à grands traits les textes majeurs des trois auteurs (en particulier *Leaves of Grass* (1855) de Whitman, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) de Césaire, *Versos libres* (1882) et *Versos sencillos* (1891) de Martí), de manière à mettre

en lumière dans leur œuvre une « ambition nationale [...] nourrie de leur désir de liberté » (43) à la fois individuelle, politique et intime. Ce désir de liberté frappe leur entreprise – « donner à leurs compatriotes ou frères les moyens de cette liberté » – du sceau d'une démesure qui s'illustre « dans la dimension des espaces, des peuples et des histoires qu'ils prennent en charge et dans la complexité des tensions, comme celles héritées de l'esclavage, auxquelles ils se confrontent » (*ibid.*). Tels sont les aspects de cette vaste entreprise de (re-)fondation nationale que l'ouvrage se propose d'étudier en quatre mouvements, avant de consacrer son cinquième et dernier chapitre à la mise en évidence de leur réussite, qui tient dans « leur capacité à révolutionner le champ littéraire et la langue, dont découle la portée politique de leur œuvre, sa capacité à transformer le champ social » (43) – une faculté d'apporter, à l'instar d'un Kafka, une réponse « indissociablement stylistique et politique » à un problème « indissociablement politique et linguistique » (Deleuze et Parnet *Dialogues* 89), suivant le concept deleuzien de littérature mineure.

## Première Partie : La conquête verbale du territoire

Le premier chapitre de l'ouvrage analyse les spécificités lexicales des trois œuvres poétiques pour mettre en lumière la façon dont chacune s'émancipe du regard européen sur les territoires du Nouveau Monde.

Ainsi, Whitman célèbre la diversité et la prodigalité de la terre d'Amérique « comme un bien commun », mettant en exergue « la relation qui s'est créée entre le peuple et son territoire » (69) en intégrant des mots pour désigner des objets nouveaux et des surnoms pour dire l'ancrage des individus dans leur région d'origine. Les paysages et climats prennent une dimension de représentation symbolique du caractère national, « âpre et grandiose comme les prairies de l'Ouest » (*ibid.*), tandis que l'exotisme se concentre dans l'appropriation de toponymes amérindiens, de pair avec un silence maintenu sur les violences perpétrées envers les Premières Nations (dont l'extinction est présentée comme inévitable).

Césaire, quant à lui, prend le contrepied du stéréotype colonialiste des « Antilles heureuses » et bat en brèche tout exotisme, tout en reliant la représentation de la Martinique (avec ses espèces locales, sa topographie et sa ville coloniale) à tout un « imaginaire symbolique occidental, antillais, américain et africain qui trouve ses racines dans l'histoire de

la diaspora noire et va à l'encontre de tout mouvement de repli sur l'île natale » (69–70).

Chez Martí enfin, le rejet de la domination européocentriste (à l'origine d'une tradition d'auto-exotisme chez les auteurs cubains) passe par une déréalisation du territoire : « les poèmes de l'exilé dépeignent une relation à la terre natale vécue sur un mode intime dans lequel les éléments du paysage se fondent dans l'évocation des sentiments nostalgiques du *je* lyrique » (70).

## **Deuxième Partie : le façonnage poétique du peuple**

Interrogeant la notion de « peuple » chez les trois poètes, le deuxième chapitre montre que la quête de la liberté est un trait fondamental commun à la représentation du peuple qu'on trouve dans leurs œuvres. Cependant, la tonalité dominante diffère de l'un à l'autre.

Alors que Whitman propose « une vue d'ensemble de la diversité des styles de vie et des métiers de ses contemporains » (95), non pas figée en une image définitive mais unie dans la célébration d'une force physique et morale (dont le groupe social des travailleurs est l'emblème) qui garantit la liberté politique individuelle et nationale, Césaire au contraire déconstruit avec sarcasme les stéréotypes racistes tout en fustigeant les faiblesses morales de son peuple, usant d'une « violence de ton qui ne s'embarrasse d'aucune précaution oratoire vis-à-vis des oppresseurs ou des opprimés. Cette liberté de parole impose avec fracas l'égalité des hommes sans distinction de couleur » (96).

Enfin, les poèmes de Martí dépeignent le peuple cubain – caractérisé par sa situation historique de victime du pouvoir tyrannique de la Couronne espagnole – « comme un tout, plutôt qu'à travers ses parties comme chez Whitman » (95) : « Chez Martí la représentation du peuple est entièrement absorbée dans les objectifs de la lutte politique de libération. Le peuple cubain qui vit dans ses vers ne respire que l'air raréfié d'un patriotisme ardent et pur » (96).

## **Troisième partie : Le poète face à l'esclavage**

Le troisième chapitre s'attaque à une question centrale pour la compréhension des sociétés américaines : le fait social et historique de

l'esclavage, qui oppose « une sourde résistance » (97) à l'ambition de liberté affirmée par Whitman, Martí et Césaire.

Dans *Leaves of Grass*, dont les éditions successives précèdent puis accompagnent le déclenchement de la Guerre de Sécession, l'abolition de l'esclavage et la mise en place de la ségrégation raciale, le lecteur peut trouver « un éventail de représentations de Noirs qui va d'une peinture idéalisée de la vie dans les plantations à une représentation radicale de la souffrance et de la haine des esclaves, en passant par l'incarnation de l'idéal masculin et démocratique dans la figure du cocher noir » (140–41). La visée de Whitman, dans une Amérique déchirée par la question de l'esclavage, est d'offrir un espace de conciliation entre les parties – visée qui n'est pas bien reçue par ses contemporains, « plus sensibles aux exigences de la charité chrétienne que capables d'entendre une affirmation d'égalité absolue » (142).

Les *Versos sencillos* de Martí paraissent en 1891, alors que l'esclavage vient tout juste d'être totalement aboli à Cuba (en 1886), s'adressant ainsi à des lecteurs qui ont toutes les chances d'avoir connu des victimes de la traite (en particulier la traite illicite, dont le poète a été témoin dans son enfance), ou d'en avoir été eux-mêmes victimes. L'œuvre fait coexister « l'esclavage comme métaphore politique de la situation coloniale et l'esclavage comme fait historique » (141). Martí, qui a séjourné en Amérique du Nord au lendemain de l'abolition de l'esclavage, est très sensible au danger que les tensions raciales peuvent faire courir à l'unité de la nation cubaine qu'il rêve libérée du joug espagnol : invoquant romantiquement la lutte commune menée par les Cubains blancs et noirs contre l'Espagne au cours de l'héroïque Guerre des Dix Ans (1868–1878) imaginée comme purificatrice et unificatrice, le poète théorise en outre, au service de l'union de tous les Cubains, blancs, noirs, indiens ou mulâtres, une vision strictement antiraciste de l'humanité délivrée de l'idée erronée de « race ».

Si le poète cubain plaide encore pour l'oubli des violences passées comme moyen de réconciliation nationale, Césaire au contraire se heurte, à la fin des années 1930, à une amnésie collective qu'il entreprend de combattre : *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* est « une exploration méthodique de l'esclavage et de la traite grâce à une documentation historique précise et un recours à l'imaginaire là où les sources font défaut » (141). Sa visée n'est pas la confrontation raciale : c'est « une désaliénation des Noirs qui ouvre à la civilisation occidentale un autre avenir que la domination politique, économique ou technique sur le reste du monde ».

Comme chez Martí et Whitman, la liberté désirée par le poète « s'articule à une conception inclusive et égalitaire de la communauté » (*ibid.*).

## **Quatrième partie : La représentation des luttes fondatrices**

Le quatrième chapitre de l'ouvrage revient sur la façon dont les trois poètes abordent dans leurs œuvres les conflits armés (Guerres d'indépendance, Guerre de Sécession) qui, au nom de la défense de la liberté, ont marqué l'histoire des États-Unis, de Cuba et des Antilles françaises. Tandis que Whitman, né dans une Amérique indépendante, se concentre sur une guerre civile dont il a été le témoin privilégié, Martí et Césaire, nés dans les colonies, mettent l'accent sur la nécessaire obtention de l'indépendance « vis-à-vis des pouvoirs extérieurs qui les privent de liberté ou les menacent » (159).

Whitman, chantre des jours grandioses de la défense de l'Union, dans lesquels il voit « l'arrivée à maturité du peuple américain » (158) épris de liberté, « offre une vision unificatrice du conflit rendant hommage à la valeur des deux camps et projette la nation réunifiée vers un avenir commun » (182). Puis, au gré de l'avancée du pays vers la reconstruction et la modernité, l'accent se déplace, dans l'œuvre poétique, vers un « vœu de fidélité à la mémoire des disparus » (*ibid.*).

Martí se concentre pour sa part sur la question de l'indépendance nationale : analyste critique, dans son œuvre en prose, de l'histoire de l'indépendantisme cubain comme du modèle délicat à manier qu'offre le voisin américain, le poète réserve ses vers à l'exaltation de la mémoire des combattants assassinés par le pouvoir espagnol, tout en promouvant « un patriotisme universel, noble sentiment qui commande le sacrifice » (183).

Césaire, enfin, fait œuvre d'historien pour rétablir certaines vérités de l'histoire d'Haïti et des Antilles françaises, occultées en particulier par le « schœlcherisme officiel » (qui a longtemps fait de la République française l'unique acteur de la libération d'une population noire qui aurait subi son sort dans une passivité résignée) : réévaluation historique (de l'indépendance d'Haïti, de l'abolition de l'esclavage et de la Révolution française) et célébration poétique de grandes figures antillaises (Louverture, Delgrès) se conjuguent « pour permettre à la mémoire collective de jouer enfin son rôle dans "la reconnaissance du passé comme ayant été" (Paul Ricœur) » (183).

## Cinquième Partie : Poètes nationaux, littérature mineure

Le dernier chapitre de l'ouvrage envisage de résoudre le paradoxe au gré duquel les trois poètes doivent en définitive leur canonisation comme poètes « nationaux » à leur qualité même d'écrivains « mineurs » au sens de Deleuze et Guattari – qui définissent la « littérature mineure » par ces trois caractères que sont « la déterritorialisation », « le branchement de l'individuel sur l'immédiat-politique », « l'agencement collectif d'énonciation » (Deleuze et Guattari, « Qu'est-ce qu'une littérature mineure ? » 29 sq.).

On reconnaît ces traits distinctifs dans la vie et les œuvres des poètes, selon des modalités distinctes : la marginalité de Whitman tient d'abord à ses audaces formelles et thématiques (notamment le prosaïsme avec lequel il aborde la sexualité), qui le mettent en délicatesse avec les goûts de la majorité respectable. Martí, quant à lui, est maintenu à l'écart de la communauté nationale par une vie passée en exil, tandis que le recours à l'espagnol l'oblige à s'exprimer dans la langue de l'opresseur – difficulté qu'il partage avec Aimé Césaire, tenu en outre à la marge de la communauté littéraire métropolitaine par les préjugés liés à sa couleur de peau.

Dans les trois cas, la posture déterritorialisée permet au poète d'exprimer « une autre communauté potentielle » (Deleuze et Guattari, « Qu'est-ce qu'une littérature mineure ? » 30) que le travail herméneutique des lecteurs, toujours mis en échec par la langue poétique, toujours relancé, contribue à faire advenir – si bien qu'il n'y a « pas de paradoxe à être à la fois un poète national et un poète *mineur*, une figure révéree d'un ordre établi et un révolutionnaire, puisque le poète national est d'abord, chronologiquement et par nature, un poète *mineur* qui par son œuvre participe à créer la nation qui l'intégrera à son panthéon » (Conclusion 227).

Claire Hennequet offre avec cette étude, servie par une langue d'une grande clarté, une série d'analyses littéraires tout à fait riches et convaincantes des textes majeurs de Whitman, Martí et Césaire, dont la mise en regard apparaît originale et pertinente. On peut regretter néanmoins que les ambiguïtés touchant les rapports entre la « communauté poétique » visée par l'écriture et la « nation » (communauté culturelle ? Etat-Nation ? Fraternité noire (chez Césaire) ou latino-américaine (chez

Martí) ?) demeurent entières jusqu'à la conclusion, qui les constate encore explicitement (224), là où un travail théorique plus ambitieux aurait sans doute permis de mettre ces ambiguïtés mêmes sur le chevalet d'une passionnante problématique. Celle-ci aurait certes requis une exploitation plus approfondie des apports conceptuels de Benedict Anderson (évoqués en introduction puis abandonnés), l'exploration des apports de la théorie postcoloniale (dont le long questionnement de la notion deleuzienne de « littérature mineure » n'est mentionné, p. 226, que pour être disqualifié au nom de l'évitable contresens des « minorités »), ou encore des relectures de Deleuze par la théorie queer (Judith Butler, Didier Eribon par exemple), très fertiles au moins pour l'analyse de Whitman. Il faut avouer enfin que l'absence de toute allusion à la théorie de la Relation élaborée par Édouard Glissant dans le sillage de Deleuze et Guattari laisse le lecteur des pages consacrées à Césaire vraiment perplexe.

Ces quelques regrets ne doivent pas retenir de saluer la parution d'un ouvrage qui demeure fort intéressant, rigoureux dans sa démarche et d'une lecture suggestive par l'originalité de son corpus et les pistes théoriques qu'il propose.

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**Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, ed. *Mexican Literature in Theory*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2018. Pp. 305. ISBN: 9781501332517.**

This compilation of critical essays looks to expand the theoretical approaches commonly taken to Mexican literature from the nineteenth century to the present. As the editor points out in his introduction, literary criticism rooted in theory has often been viewed with suspicion in Mexican academic circles as well as in the work of “Mexicanists” abroad, both of which tend to privilege aesthetic appreciation, the philological construction of a national canon, and/or social critique. The contribution this book looks to make, then, is to expand the possibilities for reading Mexican literature through recent advances in a variety of theoretical fields as well as problematizing and thereby deepening established critical traditions. Organized chronologically (according to the date of publication of the literary works analyzed), *Mexican Literature in Theory* contains chapters drawing on seven main theoretical approaches, some of which overlap: Orientalism and Pacific studies (chapter 2), cultural history and the critique of liberal capitalism (chapters 3, 8, and 11), aesthetics (chapters 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, and 14), ecocriticism (chapter 6), disability studies (chapter 12), the discourse of violence and the state (chapter 13), and the fraught relations between literary craft and the marketplace (chapters 15 and 16).

Laura Torres-Rodríguez’s chapter on “Into the ‘Oriental’ Zone: Edward Said and Mexican Literature” opens the volume with reflections on the ways in which three Mexican works complicate the Western tradition of Orientalist representation. Engaging works spanning two centuries (Fernández de Lizardi’s *El Periquillo Sarniento* [1816], Rafael Bernal’s *En diferentes mundos* [1967], and Julián Herbert’s *La casa del dolor ajeno* [2015]), she traces a trajectory by which indistinctions between Mexican selves and Oriental geographies provide openings for critiquing the Mexican state. As her section title “Stretching Toward the Pacific” indicates, her chapter pays close attention to the trans-Pacific circulation of bodies and aesthetics, in which Mexican Orientalism, rather than an oppositional projection of the Western self over the Oriental other,

becomes a way of positioning oneself towards the other for the ends of self-critique. As she summarizes in her thesis paragraph, “Orientalism here goes beyond its conceptualization of faraway geographies, to appear as the same apparatus that operates inside the nation-state in the process of configuring a specific division of labor based on biopolitical distinctions and determinations” (13).

The second chapter, Ana Sabau’s “The Perils of Ownership: Property and Literature in Nineteenth-Century Mexico” inaugurates a series of historicist critiques of liberal capitalism. Sabau discusses the problematization of concepts of private property and the commons in representations of water during the Porfiriato in works by two authors, José Tomás de Cuéllar and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera. She argues that Cuéllar’s novel *El comerciante en perlas* (1871) posits that “private property is a relation of enmity, where the other is (almost) always a threat,” the private property in this case being a pearl harvesting area in the Pacific Ocean (47). In contrast, Nájera’s chronicles on water management in Mexico City portray water as “ungovernable nature, both scarce and abundant, fluid and volatile,” whereby it comes to signify “the perceived obstacles that Mexico was facing entering modernity” (49). She closes her essay by affirming that nineteenth-century literature “was an important tool in reconfiguring the relations to the commons, thus participating in the processes of dispossession, accumulation, and enclosures on the commons that characterized the second half of the century and that would later lead to the onset of the Revolution” (49).

José Ramón Ruisánchez Serra’s “Pale Theory: Amado Nervo and the Absential” discusses Amado Nervo’s work in relation to canon formation in Mexican literary criticism and historiography. Arguing that Nervo has been banished from canonicity due to the perception that his work is derivative of other Latin American and European authors rather than “raro” (strange, singular), Ruisánchez Serra proposes to recover this writer’s value for serious literary criticism based on his heavy influence on contemporary popular culture, particularly with regards to science fiction, sentimental journalism and a “national and in fact transnational affectivity clearly legible in popular music” (57). Dialoguing with Žižek’s discussion of exemplary books, Ruisánchez argues that Nervo’s work makes visible the “*absential feature*, which usually remains silent, ‘missing from our understanding’” (61). Although the connections between this “absential feature,” the “*raro*,” the canonical, and popular culture

itself are never really clarified, he appears to make the case that rather than singularity as an aesthetic feature, Nervo's more accessible style and manipulation of the trope of sincerity brings the inner workings of singularity (its tendency to make the commonplace and the sentimental disappear as inconsequential?) to the forefront and therefore displays literature itself as procedure: "In other words, literature (qua fiction) is the name of the oscillation between the (failed) rhetorization of the absential and the textual trace of this failure" (65).

Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado's "Mexican Revolution and Literary Form: Reflections on Nellie Campobello's *Cartucho*" argues that the literary forms that arose from the Mexican Revolution reveal the incompleteness of the Revolutionary state's totalizing drive to reorganize the productive and representational economies in Mexico following the end of the armed conflict. As he writes, post-revolution culture sought "to capture and territorialize the very upheaval against the history of extraction and accumulation into a subjectivity that would re-ordain the state and capital in the modernizing projects of postrevolutionary hegemony" (79). Rather than a "national allegory" supporting this project through the creation of its own institutionalized form, Sánchez Prado sees the "literature of the revolution" as putting on display its lacunae and its impossibility. Specifically, he analyzes Nellie Campobello's *Cartucho* as a novel whose form "imagines totality otherwise, via images that weave themselves below the surface of the text or an empathy and solidarity 'from below'" (82). According to Sánchez Prado, Campobello's revindication of Villista perspectives and defamiliarized portrayals of violence disrupt the narrative of national unity, immersing the reader in the trauma that the national allegory purported to sublimate.

Carolyn Fornoff's "The Nature of Revolution in Rafael F. Muñoz's *Se llevaron el cañón para Bachimba*" draws on Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of bodily affects in her discussion of representations of nature in post-revolutionary Mexico. She argues that Muñoz's novel depicts a revolutionary subjectivity that arises not only from social inequalities, but also from the affective encounter with the arid Chihuahuan environment. As she writes, "Muñoz reworks and elevates the clichéd cult around 'local color' such that the role of the nonhuman is ultimately resignified," as evidenced by the ambivalence surrounding the title word "cañón," which signifies both a geographical feature and a firearm (97). In the end, "Chihuahua's landscape is configured in two slightly contradictory

modes: as a space that gives material and affective importance to the idea of Mexican nation, but also a space that ultimately resists state – and even human – capture” (99).

Bruno Bosteels’s “Reading Rulfo between Benjamin and Derrida: End of Story” draws on these two theorists’ formulations of debt and the purported end of storytelling in modern society to propose a rereading of Rulfo’s work as simultaneously a deconstruction/“demetaphorization” of the hegemonic narrative of the Mexican Revolution and a retelling of it with an eye to recovering a collective memory rooted in affective encounters, a process that he views as decolonial. The two theorists are tied together through the trope of death: the death of the other as debt in Derrida and the death of the storyteller in Benjamin. In this way, the debt incurred by the death of the storyteller would implicate the reader in a project of collective remembrance rooted in affect as much or more so than symbolic mediation.

Ericka Beckman’s “Rosario Castellano’s Southern Gothic: Indigenous Labor, Land Reform, and the Production of *Ladina* Subjectivity” revisits the implementation of liberal capitalism in Mexico with a discussion of how post-Revolution education, labor, and land reform initiatives affected race relations in Chiapas, provoking upper-class anxieties that are represented in Rosario Castellano’s *Balún Canán* through a gothic aesthetics. Somewhat inversely from what it may initially appear, the threat of appropriation of rich *latifundistas*’ land is not the promise of a return to the commons, even if one managed by the state, but rather the shift from a colonial economy oriented towards exportation to a small-scale capitalistic economy powered by small and medium sized agricultural production. Therefore, despite the emphasis placed on land redistribution, the shift from indigenous forced labor to wage labor becomes the primary theme in this novel, and along with it the racialized reinscription of ladino subjects as they are incorporated into the formerly indigenous agricultural labor market, placing their ideology of white(r) supremacy into question.

Christina Soto van der Plas’s “Beginnings of José Emilio Pacheco” analyzes the writer’s poetics of temporality, particularly as they relate to repetition and rupture. She associates these two movements with the imaginary of disaster (or a disastrous history) in his work, particularly with respect to the dialectic of “creative destruction” and becoming. At the same time, she relates this fragmented poetics to the excess that poetic language in general embodies with respect to representation, an excess that

expands itself into silence. The “breaking point” between expression and silence, between repetition and rupture, would indicate the possibility of an event: “Between contingency and necessity, what is at stake is how the poem in its ‘today’ poses the possibility or impossibility of an event, or something that suddenly, ‘de repente,’ breaks the ‘rules’ of repetition by making the impossible happen” (167).

Pedro Ángel Palou’s “A Theory of Trauma and the Historical Novel: A Small Theoretical Treatise on Fernando del Paso’s *Noticias del Imperio*” oscillates between the creative and the critical in its approach to the historical novel, not least in its use of an aphoristic style. The author discounts the existence of the historical novel as such due to its explicit disassociation from the claimed objectivity of historiography and the fact that “even if it creates an illusion of the past, it lives in the present” in the sense that it relates to history only in the minds of its readers. This reflection leads to a second line of argumentation in which Palou affirms that for anything to become a “discursive event [in the sense of the telling of history], it must come from trauma” (178); additionally, the recreation of history in the reader’s (textifier in Palou’s usage) mind “demands, necessarily, participation in the catastrophe” (178). In this sense, the “testifier’s orphaned language calls to the textifier’s body, even if it has gone temporarily silent” (181). The excess that the event poses with respect to this process would thus surpass language and operate on the affective level of trauma. While the chapter does not make a wholehearted attempt to draw out this relationship within Del Paso’s novel, it does link this process to producing a form of “reconciliation” with the past rooted in “disappointment” (I would imagine “desilusión” in the Spanish original, which has somewhat different connotations), by which disappointment becomes an “analytical category” capable of producing a reconciliation with the past that does not erase its differences and the tensions between them.

Rebecca’s Janzen’s “Embodiment Envy: Love, Sex, and Death in Pedro Ángel Palou’s *Con la muerte en los puños*” combines a disability studies approach with Christopher Breu’s theorization of “embodiment envy” to argue that readers experience the recollections of the protagonist-narrator of Palou’s novel, a boxer from the lower-class Tepito *colonia* of Mexico City, in a vicarious way as a procedure for working out “their envy of the powerful bodies of those who produce goods and services” (206). According to the critic, this embodiment envy is linked to the fetishization of the character’s “drunken solitude” and sexual prowess.

Lilia Adriana Pérez Limón's "Visualizing the Nonnormative Body in Guadalupe Nettel's *El cuerpo en que nací*" proposes a reading of this autobiographical text as a "conceptualization of political communities through images of disability," locating the experience of vulnerability as a key factor in the rise of a politics rooted in the "being together" of affective encounter (211). Pérez Limón argues that the author's traumatic experiences relating to her ocular deformity and the ultimate impossibility of corneal reconstruction lead to an acceptance and "rehabilitative noncompliance" that rejects the nationalistic imaginary of the ideal citizen and allows her to imagine an alternate, more inclusive form of the body politic.

Oswaldo Zavala's "Fictions of Sovereignty: The Narconovel, National Security, and Mexico's Criminal Governmentality" dismantles the hegemonic "national security" narrative locating "organized crime" as a form of criminal exception to the rule of law. Carefully contextualized, the chapter makes the case that criminality has been a constitutive feature of the Mexican state at least since the 1980s, particularly through the institution of the DFS (Dirección Federal de Seguridad). This situation gives rise to what Zavala calls "criminal sovereignty." While the majority of literary and non-literary writing occludes this reality, subscribing almost completely to the fiction of national security, he argues that César López Cuadras's novel *Cuatro muertos por capítulo* "constantly deconstructs hegemonic discourse on drug trafficking on two different levels: first, by setting it against the testimonial experience of a humble family of drug traffickers from the Sinaloa mountains in Northern Mexico that refutes the mythical narrative of drug kingpins as formidable criminals, and second, by ironically reworking that same mythology that informs most cultural productions about the drug trade as the absurd but effective material for a commercial Hollywood action film" (237). In this way, literature recovers its critical function beyond its imbrication in the "neoliberal book market," which supports the governing narrative of drug trafficking and national security.

Brian Whitener's "The Politics of Infrastructure in Contemporary Mexican Writing" examines the intersection of genre studies with the transnational literary market to reexamine the debate over the cultural autonomy/external influence dialectic. Looking beyond the economics of circulation and distribution, Whitener argues in favor of a focus on the different forms of publishing infrastructure that make possible generic distinctions and thereby change and variation in literary forms. As he

states, “Unlike lenses such as the market or the commodity, which tend to homogenize, the concept of infrastructure allows us to see unevenness between different systems of textual production and circulation, in particular outside state sponsored and capitalist ones” (262). Examining the rise of recent artisanal “Cartonera” publishing houses in Mexico as well as digital media, Whitener diagnoses a movement toward “desapropiación” in recent Mexican literature that combats the “systems of production decimated by neoliberalism” (272).

Emilio Sauri’s “‘Dickens + MP3 ÷ Balzac + JPEG,’ or Art and the Value of Innovation in the Contemporary Mexican Novel” addresses similar questions of autonomy from the marketplace through the lens of novelist Valeria Luiselli’s digital experiment in collective storytelling, *La historia de mis dientes*. Sponsored by the Jumex juice corporation’s Galería Jumex, Luiselli engaged workers at the Jumex factory in Ecatepec, who contributed sound bytes of themselves reading the text, comments, plotlines, and photographs. For Luiselli, this collaborative process gave rise to a Dickensian novel for the 21st century. Building on arguments by Adorno and Nicholas Brown, Sauri argues that “aesthetic judgment – here synonymous with *interpretation* – presumes there is something in the text that makes it more than just another commodity for the market, a *meaning* that amounts to something more than the attempt to meet consumer demand” (289). In this sense, although Luiselli’s work was widely judged a failure by critics, Sauri argues that “the value of innovation lies in its failure, insofar as the failure to produce a meaningless work of art marks the success of a postcapitalist imagination” (290).

While not all the chapters in *Mexican Literature in Theory* offer groundbreaking advances in terms of literary theorization, they do provide insight into several emergent approaches and flesh out current lines of inquiry such as those that many of the authors have presented in prior monographs. In this sense, the book serves as a good primer on recent theoretical approaches to Mexican literature, and it will be a valuable resource for graduate courses on Mexican literature as well as for critics looking to keep up to date with recent developments in the field.

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**Harrod J. Suarez. *The Work of Mothering. Globalization and the Filipino Diaspora. Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2017. Pp. 209. ISBN: 9780252082962.***

Despite their status as the second largest minority in the US (Roley), Filipinos have often been described as “invisible” and “unassimilable” (Campomanes). However, the inauguration on 29 September 2018 of the groundbreaking Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies housed at the University of California Davis underscores the growing – and long-delayed – attention to Philippines Studies in the US.

Within this context of developing scholarship in Filipino-American literary criticism, in 2017, Harrod J. Suarez published *The Work of Mothering*. Drawing from Diaspora and Gender Studies, Suarez refreshingly examines works by writers Nick Joaquin, Mia Alvar, Jessica Hagedorn, Carlos Bulosan, Brian Ascalon Roley; and filmmakers Kidlat Tahimik and Francis Ford Coppola.

At the outset, the word “work” in the title *The Work of Mothering* refers to the wave of Filipino labor diaspora (Cohen) which, since the 1970s, compose a third of all Filipinos abroad (5). Among such OFWs or Overseas Filipino Workers, the majority are women who are trained to become “nurturing, submissive and maternal” (11). Although “perhaps nearly half of overseas domestic workers who identify as women do not identify as mothers” (Suarez 12), they are thus schooled in the work of mothering. Indeed, other writers<sup>1</sup> have already described such phenomena resulting in a “care drain” for the Philippines (Hochschild 3). Such mothers thus become, on the one hand, informal ambassadors of the nation; on the other hand, servants of globalization and capitalism. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Suarez mentions the following works that discuss overseas Filipino labour: Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care* (2003); Nicole Constable, *Born Out of Place* (2014); Kale Bantigue Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents* (2011); Anna Romina Guevarra, *Marketing Dreams* (2009); Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization* (2001) as well as *The Force of Domesticity* (2008) and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export* (2010).

interest of nation and globalization, Filipino women are thus obliged to maintain care, submissiveness and motherhood. Suarez, however, suggests a reading that disturbs the binary of nationalism and globalization. In particular, he “emphasizes the ways that literature and cinema disrupt the processes of nationalism and globalization” (Suarez 13).

Consequently, against such an understanding of maternity, Suarez proposes the idea of the “diasporic maternal” – a maternity which, like diaspora, neither submits to the nation nor to globalization. Rather than a geographical or sociological category, diaspora is used here as a “condition of subjectivity” (Cho 14).

To complement a framework of the diasporic maternal, Suarez employs an “archipelagic reading” practice “that intentionally falls into the gaps of our epistemological coordinates.” He does this by bringing out “those alternative imaginaries, a practice of reading beyond nationalism and globalization” (16). Commonly referring to “a chain of islands that trail away from the nation” (17), the archipelago, like diaspora, also unsettles the idea of a nation. The term’s etymological roots, *archi* (chief) and *pelagos* (sea), indicate “the waters surrounding those islands” – “a reverse side image of the nation” (17). An archipelagic reading, therefore, considers the “underside” of narratives; the ignored and illegible. By proposing an archipelagic reading of the “diasporic maternal” – Suarez’s main thesis – the author highlights the role it plays “in biopolitics [which] reminds us... of the limits that we too often disregard in producing knowledge” (159).

In the first chapter, Suarez looks into the relationship between writing and the diasporic maternal through an analysis of Nick Joaquin’s *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (1983) and Mia Alvar’s *In the Country* (2015). Chapters 2 and 3 study the diasporic maternal in the context of filmmaking and Hollywood productions that are problematized in Jessica Hagedorn’s novel *Dream Jungle* (2004), Francis Ford Coppola’s movie *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and Kidlat Tahimik’s film *Mabababangong Bangungot* (*Perfumed Nightmares*) (1977). In the fourth chapter, the links between the diasporic maternal and immigration are examined in Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* (1946) and Brian Ascalon Roley’s *American Son* (2001).

Indeed, what seems to be the book’s most refreshing contribution is its archipelagic close-reading of such canonical Fil-Am works. For example, Suarez’s focus on the metaphors of dictionary and language in *Two Navels* and sign-language in *In the Country* which, in both cases, are connected

to the (female) body (Connie's and Milagros'), demand for alternative kinds of writing that "do not cohere with globalization" (34).

In the author's analysis of the protagonist in *Dream Jungle*, Lina, who leaves her child to the care of Aling Belen and departs for the US, Suarez argues how she "becomes a different kind of mother, one not assimilable to dominant paradigms of motherhood" (63). Neither abandoning nor accepting the nation, Lina negotiates a diasporic maternal position.

The spectrality of sound in Kidlat Tahimik's film, *Mababangong Bangungot*, is juxtaposed with the visual. Suarez draws from Michel Chion's concept of the *acousmètre*: "a voice [that] has not yet been visualized," "a special being, a kind of talking and acting shadow" (Chion 21). To illustrate this, Suarez close-reads the film's depiction of Neil Armstrong juxtaposed with a voice-over that destabilizes the visual. As such, the visible is that which is rendered vulnerable.

Although much has been written about Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* – which is perhaps as canonical as Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*<sup>2</sup> – Suarez succeeds in providing an interesting archipelagic reading of two seemingly inconsequential scenes involving female minor characters. Compared to the Bulosan novel, Roley's *The American Son* features Ika, the mother whose silence is not synonymous with subservience. Rather, this silence "recognizes the reductive quality of an identity politics that pins its hopes on visibility" (147).

The biggest surprise – indeed a "plot twist" according to Suarez (161), or a spoiler to the readers of this review – is the author's analysis of José Rizal's death. In the book's Epilogue, Suarez proposes to approach Rizal<sup>3</sup> "not as the father of the nation but as a diasporic maternal figure." (164) To make his argument, Suarez draws from historical accounts of Rizal's execution and the biblical story of Lot's wife. Like the latter who looked back towards her burning city before crystallizing into salt, the former, as it is claimed, also managed to slightly look back to his firing squad, thus twisting and falling with his face toward the sky. Suarez reads this event, not as a turn towards the nation or empire but rather, as a "pivoting for the turn to the archipelagic future" (166). Tending toward that future,

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<sup>2</sup> Both novels are included in the Penguin Literary Classics collection. The only other two Filipino writers "canonised" in the series are Jose Rizal and Jose Garcia Villa.

<sup>3</sup> Rizal was deemed a Philippine national hero and author of two novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, works that helped spark the revolution against Spain.

*The Work of Mothering* offers an innovative reading into the margins of texts, thus questioning knowledge production and interrogating our epistemological systems.

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**Jeanne-Marie Jackson. *South African Literature's Russian Soul. Narrative Forms of Global Isolation*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017 (2015). Pp. 236 + vii. ISBN: 9781350030305.**

At first blush, it might seem far-fetched to ascribe a Russian soul to South African literature. However, Jackson builds a strong rationale for comparing Russian 19th century realist literature with South African literature of the interregnum, as Nadine Gordimer called the period after 1976.

Jackson's comparisons are guided by a strong theoretical consciousness and a very thorough knowledge of the two fields. Moreover, her comparison addresses important issues in comparative literature as well as in the study and understanding of a range of South African authors. She sets herself "the task of making global literary connections outside of – even in opposition to – the idea of global literature" (4) in order to bring about a more detailed understanding of such connections since, in her opinion, the idea of "global literature" is not comprehensive enough in scope. It tends towards including only texts written in English, canonizing a small group of authors and texts, and excluding differences from a range of places and across "rival scales of orientation" (local, regional or national, 6). She is, in short, looking for a more nuanced transnational literary practice (5).

This observation triggers the first impetus behind Jackson's comparison of Russia and South Africa in periods of social turmoil: she wants to expand the historical and linguistic context for understanding South African literature. In doing so, she seeks to move beyond the framework of postcolonialism in order to address what she perceives as lacking in the understanding of South African literature, namely information about its "own transnational projections and fascinations (especially those that bypass England and the United States)" (5). She finds no middle ground between a deep understanding of South African literature that explores its relations to its apartheid past and a wide understanding that links it to the idea of a "global and/or a world novel" (8). What is missing is

research into the paradoxical way in which being isolated in the local – and isolation is a guiding metaphor in this study – has transnational and global import. Her study thus aims to study the intersection of “local contexts and ‘big’ concepts” by means of a contrapuntal reading that “seeks to balance immediate realities *and* outward projections, the local compulsions *and* global inflections, of literary traditions conjoined at incrementally more complex levels” (9).

The second reason why Jackson undertakes this comparison is that Russia and South Africa, “during the most formative moments of their novelistic traditions, seemed almost quarantined from the international networks” in which they were economically or politically embedded (9). She is not claiming that the two nations really existed in isolation, but rather that a “widespread sense” of isolation can be as productive of literary expression as a sense of transnationalism. What Russia and South Africa shared during these periods was a “perceived ‘backwardness’” (20). Therefore, the challenge is to show how “a defining perception of being on the outside unfolds across key texts and moments in the development of Russian and South African realism” (20). Focusing on this perceived backwardness bypasses the more obvious link between the ANC and the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, Jackson argues that this link is but the tip of the iceberg of South African writers’ fascination with Russia.

And indeed, the rest of Chapter 1 is a very well-informed (and persuasive) exploration of the density of the links between Russian and South African writers, from Gordimer and Coetzee to Galgut, La Guma and Vladislavic, which leads her to the conclusion that appealing to Russia “seem[s] uniquely well suited to capturing key aspects of South Africa’s hyper-fragmented reality” (19). Linking South Africa and Russia is based on one of Jackson’s key assumptions, namely that “experience drives form” (14). In this light, she contends that Russian and South African realisms have developed differently from their European equivalents, as they paid more attention to the national incohesion of their time. In other words, they went against “the unifying logic that the realist paradigm so often seems to assume” (25). Jackson’s “underlying supposition” is that “Russian and South African realisms [...] evolve precisely in order to convey their sense of foundational disorientation” (25). Her study thus takes a different route: instead of moving from the individual to the collective or from the home to the nation or the global, Jackson contends that “a more holistic portrait of South Africa as it first uses and then echoes Russia

permits an organic convergence of the concrete and the philosophical" (26). In so doing, she strongly frames her study methodologically and epistemologically, while also anchoring it securely in social reality.

The subsequent chapters unfold roughly in a chronological order, though Jackson foregrounds conceptual clarity rather than historical salience. Each chapter focuses on a moment in South African writing and starts "with a key referential symptom and then works toward a larger formal epistemological condition" (27). In this way, Jackson's comparison, which looks unproductive at first, develops into a rich and illuminating work that "capture[s] the deep resonances between the two traditions" (*ibid.*) – and also tries to explain South African writers' fascination with Russia.

In Chapter 2, Jackson triangulates the Russian debates about realistic vs. radical revolutionary writing with Nadine Gordimer's 1981 novel *July's People* and Miriam Tlali's "revolutionary" novel *Amandla*, published in the same year. One of the core issues here is whether the protagonist can be representative of his or her social type (Lukács) and whether Gordimer's and Tlali's protagonists represent exhausted or vital new types. Jackson also examines whether realistic representation, in striving for balance, can be said to enable social change. She argues that these "formal trajectories" in the development of the anti-apartheid novel are complementary rather than oppositional and therefore cannot be understood apart from one another.

Much of the chapter provides a fine-grained discussion of realism and its limits in the light of the possible social role of the writer. In her reading of *July's People*, Jackson emphasizes the radical isolation in the novel and its exhaustion of the possibility of social action. For her, the novel demonstrates its formal inability of "clearing space for a change in dispensation" (68). It eventually focuses on the exhaustion of the heroine, Maureen Smales, as a representative positive social type and on the exhaustion of the liberating trajectory of anti-apartheid novels in general.

In contrast, Jackson describes Tlali's main character, Pholoso, as "the harbinger of collective liberation" (81). Yet, she considers Gordimer's and Tlali's novels as complementary in form and content. Formally, both "take stock of a turning point in South African history through the development of a central individual" (80). Moreover, Jackson regards the two novels as "mutually intelligible" on the basis of the "social-structural notion of 'type'" (*ibid.*): they "typify interlocking halves of key moments

in literary history” (*ibid.*). This kind of insight can only emerge from a comparison with Russian authors.

Chapter 3 contains an extended analysis of the meaning and use of animals in Tolstoy’s *Strider* (1886), JM Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999) and Marlene van Niekerk’s *Triomf* (1994). Jackson argues that *Strider* constitutes a case study of how animals can be used “to teach about our universal failures” (112). She contends that *Disgrace* shows “an animal’s instrumentality within one life” (*ibid.*). In contrast to David Lurie’s giving up the puppy for euthanasia in *Disgrace*, Jackson argues, the dogs in *Triomf*, though purportedly descended from the dogs left behind when Sophia Town was “cleaned up,” are not instrumentalized. Rather, they belong to the family while remaining dogs in their own right: not mere tools or usable things for the poor white family of the Benades. Gerty the beloved pet dog remains a dog, singular, literally in the flesh, and can only be allegorised after her death. Neither suffering nor companionship alone can define Gerty, Jackson seems to suggest.

Though Jackson might overstate the importance of the dogs in *Triomf*, she builds up an intricate and persuasive analysis around the position of animals, the ethics of their use, their suffering and their potential meaning. Again, her belief in novelistic structure shines through her familiarity with theoretical and philosophical discussions. She advocates the ability of what Ricoeur calls “robust narrativity” (97) to create some kind of meaning in the latter’s absence.

The continuing presence and rewriting of Chekhov on the South African stage make the comparison with Russian literature much more obvious. In her 4th chapter, “Retreating Reality: Chekhov’s South African Afterlives,” Jackson again presents an intricate argument – this time based on the narratological concepts of an event and of narrative kernels and satellites. She argues that Chekhov’s comedies are not concerned with big kernel events but rather with a complex exploration of subsidiary happenings, the ordinary happenings of life, which propel his plays forward. She writes that Chekhov’s “ostensibly hopeless provincialism” “conceals a complex and constructive ‘micro-narrative’ paradigm that accounts for the ‘timeless timeliness’ of [his] work” (135). Such a “micro-narrative,” she claims, means “the unfolding of meaning outside or even in opposition to the ‘plot’ of a given work” (*ibid.*). The ending of *The Seagull*, offers a case in point: the characters’ trivial card game provides the energy driving the play while Konstantin takes his own life backstage, enacting a dead-end in the plot.



Jackson misses this kind of minor narrative energy in the work of Reza de Wet, acclaimed *inter alia* for writing sequels and continuations of Chekhov's plays in resonance with South African circumstances. Jackson contends de Wet's response to Chekhov suggests a self-disabling isolation that contrasts with the self-energizing isolation found in Chekhov (156). De Wet's *Yelana*, for example, "reverses the momentum of *Uncle Vanya*" and ends with eroding "narrative as a source of meaning in its own right" (159).

In the final section of the chapter, Jackson explores the reception of de Wet's response to Chekhov. She points out that critics like André Brink demand referential truth to the South African reality from de Wet while non-South African critics "uphold a standard of timeless authenticity." Jackson proposes a different way to account for the impossible position she finds de Wet's work in: "neither of Chekhov's time and place nor of its own, neither formally novel nor the mimetic expression of an urgent reality" (165). In Jackson's view, "de Wet does not attempt to write a Chekhovian classic and fail but succeeds in writing a poignant elegy *for* the classic that invokes rather than reflects her own social position" (*ibid.*). This rather elegant solution is typical of the way in which Jackson brings nuance and complexity to the often stark oppositions with which critics operate.

In Chapter 5, Jackson takes up the issue of cosmopolitan literature and its relations to childhood and to place. Her point of departure is Nabokov's autobiographical text *Speak, memory* (1967). She stresses the way it remains grounded in Nabokov's Russian childhood. She asks whether cosmopolitan literature can exist in a kind of experiential vacuum. The other texts she analyses, namely Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water* (2009) and Lewis Nkosi's *Mandela's Ego* (2006), also make problematic any easy assumptions about borderlessness and "liberatory transnationalism" (171). She is looking for "the deeper systemic and epistemic shifts" (173) that globalization entails. The question is not, she writes, "of whether globalization is ineluctable (it is) but of whether and to what extent it can be *made meaningful* in narrative form" (173, Jackson's italics). Given the conservative aura surrounding the idea of "home" in a post-colonial context, the question boils down to finding the "abiding concerns that unite fictions of displacement across both space *and* time, which might acknowledge the nation's by-now foregone status as a 'ghostly' construct [...] while still taking seriously the allure of affiliation" (176). The complex answer she proposes foregrounds

a “simultaneous retreat and recovery that sacrifices some of the easy sanguinity of an unbounded world vision” (175).

Jackson’s analyses thus reveal “the double-bind of home” alluded to in the chapter’s title. The critic regards the fragmentary nature of Nabokov’s autobiographical aesthetic as a way of creating meaning through the uncovering of intricate micro-narratives buried in memory. Mark Behr’s main character Michiel finds “fluidity through emplacement” (198) since the farm and its people to which he returns have a much more vivid and textured presence, both ethically and narratively, than his rather bland cosmopolitan life in San Francisco. In fact, Jackson argues that the novel stages a return to the confined racial and social circumstances of the farm. This confinement is the “sole ground from which a narrative of interpersonal reckoning and personal transformation can emerge” (197). Again, in Nkosi’s novel, isolation and confinement prove productive. In this case, the “confined local space” of a rural village acquires “national significance” (29), complicating ideas about border-crossing and transnationalism. With her eye for complexity, Jackson perceives that the towering figure of Mandela as “rallying point” and “source of meaning” must be satirised for “local discord to emerge” (207). Again, Jackson points to the emergence of a lack of cohesion and the possibility that South African literature might be defined as a construct “determined through disruption” (in Leon de Kock’s words, qtd. 205).

Isolation and narrative form constitute two of the guiding threads of Jackson’s book, as also transpires from the Epilogue that sums up what she regards as her most important findings. Briefly, her analyses hinge on a complication of the idea of realism through a revisiting of kinds of isolation and a serious reconsideration of narrative form itself. But such abstractions necessarily flatten Jackson’s intricate, theoretically well-informed and erudite arguments. Readers should rather savour for themselves the richness and complexity of the overall argument as well as the subtle and profound insights Jackson gleans from her juxtaposition of South African and Russian literature.

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**Jenni Ramone, ed. *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Postcolonial Writing: New Contexts, New Narratives, New Debates.*  
London: Bloomsbury, 2018. Pp. 356.  
ISBN: 9781474240079.**

Edited by Jenni Ramone, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Postcolonial Writing: New Contexts, New Narratives, New Debates* makes a valuable and innovative intervention in the field of contemporary postcolonial literary studies. This volume is structured into three thematic sections that cover a variety of geographical areas (involving different linguistic contexts) and emerging narrative (even graphic) forms, even as they open up (or reactivate) a number of timely debates ranging from migration and refugeeism to gender and sexuality, down to the relationship between postcolonial studies and neoliberal economics.

In a first section devoted to “New Contexts,” Wendy Knepper’s “Another World is Possible: Radicalizing World Literature via the Postcolonial” discusses how postcolonial writing may contribute to the emergence of a radical strand of world literature that counters prevailing views of global development. To that effect, Goethe’s construct of *Weltliteratur* needs to be extended to include the voices of the dispossessed, peripheralized people. For instance, Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, which blends world literary canons with creolized language forms and indigenous knowledge, so-called “World Bank novel[s]” (22), which address inequalities resulting from neoliberal globalization, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Globaletics*, which draws on Marxist theory to advocate an inclusive form of alterity, gesture towards a “world literature of development and freedom” (26) that aims at being “universal without become universalizing” (27). In “The Global and the Neoliberal: Indra Sinha’s *Animals’s People*, from Human Community to Zones of Indistinction,” Philipp Leonard holds that the inequalities and oppression caused by the belief in free markets as a way to achieve a prosperous world community cannot be fixed, as they are not mere flaws but lie at the very core of this economic tenet. This is illustrated in Sinha’s fictionalization of the 1984 Bhopal tragedy,

a case in point exemplifying criminal corporate malpractice and well as the impossibility for local populations to seek redress in the context of transnational trade and production. This finding is further supported by Giorgio Agamben's concepts of "bare life" (44), i.e. life that can be silenced and brutalized in total impunity, and of "state of exception" (45), referring to a space from which any notion of law has been removed. In "Postcolonial Economics: Literary Critiques of Inequality," Melissa Kennedy argues that the 2008 financial crisis has lent new currency to the fiction of Dickens and Steinbeck. In the same vein, by looking into the materialist and financial aspects of imperialism that have tended to be neglected by culture-oriented theorists, contemporary postcolonial writers have depicted the processes by which inequality is produced and maintained in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, set in Burma, and Kiana Davenport's *Shark Dialogues*, set in Hawaii, offer valuable critiques of capitalism in which economic inequality appears as too complex to fit a simple colonizer-colonized binary. In "The Postcolonial Book Market: Reading and the Local Literary Marketplace," Jenni Ramone highlights the insights that can be gained about postcolonial texts by focusing on local literary marketplaces as an alternative to global approaches that "flatten out and repackage" (72) cultural differences in marketable ways, and stresses the significance of books and "instances of reading" (73) in postcolonial fiction. By way of example, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's collection of short stories *The Thing around your Neck* deals with such themes as Western preconceptions of African literature, reading as a tool for educational self-improvement or collaborative reading as an act of resistance to the global literary marketplace. In his chapter, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee revisits the colonial-postcolonial dialectic by discussing the themes of disaster and governance in (post) colonial India in the work of two seemingly irreconcilable writers from each era: Rudyard Kipling – for whom disasters such as famine can be addressed by effective governance and ultimately lead to romance – and Mahasweta Devi – who points at the impossibility of postcolonial governance resulting from the incomprehension and incommunicability between tribal lore and global modernity. In "Postcolonial Studies in the Digital Age: An Introduction," Roopika Risam describes the rise of "digital humanities" (105) and explores the numerous fields brought to the fore by a postcolonial perspective on digital tools such as "decolonial computing" (108), participatory cultures of Web 2.0, computer-aided textual analysis, etc. While these developments hold great promise for

disseminating and archiving postcolonial knowledge in order to fill the gaps inherited from imperialism, they often also mirror and prolong unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South.

A second section dedicated to “New Narratives” addresses a wide array of genres that have tended to be regarded as ‘minor’ in the postcolonial field, which has often given pride of place to the novel. Through a discussion of several contemporary Indian poets including Arun Kolatkar, Nissim Ezekiel, Eunice de Souza and Meena Alexander, Emma Bird argues that “Postcolonial Poetry” has been marginalized by literary scholars, whose readings have frequently privileged content over form. Instead, Bird contends that far from being any more depoliticized than prose, postcolonial poetry has been equally “informed by the violence, ruptures and historical legacies of colonialism” (128). In her chapter, she insists that approaches to this increasingly cosmopolitan form, which she considers “as a palimpsest, shaped by the simultaneous accumulation of regional, colonial and world histories” (133), should attempt to rearticulate aesthetics and politics. In “Postcolonial Citizenship in Australian Theatre and Performance: Twenty-First-Century Paradigms,” Emma Cox examines the ways in which three modern-day types of theatrical performance, namely verbatim theatre (based on the testimonies of refugees and asylum-seekers), dramatic productions involving refugee performers and site responsive live art and protest, seek to question Australia’s current asylum policies centred on the detention, harsh treatment and/or repudiation of all noncitizens whose presence on the nation’s territory has been deemed illegal. Cox demonstrates that as it “challenges prevailing political and media-related discourses surrounding the asylum-seeker and/or refugee” (142), Australia’s postcolonial theatre of non-citizenship provides a humanizing space for resistance where the dynamics of racialized belonging and the effects of territorial exclusion can be adequately faced. In “Graphic History: Postcolonial Texts and Contexts,” Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji focus on how the experience of modernity was appropriated in both the Francophone and Anglophone contexts by engaging with two different graphic fictions: Olivia Burton’s *L’Algérie c’est beau comme l’Amérique* sheds light on their author of pied-noir descent’s successive feelings of nostalgia, historical guilt and acceptance as she explores “her family’s background and role during France’s colonization of Algeria” (163), while *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* (edited by Vishwajyoti Ghosh) strives to set the historical record straight and, in particular, to recollect women’s histories obliterated from the 1947

South Asian Partition's official narrative. Not only do these multimodal texts illustrate forms of past imperial violence that have long remained incommunicable; they also testify to the "vivid persistence of collective trauma in postcolonial testimony and public history" (173). Deploring, like Bird, that "postcolonial critics' privileging of cultural identity as expressed within the novel has resulted in a lack of attention to issues of aesthetics and formal choices" (183), Jocelyn Stitt offers an ambitious overview of postcolonial and, more particularly, Caribbean life-writing in which the notion of genre is a central focus. As she points out, the crucial generic features characterizing these postcolonial autobiographies contribute, in their own way, to documenting the cultural specificities and local subjectivities produced by European colonialism. Kerstin Knopf's "Decolonization and Postcolonial Cinema" shows, through four distinct case studies, how Canadian, Brazilian, Australian and Nigerian filmmakers reject the hegemony of Eurocentric film discourses and deconstruct "the neo-colonial Western gaze" (192) in order to present, instead, "an Indigenous perspective" (195). While Shirley Cheechoo (Cree) and Marco Bechis (Chilean-Italian) are both concerned with Indigenous land reclamation movements that aim at denouncing territorial appropriation by white settlers in Canada and Brazil respectively, the Aboriginal director Richard J. Frankland humorously debunks white myths founded on the exoticizing misrepresentation of Indigenous cultures. Similarly, Nigeria's Nollywood deploys decolonizing strategies which clearly criticize the Western film industry's unmodern depictions of Nigerian identities. As for Jenni Ramone's interview with Seth Alter, it takes issue with the widespread societal perception that all computer games are necessarily anecdotal. Inasmuch as "Neocolonialism: Ruin Everything" (Alter's first video creation) forces players to rethink the extent to which their own uncontrolled capitalism may contribute to the ruination of the world, it indeed suggests that while postcolonial gaming "can't change the world any more than books or movies can [...] [it] can change how someone perceives the world" (212).

In the book's third part, entitled "New Debates," three scholars broach the prominent postcolonial topic of migration from fresh angles. In "Postcolonial Refugees, Displacement, Dispossession and Economics of Abandonment in the Capitalist World System," Stephen Morton explains how the logic of economic neoliberalism has framed the figure of the postcolonial refugee and made it impossible to distinguish between "the (legitimate) asylum seeker and the (illegitimate) economic migrant"

(or 'cimmigrant') – a “false dichotomy” (219) that permeates today's political discourses. In the same way as Mehta and Mukherji, he refers, more specifically, to all the women who were displaced and dispossessed of their bodies and (hi)stories in the wake of India's Partition, maintaining that they were then cast as disposable by a comparable capitalist logic. In her chapter, Subha Xavier first considers some foundational concepts in migration and diaspora studies, before pondering how aspects of these theories may, on the one hand, help reconfigure the postcolonial field and, on the other, be related to two representatives of the contemporary literatures of migration and diaspora. After indicating that the alleged feminization of migration was more likely to derive from an increased concern with gender difference in migration, Xavier sets out to outline the Chinese (but France-based) writer Shan Sa's “migrant feminism” (265), while the writings of Haitian-Canadian author Dany Laferrière are associated with the transnationalism that is said to characterize diasporic (rather than migrant) subjects. As for John Cullen Gruesser, he surveys some of the most seminal works published by scholars of “Postcolonialism and African American Literature” (such as Ashcroft et al.'s *The Empire Writes Back*, Henry Louis Gates Jr's *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* or Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*), so as to determine the extent to which these two hitherto distinct fields could benefit from each other's “theoretical terminology” (286) if they were willing to find a common ground collapsing the binarism that has opposed them to this day. Additionally, this section raises the questions of postcolonial sexuality and secularism. In “Postcolonial Sexualities and the Intelligibility of Dissidence,” Humaira Saeed shows, through reference to the novels *A Married Woman*, by Manju Kapur, and *Cereus Blooms at Night*, by Shani Mootto, how postcolonial texts can articulate forms of dissident sexuality that take local kinship structures into account and resist Western epistemologies and identity categories, as well as the “universalizing push of global homosexuality” (247) which, she submits, is but yet another form of imperialist capitalism that only allows for the incorporation of “race-, class- and gender-sanitized queers” (243). In “Faith, Secularism and Community in Womanist Literature from the Neocolonial Caribbean,” Dawn Mirand Sherratt-Bado discusses narrative texts by three Afro-Caribbean woman writers that emerge as alternative womanist forms to the male-centred, Western bildungsroman. In each of them, the young black woman protagonist suffers a moral or physical disease that can

only be cured by “obeah” (291), a syncretic form of folk medicine and religion that also morphed into a political tool of postcolonial resistance. Obeah and its derivatives, which are illegal to this day in the Caribbean, are thereby rehabilitated as valid epistemologies. In “Secularism in India: Principles and Policies,” Manav Ratti describes the peculiarities of Indian secularism, as well as the criticisms and challenges it has to face. As a consequence of several factors, among which democracy, India’s colonial history, its huge population and high percentage of believers, Indian secularism has close links with nationalism (as an antidote to sectarianism) but places a special emphasis on religious communities. The controversial concept of “principled distance” (312) allows the state to intervene to various degrees in different religions in the interest of democracy and nationhood, while persisting religious violence between Hindus and Muslims remains a major challenge.

Through its engagement with a range of pressing postcolonial issues, this advanced introduction, which includes a useful glossary of key critical terms, evidences the ongoing relevance, in today’s world, of the postcolonial and its “narratives of resistance” (7) to (neo)colonialism; it will, accordingly, give food for thought to researchers and students, as well as to anyone interested in postcolonial studies and their multifarious subfields of scholarship.

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**Dominic Davies, Erica Lombard, and Benjamin Mountford, eds. *Fighting Words: Fifteen Books That Shaped the Postcolonial World*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017. Pp. 279. ISBN: 9781906165550.**

*Fighting Words: Fifteen Books That Shaped the Postcolonial World* is the inaugural volume of a series entitled “Race and Resistance across Borders in the Long Twentieth Century,” which itself finds its origins in an interdisciplinary network launched by The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH) in 2013. The book starts with an oddly self-congratulatory note by the series editors (who describe their own advisory board as “a veritable powerhouse in the field” [x] and write that readers are about to discover a “brilliantly edited” [xi] volume), followed by an introduction in which the three editors of the book retrace the genesis of their project and outline its aims. *Fighting Words*, as Davies, Lombard, and Mountford report, grew out of a wish to provide a postcolonial counterpart to Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr’s *Ten Books That Shaped the British Empire: Creating an Imperial Commons* (Duke University Press, 2014). Whereas Burton and Hofmeyr’s volume underscored the role played by books in supporting Britain’s colonial venture, Davies et al.’s project focuses on the idea that texts are also “powerful tools for those seeking to critique and resist imperial rule” (4).

The editors of *Fighting Words* are acutely aware that the selection of books that they have operated “necessarily involves an element of arbitrariness” (20). From the onset, Davies et al. make it clear that they have chosen to include in their volume not only “re-evaluations of [...] canonized texts” but also “studies of overlooked resistant writing” (1). This fact may account for the absence of chapters on classical works such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) or Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), and conversely explain the presence of a section on Annie Besant’s *Wake Up, India* (1913), a collection of lectures that, according to contributor Priyasha Mukhopadhyay, “has been barely visible in historical and literary scholarship” and “has next to no claim to

a transnational reputation” (90). If it remains debatable whether all fifteen books analysed in *Fighting Words* have veritably *shaped* the postcolonial world as the subtitle of the volume suggests, what is crucially not in dispute is that the selected texts, which are examined in chronological order of publication, are each of considerable interest when it comes to exploring the concerns and complexities of postcolonial history and politics. This quality lends legitimacy to the editorial freedom exercised by Davies et al., who define their volume as a “pedagogic project” (18) that aims to give readers the tools to engage in a critical understanding of colonialism and its aftermath. In this ambition, *Fighting Words* undeniably succeeds.

Another daring decision that pays off is the editors’ broad interpretation of what constitutes a “book.” The material examined by the contributors indeed includes not only the expected works published as single bound volumes but also, for example, the initial run of the magazine *Transition* under the editorship of Rajat Neogy (1961–1968), and two autobiographies by Jawaharlal Nehru “here discussed as one ‘book’” (21–22). This inclusive approach to the idea of a “book” makes for a welcome diversity across the volume, an eclecticism that also finds expression in the wide range of analytical approaches adopted by many of the contributors. Beyond textual examination, most of the chapters leave pride of place to discussions of the books’ editing and publication histories, as well as to analyses of the works’ dissemination and reception.

The methodological echoes that reverberate across the volume are supplemented by thematic ones, so that readers are implicitly invited to engage in a fascinating comparative exercise. For instance, anti-capitalism, which inspired many anticolonial movements of resistance, is at the heart of the opening section by Dominic Davies on Marx and Engels’ *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), and it prominently resurfaces in different guises – often in the form of opposition to or collusion with neoliberalism – in several other chapters: Benjamin Mountford’s section on Frank Hardy’s *The Unlucky Australians* (1968) discusses the exploitation of the Indigenous Gurindji people by a multinational company in Australia’s Northern Territory, and the means of resistance deployed by this Aboriginal community to counter their mistreatment; Asha Rogers in her chapter shows how the first editorial of *Transition*, a magazine designed to promote creative and intellectual debates in the emerging postcolonial nation of Tanzania, was “[p]ositioned dangerously close” (190) to an advertisement for Coca-Cola, suggesting an alliance

with another form of imperialism; Erica Lombard, discussing Nelson Mandela's autobiography *A Long Walk to Freedom* (1994), cites the South African activist's complicity with neoliberal interests during his presidency as one of the reasons why the legacy of Mandela's struggle for freedom in South Africa remains more symbolic than material.

Many of the chapters in *Fighting Words* also concentrate on elements of form, and once again there are reverberations across the different sections. For instance, when Lombard describes Mandela's book as a work that largely conforms to the genre of the postcolonial leader's autobiography, she is referring to the characteristics of this type of narrative as outlined by Elleke Boehmer in her chapter on Nehru's *An Autobiography* (1936) and *The Discovery of India* (1946), a section in which Boehmer interestingly argues that the Indian politician uses "patterns of interpellation and self-projection" to "call the new postcolonial nation of 'all India' into being" (121). Generic considerations also feature in Janet Remington's section on Sol Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* (1916), which however focuses more prominently on the book's writing and publication histories and on its author's unsuccessful attempt to appeal to the British imperial government to directly intervene in discriminatory South African politics.

Directly linked to the generic features of the books under study and to their political objectives are the epistemological strategies underlying their authors' formal choices. For example, Johanna Richter's contribution on Guatemalan Miguel Ángel Asturias's *Men of Maize* (1949) largely attributes the "resistant potential" (157) of the novel to the author's decision to blend Mayan literary and philosophical traditions with European avant-garde strategies. Cheikh Anta Diop's *Nations nègres et cultures* (1954), discussed by Ruth Bush, can also be regarded as an attempt to restore the dignity of colonized peoples, but one which adopts a radically different approach in that it aims to "provid[e] a scientific basis for affirming the humanity of black Africans" (174). Diop's book famously retraces the origins of Ancient Egyptian civilization to sub-Saharan Africa and, in its insistence on the sophistication of African cultures, this work bears notable similarities to Joseph B. Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944), examined by Rouven Kunstmann in the volume. In this section, Kunstmann focuses on the reactions to the Ghanaian politician and intellectual's claim that the Akan people of Ghana held a monotheistic belief that formed the basis of a shared cultural ethnicity, which was itself "rooted in a common origin in either the distant Kingdom of Ghana or Ancient Egypt" (143).

Interestingly, Kunstmann recounts that Danquah's hypothesis about the ancient state of Ghana was then "borrowed" (143) by his political rivals, among whom Kwame Nkrumah, to defend the idea of a unified Ghanaian national identity. That *Fighting Words* includes a chapter on Danquah's book rather than on Nkrumah's better known autobiography provides an interesting illustration of how Davies et al.'s project particularly values the work of those perceived to be precursors in their fields. Indeed, references to the prophetic value of authors and their books abound in the volume. For instance, Imaobong Umoren identifies African American educator Anna Julia Cooper as a "visionary" (54) who, in *A Voice from the South* (1892), provided a thought-provoking examination of the "complex intersectional identities" (50) of black women in the US. In a similar vein, Reiland Rabaka uses the word "prophetic" (75) to describe the concepts of the Veil and the color-line that Cooper's male compatriot W.E.B. Du Bois developed (along with the idea of double-consciousness) to investigate the condition of African Americans in his well-known *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Frantz Fanon's vision in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) too is praised for its "foresight" (203) by John Narayan, who argues that the Martinican thinker "anticipated our neo-imperial present long before it fully materialized" (203).

Next to these postcolonial "prophets" of sorts, *Fighting Words* also devotes space to more ambiguous figures and works. For example, white British Emily Hobhouse's *The Brunt of the War and Where It Fell* (1902), which is examined by Christina Twomey, is an ostensibly laudable text that vehemently criticizes the British government for the inhumane treatment of Boer women and children in concentration camps during the South African War (1899–1902). However, as Twomey asserts, Hobhouse in her lifetime showed far less regard for the hardships endured by black South Africans in the same situation: she "always maintained that it was not her responsibility to investigate conditions in the black camps" (60) and made only "piecemeal efforts" (68) against racial discrimination in South Africa. Similarly ambiguous is British activist Annie Besant who, despite championing anti-imperial resistance in *Wake Up, India: A Plea for Social Reform* (1913), ultimately advocated "only limited freedom [for India] under British rule, rather than outright independence" (96), as Priyasha Mukhopadhyay suggests. A different kind of equivocality surrounds Australian Sally Morgan's best-selling memoir *My Place* (1987), examined by Michael R. Griffiths. The book recounts a young woman's discovery of her Aboriginal identity in a way that, Griffiths

explains, potentially leads the white Australian reader to over-identify with the Indigenous protagonist, thus possibly encouraging a dubious form of cultural appropriation.

The paragraphs above retrace but one possible interpretative trajectory through *Fighting Words*, a volume that additionally sustains readers' engagement thanks to the relatively short format of its contributions. The book also largely fulfils its objective of providing chapters written in a "pithy and accessible style" (18), with the possible exception of one section whose clarity is marred by unnecessarily convoluted syntax. Importantly, the volume achieves the rare feat of both providing ample material for reflection *and* leaving its readers wanting to know more about the books examined within its pages. In this sense, *Fighting Words* is a most stimulating read; it should be of considerable interest to a large number of students and researchers in postcolonial studies.

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**Gaurav Desai. *Commerce with the Universe: Africa, India and the Afrasian Imagination*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. Pp. 291. ISBN: 9780231364559.**

“Whatever our view of what we do, we are made by the forces of people moving about the world.”

*Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (3)*

Such a statement, one might argue, calls for taking stock of the various ways in which one perceives global (or planetary) collectivities and one's place within them. On an ideational (one might even say ideological) level, such collectivities function as what is often described as an “imaginary.” The idea of the social as imaginary, could be traced back to Sartre's “Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination” and Lacan's subsequent response to the same, wherein he postulates the intersecting realms of the “Imaginary,” the “Symbolic” and the “Real.” Within the Humanities academy, particularly in Euro-American contexts, contemporary discourses arguing for “imaginaries” as the basis for social collectivities can be predominantly attributed to the reception of Benedict Anderson's 1983 book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Anderson acknowledges an indebtedness to the scholarship of historians such as Eric Hobsbawm and proposes extending a modernist historicist approach to understanding the processes by which nations come to define a sense of nationhood and citizenry (Anderson 2). The book itself, one might argue, explores the complex ideational and ideological relationships between modernity and nationhood, as the sovereignty of the nation state in contemporary history derives its force from modern structures of governmentality. Anderson's work in *Imagined Communities* was particularly impactful in that it not only sought to explain the operationalities, both discursive and otherwise, underlying

a nation state, but it also furthered robust critiques of nationalism. However, as comparatists, we know from the history of our own field and disciplinary praxes, that a critique of nationalism often opens up possibilities for an imagination of the “Supra-National” (Guillén 3). However, such an opening of the “imaginary” happens almost in tandem, as we see in a work such as Edward Said’s *The World, the Text and the Critic* published in the very same year as Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. By the time we arrive in the 1990s and gradually approach the turn of the millennium, the “imaginary” as a conceptual and ideational notion becomes irrevocably attached to an understanding of the “Global,” as can be observed in works such as Arjun Appadurai’s 1996 book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*.

The purpose of such a brief history of “imagination” as a category within humanist scholarship over the past three decades or so, is to perhaps provide a better appreciation of the work Gaurav Desai attempts to present to his readers in *Commerce with the Universe: Africa, India and the Afrasian Imagination*. Globality, as understood within a contemporary humanist discursive context, is most often tied to a postmodern postcolonial epoch, in quite the similar fashion that “modernity at large” is often tied to a colonial epoch. However, as Appadurai eloquently sums it up, “We cannot simplify matters by imagining that the global is to space what the modern is to time” (Appadurai 9). Arguing that in many societies, globality, like modernity, lies “elsewhere,” he posits a variety of cultural examples of such ‘elsewheres.’ One in particular stands out in relation to Desai’s book, Mira Nair’s 1991 film, *Mississippi Masala*, one of the several examples of an “Afrasian Imagination” cited in *Commerce with the Universe*. The reference to Nair’s film figures in the last chapter of the book where Desai discusses Mahmood Mamdani’s *From Citizen to Refugee* in the context of the aftermath of Idi Amin’s historic 1972 directive mandating the evacuation of Asian (particularly South Asian) peoples from Uganda. The expulsion order was, however, unclear regarding Ugandan citizens of Asian/South Asian descent. One might argue that Amin’s imagination of a Ugandan nation extended only to an ethnically Ugandan citizenry. However, his concerns, as Amin admitted on several occasions, were focused on the almost monopolistic position held by historical entrepreneurial South Asian families within the economies of the newly independent East African countries – families such as the Mehtas or the Madhvani of the Mehta and Madhvani groups of companies respectively that currently have investments and operations



across the globe in India, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, West-Asian countries and North America (Jørgensen 288, 290).

The military coup that overthrew Apollo Milton Obote, the second democratically elected President of independent Uganda and Idi Amin's subsequent rise to power, arguably was a truly "post" colonial crisis. Amin's directive mandating the expulsion of South Asian peoples from Uganda, almost a decade after the country's independence from Britain, could justifiably be understood as negotiations towards the defining of a sovereign citizenry. However, as Jørgensen explains in his history of modern Uganda, the chain of events leading up to the anti-Asian directives of 1972 were a complex combination of cultural and economic factors (186). It is precisely such a complex intermeshing of the cultural and the economic, in the context of new national sovereignties in Eastern Africa, that Desai's book seeks to explore. In such a sense, the book seems to address processes of cultural transferences, of resonances and dissonances, and of residuals and emergents in a passage from the colonial past to a postcolonial present. Therefore, though a discussion of anti-Asian sentiments in East African countries comes only towards the end of the book, one might see such a historical moment as a useful entry-point into Desai's project in *Commerce with the Universe*. He presents the reader with a broad historical context for contacts between the South Asian peninsula and East Africa starting in the early colonial period, leading up to conflicting sentiments regarding the Asian "presence" in postcolonial East African countries. Therefore, the frame that Desai poses, of commerce as both "romance" and "conflict," is effective in understanding a history of colonially mediated contacts between South Asia and East Africa. The stereotypical image of Indians in East Africa has been that of the "dukawala" or the shopkeeper, a characterization that, as Desai explains, authors such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o problematize in works such as *Weep Not Child* and *Wizard of the Crow* (3–6). Such a problematizing of Asian stereotypes in the region, he argues, indicates a critique of "racially and ethnically" based nationalisms. However, before one can begin to understand the value of "forging" ethnically plural and racially diverse nationhoods, it becomes important to understand the underlying forces operational within such histories (3–6). Therefore, the large historical grand narrative that Desai engages with in this book is not merely the movement and presence of South Asians in East Africa, but rather the entire "imaginaire" that forms the basis of fields of inquiry such as Indian Ocean studies.

Beginning his study with a reading of Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, Desai offers a possible cartography for Indian Ocean historiographies differing from dominant occidental frames. His reading of Ghosh's work from such a perspective forms the central argument of the first full chapter in the book. The unique genre defying form of Ghosh's narrative allows for an exploration into the vast plural worlds that came into existence through contacts facilitated by sea-routes across the Indian ocean dating farther back than the twelfth century. Despite having its flaws and its implicit favoring of "free-market economics and the market-oriented state," Desai argues that Ghosh's narrative provides an imagination of trade and commerce that defined the narratives of many twentieth-century Indian travelers to East Africa (45). He explores such accounts in subsequent chapters. Before launching into his readings of narratives and texts from such twentieth-century Indian travelers, Desai sets up working frames for reading "Asian Texts and Lives" in a context of colonially mediated contact. In chapter three, titled "Post-Manichean Aesthetics," he explores the extents to which such contacts between Indian travelers and the peoples of East Africa were shaped by a shared colonial history, one that was of course experienced in vastly different ways by the two. In the two following chapters, Desai explores the lives of South Asian travelers and entrepreneurs in East Africa, starting with two early twentieth-century Parsi travelers, Ebrahimji Adamji and Sorabji Darookhanawala. Chapter four reflects and analyses the impressions of East Africa we receive through the eyes of Adamji and Darookhanawala, as indicated in accounts of their travels. Chapter five, on the other hand, focuses on the early entrepreneurial triumphs of Indians in regions such as Kenya, Uganda, the Congo, and Southern Sudan. In this chapter, Desai focuses on the lives of the founders of some of the largest business empires operating out of Eastern Africa today. The stories of Nanji Kalidas Mehta (1887–1969), Manubhai Madhvani (1894–1958) and Madataly Manji (1918–2006) form the core of Desai's understanding of commerce as romance and conflict (139). In Mehta's autobiography, he observes, we find "a remarkable account of the life and travels of a man who came of age in the era of colonially mediated mercantile expansion" (121). Across these three autobiographical narratives we move from such an "era of colonially mediated mercantile expansion" (121) to the later apprehensions and reservations regarding the vast economic influence wielded by entrepreneurs of South Asian descent in postcolonial East African countries. The mercantile romance

that started with early twentieth-century Indian travelers, as Desai states, soon became a fraught nightmare for the first generation of Indian entrepreneurs born in colonial East Africa (150). Subsequently, independence from colonial rule and the rise of ethnic nationalisms in nascently sovereign East African countries, called into question the loyalties and citizenships of peoples of Indian descent in countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Chapter six provides a brief history of the Indian presence in Nyerere's Tanzania and the somewhat different tracks followed by Tanzania and Uganda in addressing questions of a plural and integrated citizenry. It is precisely such a question of a location within East African citizenries that chapter seven returns to, in presenting a reading of M.G. Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*. Comparing *The Gunny Sack* to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Desai argues that Vassanji's narrative served an "inaugural role" in introducing a history of South Asians in East Africa to an anglophone literary readership (173). While directly engaging Julius Nyerere's vision of a socialist Tanzania, it also captures the everyday lived realities of South Asian immigrant communities in countries that were struggling with defining national and nationalist sovereignties in the context of a postcolonial nation state. The final chapter rounds off the discussion on postcolonial nationhoods with a reading of Mahmood Mamdani's *From Citizen to Refugee* (205). Mamdani's book documents his own experiences of life in the Kensington refugee camp in England along with several other Indians who had been expelled from Uganda by Amin's regime. The book maps a historical trajectory whereby Mamdani and several Ugandans of South Asian descent were expelled from their country of either birth or citizenship. In conclusion, Desai restates an earlier response to the "Naipaul brothers" who has suggested that East African Asians had been "uninterested in the life of the imagination," while invoking Paul Gilroy's hope of "imagining political culture beyond the color line" (215).

As Desai expresses in his concluding chapter, *Commerce with the Universe* is not a book that seeks to reify a sense of Asian exceptionalism. In positing an "Afrasian Imagination," it becomes a book not only about imaginaries or imagined communities, but more importantly about imaginations in and of the Afro-urasian landmass as a whole, and the historical forces of people moving about it across time. However, in positing Afrasia as its primary concern, Desai's work is of particular significance within growing concerns regarding the complex nature of dialogues across Southern globalities both within the academy and

beyond. As an early-career comparatist working in both the literatures and cultures of Africa and South Asia, Desai's work is particularly encouraging to me. The question I have often found myself asking is whether it would be possible to envision a South-South dialogue that is not mediated through Western Euro-American epistemes. In my humble estimation, Desai's work in *Commerce with the Universe* begins to point towards possible avenues for such dialogues. I am not saying that the history of contacts between Africa and South Asia has not been fraught. However, through their somewhat shared histories of coloniality and postcoloniality, the two regions of the world share in many of the same struggles of decolonization. They are also engaged in similar struggles in negotiating competing global neocolonialisms.

In a recent conversation with a Nigerian colleague, I was surprised to learn of the immense popularity of Indian soap operas in Nigeria. I always knew Bollywood films had a global circulation. However, I found it hard to understand that serialized television melodramas that more often than not choose domestic skirmishes between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law as major plot-lines had much cultural carry-over. As Desai's effectively does in *Commerce with the Universe*, I wish to emphasize that there have always been imaginations of the Other. The latter often do not function on the macrocosmic levels of imaginaries that define a nation or a citizenry. They are, however, indicative of the forces of movements about the world on the level of microcosmic contacts between cultural alterities. In such a sense, any project that seeks to understand a relationship with otherness fails in part if it cannot account for such microcosmic acts of imagination. Given the subject of the book, and the author's own dexterity in navigating such imaginations of otherness, the René Wellek Prize it received from the American Comparative Literature Association was most fitting. While interrogating fundamental premises of locationality and directionality within fields such as postcolonial studies, subaltern studies and Indian Ocean studies, Desai's work also echoes Wellek's own vision of literary scholarship becoming an "act of the imagination" (Wellek 171).

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**E.V. Ramakrishnan. *Indigenous Imaginaries; Literature, Region, Modernity.***  
**Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2017. Pp. 274.**  
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This volume, compiled from a series of lectures presented throughout India and abroad by the eminent Indian comparatist, E. V. Ramakrishnan, takes as its point of departure the fact that India (as well as parts of India) contains multiple worlds made up of a plurality of languages and that Comparative Literature, much more than postcolonial and other postmodern theories of literature, offers a viable means of grappling with Indian literatures in its ability to study cultural mobility. In fact, Ramakrishnan offers a call to arms to Indian Comparative Literature to take on this important task. In this volume, he undertakes to study modernity in India by tracing back the regional variations of its numerous traditions.

Section I begins by looking at the impact of English education and the print medium on Indian culture, particularly in its introduction of the normative practices of reading, writing and translation from oral to written culture. Ramakrishnan first focuses on Malayalam novels, the role the English-knowing elite played in their dissemination, and the impact they had introducing a concept of modernity. He also examines how Indian languages sought accommodation through a rediscovery of native traditions, especially Tamil, and sought distinctions between pure languages and hybrid tongues through the creation of a category of the “folk” tradition.

In Chapter 2, Ramakrishnan looks at the translation practices in the 19th century and in the first decade of the 21st century. Initially, translation served as a strategic attempt to move away from the hegemony of the Sanskrit language. He takes particular aim at Indologists who refused or were unable to see agency in modern Indian language translations. The author draws then a parallel between Orientalism and modern Indology. Ramakrishnan takes particular issue with the work of the Sanskritist Sheldon Pollock, who by tying his work to recent critical

theory, carries on the Orientalist tradition by refusing to take account of the multilingual ethos of regional languages and their cosmopolitan traditions. Ramakrishnan compares Indology's appropriation of postcolonialism's premises – an inability to take on the ground reality in India, to Comparative Literature's breadth of inquiry.

Chapter 3 continues this discussion of the gulf between theory and experience by looking at devotional (Bhakti) and Dalit (formerly Untouchable) literatures. Ramakrishnan enlists Bakhtin and Ambedkar to criticize hegemonic systems centered on European rationality and the Indian caste system, respectively, as in the case of how one can resist assimilation into hegemonic discourses. The disconnect between theory and real life is particularly relevant to the situation of Dalits and naturally segues into Chapter 4 which takes on the “nightmarish underbelly” of the globalized world and examines how there is a temptation to withdraw into nativism and nationalism, when a community bereft of the legitimacy of its own discourses, tends to look elsewhere for validation. In particular, he examines how the theory of multiculturalism is ultimately unwilling to engage the Other – an argument that this reviewer has also endorsed in her own work. Chapter 5 further develops this argument by examining the politics of identity formation, particularly the various minority discourses in India today, and especially in the new generation of Kerala Muslim writers and the Dalit community.

Section II opens with an examination of the social imaginary as it related to Tagore and how he helped define the modern Indian subject in his poetry and prose. Here, Ramakrishnan finds another example of how Hinduism has been co-opted (as it is today) in the service of nationalism and its homogenizing effect on the body politic. Succeeding chapters in this section examine other cases of this homogenizing tendency in the work of Basheer, Ghosh, Devi and Anand. While colonization brought new knowledge to authors, it also alienated the people from their roots, as seen in Ramakrishnan's examination of Nemade's novel *Kosla* and its exposition of the philistinism of cultural and educational institutions. Ramakrishnan sees a deepening divide between rural and urban experience in the post-colonial era where minor works in English are celebrated as international literature, when at the same time much more substantial work written in regional languages, even when available in English translation, is ignored. All these tendencies lead Ramakrishnan to question the legitimacy at the core of the notion of the nation and to wonder whether there is a need simply to reimagine it.



This point is further developed in chapter 10's interesting comparison of Malayalam fiction and Gabriel García Márquez. Here the author looks at the reception of Latin American fiction, and especially Magic Realism, in Malayalam. Ramakrishnan sees parallels in Kerala's confrontation with modernity and Magic Realism's depiction of Latin America's crisis of authenticity, where narration becomes an act of resistance to reclaim a lost community. Chapter 11 returns to the fraught issue of the fate of the regional literatures that find no place in postcolonial criticism, even when they are available in English. As this reviewer has pointed out elsewhere, this literature is ignored because it counters the master narrative of postcolonial criticism with respect to India that avoids the post-Independence and non-English realities. Ramakrishnan shares my concern with modern criticism's inability to engage with the continued oppression and displacement of various groups at the hands of South Asians, drawing on the examples of the crisis in Kashmir and the situation of Sri Lankan Tamils.

The final section of the book begins with an examination of the rise of an educated elite in the 19th century and its complicity with oppressive aspects of the Western colonial worldview. The symbolic capital of English was used to critique the aesthetics of neo-classical Sanskrit. So too did the project of modernism employed in the translations of Shakespeare. Orientalists of the past, as well as Indologists of the present, exploit the elitism of the Sanskrit cosmopolis. Just as English was used by the British to displace Sanskrit, so even today it is used to regulate, objectify, and classify Indian languages. The literary then becomes the site of contestation, as in the case of Dalit literature and missionary critiques of caste. With the rise of a collaborative class, translation is enlisted in the process of self-fashioning

Chapter 13 examines orality in the Indian context and its multilingual traditions. Ramakrishnan notes that since regional cultures are not constructed along identical lines across India, histories of Indian literature need to reclaim cultural products that have been relegated to backyards of folk literature and left out of the canon because of the distinction between the folk and mainstream artificially imposed by colonialism and replicated in postcolonial times. We need to get rid of colonialism's alien codes of representation, as they continue to operate in standardizations and exclusions.

The next two chapters use Lefevere to talk about Kerala/Malayalam literature as refractive rewritings. The author also investigates the role of

translation in shaping modernist poetic sensibility in Bengal, Malayalam and Marathi. Ramakrishnan shows how Modernism is very different in different modernist Indian traditions. Finally, the author returns to the problem of canonicity using Malayalam literary historiography's quest for modern cultural identity in Kerala as a case in point. The fraught issue of canonicity was aided and abetted by the Sahitya Akademi's approach to canon formation (i.e. unity in diversity) that has effectively sidelined Muslim and Christian writers. The reincorporation of Dalits into mainstream Malayalam literature and the redefinition of literary history from the margins has done much to reverse this trend.

The essays collected in this volume, while dealing with a variety of subjects, all point to Ramakrishnan's main thesis: there are more things in Indian literatures, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your postcolonial criticism.

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**Elizabeth Jackson. *Muslim Indian Women Writing in English. Class Privilege, Gender Disadvantage, Minority Status*. New York: Peter Lang, 2018. Pp. 170. ISBN: 9781433149955.**

In discussing the very slim corpus of “Muslim Indian Women Writing in English” – 4 writers and a dozen volumes in all – Elizabeth Jackson has judiciously further narrowed her field by specifying “class privilege, gender disadvantage and minority status” as the triple foci of her study. Curiously, all the adjectives designated to describe the subject of her study are exclusive in some way or other, and latent in them are the effects of exclusion as well as exclusivity. The discourse of feminism challenges the patriarchal order of things in the time and place wherein patriarchy constitutes it: deprivation of various sorts is inflected by, even subordinated to, patriarchal gender organisation which frames the lives of women and men in society (a section on female power as surrogate patriarchs as well as the patriarchal bargain makes us aware of this fact, 145–9). The questions which follow arise from this context, and do so because the author has conscientiously dealt with all aspects of the matter through categories of analysis currently fashionable and hence unchallenged. This book is such a professional study that we are led to reflect upon the bases of the “profession” of comparative literature as such, a situation we are faced with directly in the title itself: “Muslim Indian Women Writing in English.” One may begin to ask, has “Muslim Indian” the same resonance as “Indian Muslim”? On what grounds are we putting one description before the other? Is one a preferred identity over the other? Does the order of words in a phrase designate their importance to the subject they describe or is it the whisper of history that makes us give one term apparent – political – priority over the other? The very carefully mapped out title of the book reveals to us the constraints within which work on the real lives of women in society is arrayed – the sociological categories can contain narratives of a single aspect of women’s lives, but there is no way in which they exhaust the experience of inhabiting those categories simultaneously as a living breathing woman, as the fiction considered in this book shows, sometimes contradictorily. Intersectionality attempts to

complicate the terrain but rarely is the narrative able to keep the different “sections” in active dialogue with one another, which is imperative for the understanding of lived experience. From chapter 2 to 4, the author does present to us the contradictory aspects of such lived experience. In doing so, she shows how the attempt to link underlying social ideology to it, detectable in the choices made by the characters from different chronotopes – disaggregates into different aspects of an entire life spent in a patriarchally organised society. Gender practices engage with – support, resist, reject or adjust to – patriarchy in the form it takes within family, society, religious community, state.

This brings us directly to the problem of organising a scholarly study of literature along categories of sociological interpretation. This does not imply a critique of the book, which makes a valiant effort to let literature speak for itself, showing the awareness of contradictions highlighted above. However, the works analyzed in this study are tightly bound into chapters according to their thematic content, a standard procedure when examining literature through social science categories. This book contains only a single chapter placed at the very beginning reminding us that we are reading fiction, rather than extended interviews of random participants in a focused survey on precisely what the subtitle claims describes their lives: minority status, gender disadvantage and class privilege. This framing device, added to *Muslim Indian*, as pointed out earlier, exhibits the contradictions and the apparently impossible situations experienced by these women.

This contradiction stands out despite the author’s attempts to cover various aspects of a category in every chapter subsections. Trying to capture the weft of life in a general rubric is bound to provide doubtful answers – some women in a given classification may not share the views exhibited by others in their “category,” while some women’s lives resist any attempt to categorise. Jackson discusses at length the preponderance of one identity over the other in the chapter “Religion and Communal Identity,” concluding that class is a greater force than religion in depriving women of whatever constitutes their natural right. Hence one wonders why the title of the book insists on placing “Muslim” before Indian. Is it a knee jerk reaction against the denigration of Islam worldwide, as some people mindlessly link it with terror instead of scrutinising the specific time, place and cause for the disturbed milieu in which Muslims have been confronted with the additional burden of being held responsible for

this phenomenon? If class truly constitutes the factor prompting women's exploitation rather than communal identity, then all Indians, be they of any religion whatsoever, will be subject to the same forces, and there is no need to single out the Muslim woman for special focus.

However, perspectives are bound to change as time passes – the books and authors considered span a period of fifty years, during which India became a sovereign entity and a functioning democracy. As Jackson points out

Religion is not a particularly prominent theme for any of these Muslim authors...We have also seen that communal identity is an increasingly important factor in the lives of the characters in the later texts. In the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries we note a growing sense of hardening of communal divisions, with Muslims being part of an embattled minority, whether or not they are religious. (156)

So ironically, religion does play a role: a politicised one. A democracy is committed to protect its minorities. The Muslims in India, as the result of history, represent the largest minority in the country. Does this imply that class privilege may not be enhanced by minority status, but that patriarchal oppression certainly is? What is identity in the context of the plurality of India? Is it a question salient to Indians today because of the need to interrogate the undercutting of the importance of caste, class or gender through the prioritising of religion and separate exclusive cultures? Jackson does not need to address this matter for the writers considered do not write of contemporary times – the latest book dates from 2006, paving the way for the dawn of the situation we find ourselves in today. The gender ideology practised in Muslim society differs from that of Hindu society. However, the power of patriarchy, though admittedly not its shape, remains the same in all societies. While the Koran instructs that all are born equal and that woman has certain rights Hinduism and Christianity did not give her, the power of masculine privilege, regardless of which society we are concerned with, subverts the dictums of the Koran by designating men as the conduits to spiritual and other types of wisdom, and keeping women within the confines of the patriarchal family structure. Examples of this are legion in the eyes of the writers examined in this book. Gender thus can be privileged over class: writing of Samira Ali's character Layla in *Madras on Rainy Days*, Jackson singles out the relation between a socially and economically privileged bride and her disenfranchised groom – among Hindus this could also occur along

the lines of caste. However, gender hierarchy triumphs through marriage. Jackson comments “Thus the narrative emphasises the inherently inferior status of a wife to her husband regardless of their relative social classes.” (130–1). In *Reaching Bombay Central*, the porter imposes upon the timid heroine, whose life has been spent in deferring to men. In Attia Hossain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, the destabilising effects of different gender ideologies upon women in patriarchy can be observed in the fate of Aunt Saira and her friends, the “new Muslim woman” (139).

Jackson offers a narrative construction of the negotiations with patriarchy gleaned from the works of four writers who are women, Muslims, Indians. They obviously belong to a class which gives them the privilege of an English education, leading to an experience of life both behind the purdah and before it in an India which grows from a colony into an independent secular democracy. At the time when the works of fiction analyzed are set: “Elite Indian women [...] were well aware of feminist ideas but often living in family structures imposing gender subordination softened by class privilege” (129). The novelist’s task is to probe the lack of fit Jackson outlines in sociological terms. As readers of scholarly writing, we should feel prompted to wonder at the subtle forces of change already manifest in literature but not articulated in social science theories until they became threats to the harmonious life of a plural society. In most of South Asia, no literary production can exist in the coloniser’s language without the context of an older written tradition of literature. In every language that may be called modern Indian, we can discern the start of a conversation with the west rather than the limited idea of the west prevalent in a world of Anglophone supremacy. Jackson fails to consider this aspect of things, though her awareness of it is evident early enough in her remarks on women writing in Urdu and their similarity in education and class with those writing in English. Given this realization, placing Anglophone writing at the basis of theorisation about South Asia skews Jackson’s research field. It limits it in a way that restricts the practice of comparative literature.

Considering the importance of the plurality of belief and experience, the idea of “India” does not constitute a homogeneous whole. India is the home of many languages, religions and cultures, constituting a plural society that survives on the negotiation of this plurality as everyday experience. Accordingly, Jackson should combine a sense of synchronic diversity with her diachronic approach. However, scholars of Indian writing, whether they be Indian or foreign, do not seem to privilege this

perspective. Evidently, foreign scholars face a greater challenge in learning that both diversity and overlapping histories, languages and customs are complementary to each other; that caste identity is commonly experienced in overt and covert ways in the very structure of social life itself, and that gender discrimination rides piggyback on every other form of discrimination available in patriarchal capitalist society.

Jackson's study offers a very apt example of a species of "comparative approach" which fixes the other/woman with a sympathetic "objective" gaze, trying to construct a history of her emotions with the flow of events underlying her historical being. However, it would be necessary for the critic to indicate what may be the areas of concern and to identify their causes. First, the categories used in this book to study experience show themselves to be contradictory even when applicable without qualifications. Subjective realism and free indirect discourse enable critical distance and involvement, a position of looking at rather than looking through. Jackson refers to the "social realism" of some Indian English writers in order to explain why women writers in general and Muslim ones in particular, do not receive much attention, even from a scholarly perspective. Similarly, the non-Muslim women writers in English during the postcolonial period remain less popular than their male counterparts like Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth who are described as writers of "the implicitly mainstream Anglophone Indian novel (6, quoting Priyamvada Gopal). Jackson's subtle approach relies on narrative strategy. She establishes distinctions in her corpus on the basis of the nuances of realist fiction which she divides into subjective realism and social realism (13). All writers, male or female, who use the latter aesthetic garner more popularity; women writers whose "fictional worlds are unashamedly domestic and their characters inevitably female" (167) generally adhere to the subjective realist narrative style. The centrality of the male perspective, identified with the "public" sphere, still constitutes a barrier to interpreting the experience of women and men in society as interactive within a structure of feeling. This is evident, Jackson argues with examples of extrapolation, in "patriarchal bargains and negotiations" (134–35) theories, as well as in Shangari's "surrogate patriarchy" thesis (*ibid*). With sympathy but with no less sharpness, Ismat Chughtai and Qurratulain Haider have critiqued a similar phenomenon in their Urdu writings, their writing styles being more experimental than those of the authors discussed by Jackson. Should Jackson have placed Haider's novel *River of Fire* in conversation with the work discussed in her book, certain

questions of reception of literature among Western educated women writers, Muslim and otherwise, could have been brought up. Does the staid realist paradigm of most of the women writers mentioned in this study, whether Hindu or Muslim, reflect what the writers were interested in reading? Does the history of literary reception of English realism in Indian languages impact the writing styles of the first few generations of women writers? Does the narrative style of someone like Jane Austen, a preminent figure in English Literature courses, influence those women writing in English? This history of reception, or even a brief mention of it, is not addressed in contemporary critical and scholarly engagements, which favour a sociological categorisation of experience. Sadly, such approaches limit the scope of comparative practice.

Comparative methods provide us with the means and the material to study alterity and difference as intrinsic ways of being human. To pin them down into categories would be an injustice to the tremendous courage of the women who preserved the contradictions inherent in such differences. Indeed, their criticism ought not to be silenced nor should the sheer tragic force of their lives be diminished or reduced in any way through our own limitations. Jackson's study, in conscientiously trying to keep the complexity of lived experience intact despite the non-literary categories of analysis deployed, foregrounds the valuable role of literature and highlights the need for appropriate modes of understanding it.

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**Janet Wilson and Chris Ringrose, eds. *New Soundings in Postcolonial Writing: Critical and Creative Contours*. Leiden and Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2016. Pp. 296 + xxiv. ISBN: 9789004326415.**

This wide-ranging collection of critical essays and creative writing offers a highly welcome tour d’horizon of world Anglophone studies. It assembles essays, prose and poetry in honour of Bruce King, the octogenarian maverick scholar, jazz lover and world traveller who in the course of his “literary and musical peregrinations” – as he calls them in his autobiography – not only met many literary giants (often at a time when they were still budding writers), but also published a large number of essays and books that made decisive contributions to conceptualizing the emerging field of world Anglophone writing. Several of the critical and literary contributions in this volume pay tribute to Bruce King’s powerful presence in the field of world Anglophone studies and set up a wide-ranging conversation spanning all the regions where King himself was active: the Caribbean, England, South-East Asia, and New Zealand and the South Pacific.

*New Soundings in Postcolonial Writing* also provides a comprehensive interesting snap-shot of the current state of the field that Bruce King was active in for most of his academic life, a field that used to be known as “Commonwealth Literature,” that King himself has famously referred to as “New Literatures in English” or “New National Literatures” and that many have habitually referred to as “Postcolonial Studies” from the 1990s onwards.

There is, of course, a certain incongruity in the fact that Janet Wilson’s and Chris Ringrose’s introduction to the volume suggests that Bruce King is to be honoured for his “remarkable contribution to the understanding of postcolonial literatures,” while King’s own critical work has largely bypassed the term ‘postcolonial’ as a critical category. King’s truly stunning list of publications encompasses only two ‘postcolonial’ titles, both of which – the edited collections *Post-colonial English Drama: Commonwealth*

*Drama since 1960* (1992) and *New National and Post-colonial Literatures: An Introduction* (1998) – collocate the ‘postcolonial’ with other critical categories. His most incisive publications – e.g. his path-breaking *The New English Literatures: Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World* (1980), his magisterial *The Oxford English Literary History, Vol. 13 1948–2000: The Internationalization of English Literature* (2004) and his collected essays *From New National to World Literature: Essays and Reviews* (2016) – have explored the potential of other critical concepts to elucidate the emergence and further development of Anglophone literatures worldwide.

This incongruity is compounded by the fact that not only Bruce King’s work but also most of the contributions in this volume seem to bypass the conceptual frame set up by the editors. The first two pages of their introduction set out a somewhat self-congratulatory account of the inevitable rise of postcolonialism that reiterates the fallacy that has bedevilled postcolonial literary theory from its very beginnings: the conflation of a critical analytical method (‘postcolonial theory’) with a whole academic field (‘postcolonial studies’) and the subject area of that theory and field (‘postcolonial literature’). Thus “postcolonialism” is apostrophied as a “movement” (xii) that presumably encompasses writers, scholars and theorists, while “postcolonial studies” not only seem to hold conceptual sway over the field of (“postcolonial”) Anglophone literatures worldwide, but literally seem to call them into being, as the editors assert that both the critical and the literary contributions to *New Soundings in Postcolonial Writing* “are associated with the discipline of postcolonial studies and might be seen as products of this broad field” (xi). Following this line of thought, the editors also claim that many contributions to their volume testify to “the project of re-examining the literatures and cultures of decolonized nations under the disciplinary banner of postcolonial studies” (xii).

A cursory look at these contributions shows that the field of world Anglophone studies is indeed thriving (as are the diverse Anglophone literatures across the world), but that the willingness of practitioners in the field to rally behind the banner of postcolonial studies is not particularly pronounced. Most contributions do not even mention the term postcolonial; some mention it but do not work with it as a theoretical category; some work with the term, but in a very circumscribed way; and the only contribution that can really be said to hoist the postcolonial banner is, in fact, the most problematic essay in the volume.

Kathleen Gyssels' essay "From 'The Rivers of Babylon' to *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes*: Intricacies of the Postcolonial and Postwar Jewish Condition" provides an interesting tour d'horizon of literary engagements of African American and Afro-Caribbean writers with Jewish history and the holocaust, but shrinks the idea of the "postcolonial" to slavery and its legacies. In a reductive move typical of a variety of postcolonialism particularly popular in the USA, the postcolonial is exclusively defined in terms of what Michelle M. Wright (2015) has called "Middle Passage Epistemology" and is thus made to radically exclude other (post)colonial experiences in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Pacific that are not predicated on the legacy of slavery. A brief transdisciplinary glance at recent work in Memory Studies (such as Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* [2009], a seminal study of the strong and strained relations between Jewish and anticolonial memories in the 20th century) might have helped both to open up the concept of "the postcolonial condition" and to avoid awkward conclusions such as that "the condition of slavery resembles in many respects that of the persecuted Jew" (55).

Two more essays employ the 'postcolonial' as a critical category, albeit in much more precise terms that evade fuzzy catch-all notions such as "the postcolonial condition". Bénédicte Ledent's "The Many Voices of Postcolonial London: Language and Identity in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004)" scrutinizes two well-known Black British novels to gain insights into "the cultural plurality of postwar London" (87). At a time when Brexiteer anxieties are tearing Britain apart, Ledent's sober analysis of the "inherently multiple, impure and unpredictable" role of English in *White Teeth* (84), the "fusion and confusion that characterize London" in *Small Island* (91) and the "redefinition of Englishness" at work in both novels (92) shows the potential of literary studies to address the 'great questions' of the day not through ideologized discourse, but meticulous philological labour. Geetha Ganapathy-Doré's "A Postcolonial Passage to England: Michael Ondaatje's *The Cat's Table*" also employs 'postcolonial' terminology in her analysis of Ondaatje's migration novel, but ultimately perceives *The Cat's Table* in terms of a transition towards "the contemporary novel" (108) and an instance of "the transition from the postcolonial moment to the globalization moment in the history of the novel" (96).

Globalization – not in the incarnation of a capitalist conspiracy, but as a sociocultural configuration that presents new challenges to literary studies – and world literature are two key categories taken up

in this volume. They not only figure prominently in Ganapathy-Doré's essay, but also in Laetitia Zecchini's "'A Message in a Bottle': On the Pleasures of Translating Arun Kolatkar into French" that presents the bilingual author writing in Marathi and English as a "pirate of a poet" who "derides debates over the 'right' to translate or the 'right' to write in English, and challenges the patrimonial urge to guard a culture or a tradition from possible perversions of history or 'foreign' hands" (118); Zecchini describes her own urge to translate Kolatkar's work as the desire to ensure that this author "would register on the map of world literature" (115). Marta Dvořák's "Intertext, Architext, and Métissage: Anita Desai's Negotiation of Cultural Gaps" explores Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and *In Custody* against the background of "global tendencies in literary creation and cross-cultural dialogism" (134) and seeks to develop a literary mode of analysis that "discloses the manner in which the literatures of the globe can be brought together both cross-culturally and architextually" (135). Highlighting the negotiation and translation of cultural differences in Desai's work, Dvořák suggests that "the view of alterity as a feature of a material location, rooted in a specific spatial, socio-political, linguistic or religious context" may shift back to an enquiry into "the distinction between the self and epistemic Other (arguably destined to dissolve)" (147).

This view is supported by a number of contributions that engage in a critical scrutiny of such "material locations" and move beyond both a celebration of self-enclosed local, national or regional contexts and identities and the notion that such an identity must necessarily emerge from "writing back" to a putative centre towards a literary sounding of transculturality, translocal entanglements, and the specific features of local modernities. While John T. Gilmore's "The Rock: Island and Identity in Barbados" is largely based on a more conventional understanding of landscape informing the literary imagination, J. Michael Das's "A Perpetual Surprise: East Indians in the West Indies" underlines the cultural complexity at work in the Caribbean by moving the role of "New World Indians" centre stage in his discussion of creolization and cultural openness in the work of Lovelace, Naipaul and Walcott. In a similar vein, Robert D. Hamner's, "The Present Absence of the Father in Derek Walcott's Poetry" scrutinizes how Walcott develops the literary means "whereby the poet may be *in* and *of* the island even as his imagination transports him to the farthest reaches of the earth,

physically and spiritually” (29), while Muneeza Shamsie’s “Pakistani English Novels in the New Millenium: Migration, Geopolitics and Tribal Tales” unfolds the recent history of Pakistani English novels as “a discourse which both looks unflinchingly at the problems of the troubled land and celebrates its cultural riches” (166), but also sets up intricate relations with the “klose-knit Pakistani community-in-exile” (153) and features protagonists “that glide effortlessly across South Asia’s national boundaries” (164). Arvind Krishna Mehrotra’s “Jejuri-Bandra-Jejuri: Strolling with Kolkatar” unpacks the rich literary world opened up in Kolkatar’s *Jejuri* poems while strolling through the ‘real’ Jejuri in Maharashtra, and Gordon Collier’s “Read Instructions and Shake Carefully Before Use: Fragmented Wholes in Narratives by Bill Manhire and Gregory O’Brien” searches for “narrative ways of celebrating the homegrown without succumbing to parochialism” (193) in New Zealand writing that turn “the anxious quest of a small nation for worldwide recognition” (201). Together with other New Zealand authors, Collier argues, Manhire and O’Brien have produced novels in which “New Zealand is always a ‘real’ if not a realistic presence”, but that also contribute “to the slow and sadly affectionate leavetaking from the tradition of realism” (213). Finally, in his “‘The Biggest Adventure’: Indigenous People and White Men’s Wars,” Geoffrey V. Davis (whose sudden death in November 2018 sent shockwaves across the worldwide field of Anglophone literary studies) explores Patricia Grace’s *Tu* and Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road* and examines a facet of indigenous literature in Canada and New Zealand that provides fascinating insights into the often sidelined history of indigenous participation in World War I and II, but also testifies to indigenous cultures’ entanglements with global history.

By way of conclusion, *New Soundings in Postcolonial Writing* displays thought-provoking contributions from across a burgeoning field that seems to have outgrown the name it is conventionally known by. Janet Wilson and Chris Ringrose have put together a volume that shows how alive the field of Anglophone literary studies is and that indeed honours Bruce King’s lifelong explorations in this field, not least by showing how seminal many of his contributions have been and (in the part dedicated to creative writing) what an impact his personality has had on many practitioners in Anglophone literatures around the globe. Whether the (hopefully numerous) readers of this excellent book will come away with

the idea that what has been sounded out in this volume is “Postcolonial Writing” is anybody’s guess.

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**Daria Tunca and Janet Wilson, eds. *Postcolonial Gateways and Walls: Under Construction. Cross/Cultures*, 195. Leiden and Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2017. Pp. 347. ISBN: 9789004337671.**

*Postcolonial Gateways and Walls: Under Construction* reads like a provocative title for a volume that announces both a certain audacity and cautious urgency. In an age of raging discourses and scathing sentences poured out against migrants, refugees, or caravans by unscrupulous politicians, the reference to an apparently unfinished business – still “under construction” – has the virtue of urging readers to take stock of a situation, assess its potential hazards, and contemplate productive solutions. The planetary commotion prompted by the United Nations Global Compact for Migration makes this volume a seasonable read, and the editors are well inspired to frame their collection of essays not just from a thematical perspective, but also from a disciplinary outlook, so as to interrogate the state of postcolonial studies and think beyond the literary field.

In their introduction to *Postcolonial Gateways and Walls*, Daria Tunca and Janet Wilson prepare the ground for an edifice organized in four chapters, each addressing aspects that either bind or tear cultures apart. The potent metaphors of ‘gateways’ and ‘walls’ help to conceptualize representations of (dis)connecting forces at play between people and cultures, the latter not limited to nations and ethnic groups, but also encompassing disciplines. This, admittedly, is one of the virtues of the book: it does not spin out metaphors merely for aesthetic benefits; it takes them beyond their face value and aims at ethical ends. Consequently, the organic construction of the volume helps expand the metaphors and engage in thorough discussions of migration flows, literary appreciations thereof, and their attendant complications on a global level.

Ultimately, metaphors help to envisage situations in “more familiar, concrete” terms, Tunca and Wilson note (ix), provided they do not estrange from realities nor reinforce the neo-colonial agenda. Therefore, ‘gateways’ and ‘walls’ themselves are scrutinized as elements that bind or

bar, on many different levels, not just geographical or political, but also moral or academic. As a matter of fact, the editors are unambiguously making the case for reexamining the discipline of postcolonialism and are inviting readers to unpick metaphors as constructive tools, more specifically in literary spaces and textual occurrences (xi). To avoid lingering on hybrid or border-crossing images that could congeal sterile or deceptive tenets, *Postcolonial Gateways and Walls* is an invitation to pursue Homi Bhabha's agenda, and reevaluate signs across cultures.

The architecture of the volume, organized in four main sections, reflects the dynamic and multidimensional perspectives adopted by its authors. The essays included in the first part – “Gateways and Walls: Between East and West” – foreground Turkey, and more specifically Istanbul, as a central trope. Gareth Griffiths' timely reexamination of Fanon's discussion of the veil sheds light on the stakes of changing legislation of dress codes – in particular of the Islamic headgear, in Turkey, Europe, or elsewhere. Sartorial impediments once proved powerful weapons of subversion, but the author shows that “clothing borders” still determine colonized subjects whether they don or abandon the veil (18), this time across many spaces and dislocated cultures. Griffiths' cultural and political contribution is a welcome preamble to the next, more literary, subsections.

Indeed, the subsequent disquisitions tackle a variety of authors and texts: In “As Rare as Rubies,” Elena Furlanetto draws perspicuous analogies between Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* and *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* and Salman Rushdie's best-known novels, thereby pointing to the empowering potential of postcolonial critique for the subaltern. Adopting a similarly diachronic and transcultural perspective Gerhard Stilz elaborates on the intriguing “Bosphorus Syndrome,” not unfamiliar to Orhan Pamuk's “hüzün,” a culture-induced nostalgia. Stilz's panoptic observations of peoples expanding along the shores of the glorious river illustrate “this long process of bridging and barring” (56), which makes Istanbul an ambiguous yet promising space. Both Padmini Mongia's and Marta Dvořák's essays make audacious assumptions, the former by interrogating Amitav Ghosh's unacknowledged response to Joseph Conrad, the latter by probing the “dialogic elasticity” of English for writers on the Indian subcontinent.

Part II of the volume, “Under Construction: Nations and Cultures,” constitutes a more uneven or fragmentary set of contributions, due to



the disparities in tone and intention. The reader may find it slightly more demanding to navigate the many roads borrowed here, from Australian philosophy to West African and Caribbean notions of nation, to Sri Lankan novels, among others. This, though, is not said to disparage the intrinsic quality and highly knowledgeable essays that make up this second section. In “Towards an Australian Philosophy,” Marie Herbillon effectively disentangles and aligns Murray Bails’ complex *Pages* with the broader postcolonial project which, she insists, must be apprehended through “cultural pluralism” (89) and a rethinking of Enlightenment. Equally ambitious is Bronwyn Mills’ “Image-i-nation” model, which makes for a wide-ranging examination of the concept of nation illuminated by forays into languages and cultures from West Africa and the Caribbean, and significantly upends old premises.

Simran Chadkha’s and John C. Hawley’s essays make for instructive reads that reflect upon the potentialities of literary texts to interrogate the relations between the colonial and postcolonial. “Refugees and Three Short Stories from Sri Lanka” highlights the pedagogical and curative potential of storytelling with a human touch to raise awareness and prompt action. The perusing of such narratives, Chadkha suggests, is part of the academic agenda to prevent the negative stigmatization of refugees. Albeit framed in the context of the Indian subcontinent, her contribution shines a light on the perils of exclusionary identity policies resulting from poor asylum policies across the world. In “Gateway to the Unknowable” Hawley posits historical fiction as indispensable material to deconstruct and reinterpret stories and histories.

Deepika Marya concludes this section by bringing the discussion back to epistemological questions relative to the place of postcolonial literature in the broader context of world literature. In so doing, the author reclaims postcolonial “worldings” to re-imagine a world order, and summons prominent thinkers in the process – Fanon, Auerbach, Wellek, Damrosch, Casanova, Said, Morrison, an all-embracing and over-ambitious demonstration. Still, the recourse to novels by Tayeb Salih, Thomas Mofolo, and Shrilal Shukla does not suffice to substantiate the initial argument, despite the commendable attempt at contemplating unexpected constellations and revisiting scales of comparison. But the author’s references to a history of resistance underpinning world literature to thwart coercive globalizing impulses and promote social justice are noteworthy. In the final analysis, this second part of the book certainly offers much to ponder over.

Then comes a question, opening part III of the volume: “The Border: Wall or Gateway?” This section is probably the least metaphoric, the borders presented in the essays being concrete walls, frontiers, or boundaries. They exist, (have) existed, and/or will exist in texts and contexts, as gateways to build networks of mementos or layers of palimpsests. Claudia Duppe’s conflation and subtle parsing of texts by authors hailing from New Zealand and writing on the Berlin Wall – Cilla McQueen’s *Berlin Diary* (1990) and Romania-born Kapak Kassabova’s selected poetry and prose – illustrate how a “physical landmark” (196) and “political paradigm” (201) standing as “a symbol of cultural conflict and contact” (194) can ultimately be refracted in a multitude of contexts and serve as a compass to find one’s bearings in an ever-changing world.

The next essays in part III focus on other postcolonial localities, namely South Africa, Canada, and India. Carmen Concilo examines Ivan Vladislavič’s production to discuss the representation of the wall in South Africa’s urban spaces and literature. Drawing on Heidegger, she problematizes “the dialectic between hospitality and hostility” (206) of this “rooted icon” (206). Vladislavič’s works, Concilo argues, bespeak that inclusion and exclusion are not mutually exclusive due to “the need for a philosophy of *Mitsein*” (216). Vera Alexander’s ground-breaking contribution – “Enclosed: Nature” – beautifully cracks the codes of nature in her inspirational exploration of Carol Shields’s “textual mazes.” She dislocates and re-evaluates the rapports between humans and their environment by ingeniously infusing her ecocritical analysis with garden architecture and horticultural design. Finally, Goldnar Nazideh addresses the issues of mourning and “narrative haunting” (245) through memory images in Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*.

The last section of *Postcolonial Gateways and Walls* opens yet another building site in the composition of the volume by adding a gendered perspective. Going back to the overarching theme of the book and the global conversation on migration, Elisabeth Bekers compares Caryl Phillips’s *A Distant Shore* and Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*, which both humanize the plight of displaced persons from Africa to Europe. Phillips and Unigwe push the boundaries of the slave narrative genre by giving access to the personal experience of protagonists faced with the traumatic experiences of eviction, racism, and prostitution. Devon Campbell-Hall deals with the exteriority, materiality, and (in)visibility of aging Asian women’s bodies and confronts the subversive “magical-realist transformation” of “desexed crones” against Graham Huggan’s

“postcolonial exotic” (281), which the main protagonists of Ravinder Randhawa’s *A Wicked Old Woman* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* strongly resist.

The two remaining essays, respectively by M. J. Daymond and Sissy Helff, have merits but are more peripheral to the main organization of the book. Daymond’s framing and perusing of three authors’ correspondences – Bessie Head, Dora Taylor, Lilian Ngoyi – through a postcolonial lens informs readers about their harrowing experience of living in South Africa under apartheid. It shows how writing was their saving grace, a testament to their resilience in the face of adversity. Significantly, the author suggests, the letters must be appraised in their capacity to “destabilize” not only “socio-political boundaries” but also “conceptual boundaries in postcolonial criticism” (311). Helff’s essay studies masculinities in Tim Winton’s *Breath*, but “Gendered Gateways,” albeit surfing on the gender wave, falls short of discussing postcolonialism or even the bridging or rescinding forces of gateways. One would have loved to finish on a more definitive or conclusive note, this said without detracting from the quality of Helff’s analysis.

In conclusion, *Postcolonial Gateways and Walls* certainly deserves the attention of scholars in postcolonial studies. First, its timely and variegated discussions of gateways and walls in multiple contexts open new avenues of reflection, not limited to literary texts, but also crucially grounded in the lived experiences of migrants and refugees, or any other character struggling against objectification or stigmatization. Second, the editors were well-inspired to invite contributions that span a wide range of themes developed across many locations, each substantiated with solid theoretical material equally borrowed from a variety of disciplines. Third, unexpected comparisons of texts following unprecedented re-mappings are truly rejuvenating for postcolonial studies, within the larger frame of world literature. In that sense, the book delivers on the editors’ consistent project in progress, which should inspire all organic intellectuals willing to critically expand a discipline by rethinking its paradigms and premises.

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**Salhia Ben-Messahel and Vanessa Castejon,  
eds. *Colonial Extensions, Postcolonial  
Decentrings: Cultures and Discourses on the  
Edge*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2018. Pp. 236.  
ISBN: 9782807600539.**

Salhia Ben-Messahel and Vanessa Castejon's edited volume *Colonial Extensions, Postcolonial Decentrings: Cultures and Discourses on the Edge* brings together ten essays as varied in their readings of the term "postcolonial" as they are well assorted in their questioning of traditional and historical discourses. Divided into four sections, the volume proposes an internal layout based on geographical rapprochements, colonial-historical resemblances, thematic analogies, and methodological proceedings to deal with multicultural issues in a globalised world.

The first section is entitled "Colonial and Postcolonial Localities" and draws patterns of interaction between hybridity (of identity politics, culture, language) and storytelling.

Paolo De Meideros's comparative article "Postcolonial Memories and the Shattered Self" begins with a famous quotation from Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy*. The quotation goes: "Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to lie quietly in the dark. [...] One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read?" (21). The quote, De Meideros argues, exemplifies the need of postcolonial identities not only to testify but also to seek out responsibility, therewith allegorically summoning the United States and Europe to confront their colonial ghosts. Morrison's novel as a whole serves as starting point for De Meideros's examination of the various ways in which the shattering of the postcolonial self between places that simultaneously claim and reject allegiance is represented (in literature and film). For the purpose at hand, De Meideros investigates various forms of colonial violence, as well as the negative inheritance (mainly through the indictment of the father figure) they brought on, in works by Tony Morrison, Lúcia Jorge, Isabela Figueiredo, J. M. G. Le Clézio and J. M. Coetzee. In spite of the variety of representations these works offer of postcolonial selves, De Meideros

insists on the importance of “shar[ing] a common refusal to indulge in nostalgia or to remain silent” (35). In so doing, he then ends up reversing Morisson’s quotation, asserting that “the telling does, and should, hurt” (35). The title of Elisabeth Bouzonviller’s article, “Doris and Erdrich’s *The Crown of Columbus*, or Building Up a Hybrid Version of 1492 for a New, Mixed-Blood America,” is already quite informative. Published in 1991 conjointly by mixed-raced Native American novelists Louise Erdrich and her former and late husband Michael Dorris, *The Crown of Columbus* is a novel which offers a Bhabhaian “third space” of hybridity beyond stereotypes. Indeed, as Bouzonviller superbly illustrates, the novel forms a space where genderless homodiegetic narrative perspectives alternate through a unique collaborative writing technique, where the dominating Western culture and the more peripheral Native American one merge, and where history and fiction, the political and the personal, interweave in an unchronological structure, thereby echoing the Native oral tradition of storytelling. Throughout her article, Bouzonviller highlights the metafictional reference to the art and power of storytelling contained in the novel and shows how the novelists’ activist imagination reverses history to fight against stereotypes and offers an alternative discourse, celebrating memory and envisaging a hybrid future. In the last part, Bouzonviller clearly exemplifies how Dorris and Erdrich use teasing and self-deprecation to undermine stereotypes and build a strong sense of community in the face of a hostile American environment, thus creating a “Third Space of enunciation,” in which what Erdrich has termed “survival humour” (51) operates next to storytelling as a metafictional process of voice liberation.

In his article, “Alistair MacLeod’s Engagement with the Modern World in *No Great Mischief* (1999) and *Island* (2001),” André Dodeman examines works by a Canadian writer of Scottish descent through a postcolonial lens. Despite the daring and even disputable choice of such a committed perspective to deal with Cape Breton’s Gaelic subjection to Canadian national rule, Dodeman brilliantly conveys MacLeod’s attempts to challenge the threatening temporality and encompassing discourse of globalized modernity, fashioned by imperialism. MacLeod’s merging of Gaelic tradition, language, and superstition with national and globalized discourses, Dodeman argues, downplays the dominance of Western historiography, epistemology and empiricism, while at the same time “highlighting the heteroglossic nature of the world” (63) and therefore challenging the Western liberal humanist belief in “the

monoglossic nature of the politics of assimilation and cultural uniformity” (65). In short, while MacLeod’s short story collection and only novel (written from the margin of national discourse) attempt to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the world, Dodeman’s postcolonial reading of MacLeod’s work (written from the margin of postcolonial discourse) seems to call for a highly comprehensive understanding of postcolonialism.

The second section, entitled “Postcolonial Transculturalism,” brings Australian connections to land, Indigenous cultures, its Asian Diaspora and political economy into focus from different, to some extent debatable, perspectives.

Vanessa Castejon, Anna Cole and Oliver Haag’s collaborative research piece “European Views of the Indigenous ‘Other’, A Study of Responses to Warwick Thornton’s *Samson & Delilah*” somewhat jars with the collection’s overarching approach, namely through its take on Warwick Thornton’s film *Samson & Delilah*, released in Australia in 2009, from a European, and one may be – perhaps too easily – tempted to argue Eurocentric, reception-based viewpoint. Positing that histories of colonialism reflect in European audiences’ culturally coded readings of foreign texts, Vanessa Castejon, Anna Cole and Oliver Haag have interviewed audience members after their viewing of *Samson & Delilah*, to learn more about the state of postcolonialism in England, France and Germany. However, while the authors rightly refute the representativeness of “broad national categories” (80) such as “British,” “German,” and “French,” they do not seem to question the Eurocentrism of their own approach sufficiently. In other words, although indisputably critical of Western grids of reading and offering a careful comparison of culturally related reactions, the article’s authors may be walking on a tightrope, but this is perhaps inevitable when dealing with reception theory in a European postcolonial approach to *Samson & Delilah*.

In his article entitled “In Trans/Action: Materialising Cultural Dissent, Activising Asian Australian Communities,” Paul Giffard-Foret uses Raymond Williams’s concept of “cultural materialism,” which brings together social superstructure (ideology) and economic base, to question hybridity and its “fetishizing of cultural difference” (100). The article opens with a genealogical overview of Asian Australian literature and focuses on the representation of Frantz Fanon’s theory of “national culturalism” in novels by Mena Abdullah, Brian Castro and Simone Lazaroo. Other writers, such as Merlinda Bobis and Siew Sang Tay, are seen to take issue

over Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism" and the power-asymmetries inherent in "pan-Asianism" (105). In his study, Giffard-Foret thus brings out literature's transnational and *transactional* (both socio-economic and activist) character, as opposed to its cultural character. He further illustrates this opposition between transnationality/action/activism and culture by means of Asian Australian cultural and artistic politics, namely by contrasting scholar Ien Ang's mitigated, cultural relativist response with writer Roanna Gonsalves's militant, cultural materialist response to the 2009 and 2010 Indian students attacks in Melbourne and Sydney.

In "Australian Spaces, the Reconfiguring of Cultural Maps and Enrootings," an exquisite comparative analysis of Australia novelists David Malouf and Tim Winton's collections of essays *A First Place* (2014) and *Island Home* (2015), Sahlia Ben-Messahel reconsiders multiculturalism and identity politics in postcolonial Australia by means of a redefinition of geographic spaces and the sense of belonging. However, her argument that, through their refusal of imposed norms and their deconstruction of existing structures, Malouf and Winton provide a new perspective to reconfigure space and reality might at times prove ambivalent in its non-problematisation of spatial and cultural appropriation by settler Australians. Similarly, Ben-Messahel's reference to Glenda Sluga's article "The Migrant Dreaming," which somewhat controversially establishes a correlation between the experience of migration (a culture creates its own history) and "dreaming" (the created culture surfaces in places and spaces), proves at times contentious. This being said, her reference to Nicolas Bourriaud's "space of the radican," a space "where diversity would become a category of thought, and subjectification the result of multiple enrootings and errantries in mobile environments, in a global space where frontiers and borders never stop shifting" (136), offers a truly original take on the Australian literary canon.

In section three, the editors have assembled two essays dealing with "The Transgression of Cultural Discourse." Indeed, while the first transgresses Sri Lanka's mythical and historical discourses, the second breaks with the tradition of male narratives in Cameroon.

In her article "What sort of world would they build on our remains: Postcolonial Anxiety in Romesh Gunesekera's *Reef*," Sabine Lauret cleverly observes a correlation between *Reef's* first-person narrator-protagonist, or "I-postcolonial," who is haunted by the colonial ghosts and divided between the colonial past and postcolonial present, and Sri Lanka's split identity. The novel thus encapsulates postcolonial



anxiety (“the torments suffered by both the individual and the nation/community in a post-independence era” (142)) not only on an individual but also on a political-allegorical level. In her article, Lauret proceeds with an investigation of the political unrest that lies at the heart of the narrative and exacerbates postcolonial anxiety. To do so, she first examines the breaches in the child narrator’s memory, thus exposing the haunting nature of the past and, by allegorical extension, the aesthetic allusiveness of history’s partial reflection of the past; she then investigates how violence surfaces in the intersection of the domestic with the universal; eventually, she demonstrates that postcolonial anxiety in *Reef* is an anxiety of origins, as the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka not only results from but also dangerously feeds on the historical disagreement on the original myth (Tamil or Sinhalese?), before wisely concluding her article with the following words: “The cure of postcolonial anxiety is then not in a narrative but in the control of this narrative” (151).

In her article “Calixthe Beyala’s Fiction: Disguised Writing?” Laurence Randall sets out to provide her readership with a remarkable insight into Beyala’s literary oeuvre by comparing the reception of her work in the West, where it is acclaimed for its provocative and destabilizing nature, and its critical reception in Cameroon, where it is qualified as erotic or pornographic. After looking at the historical difference between the man’s narrative voice (celebrated in the written tradition) and the woman’s narrative voice (confined to the oral tradition) in African societies, Randall notes that “this barrier is still felt in the marginalization of women’s writing by the patriarchal African critics” (156). Sadly, however, Randall does not give voice to female African critics either. She nonetheless contests the masculine African critics’ reproaches on the masculinity and brutality of Beyala’s writing, as well as their accusation of plagiarism. For her, what these attacks truly demonstrate is “Beyala’s ability to disguise her writing” (158), be it by appropriating the African male writer’s sexual topics and speech, by employing vernacular language as well as Africanisms to reflect an effort to retain the Cameroonian linguistic tradition against the language of the coloniser, or else by using African humour as an element of parody and satire to undermine the usual/masculine order of things.

The last section is given the revealing title “Legacies of the Empire and Postcolonial Politics.” It differs from the previous sections in its political-historical approach of post-imperialism and postcolonialism.

As the title suggests, Sharon Baptiste's article, "The Evolution of the Black Cultural Archives: 1981–2015," traces the evolution of the Black Cultural Archives (BCA), Britain's first museum and archive dedicated to the African and African-Caribbean Diasporas, since its beginnings in 1981 as a cultural and educational grassroots organisation. To do so, Baptiste lays out the major causes and consequences which led the BCA's founding members to establish strategies that would compensate for the observed underachievement and underperformance of schoolchildren of African and African-Caribbean descent living in London. She then expounds the strategies initiated by three of the BCA's directors (Len Garrison, Sam Walker, and Paul Reid) to allow the African and African-Caribbean communities to tell their own history. Eventually, her article focuses on the BCA's achievements (the recognition and inclusion of black British history in the national historical narrative), while also acknowledging the existence of some "naysayers' criticism" (200), whose virulence Baptiste nonetheless views "in a positive light" (199–200), for such criticism "raises general awareness – a small yet significant step towards recognition and ultimately perhaps inclusion in the wider historical narrative" (200).

In "Arab Post-colonial Ideologies versus Colonial Political Legacy: The Case of Arab Nationalism," Fouad Nohra discusses the post colonial nature of Arab nationalism. The scepticism, among Arab people, about the authenticity and legitimacy of the new Arab states, drafted when the European military occupation of the region started in the early 20th century, forms the backdrop of this highly informative and well-researched article. Divided into three main parts, the article first considers the competition between the five national paradigms (sectarian, provincial, regional, Arab, and pan-Islamic) offering a post-colonial alternative to the colonial paradigm. For illustrative purposes, Nohra uses Syria, the geographic region where the anti-colonial process started, as an example. He then sets out to explain how the Arab national paradigm gradually became "the doctrinal frame of a serious and deeply rooted post-colonial process" (206), before the pan-Islamic doctrines took over and rehabilitated the vested colonial state structure. Last but not least, against the failure of the post-colonial Arab national paradigm, Nohra questions the possibility of an appropriate post-colonial paradigm, one that would lead to a unification process rather than to fragmentation, and wonders whether, "the unsustainability of such a political fragmentation

will again result in a new form of post-colonial and reformist pan-Arab awakening” (229).

What this interdisciplinary volume of *Comparatism and Society* then has to offer is a unique take on multiculturalism and globalization through its in-depth examination of postcolonial discourses as the extensions and decentrings of the home-territories.

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**Jopi Nyman. *Displacement, Memory, and Travel in Contemporary Migrant Writing*. Leiden and Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2017. Pp. 251. ISBN: 9789004342057.**

It is been a decade or so since scholars working from within the fields of postcolonial literatures and diaspora studies started challenging celebratory understandings of mobility. Indeed, Iain Chambers's over-optimistic and influential conceptualisation of (postmodern) identity as migrancy – or of migration as a means of crossing borders and breaking barriers of thought and experience (see Chambers 2) – has been notably challenged by critics such as Vijay Mishra (2007), who has argued that diasporic subjectivity was also informed by stasis and melancholia, or Sara Ahmed (2000), who has aptly addressed the ways in which decontextualized celebrations of movement were interlocked with dubious forms of “stranger fetishism.” As early as 1996, Aytar Brah pointed out in her now-classic *Cartographies of Diaspora* that the metaphorization of migrancy as border-crossing was complicit in lumping together divergent categories such as the nomad, the exile, and the migrant. Today, the so-called “refugee crisis” gives new momentum to Brah's astute remark that “the question is not simply about who travels, but when, how, and under what circumstances” (182).

Jopi Nyman is conscious of the many critical pitfalls and blind spots that romantic conceptualizations of travel, mobility, and migrancy have generated in postcolonial scholarship, and he starts his volume by reminding us that many contemporary texts dealing with experiences of migration and relocation “give at least as much impetus – if not more – to dis-ease and discontent as they do to the celebration and uninhibited performance of postmodern subjectivity” (1). Organized around the three key themes of displacement, memory, and travel, Nyman's collection examines contemporary literary narratives of global migration and deals with texts whose generic anatomy ranges from culinary memoirs, through novels, to short stories, poems, and autobiographies. The originality of Nyman's corpus needs to be underlined, as the critic discusses literary texts by star authors such as Caryl Phillips, Abdulrazak Gurnah, and

Monica Ali, but also looks at narratives by less celebrated writers such as Jamal Mahjoub and Simão Kikamba, and even by non-professional authors. By highlighting the ambiguous aspects of mobility in selected contemporary narratives of global migration, Nyman's stated goal is "to push the boundaries of postcolonial and transcultural studies" (7) – indeed, to do better justice to the complexity of texts showing us that, today, "the global is present in the local, the binary notion of centre and periphery is being erased, and established paradigms in both European and postcolonial studies are in need of refinement" (7).

Nyman's volume falls into three Parts. Part 1 focuses on texts dealing with forced migration and displacement in Africa, Europe, and the United States. The narratives under study are refreshingly eclectic as far as genres are concerned, as they range from texts included in the first three volumes of *Refugees Writing in Wales* (2003; 2004; 2005), to Kikamba's South African refugee novel *Going Home* (2005), to Jamal Mahjoub's short story "Last Thoughts on the Medusa" (2008), to Ishmael Beah's memoir *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007). The chapter on Kikamba's *Going Home* specifically delivers on Nyman's promise to complicate both the binaries at play in the postcolonial paradigm and the overemphasis on transcontinental migration intrinsic to transcultural studies. Indeed, Kikamba's novel, which has been under-examined by postcolonial scholarship, refreshingly portrays migration *within* African countries – from Zaire to Angola to South Africa – and is shown by Nyman to tackle head-on the institutionalized forms of violence African refugees are subjected to in closed spaces such as the headquarters of the Angolan secret service or the Lindela Repatriation Centre in the vicinity of Johannesburg. In many ways, Nyman's analysis of selected texts included in the first three volumes of *Refugees Writing in Wales* complements his discussion of *Going Home*, in that it suggests points of commonality between the politics of exclusion towards refugees in contemporary Britain and towards the so-called *Makwerewere* in South Africa. Yet, perhaps because Nyman tries a bit too hard to paint a comprehensive picture of the many professional and non-professional contributions included in the *Refugees Writing in Wales* project, his analysis can be cursory at times and ends up lacking context. For instance, his reading of poems by the Algerian author Soleïman Adel Guémar brushes over the poet's imagery of military violence and organized torture, making it uncertain whether Guémar's graphic evocation of an Algiers "ordered to the electrodes" (qtd. in Nyman 25) in fact relates to the Algerian War of

Independence or to the Civil War during the 1990s. Also, several projects rooted in different parts of Britain have mediated the refugee experience (see for instance the two volumes of *Refugee Tales* (2016; 2017), which are linked to the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group), so a discussion comparing the methodologies, outcomes, and regional differences at play in these endeavours would have been welcome. Chapter 4 focuses on Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Home* and compellingly addresses the ways in which this autobiographical text foregrounds the paradoxes of its child protagonist's subjectivity – as a child soldier, Ishmael is both a killer and a victim – and yet follows a linear script of trauma and recovery which culminates in Ishmael's transformation as an American adolescent, thus problematically designating the globalized West (specifically the US) as a space of purification and healing. Transcontinental movement between Africa and the globalized West is also central to Mahjoub's short-story "Last Thoughts on the Medusa." Nyman's discussion of *ekphrasis* beautifully captures the ways in which Mahjoub's protagonist's viewing of Géricault's painting in the Louvre finally substitutes literal for symbolic forms of border-crossing, which ultimately testifies to the protagonist's transformation from "victimized migrant" to "a young Afro-European" (86) able to think through, and beyond, a colonial legacy of violence and institutionalized erasures.

Entitled "Memories of Migration," Part 2 continues to give pride of place to African (and African diasporic) writers, but opens on a discussion of *Climbing the Mango Tree* (2005) and *The Language of Baklava* (2005), two culinary memoirs written, respectively, by Delhi-born Madhur Jeffrey, the popular chef and author of Indian cookbooks, and by second-generation Jordanian-American Diana Abu-Jaber. Nyman's reading of Jeffrey's and Abu-Jaber's memoirs foregrounds food as being central to the formation of migrant subjectivity because of its ability to create community and trigger memory beyond relocation and across the generations – which is nothing new. Still, the critic manages to break new ground by addressing the ambiguous transgenerational dynamics at play in Abu-Jaber's memoir, one that is expressed through the protagonist's eating disorders as well as through the opposition between migrant communities' "culture[s] of food" and America's diet obsession. The next two chapters, an analysis of Gurnah's *Pilgrims Way* and of Phillips' *Dancing in the Dark* highlight the Janus-faced nature of melancholia – specifically of racial melancholia – and problematize the process of staging one's own cultural otherness and/or performing racial stereotypes as one that

oscillates between subversion of, and conformity with, dominant racial hierarchies. For Nyman, neither Phillips nor Gurnah advocate that new communities be “based on exclusiveness or a shared racial consciousness” (129) in the new location. Indeed, the blackface performances of Phillips’ protagonist do not signal subversion, but only reinforce his self-hatred and spiritual paralysis; likewise, Gurnah’s migrant characters find little solace in “passing [themselves] off as [...] exotic[s]-in-exile” (qtd. in Nyman 125–26). Significantly, it is only through his relationship with Catherine, who simply “relates to him as a fellow human being” (128) that Gurnah’s protagonist somehow manages to get over the losses brought about by the Zanzibar Revolution and the pain of relocation.

The first two chapters of Part 3 of Nyman’s volume, entitled “Migration, Travel, and Postcolonial Europe,” returns us to writings by the Sudanese-British writer Jamal Mahjoub. The opening chapter deals with Mahjoub’s road novel, *Travelling with Djinns* (2003), a book which, for Nyman, “places Europeanness within a transnational framework” (158). Indeed, in many ways, Nyman shows that Mahjoub’s protagonist’s wanderings from Denmark to Germany and then from France to Spain in an old Peugeot with his son only constitute a pretext to meditate on Europe’s “colonialist and racialist constitution” (161) while “show[ing] the transculturation characterizing its past” (162). The next chapter is devoted to Mahjoub’s *The Drift Latitudes* (2006), which also emphasizes the transnational component of European identity through the stories of the German refugee Ernst Frager and of his two British-born daughters, who are unaware at first of each other’s existence and have affiliative and filiative links, respectively, to Sudan and the Caribbean. As Nyman sees it, the “dispersed family” (184) plot allows Gurnah to locate hybridity and multiplicity at the very heart of Britishness – just as Gurnah’s choice of Liverpool as the background to Frager’s relationship with Miranda, the daughter of West Indian immigrants, gives him ample occasion to revisit the history of a city associated with the transatlantic slave trade and with other forms of boundary crossing. In the last two chapters of his volume, Nyman looks at Monica Ali’s *Alentejo Blue* (2006) and then at *In the Kitchen* (2008), two texts which are less known than her much fêted debut novel, *Brick Lane* (2003). Set in contemporary rural Portugal and comprised of nine intertwined chapters, *Alentejo Blue* received mixed reviews by critics baffled not only by the piecemeal structure of the book, but also by Ali’s choice of location, which was deemed too exotic. Yet, in what appears to be, at times, an over-enthusiastic rescue mission, Nyman



argues that Ali's choice of an apparently peripheral Portuguese village allows her to create a "translocal" narrative, in that the transnational networks in which the village's inhabitants participate "expan[d] the meaning of the local" (209) and by extension, complicate, even reverse, the binary relationship between centre and periphery. Nyman's reading of Ali's *In the Kitchen* is less programmatic. By discussing the ways in which Ali employs the conventions of the katabatic narrative to portray the ethical awakening of its protagonist, an executive chef whose kitchen staff consists of workers from all over the world, Nyman aptly shows that Ali raises fascinating questions of responsibility in relation to transnational labour, which suggests that the "new Britishness" imagined in Ali's novel is both "relational and ethical" (229).

Beyond its imperfections, including the absence of a concluding section and a number of typos which grows exponentially in the last chapters of the book, Nyman's volume makes a vibrant contribution to the field of transcultural studies and postcolonial literatures. Although much more could have been done about the intersection of literary form and postcolonial issues in the globalized era, the generic anatomy of Nyman's corpus is exquisitely diverse, his choice of texts is engaging, and his resolve to bear witness to the current entanglements between the local and the global in contemporary postcolonial writing is both convincing and well-informed. *Displacement, Memory, and Travel in Contemporary Migrant Writing* will appeal to students and scholars working from within the field of transcultural studies and postcolonial and diasporic literatures, as well as to those with an interest in refugee literatures and trauma and memory studies.

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**Jay Rajiva. *Postcolonial Parabola: Literature, Tactility, and the Ethics of Representing Trauma*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017. Pp. 208. ISBN: 9781501325342.**

As part of the comprehensive field of postcolonial studies, postcolonial trauma studies have recently moved to the forefront of scholarly interests formerly anchored more or less exclusively in trauma and affect theory, Holocaust studies, cultural studies, memory studies, and/or historiography. A theoretical milestone in the fusion of trauma theory with memory and cultural studies, Michael Rothberg's study *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009) has laid out new ways to think about the relationship between different communities' histories of victimization, starting with the premise that "memories are not owned by groups – nor are groups 'owned' by memories." In Rothberg's view, "[m]emory's anachronistic quality – its bringing together of now and then, here and there – is actually the source of its powerful creativity, its ability to build new worlds out of the material of older ones" (5) – hence the newfound relevance of trauma literature, or, rather, trauma narratives (including cinema and other media of communication) in today's critical landscape. Other testimonies to this general trend are Stef Crap's *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2013) and Abigail Ward's collection of essays *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance* (2015), which includes exegeses of Indian, Australian, Palestinian, Caribbean, African-American, South-African, and other global trauma narratives. It is in this theoretical environment that readers will receive Jay Rajiva's recent book *Postcolonial Parabola: Literature, Tactility, and the Ethics of Representing Trauma* (2017), an ample, philosophy-laced, and at the same time original analysis of postcolonial trauma literature, based on the juxtaposition of two distinct postcolonial histories: Indian Partition and South African apartheid. Rajiva aligns his approach to trauma narratives with Crap's critique of Western trauma theory and ethical argument that colonial traumata should be acknowledged on their own terms, in the spirit of a genuine cross-cultural engagement, as opposed

to a universalizing Eurocentric point of view (Craps also signs one of the blurbs on the back-cover of Rajiva's book).

In his introduction, entitled "Postcolonial Comparison," Rajiva provides an overview of (1) the book's subjects: postcolonial trauma literature representing the 1947 Partition of India and the South-African apartheid and post-apartheid eras (the 1996–1998 period of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission); the ethics of representing trauma; the nature of the reader's encounter with a trauma text and his or her response to literary trauma; (2) the book's underlying theoretical apparatus: trauma theory, affect theory, postcolonial studies, phenomenology, post-structuralism, and reader response theory; and (3) the main topic of each of the four chapters and the conclusion. The author builds a complex and intriguing argument by connecting the ethics of representing trauma – a creative process – with the encounter between reader and trauma text – a re-creative process reminiscent of Roland Barthes's author/scriptor (reader) dichotomy. The Other, Rajiva suggests, is not just the postcolonial subject, but also the literary narrative itself, "the corpus of the text, the body, if you will, of the literature, which leads to the reader's encounter with the text as a mass" (9). This point of view leads the author to a demonstration of the other main topic of the book, the "tactility of the reader's encounter with literary trauma": it is the narrative structure of the postcolonial texts discussed in the following chapters that engages their reader "in a relationship that is at once aesthetic and ethical" (9). Rajiva deliberately distances himself from those who expect theory to be objectively accurate, and underscores the uniqueness of his use of theoretical concepts to analyze literature; in his argument, "all theoretical application is metaphorical – built on a set of literary tropes and figurations that provide coherence and intelligibility" (13). He self-identifies his book as a "cross-pollination" of trauma theory, poetics, and phenomenology, meant to "generate an ethical engagement with postcolonial trauma literature" (14).

The first chapter, "Excess and Tactility: Toward Interpretation as Vexed Contact," sets up the theoretical framework (trauma theory, affect theory, and phenomenology) for analyzing postcolonial trauma narratives in connection with reader response to trauma fiction. The chapter focuses on the work's most relevant and probably most intriguing topic, the reading of postcolonial trauma as parabolic contact. Rajiva proposes a critical examination of tactility as the basis for reading postcolonial trauma. By questioning the core concepts of trauma theory,

he describes postcolonial trauma literature as the “potential site of [...] productive excess: a uniquely tactile encounter between reader and text that contains both visceral and interpretive dimensions” (20). In the section dedicated to the nexus between metaphor and phenomenology, the chapter engages in lengthy, albeit useful, philosophical considerations on contact and tactility. The author starts his argument by proposing a reevaluation of the ethics of reading as contingent because “when we ‘touch’ a text, we do not acquire mastery over it by the purity of a tactile encounter. The encounter is a touch, but it is also a contentious touch” (33). What follows are discussions of Edmund Husserl’s thoughts on tactile experience; Jacques Derrida’s critique of Husserl’s definition of touch; and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theoretical framework that “opens up the possibility of ethics as predicated on visual substitution” (38), which is relevant to our understanding of empathy: “my awareness of the world is now predicated on co-perception, the double act of perceiving the other and perceiving the other as a perceiving subject” (38). The chapter concludes this meticulously corroborated philosophical journey with one of the book’s core ethical stances: awareness of the danger of reducing the experience of the Other to one’s perception of the Other; this is how “postcolonial literature makes the figurative limit of trauma’s representation ethical...” (41).

A brief interpretation of Emmanuel Levinas’s ideas on the hegemony of Western thought – particularly the reductive quality of the security of knowledge inherent in “I think,” where unity of expression and utterance resides – is complemented with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s reading of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* in order to emphasize the moral danger “in positing an untroubled cognition that emanates from a unified, rational subject [...] not burdened by the Other that he excludes...” (45). Rajiva concludes this ample theoretical chapter by stating his goal to “frame the experience of reading postcolonial trauma as vexed contact, a continual imbrication of sight and touch” (46). While the novels discussed in the following chapters contain representations of traumatized bodies, these texts, the critic points out, “are also bodies, shaped by their respective narrative structures” (46). This combination of texts representing bodies and texts as bodies ultimately shapes the ethical concerns of postcolonial trauma. Clarifying the work’s title (and including the graphic of a parabola with two asymptotes), the author explains the parabolic quality of postcolonial literary trauma as an essentially asymptotic movement, “always approaching a limit without

arriving.” In postcolonial trauma narratives, “contact is continuously deferred, but movement is continuously open” (47).

The following chapter, “Transfixion and Subversion: The Unexpected Endings of J. Devi and Coetzee,” lays out the historical contexts of the Partition of India and South-African apartheid, and showcases two novels, *The River Churning* (2005), by Jyotirmayee Devi, and *Age of Iron* (1990), by J. M. Coetzee, which, by employing multiple layers of narrative structure, offer what Rajiva considers “tactile encounters” with literary trauma. Devi’s text offers an example of pre-Partition violence, rape, perpetrated on the main character when she was a young girl. Her trauma, however, resides not only in that initial experience, but also in her “subsequent encounters with the narrative structure of the community discourse on rape” (61). Coetzee’s novel makes narrative complexity contingent on the introduction of the literary text as body, “the ethical posture of both the body of the text and the body of its narrator [who is dying of cancer]” (77). Subversion of the state’s attempt to control the representation of trauma is present in both texts.

Chapter 3, “Seduction and Substitution: Behr, Sidhwa, and the Child Narrator,” addresses the issue of “vexed contact” by analyzing the child narrators of two novels, *The Smell of Apples* (1993), Mark Behr’s debut work, and *Cracking India* (1992), by Bapsi Sidhwa, originally published as *Ice Candy Man* (1988). Both works present the reader with a strangely euphoric experience of reading trauma. Rajiva discusses both texts’ reliance on the innocence of child narration “as a deferral of the full presence of trauma, in which an initial narrative caress [a sign of misdirection, false euphoria, and delusion] leads to the seduction of the reader” (89). The children’s candor and omission of details of violence become methods of concealment unquestioned by the reader. In the context of fantasy literature, John Timmerman referred to the child character and/or narrator as someone who “senses what is good and evil with a capacity which does not have to analyze good and evil into categories but instead makes instinctive, intuitive judgments about them,” all the while maintaining his imaginative ability (37) – a description that also applies to Behr’s and Sidhwa’s narrators, who frame the literary experience of postcolonial trauma “in terms of innocence lost” (92).

Sidhwa’s use of English shows its ambivalence as the language of colonial legacy, “both betrayer and liberator”; therefore, Rajiva opines, “[v]iolence inhabits English as the untold Other of the text” (114). This

remark echoes the German-language poet Paul Celan, born Paul Antschel (1920–1970) in a Jewish family in Czernowitz (today's Ukraine), according to whom German was the only language which “*gives back no words for that which happened*, no justification; history is made under the name of one language and it is strange that people suffering the consequences of different historical segments start hating the language provoking the trauma, the disrupter...” (in Maftai, “The Exile Literature”). Rajiva ends the chapter with the conclusion that, if Western trauma theory is an inadequate means of understanding postcolonial collective and historical trauma, “it also falls short by way of a disavowed kinship with postcolonial literature across two distinct regions and traumatic eras, the apartheid of South Africa and the Partition of India” (130).

The fourth chapter, “Motion and Stillness: Surface as Depth in Dangor and Ondaatje,” focuses on the study's central concept of “postcolonial parabola” in order to suggest the possibility of narrative surface as depth in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001) and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000). “The body moves, a point on a map, toward a destination it will never reach. This is postcolonial trauma as parabolic movement, concentrated energy transmitted in wide beam” (133), Rajiva explains. Traumatic experience as surface is the central idea of the book's penultimate chapter, which also questions the idea of a stable relationship between reader and text. The critic's main argument is that both novels place the reader in a confrontation with a “surface of traumatic representation that resolutely refuses to provide closure, or ‘depth’” (133); the two works thus share the space of postcolonial parabola, “[d]eferring the traumatic encounter in order to present it, approaching but not arriving” (178).

In the conclusion, entitled “Postcolonial Relation,” Rajiva projects the future of his book's conceptual framework by discussing nexuses between hybridity, psychic opacity, and postcolonial trauma. Breaking away from the previous chapters, the conclusion shifts focus onto the postcolonial space of the Caribbean, specifically Haiti and its violence-marred history. Rajiva discusses Edwidge Danticat's novel *The Dew Breaker* (2004) and connects her representation of Haitian trauma to concepts developed by the Martiniquan philosopher Édouard Glissant in *Poetics of Relation* (1990): *métissage*, creolization, and Relation. *Métissage* is not only an encounter between different cultures, but also a “shock, a kind of cognitive jolt that allows for the possibility of creolization” (182); both processes are embodied in Glissant's central concept of Relation

(which is fundamentally incompatible with chain and filiation), and tie in seamlessly with Rajiva's emphasis on the diversity and uniqueness of the postcolonial experience.

*Postcolonial Parabola* is built on solid theoretical grounds leading to a complex and intriguing argument. Settling for a synecdochic "Reader," however, instead of discussing specific categories of readers from different geo-cultural spaces, seems guilty of the same fallacy as that of universalizing postcolonial trauma by using culturally reductive Western trauma theory concepts. Such a relevant premise that apparently begs the question does not diminish the scholarly value and methodological originality of Rajiva's work; if anything, it might even constitute an axiological starting point in future arguments underscoring the uniqueness of postcolonial trauma literature and the encounter with it by various readers.

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**Delia Ungureanu. *From Paris to Tlön: Surrealism as World Literature*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2018. Pp. 340. ISBN: 9781501333194.**

Reading Delia Ungureanu's recent study *From Paris to Tlön: Surrealism as World Literature* evoked for me the sensation of walking along a well-worn and familiar trail, only to look up and realize that at some point the path had somehow shifted, and that as a result, the landscape surrounding me was suddenly reworked in startling ways, new and fresh. I still knew the general direction and destination; the route was not completely foreign. Still, the unexpected sights inevitably held my attention in engaging and productive ways. The nature of Ungureanu's project – to trace out the various social, ideological, and cultural networks through which surrealism moved during its geographic expansion and aesthetic translation from poetry, to visual art, and eventually the novel – inherently lends itself to the imagery of traversing such trails as they continually fork into interlaced and overlapping paths.

Ungureanu describes the various aspects inherent in her approach in a useful introduction, in which she frames surrealism as a conceptually international group practice from its inception. Surrealism may have begun in Paris, but it did so only through the combined efforts of an international group. Focusing on “the complex circulation of surrealist ideas between Paris and newly rising cultural centers, from New York to Buenos Aires and points beyond” (2), Ungureanu “build[s] on the concept of network theory from social anthropology” with the goal of “rethinking surrealist ideas within a crisscrossed intellectual history [in hopes of going] beyond existing studies of the more obvious networks of circulation and cultural institutions that the surrealists used” in order to “better understand the subtle, oblique, but very fertile impact of surrealist ideas on writers working in the United States, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East” (3). Using this approach, Ungureanu employs three structuring principles throughout her project. First, she consistently considers the influence of traditionally marginal forms and genres, such as magazines, in the dissemination of surrealist ideas, motifs, and themes. Second, she emphasizes the international character of the

movement from its inception, consistently noting the varied nationalities not only of surrealism's core adherents, but also those of the artists and authors who shared social and physical spaces, such as Adrienne Monnier's Parisian bookstore, with the surrealists. And third, she focuses "on the theory and practice of the surrealist object as a prime element traded throughout the intellectual network" (7). This third structuring element produces some of the book's most useful work in that, despite the necessarily heavy emphasis on history, the focus on the continual theorization of the surrealist object allows Ungureanu to consistently enrich such history through repeated examples designed to reveal the theoretical push and pull of the surrealist object through its multiple translations, adaptations, and reconfigurations throughout the expansion of the surrealist project. This work, which occurs consistently across all seven chapters of the book, makes a necessary argument for surrealism not as a historically isolated aesthetic practice, but a global project with continued aesthetic and theoretical influence, and as such, justifies the inclusion of Ungureanu's book within Bloomsbury's "Literatures as World Literature" series.

The first two chapters, "Intellectual Networks and Surrealist Objects" and "On the Road to Establishment: Surrealism in the 1930s" cover the beginnings of surrealism, loosely structured around first André Breton and then Salvador Dalí. Breton and Dalí are established as the heads of two distinct versions of surrealism, both of which would spread internationally along the various networks of cultural and capital exchange. Breton is positioned as the movement's father, intent upon theorizing the symbolic, the dream, the code, and the game – and Ungureanu uses Breton to provide articulate discussions on the concepts of revolution (both aesthetic and political), automatism (and automatic writing), the subconscious, the dismissal of reason, the symbolic object, plagiarism, convulsive beauty, and the ascendant sign. In the same manner, Dalí's eventual differences with the original surrealist group and his work to transform the symbolic into cultural and economic capital provide a loose frame for the second chapter: the paranoiac critical method, dreams, cannibalism, the objective hazard, the chance encounter, and a continued look at the evolution of the symbolic object are all productively discussed as a result. Ungureanu will utilize Breton and Dalí as representative figures throughout the book in order to draw out the nuanced distinctions operating within surrealism. Often, these comparisons are facilitated through the use of literary figures: Breton

becomes Alice, and Dalí, the White Rabbit. In another instance, Ungureanu reports their different concepts of the object: “For both, the object is feminine and sexual; but while for Breton she’s the ideal space for all metamorphoses, for Dalí she is merely the passive *reflection* of metamorphoses. These responses illustrate their opposite conceptions of love: focused on the object versus the perceiving subject, the ‘I.’ For Breton, she is Circe; for Dalí, she can be associated with Narcissus” (63, emphasis in original). With concision and insight, Ungureanu’s literary comparisons draw out such subtle differences in ways that allow even those unfamiliar with the finer details of the movement to appreciate the distinction.

The fourth and fifth chapters, “Surrealism on the New York Market” and “The Battle Over the New World,” continue to follow the general contours of the historical developments within surrealism. Ungureanu follows Dalí to New York, where the collaborative Parisian spaces of the salon, the bookstore, and the magazine are changed for the legitimization of an established movement through the curated spaces of Julien Levy (in his avant-garde gallery) and Alfred Barr (in the Museum of Modern Art). Dalí built economic capital and cultural popularity through his relationship with *Vogue* and other, more visible work (e.g., “One of the ways surrealism entered real life was through the artificial paradises of Manhattan shop windows” [153]). The result of Dalí’s willingness to pursue commercialism was that “even a concept that was Breton’s property, his version of the surrealist object – the *trouvaille* or found object – was received across the Atlantic as if it were Dalí’s” (153). When Breton arrived in New York in 1941 fleeing Nazi-occupied France, his own ideological commitments to revolution over economic popularity, combined with the language barrier and unfamiliar culture, made his American experience in many ways more difficult. Ungureanu draws out this difference in terms of their distinct social and cultural networks: “Just as he’d done in the 1920s, Breton activated the avant-garde networks he could find, rather than the upper-scale social networks that Dalí sought out” (182). She also continues to compare the ways in which Dalí and Breton continue to theorize the surrealist object, considering their respective uses of a woman’s shoe (190–204) before finally bringing these historically-oriented chapters to a close, linking the revolutionary position of surrealism with the Parisian protests of 1968, the Haitian revolution, 1970s Romania, and protests against communism in 1980s Poland.

The remaining chapters – the third, sixth, and seventh – are centered around a type of literary detective work in which Ungureanu unearths a variety of clues that point toward a connection between the surrealist project and authors generally considered unconnected with surrealism: Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, Orhan Pamuk, and Mircea Cărtărescu.

The third chapter, “Pierre Menard and the *Sur*-realist,” untangles an odd connection between the Borges story “Pierre Menard, Autor del *Quijote*,” which appeared in the magazine *Sur* in May 1939, and a study of the poet Lautréamont’s handwriting by Dr. Pierre Menard, which appeared in the magazine *Minotaure*, also in May 1939. Ungureanu carefully builds a persuasive case that Dr. Menard’s piece had been completed and available through editorial circumstance to Borges as early as the spring of 1938. The chapter functions, however, as an exploration of the poetics of plagiarism as developed by Lautréamont and later taken up by Breton and the surrealists. Cannibalistic and kleptomaniac impulses fed the poetics of plagiarism as past texts and projects were consumed and recontextualized, demonstrating “the futility of the obsession for novelty and originality that stood at the heart of the romantic agenda” (94). With the romantic project exhausted, a poetics of plagiarism offered a new way to engage old problems; Duchamp’s readymades and Breton’s *la trouvaille* were thus presented as “the synonymy between necessity and desire. The found object *becomes* a creation once it is placed in a new web of signifiers” (96). This theoretical focus allows Ungureanu to thus interweave Borges’s text with a poetic practice that is nothing short of foundational to the surrealist project. Borges’s own interest in the nature of textuality, repetition, games and puzzles, and real-world connections with his fictional universe thus is itself recontextualized in terms of Ungureanu’s argument for a Borges-surrealism connection: “Beyond his specific engagements with the surrealists’ poem-objects, automatic writing, and plagiarism, Borges’ fictional universe is structurally related to the world of surrealism as he defines his short stories as dreams that will only continue to grow and ramify through their readers’ imagination” (124).

While the Borges connections are indeed interesting and well worth thinking about more thoroughly, in the fifth chapter, entitled “From Dulita to Lolita,” Ungureanu demonstrates a dazzling display of literary detective work that unquestionably connects Nabokov’s *Lolita* with specific surrealist artists and works in thought provoking ways. She tracks down a photo from *Life* in 1941 showing Dalí planting a

mannequin in a pond, arguing that it is in fact the very photo Nabokov describes in *Lolita* as a “surrealist painter relaxing, supine, on a beach, and near him, likewise supine, a plaster replica of the Venus de Milo, half-buried in sand” (qtd. in Ungureanu 205), and from there launches into a series of thematic connections between Dalí and Nabokov centered around their aesthetic interest in the erotic. Ungureanu repeatedly notes Nabokov’s voiced disinterest in and even disdain for the surrealist project, asking why this disinterest was taken at face value, given the thematic overlap between Nabokov and “the movement that most searchingly, and often outrageously, probed the relations of art and lust, repression and revolution” (216). When she asserts that “Attending to the novel’s surrealist heritage can offer a new way to assess Nabokov’s provocative interweaving of refined aestheticism and raw sexuality” (216), Ungureanu is convincing. However, her argument has really only set the stage for the rest of the chapter, which takes up a startling connection between Dulita, a young Spanish girl who became an object of his sexual fantasies and about whom he wrote as a figural character on several occasions, and *Lolita*. The two figures both occupy a similarly forbidden space as objects of desire embedded in fantasy: mothers facilitate the pursuit of their daughters; the daughters are caught up in the game of desire; that desire ultimately leads to a mixture of both sex and death driving them onward through the text. “*Lolita*’s most direct predecessor has been hiding in plain sight in the pages of Dalí’s *Secret Life* and *The New Yorker*’s reviews” (225) Ungureanu muses. Once the connection is established, Ungureanu continues to work with the texts, positioning *Lolita* as a “surrealist object, decomposed and fetishized” (227). While there is not room in this review to cover all the connections developed by Ungureanu, by the time she ends the chapter with a quotation asking if we can tell who wrote the passage, “Humbert-Nabokov or Breton?” (258) the argument for surrealism’s relevance for and influence on Nabokov’s project has been successfully and compellingly put forth.

The final chapter, “The Ghosts of Surrealism in the World Novel,” argues for the continuing relevance and influence of the surrealist project within contemporary world literature. “Two generations removed from the surrealist era, Pamuk and Cărtărescu create their fictional worlds in a kind of second-order surrealism, drawing as much on the surrealists’ modernist contemporaries and on the intervening generation of surrealist-influenced writers, from García Márquez to Calvino, as on the surrealists themselves” (259). Ungureanu’s approach here weaves in

and out of both texts and artworks; she reads Pamuk and Cărtărescu not so much in order to argue for a direct connection with the surrealists (although there are certainly moments, such as Pamuk's boxes in the actual Museum of Innocence, where the connection with the force of the surrealist object is quite clear), but rather to demonstrate the ways in which the themes and motifs of these contemporary projects connect, with or without intention, to the surrealist provocation. The previous work of the preceding chapters culminates not in the shock of a newly uncovered undeniable literary connection, but instead in the growing realization that, as a reader, we have been brought to a point in which we can recognize the way in which our own ability to discern the potential effect and influence of surrealism itself has been assiduously cultivated. We are thus willing to accept not only the initial internationalism of the surrealists, but also likely to agree with Ungureanu's positioning of surrealism as a current worth tracing in world literatures, since "the surrealists had a remarkable legacy in Latin America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and beyond" (306).

*From Paris to Tlön* is complex and compelling. The blend of cultural history, literary criticism, theory, and detective work results in a work that at first approach may appear somewhat disjointed, but the truth of the matter is that the historical material, thematic material, and theoretical material involved in the reading of these particular literary texts is itself so tightly intertwined that separating it out would significantly diminish the volume's impact and usefulness. And it should be noted that the volume itself is well conceived to enhance such usefulness: richly illustrated throughout, with a thorough bibliography and robust index, the overall care and thoughtfulness evident here make the occasional typo and the even rarer rough patches in the writing itself of negligible import.

In the Borges story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," the fictional world of Tlön is brought into a relationship with the "real" world of the text through a series of unanticipated and at time inexplicable interactions: Tlön seeps, as it were, through its fictionality via texts and into the world, irrevocably changing the world itself to the point that Borges's narrator posits that the current national cultures are in the act of disappearing as the entire world fills with dream of Tlön. Ungureanu traces a similar trajectory for surrealism itself in *From Paris to Tlön*. The fiction/surrealism thus becomes the real, yes, but the work here is more than merely drawing our attention to the ways in which surrealism had more influence and interlocutors than previously thought. Rather, it is

the motion of this particular seepage from the aesthetic into reality itself and the resultant changing of that reality that is significant. Following surrealism through its slow but steady flow down a complex crossing of continually forking paths into the world proves to be a fascinating journey, and one this reviewer highly recommends.

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**Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian, eds. *Romanian Literature as World Literature*. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2018. Pp. 357. ISBN: 9781501327919.**

Published by Bloomsbury in the series *Literatures as World Literature*, this is a well-timed book looking to reshape the history of Romanian literature and culture for the twenty-first century. For all its diversity, the book has a common drive: its contributors – the youngest generation of Romanian literary scholars – are devising tools and coining analytical categories with which to revisit the scenarios of the existing Romanian literary histories and to (re)chart modern Romanian literature. As it makes clear, the book ties up with the actual “state of the art” in literary research, both with the *world literature* space in comparative studies and with the ongoing critique of methodological nationalism in literary history (Christian Moraru, Andrei Terian, “Introduction: The Worlds of Romanian Literature and the Geopolitics of Reading”).

The authors concur in their effort to deconstruct the interpretive model of the authoritarian, militant *Grand Narratives* of Romanian literary histories epitomized by George Calinescu’s *History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present Times*. Endorsed in schools, quasi-institutionalized in text-books and academic curricula, Calinescu’s strategic interpretive narrative of unbroken national literary continuity from remote and glorious origins fills any gaps, misreads, and, when necessary, resorts to invention, in a drive to compensate for the belatedness and lack of a core tradition in Romanian literature. The book under review should be seen as a firm reply to the stout analytic scenario fostered by Calinescu, a scenario that outlasted him to be promoted by the cultural and educational institutions to this day.

In an attempt to highlight pluralism and worldliness in the areas previously dominated by nationalist essentialism, the team makes new theoretical departures and develops a particular discursive logic of literary

research. This is especially clear in two of the most daring studies in the volume, devoted to early modern Romanian literature and, respectively, to the national poet Mihai Eminescu.

Caius Dobrescu's contribution, "Soft Commerce and the Thinning of Empires: Four Steps toward Modernity," is a tentative reverse-interpretation of a persistent syndrome in Romanian cultural pathology. The author revisits the thorny and overrated issue of empires, engraved in the national past as an emotional obsession of Romanian identity, turning a historic and geopolitical destiny into a cultural opportunity. One of the few foreign researchers specializing in Romanian history, Catherine Durandin, maintains that the Roman conquest of Dacia triggered an emotional imperial obsession, later reinforced by the assimilation of Romania by one empire after another, from Turkey to the later Soviet Russia (Durandin 12). As a result of its particular location, a genuine "imperial syndrome" was permanently in the background of the Romanian cultural mentality, as a rich source of prejudice and stereotype. Sailing against the mainstream, Dobrescu reevaluates the literary outcomes of the allegedly colonizing and assimilationist imperial pressures in South-Eastern Europe. Underlining the significant part played by the imperial forces in opening up local cultures towards transnational, universal and trans-metropolitan horizons, Dobrescu detects in the new anti-imperialist cultural forms a catalyst of the national self.

Andrei Terian's approach to the work of the romantic poet Mihai Eminescu ("National Mythology to the World Pantheon") puts forward a fresh and programmatic alternative to the traditional study of the national myth. In Calinescu's monumental literary history, the canonical figure of the national poet takes on the role of Shakespeare in Harold Bloom's *Western Canon*. Viewed from Eminescu's standpoint, pre-classical writers gain a strictly relational value not through what they were in themselves, but through what they symbolically herald. Terian reverses Eminescu's traditional image as the quintessential entity of Romanian-ness, and digs up the mainspring of his poetic universe in the transnational Eurasian space, dominated by Hindu mythological-philosophical energies. In doing this, he reveals a deep cosmopolitan and universalist dimension of Romanian culture: its Eastern legacy, the so-called *Orientalism*, firmly opposed to *Occidentalism* as the response from a nation looking for cunning strategies to gain acceptance as a fully-fledged member of the "Western European club."

This polarisation is present in most Romanian cultural models, and is due to the attachment of peripheral cultures to strong, even authoritarian explanatory criteria, which can create order in the confusing and unquiet plurality of their semantic areas. Consequently, antinomies such as *Orient versus Occident*, *European versus Non-European* or *Modern versus Traditional* were extremely appealing to the Romanian agents in charge of national identity.

The development of Romanian Modernism(s), its many facets and the fundamental role assigned to Romanian cultural modernization scenarios are investigated by two contributors to the book: Carmen Musat (“After ‘Imitation’”: Aesthetic Intersections, Geocultural Networks and the Rise of Modern Romanian Literature”) and Paul Cernat (“Communicating Vessels: The Avant-Garde, Antimodernity and Radical Culture in Romania between the First and the Second World Wars”). In interwar Romania, cultural elites tried to develop a set of creative strategies and of interpretive cultural techniques to counteract a conspicuously assumed cultural marginality. Among them, the strategy of imitation and the – semantically overloaded – cultural and ideological categories of Modernism, Anti-Modernism and Avant-Garde, embraced by writers in their attempt to keep up with the dynamics of European cultural history.

In her study, Musat addresses imitation, revealing the international core and the intercultural outcomes of the Romanian mimetic syndrome, while Cernat summons the metaphor of the “communicating vessels” to tackle the unique paradigm underlying the two polar opposite engines that drove interwar culture locally: the ideological and discursive models of avant-garde, on the one hand, and existentialist-spiritualism, on the other.

Uncovering a colonial paradigm in the scenario of Soviet-driven modernization, Bogdan Stefanescu stresses the opening of Romanian culture towards the geo-cultural models of other colonial spaces in the so-called Second and Third Worlds. In theoretical terms, this allows the author to reinterpret the accepted idea of a vacuum in the area and to embark on a genuine “comparative post colonialism,” drawing on the category of nodal cultural convergence. Stefanescu’s contribution is in step with the current thinking in literary studies, which sees world literature and geopolitics as two sides of the same coin, as Theo D’haen puts it (D’haen 7–24).

The world-system analysis is applied by Teodora Dumitru to the controversial Romanian literature of the eighties – the so-called “textualist” production of the late Cold War period. Her insightful close readings support the argument that we should see in this atypical *postmodern* “literature without Postmodernism” a blend of the anti-systemic Beat rhetoric of resistance and subversion with genuine Americanophilia and enthusiasm for the culture of the free-market economy.

The two distinct key levels of this book are easy to identify. On the one hand, the authors develop and set off a wide range of analytic devices intended to counteract the preexisting interpretive scenarios of modern Romanian criticism and literary histories, underpinned by a national essentialism which has been playing the card of ethnic difference and linguistic isolation. Although very much overrated, their hypersignificant stock of categories – see for instance meta-, para-, inter- and trans-imperialism, recursive globalization, interactional historiography, transnational geolocation etc. – helps detect the small latent openings toward worldliness in a culture permanently haunted by an over-arching fear of belatedness and isolation.

On the other hand, the object of their interpretation – Romanian literature – is widened considerably, to incorporate various areas previously excluded from national literature. They claim back the regional or minority literatures (Imre Jozseph Balasz, “Trees, Waves, Whirlpools: Nation, Region and the Reterritorialization of Romania’s Hungarian Literature”), the great diaspora Romanian-born writers – Eliade, Cioran, Ionesco (Mihai Iovanel, “Temporal Webs of World Literature: Rebranding Games and Global Relevance after the Second World War”), the emigrés of the communist period (Doris Mironescu, “How Does Exile Makes Space? Contemporary émigré Literature and the Worldedness of Place: Herta Muller, Andrei Codrescu, Norman Manea”) and the “outsider” writers from Bessarabia, Bukovina and the Serbian Banat (Mircea Diaconu, “Reading Microliterature: Language, Ethnicity, Polyterritoriality”).

I have deliberately left out the excellent study by Mihaela Ursa, “Made in Translation: A National Poetics for the Transnational World,” which epitomizes the recent efforts by literary scholars to redefine translation studies as a transdisciplinary area, bringing together comparative literature, imagology, linguistics, anthropology, philosophy and cultural studies, in a sustained effort to show that “translation isn’t just translating” – to quote

Haun Saussy (Saussy 43–57). After a pertinent review of the ongoing debate in Romania around the cultural roles assigned to translation, the author defines it as a stepping stone for any nation building, and argues that in Romania it was closely tied into the national project.

The effort from the youngest generation of Romanian scholars – *the Millennials* – to put forward their particular views on the history of Romanian literature and its interpretation strategies brings an opportune conceptual reshuffle, intended to problematize particular facets of literary production and interpretation, either overlooked or deemed unproblematic until now. Overall, this study stands out first and foremost through its ability to ask the most pressing questions on the subject, to single out the key dilemmas and to open up relevant paths for future research. The convergent effort of the contributors to bring together literary history and comparative literature with cultural studies, translation studies and imagology is worth noting.

The authors are successful throughout in deconstructing the discourse of national and ethnic essentialism, in step with the most recent developments in literary research: the replacement of the national-modular categorization of literary traditions, the “intersectional” notions of identity formation, the demise of Eurocentrism and the rise of post nationalism (Leersen 13–32).

However, in spite of the authors’ advocacy for generational “Difference,” their product clearly displays the unmistakable common denominator of all previous Romanian literary histories: *the militant drive*, which turns the book into a *Manifesto*.

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**ACTES DU CONGRÈS DE L'AIRC, PARIS 2013 /  
PROCEEDINGS OF THE AIRC CONGRESS, PARIS 2013**





**Anne Tomiche, dir. *Le Comparatisme comme approche critique / Comparative Literature as a Critical Approach. Tome 1: Affronter l'Ancien/ Facing the Past. Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2017. Pp. 584. ISBN: 9782406065227. Tome 6 : Littérature, science, savoirs et technologie/ Literature, Knowledge, Science and Technology. Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2017. Pp. 621. ISBN : 9782406065371.***

En juillet 2013, l'Université Paris-Sorbonne accueillait le vingtième Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée. Les actes de ce colloque firent l'objet d'une publication ambitieuse en six volumes chez Classiques Garnier. Partant du constat que la mondialisation oblige les comparatistes à redéfinir leur discipline, tant par rapport au marché du livre, qu'au statut du texte, de l'auteur, ou même du lecteur, ainsi que par rapport à la notion même d'altérité, le congrès s'interroge sur différents aspects centraux ou marginaux des études de littérature comparée.

Le premier volume qui se propose d'« Affronter l'Ancien » se consacre à l'étude de l'Antiquité et entreprend ainsi d'étudier et d'interroger la pertinence des outils comparatistes dans le cadre d'une étude consacrée aux textes anciens. Outre une introduction générale consacrée au congrès et réalisée dans sa version bilingue, soit en français et en anglais, par Anne Tomiche, cet ouvrage, fort bien structuré, comporte trois parties. La première fut intitulée « Antiquité /Modernité : un laboratoire du comparatisme », la deuxième « Le Comparatisme à distance : la Littérature Comparée des Périodes Anciennes (LCPA) ». Par ailleurs, cette deuxième partie rassemble elle-même des contributions réparties en cinq sous-parties : « Réévaluations de quelques figures de l'histoire du

comparatisme », « Enseignements des textes distants », « Traductions du passé, comparatisme d'aujourd'hui », « Histoire et théorie, analyses du geste comparatiste » et enfin « Théories contemporaines de la fiction, textes anciens ». La troisième et dernière partie s'intitule « Mythes, stéréotypes, *topoi* et réécritures ». Elle se divise en deux sous-parties : « Mythes et stéréotypes », puis « *topoi* et réécritures ». Au moment d'aborder chaque partie, le lecteur est agréablement guidé par des articles introductifs qui livrent une réflexion générale sur le sujet. On peut toutefois regretter que la troisième partie ne bénéficie pas d'une telle introduction. Ces avant-propos théoriques livrent une réflexion méthodologique consacrée aux outils d'analyse dont dispose le comparatiste pour entreprendre des recherches dans le domaine envisagé, ce qui permet d'actualiser les pratiques de chacun. Les articles qui suivent servent alors à illustrer cette réflexion méthodologique et théorique. Cette approche introductive très structurée dont on peut certes regretter certaines redites sans doute inévitables doit être d'autant plus saluée que le lecteur déplore son absence dans d'autres volumes, notamment dans le volume 6, consacré au rapport de la littérature aux sciences, sujet certes traditionnellement moins exploré par la recherche. Cette présentation témoigne manifestement d'un appareil critique fort bien outillé mis à l'épreuve par une certaine pratique d'analyse et une mise à distance conceptuelle certaine.

Véronique Gély propose une première réflexion générale et introductive à ce volume où elle compare ainsi les apports de la littérature comparée, discipline caractéristique des Lettres Modernes – en particulier de leur agrégation –, aux analyses réalisées par les spécialistes de Lettres Classiques. Si ces dernières, assez récemment, tendent à « défamiliariser » l'Antiquité et à y voir non pas tant la mère fantasmée des civilisations occidentales, comme ce fut longtemps le cas en Europe sous l'influence d'Erich Auerbach, d'Ernst Robert Curtius ou de Leo Spitzer, mais bien plutôt à comprendre l'Antiquité comme un foyer de civilisations dont il convient de mesurer l'altérité, la méthode comparatiste consiste pour sa part à évaluer l'écart qui sépare le texte, voire les textes modernes, de l'hypotexte antique, grâce à la notion de transfert culturel. L'étude du texte antique se voit investie alors d'une dimension heuristique, ironique et éthique propre à déconstruire les préjugés. Cette défamiliarisation remet par conséquent en cause l'eurocentrisme souvent reproché au comparatisme occidental pour ouvrir davantage au monde les études comparatistes.

Fort de ce constat, la première partie propose une série de contributions en français ou en anglais, propres à illustrer ce propos introductif. Une série d'études s'applique au renouvellement de l'inspiration nationale par le prisme paradoxal de l'Antiquité : l'héritage antique au service de l'identité géorgienne face au monde, l'inspiration antique d'Eschyle comme affirmation du nationalisme albanais face au géant soviétique, le renouvellement de l'inspiration dramaturgique russe à l'âge d'argent (1890–1920) face à l'influence occidentale, et enfin le renouvellement de l'écriture du tombeau par le recours aux mythes égyptiens sous la plume de Mallarmé.

Une autre série d'articles rend justice au modèle antique par les thèmes abordés : l'autorité des anciens par rapport aux modernes dans les textes médicaux du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, le recours polémique à l'Antiquité dans un corpus anglais et français du XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles, la constitution de ballades britanniques romantiques grâce au transfert d'une lecture fantasmée de chants héroïques romains par un historien allemand et relayée elle-même par un poète anglais, l'hypothèse que les sciences de l'Antiquité constituent un laboratoire du comparatisme, aux confins de la littérature et de la philosophie, le renouvellement de l'approche tragique par Sénèque à l'époque moderne, l'apport de la littérature comparée aux études antiquisantes dans la transmission notamment manuscrite des textes antiques, la lecture que Corneille fait d'Électre dans le but de renouveler l'esthétique tragique en son siècle policé.

Dans son introduction à la deuxième partie « Le Comparatisme à distance », consacrée à la littérature comparée des périodes anciennes (LCPA), Françoise Lavocat invite à un renouvellement méthodologique et à une approche réflexive de la discipline. Elle insiste tout d'abord sur les différentes difficultés que rencontre la LCPA : tout d'abord, il s'avère difficile d'établir des découpages chronologiques entre différentes aires culturelles. Puis l'immense ouverture synchronique aux littératures du monde a nui à l'approche diachronique. La disparition progressive des langues anciennes parmi les compétences communément partagées constitue par ailleurs dans cette approche un problème évident. En outre, les sensibilités chauvines qui consistent à croire en l'impossibilité de comparer les grandes périodes littéraires d'un pays avec celles d'un autre nuisent à toute forme de comparatisme. Face à ce constat, l'auteur réaffirme avec force la pertinence de la LCPA et met l'accent sur les notions de familiarisation et de défamiliarisation propres à relancer

la recherche en la matière. Ce faisant, elle réhabilite un principe de recherche hérité du formalisme russe : la familiarisation qui consiste à « construire du commun » et son antagonisme la défamiliarisation qui cherche à mettre à distance un objet d'études que, peut-être à tort, on croit connaître en éprouvant cette prétendue connaissance par un examen notamment historicisant de ses conséquences sur nos idées. Il convient alors de considérer tant la connaissance du texte ancien que le point de vue contemporain à partir duquel on l'étudie. Il sera peut-être permis ici d'exercer quelque esprit critique à l'égard de cet outil d'analyse et du renouvellement méthodologique annoncé : si cette réhabilitation conceptuelle a le mérite de théoriser une pratique comparatiste, elle ne fait en somme que rappeler et réaffirmer une pratique aussi ancienne que la littérature comparée, et en particulier que ses études de réception. D'ailleurs l'auteure se réfère elle-même, outre au formalisme russe, au penseur allemand Schleiermacher du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et n'hésite pas à y reconnaître la résurgence d'un certain humanisme qui a pu susciter une certaine défiance. Mais il n'en reste pas moins vrai que cette démarche conceptuelle encourage à poursuivre la LCPA, précisément au nom de la distance temporelle qui nous sépare de son objet d'étude. D'un point de vue strictement rhétorique, le lecteur peut toutefois regretter que cet effort de définition conceptuelle n'apparaisse que dans l'introduction du deuxième volet, dans la mesure où la notion même de défamiliarisation fait l'objet d'une mention spécifique dès l'introduction du premier volet, sans pour autant bénéficier au préalable d'une définition aussi précise. Il convient sans doute de voir dans cet agencement un approfondissement pédagogique des concepts et des démarches analytiques propres à la LCPA.

Cette approche méthodologique et épistémologique introduit une nouvelle série de contributions qui ont pour objet d'étude la démarche comparatiste des romanistes allemands : la lecture biographique que Piero Camporesi propose de Pétrarque, la complémentarité du corps et de l'esprit dans la pensée de l'art à la Renaissance, la lecture du théâtre moderne à partir des théories contemporaines, le comparatisme des théoriciens de l'âge classique face à la distance historique qui les sépare de l'Antiquité, la notion d'immersion fictionnelle appliquée aux romans du XVI<sup>e</sup> et du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, la distance culturelle des traductions de tragédies antiques réalisées aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, l'auto-translation chez Thomas More comprise entre la pratique de la Renaissance et la critique contemporaine, la satire ménippée étudiée d'un point de vue

comparatiste nécessaire à la saisie de son caractère polymorphe, le renouvellement épistémologique des approches historicisantes pratiquées tant en France qu'aux États-Unis, l'élargissement du champ d'analyse comparatiste des périodes anciennes à partir de l'exemple chinois, et la déconstruction d'une conception proprement européenne de la fiction à partir de l'exemple japonais.

Dans la troisième et dernière partie, les contributions s'intègrent davantage aux études d'anthropologie et de *gender studies* en se concentrant sur la dimension universelle et anthropologique du mythe, celui d'Œdipe ou celui de la déesse matriarcale, la question des stéréotypes et l'approche méthodologique qu'elle suppose, la construction de la vertu et de l'autorité féminines et enfin les discours transgenres des premières dynasties chinoises.

Le volume 6 se propose d'explorer les rapports de la littérature aux sciences, ce qui nécessite une approche comparatiste et épistémologique, propre à interroger le caractère heuristique de la littérature. Ce rapprochement des sciences et de la littérature suppose ainsi une réflexion proprement philosophique sur la littérature. Le volume est introduit, outre par la longue préface bilingue d'Anne Tomiche qui présente les enjeux du congrès, par une conférence de Jean-Pierre Changeux, neurobiologiste à l'Institut Pasteur et au Collège de France, membre de l'Académie des sciences. Remaniée en essai par Suzanne Nalbantian, cette conférence intitulée « A Neurobiological Theory of Aesthetic Experience and Creativity » rapproche les sciences biologiques et les sciences humaines, présentant ainsi dans ses grandes lignes la recherche que le savant mène depuis plusieurs années pour établir une théorie neurobiologique de l'expérience artistique. À partir de quelques œuvres de Dalí, Léonard de Vinci ou encore Matisse, il explique les mécanismes électriques et chimiques observés lors de la création ou la contemplation artistique.

Ce volume se divise en trois parties. La première est intitulée « Science et littérature ». La deuxième, « Littérature, savoirs et émotions », se présente elle-même en trois sous-parties consacrées respectivement à la « Littérature et [aux] paradigmes scientifiques », à « La littérature et [au] vivant », et à la « Littérature et [aux] émotions ». Enfin la troisième partie consacrée aux « Humanités numériques » comprend trois sous-parties aux sous-titres anglais : « Digital Aesthetics and Reading Strategies », « Games and Narrative », « Local Vs. Global Frames ». Le volume contient une bibliographie générale relative au Congrès – dotée d'une partie consacrée à la littérature et aux sciences et d'une autre axée sur le « comparatisme et les

humanités numériques » –, un index des noms propres valable pour les six volumes, et les résumés de chaque contribution publiée dans ce même volume 6. Malgré cette structure claire et précise, le lecteur pourrait regretter que la deuxième partie ne fasse pas l'objet d'une introduction ou d'une présentation en bonne et due forme, comme c'est le cas de la première et de la troisième partie. Seule la deuxième sous-partie de cette deuxième partie bénéficie d'une introduction, et il peut en ressortir une impression quelque peu confuse. La comparaison avec le premier volume, doté lui-même de toute une série d'introductions, fait en effet d'autant plus ressentir cette lacune. Sans doute peut-on la mettre sur le compte de l'originalité thématique que suppose le rapprochement des sciences et de la littérature. Consacrant leur premier volume à l'étude de la Littérature Comparée des Périodes Anciennes (LCPA), ses auteurs étaient sans doute scientifiquement mieux armés pour aborder leur objet d'études. À l'inverse, pour étudier le rapprochement des sciences et de la littérature, les responsables du volume 6 ont pu manquer d'un certain appareillage conceptuel et davantage surtout d'une tradition scientifique. Par ailleurs, si les subdivisions des parties II et III permettent d'établir une réelle cohérence dans la série des contributions, c'est moins le cas pour la première partie qui laisse le lecteur envisager lui-même la cohérence de ces premières contributions.

La première partie s'intéresse en particulier à la perception des sciences par la littérature. Il s'agit d'une approche unilatérale. Les contributions sont rassemblées et présentées par Christine Baron qui s'interroge dans une sorte de préface sur « ce que savoir en littérature veut dire ». Cette introduction présente les enjeux épistémologiques de ce rapprochement. Tirillée entre les exigences d'un savoir rigoureux et sa réalité artistique, la littérature soulève certaines polémiques lorsqu'elle prétend se rapprocher des sciences. Cette contribution évoque ainsi le courant philosophique très controversé qui prétend mettre sur un pied d'égalité la science et la création artistique. Puis Christine Baron mentionne les études sociologiques de la littérature, assez bien développées. La génétique textuelle prétend également appliquer au texte littéraire la méthode d'analyse des sciences naturelles en considérant le texte comme un véritable organisme vivant. Remarquant enfin que la littérature ne se présente pas comme un véhicule de contenus cognitifs, Christine Baron précise que la littérature contextualise les contenus en leur donnant une interprétation, qu'elle les historicise, qu'elle relie un savoir à un état de choses politique,

économique, ou encore existentiel, par la métaphorisation. Interrogeant l'usage fait de ces savoirs véhiculés par la littérature, l'auteur précise que la littérature reconfigure le monde que nous habitons. L'apport de la psychanalyse n'est pas oublié. Cette jeune science permet en effet de reconfigurer en particulier les personnages de fiction littéraire. S'il convient de saluer l'effort de l'auteur à balayer les différents champs du savoir scientifique explorés par la littérature, le lecteur peut toutefois regretter que cette introduction à la première partie ne présente pas de manière plus exhaustive les mérites de chaque contribution contenue dans la première partie pour les rattacher à la problématique initiale. L'auteur le fait pour certains articles, et souvent de manière allusive, mais pas de manière systématique.

Cette première introduction est alors suivie de sa série de contributions. Gisèle Séginger interroge la notion de paradigme pour explorer les rapports de la littérature et de la science. Elle compare notamment les approches universitaires des deux disciplines pour mettre en valeur la particularité de chacune. Elle approfondit les aspects sociologiques, philosophiques, historicisants. L'exemple de Flaubert permet alors de conclure que la notion de paradigme scientifique peut structurer un texte littéraire, qu'elle rend éventuellement compte d'un réseau intellectuel complexe et enfin que le texte littéraire peut explorer la connaissance scientifique.

Trois premières contributions s'intéressent au dialogue de la littérature avec les sciences : Marie Cazaban-Mazerolles compare deux œuvres qui favorisent ce dialogue : le *Brave New World* d'Aldous Huxley et *La Possibilité d'une île* de Michel Houellebecq. Elle y étudie en particulier les défis posés par la première à la seconde. Nicholas Manning interroge pour sa part les mythes et les malentendus des modèles littéraires et biologiques de l'affect. Et Sébastien Olson-Niel s'intéresse aux transferts épistémologiques chez Herman Melville, Émile Zola, Romain Gary et Michael Cunningham. Il y examine les spectres de la science et les transferts scientifiques.

Deux autres articles interrogent la dimension pédagogique de la littérature dans le domaine scientifique : Carine Goutaland analyse ainsi les métaphores de l'ingestion du savoir dans la littérature naturaliste. Et un article rédigé à six mains par Silvia Aymerich-Lemos, Hélène Beaulieu et Joseph-Joan Centelles étudie le néologisme « LabLit », la fiction destinée à favoriser l'apprentissage des sciences par les jeunes.

Carolina Ferrer et Laurence Dahan-Gaida explorent dans deux articles différents la représentation littéraire d'une idée scientifique : la première approfondit la théorie du chaos dans les sciences humaines et sociales et la seconde compare chez Paul Valéry et Robert Musil la réflexion sur le temps et ses représentations avec une approche essentiellement philosophique.

La deuxième partie débute par une sous-partie consacrée aux rapports de la littérature aux savoirs et aux émotions. Deux articles se confrontent à la question que posent ces rapports : Kathleen L. Komar analyse la manière dont les technologies électroniques appréhendent la littérature et interroge à l'inverse la façon dont la littérature envisage l'espace cybernétique. Patrizia Piredda pour sa part étudie comment Heidegger et Pirandello donnent au savoir une dimension technique. L'intérêt de cet article réside notamment dans le rapprochement d'un philosophe et d'un écrivain dans l'exploration prométhéenne des savoirs scientifiques.

La deuxième sous-partie se consacre aux rapports de la littérature au vivant. Si nous avons pu regretter que la deuxième partie ne soit pas introduite en bonne et due forme, cette deuxième sous-partie fait l'objet d'une introduction par Haun Saussy qui insiste sur la comparaison de la structure notamment métaphorique de la littérature avec celle d'un organisme vivant constitué par tout un réseau de cellules. Par ailleurs, le véritable point de comparaison entre la littérature et cet organisme vivant serait l'idée de créer de la vie à partir d'éléments qui eux ne sont pas vivants. La comparaison d'une œuvre littéraire et d'un organisme vivant s'appuie sur la théorie formaliste de l'altération du genre développée par Chklovski et Tynianov.

Dans cette deuxième subdivision, Carlos Rojas compare la circulation de microbes mortels à la diffusion du savoir dans le roman *Ruyan@SARS. come* de Hu Fayun qui utilise l'image ironique d'une censure étatique, métaphorisée en organisme dont le système immunitaire élimine les microbes, c'est-à-dire les œuvres jugées malsaines. Dans le même registre, Mirian Carballo observe dans les romans de Margaret Atwood *Oryx and Crake* (2003) et *The Year of the Flood* (2010), ainsi que dans le film de James Cameron *Avatar* de 2009 la dissolution des frontières entre les espèces humaines et le domaine naturel que suppose notamment la dimension en 3D du support filmique.



La troisième sous-partie qui se propose d'étudier les rapports de la littérature aux émotions comprend trois articles : dans la tradition de la philosophie idéaliste allemande, Joëlle Prungnaud établit un rapport entre les émotions provoquées par l'architecture et la littérature comparée. Puis Róbert Gáfrík explore le lien qui peut exister entre les recherches actuelles menées sur les émotions et la poésie sanskrite en particulier et comparatiste en général. Enfin, Silvia Ulrich s'intéresse à la nouvelle de Stefan Zweig *Brûlant secret* pour y explorer les relations entre les émotions et l'hôtel, soit l'espace dans lequel elles peuvent évoluer avec les personnages.

La troisième partie consacrée aux humanités numériques est introduite par H-J. Backe qui, prudent, laisse entrevoir quelque inquiétude sur l'avenir des humanités traditionnelles. L'auteur remarque que la littérature numérique demeure un vaste champ d'investigation inexploité et propose une série de problématiques sur la pertinence et l'efficacité des outils d'analyse comparatiste, sur le statut de l'auteur, celui du texte ou même celui de la littérature.

Deux articles illustrent la problématique des stratégies de lecture dans le domaine des esthétiques numériques : Alckmar Luiz Dos Santos dresse un état des lieux de la littérature numérique contemporaine du Brésil. Et Matti Kangaskoski étudie le poème numérique de Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries « Dakota ».

Deux autres articles explorent les liens de la narration et des jeux vidéos. H. J. Backe adopte une démarche « défamiliarisante » des innovations artistiques dans les jeux vidéo à partir des outils d'analyse de la sémiologie. Solvejg Nitzke étudie quant à elle le savoir conditionné tant par la fiction que par les sciences.

Enfin, dans une dernière sous-partie qui analyse les liens dialectiques entre l'échelle mondialisée et locale de l'ère numérique, Isabelle Krzywkowski pose les questions soulevées par les littératures numériques dans un contexte de mondialisation, et ce faisant, elle compare les littératures numériques d'Allemagne et de France, toutes deux faiblement développées sur des modes différents et insiste plus sur l'aspect révolutionnaire d'internet que sur celui de l'usage informatique. Puis Amelia Sanz, Miriam Llamas, Begoña Regueiro analysent les conséquences de la révolution numérique mondialisée sur l'écriture, tant

dans sa production, que sa diffusion et sa consommation, concluant sur l'importance de ce vaste champ d'études encore aujourd'hui largement inexploité.

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**Anne Tomiche, dir. *Le Comparatisme comme approche critique / Comparative Literature as a Critical Approach. Tome 2 : Littérature, arts, sciences humaines et sociales / Literature, the Arts, and the Social Sciences. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017. Pp. 534. ISBN : 9782406065258.***  
**Tome 3: *Objets, méthodes et pratiques comparatistes / Objects, Methods, Practices. Classiques Garnier, 2017. Pp. 453.***  
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Sur les six volumes qui constituent les Actes du XXème Congrès de l'AILC qui s'est tenu en juillet 2013 à l'université Paris-Sorbonne, il me revient de présenter, réparties sur deux volumes, une soixantaine de communications. Comme il me paraît souhaitable et utile de rendre compte de la manière la plus exacte possible de la richesse et de la diversité d'un tel ensemble, on comprendra le choix fait d'une présentation descriptive et autant que faire se peut objective.

Sous le titre « Littérature, arts, sciences humaines et sociales », le volume II inverse, dans son contenu, l'ordre établi par le titre pour offrir en deux grandes « parties », d'abord « Littérature et sciences humaines et sociales », puis, sous la rubrique « Intermédialités », ce qui correspond à « Littérature (et) arts », essentiellement la musique et les « arts de l'image et du son ». Par « sciences humaines et sociales » on comprend vite qu'il s'agit « au premier chef » (14), comme le note Anne Tomiche, l'organisatrice du Congrès, de la « philosophie » (brièvement introduite par Camille Dumoulié) et de « l'anthropologie » ou, plus exactement, de contributions « pour une esthétique comparatiste » (83–140), d'une philosophie « postcoloniale », de la « déconstruction » (175–200) et d'une « archéologie du quotidien » (201–50). Au reste, le lecteur a

été averti très tôt (12–13), dans la présentation d'ensemble détaillée donnée par Anne Tomiche, que « cohabitent des sections qui ont été pensées comme telles dès la mise en place du Congrès et des sections qui ont été constituées après coup, lors de la structuration d'ensemble de cette série de volumes ». Dans la mesure où il s'agissait de réfléchir sur « Le Comparatisme comme approche critique », il aurait peut-être été instructif de connaître ce qui avait surgi de manière imprévue, comme une sorte de dynamique ou de logique dans la réflexion « critique » sur une discipline assurément complexe, tant il est vrai qu'il n'y a pas « *une et une seule* méthode comparatiste mais bien *des comparatismes* » (12, en italique dans le texte).

Robert Smadja, modifiant, de façon significative, le libellé général de la section où il s'inscrit, reprend une recherche sur un Beau spécifiquement littéraire et non amalgamé, le plus souvent, avec « les autres arts » (83). C'est donc une « beauté intelligible » qu'il s'agit de cerner et il ne sert à rien d'opposer le sensible à l'intelligible, mais de tenir compte d'un « retentissement affectif » (89). Dominique Peyrache-Leborgne réfléchit sur le sublime (ou plutôt sur le sentiment du sublime) comme « notion transgénérique » (95) dans une perspective largement diachronique qui accrédite les positions de Heidegger et les intuitions de Jean-François Lyotard et de Jean-Luc Nancy. Clélie Millner met en relief l'idée d'une littérature comme « art sceptique », sous l'autorité de Montaigne, et d'une écriture « enquêteuse » et « non résolutive » (107), à partir de textes de Daniele del Giudice, Antonio Tabucchi, Antoine Volodine, Peter Handke et Roberto Bolaño. Pour Arnaud Marie, l'entrée dans le « Tout Monde » constitue un défi pour la littérature comparée entendue comme « polémologie » et soucieuse de rendre compte d'une universalité « inquiète » (122). A partir de deux noms que tout oppose (Richard Millet *vs* Patrick Chamoiseau), c'est une plaidoirie pour un comparatisme marqué par un « tropisme guerrier » (122), mais aussi une défense et illustration originale d'un « néo-comparatisme » qui souhaite dépasser le « double écueil » de l'universalisme classique et le « renoncement à toute forme d'universalité » (134–35). Assurément, nous sommes là clairement devant une nouvelle « approche » de la discipline, pour reprendre le programme général du Congrès, provocante dans le meilleur sens du terme.

Un libellé habile, souple et flexible (« Rythmes, flux, intensités », 141–74), permet de regrouper trois communications qui sont de fait des propositions de relecture d'œuvres représentatives de notre

modernité : Les *Cantos* d'Ezra Pound interrogés à la lumière de l'idéologie fasciste qui permet de nouvelles articulations entre philosophie, politique et poésie (Jonathan Pollock) ; Beckett, Michaux, Deleuze revisités à partir de « la voie des rythmes », fil conducteur emprunté à Michaux (Silvio Ferraz et Anita Costa Malufe) ; Deleuze lecteur de D.H. Lawrence, approche « comparatiste » menée par Juliette Feyel qui révèle un Lawrence nietzschéen, entre progressisme et aristocratie (165), un Lawrence qui est, pour la philosophie de Deleuze, « à la fois comme vivier d'idées et de thèses mais aussi comme méthode » (169). Et ce sont encore deux autres « lectures » qui suscitent un regroupement sous le signe de la « déconstruction » et d'une « philosophie postcoloniale » : d'une part, l'œuvre de Derrida entendue par Brendon Wocke comme « poétique », comme « écriture littéraire » qui fait un « usage d'ailleurs excessif des jeux verbaux » mais aussi comme « philosophie sans concept » (175–77 et 184) ; et, d'autre part, Wole Soyinka et Edouard Glissant essayistes, entre communication, collaboration avec le lecteur et esthétique de l'inachèvement (189), relus et réinterprétés par Florian Alix.

Une « anthropologie du quotidien » : tel est le champ nouveau que définit, en quelques pages introductives, Ariane Bayle, puisant tour à tour dans Michel de Certeau dont l'apport est à juste titre montré comme décisif, mais aussi, au plan fictionnel, chez le romancier Georges Perec (*Les Choses* de 1965), une autre manière utile de retrouver, me semble-t-il, appliqué à la littérature, le champ des études (historiennes) consacrées à la « culture matérielle ». C'est dans une perspective nettement anthropologique que Liouba Bischoff interroge la pratique et l'écriture du voyage chez Bruce Chatwin et Nicolas Bouvier, écrivain « nomade » et écrivain « enquêteur » (211–13). Les « journaux du sida » sont réévalués par Domingo Pujante González comme « récits de vie non-exemplaires », marquant un renouveau du genre autobiographique étranger à toute « esthétisation » (221). Enfin Nella Arambasin, dans une intervention fondée précisément sur « l'anthropologie du quotidien », interroge « les nourrices, servantes, actrices de la geste ancillaire », « une histoire émietée » (229) dans laquelle l'éthique du « care » actualise la question antique du « mieux vivre » (234).

Les rapports entre littérature et musique (seconde orientation générale) font l'objet d'une section plutôt riche et dense, introduite de façon très détaillées par Timothée Picard et Emmanuel Reibel (251–60). Douze communications sont ainsi par eux regroupées : deux sur « l'histoire » du champ musico-littéraire ; deux autres sur l'intermédialité confrontée

à l'hybridité ; trois études « consacrées à la poésie », puis trois autres au « roman » auquel s'ajoute « le genre du théâtre radiophonique » ; enfin « quelques propositions méthodologiques novatrices » pour les deux dernières (253). C'est dans une optique largement diachronique que Francis Claudon reprend un « dialogue des Anciens et des Modernes » où il occupe une place capitale et ... équidistante. On appréciera une trajectoire historique qu'il retrace depuis Oskar Walzel jusqu'à Pierre Zima, distinguant utilement tradition américaine et française. L'intermédialité, note-t-il justement, « tend vers la littérature générale » (272) et ce serait là encore, semble-t-il, une invitation à préciser de nouvelles approches, pour reprendre le thème fédérateur du Congrès. Andrzej Hejmej propose un utile programme de « comparatisme intermédial » en quatre catégories : convergence entre narrativité dans la musique et la littérature ; transposition (roman en opéra) ; reproduction d'analogies structurelles et « polymédialité », insistant sur l'hybridité des corpus (288).

C'est sur cette même notion (« l'hybridité musico-littéraire ») mais aussi « l'hétérogénéité » (296) que revient Aude Locatelli en convoquant un riche éventail d'exemples. A partir d'une question faussement simple : « Sommes-nous encore romantiques ? » Jean-Louis Backès oriente sa réflexion vers une autre notion : « l'ineffable » (316). Michèle Finck, quant à elle, propose des « paradigmes » pour un champ de recherche qu'elle nomme « audiocritique », un essai de « poétique du son » (317), sous le signe du « musicien penseur » (328), conférant à la musique une sorte de fonction de « guérison ». On peut penser (mais comparaison... n'est pas raison) à l'idée d'une musique « consolatrice » défendue par Georges Duhamel dans un essai quelque peu oublié. Thomas Le Colleter reprend quelques intuitions de Michèle Finck pour repenser les rapports entre musique et poésie et approfondir les « discours » tenus par les poètes sur la musique (345).

Si nous passons à présent au roman, Yves-Michel Ergal, reprenant ses travaux sur « l'écriture de l'innommable », précise la « troisième voix narrative » (350) de Beckett, une « écriture vocale », « lieu de fusion entre écriture et musique » (353) : Lire Beckett, « c'est l'écouter » (361). La notion de « *mélôphrasis* », empruntée à Rodney Edgecombe, calquée sur *ekphrasis*, permet à Yves Landerouin de reprendre systématiquement tous les types de discours critiques sur l'œuvre musicale (364) pour aboutir à une « critique » transversale, transgénérique, voire transémotique (368). Et l'on retiendra la tranquille innovation proposée : se prendre soi-même comme point de départ d'une analyse présentée comme « égocentrique »

(373). A partir d'une suggestion de Claude Lévi-Strauss dans *Le cru et le cuit* – écouter la musique c'est « accéder à une sorte d'immortalité » (375), Nelly Avignon propose ce qu'elle nomme un « modèle éternitaire », le « rêve », à travers la forme romanesque, d'une « éternité musicale » (388). Dans le corpus présenté il eût été intéressant de faire figurer le romancier argentin Ernesto Sábato qui poursuit dans *L'écrivain et ses fantômes* ce rêve d'éternité, non d'immortalité, pour ne rien dire du « grammairien » Brunetto Latini qui, selon Dante, apprenait « *com l'uom s'eterna* » (*Inf.*, XV, 85). Rebecca Margolin de son côté explore « l'art radiophonique » (selon la formule de Paul Deharme qui remonte à 1929) pour mettre en évidence « les séductions de l'écoute à l'aveugle », ou encore « la narration faite au présent de l'indicatif qui emporte l'auditeur » (391), un « théâtre d'ondes » pour lequel elle propose des « approches renouvelées » (395–98) et un riche corpus (398–401) concluant que « la musicalité de la dramatique radiographique constitue une herméneutique (406). Ici, pour retrouver le projet initial du congrès, c'est un corpus nouveau qui appelle des « approches renouvelées ».

C'est la même optique, la même dynamique qu'on retrouve dans les deux dernières communications : d'abord, celle de Marie Gaboriaud qui reprend la question du « discours musical » envisagé comme « un objet en soi » pour en finir avec l'idée que la musique peut se passer de commentaires et accepter l'idée que ce discours est aussi « un métalangage » (417) ; puis celle de Marik Froidefond qui se propose de rendre compte des « affinités » entre œuvres littéraires et musicales sans invoquer « l'influence » ou « la filiation ». Un exemple réduit mais convaincant est retenu – la « suite » musicale, en particulier baroque (428) – confrontée à la notion de « cycle » romanesque. On ne saurait trop souligner la richesse de cette section et les perspectives qu'elle ouvre dans le droit fil du thème choisi pour le congrès.

On découvre assez largement les mêmes préoccupations dans la dernière section consacrée aux rapports entre littérature et arts de l'image et du son. C'est l'exemple de la BD (*Gemma Bovary* de Posy Simmonds) étudié par Henri Garric comme possibilité de « parasiter » la tradition littéraire (445). Ce sont les « altérations » ou les alternatives que représentent des formes nouvelles prises par le discours critique sur le film (schémas graphiques, matrices numériques, « lectures » numériques de film) qui apparaissent comme autant d'« approches » proprement « comparatistes » (468) proposées par Caroline Eades. C'est la « mise en narration » de la théorie démontrée par Markus Schleich ou comment le théorique devient

narratif à partir du film *Adaptation* de Charlie Kaufman. Ou le parcours très détaillé de Ko Iwatsu qui revisite le thème de *l'Île des morts* de Böcklin en lien avec l'*opus 29* de Rachmaninov sur le même sujet. Ou encore la musicalité de la prose de Le Clézio, en particulier dans *Ritournelle de la faim* analysée par Li Mingxia ; enfin, « l'influence » des *Variations Goldberg* de Bach sur deux romans contemporains (*Der Untergeher* de Thomas Bernhard et *Contrapunt* d'Anna Enquist) mise en lumière par Viktoria Grzondziel.

Nous terminerons cette lecture marathon par les deux communications en séance plénière : celle proposée par Jean-Paul Costa, Président de l'Institut international des droits de l'Homme, pour une présentation de la démarche « comparatiste » menée dans le contexte du droit comparé et la riche contribution de Bernard Franco sur le comparatisme comme « humanisme moderne ». L'humanisme comparatiste est vu comme évoluant entre « érudition » et « apport personnel à la littérature », entre « une approche humaine de l'objet scientifique » et « la nécessité d'un élargissement de la connaissance » (71). Quant à l'exemple du droit comparé, on en tirera profit en le mettant en miroir avec notre discipline, tant par les objectifs proposés que par les méthodes mises en œuvre, les obstacles rencontrés (45–46) et... « les progrès à faire » (49). Par ailleurs, l'utilité justement remarquée des « monographies » (48) semble offrir – comme on va le voir – une introduction toute trouvée au volume III.

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Sensiblement plus réduit en nombre de pages, mais non en communications, le volume III est consacré aux « Objets, méthodes et pratiques comparatistes ». Un tel programme oblige à trouver une sorte d'équilibre, voire de complémentarité, entre les exemples et les corpus retenus et les perspectives d'ordre général ou théorique qui peuvent être avancées. Une première « partie » intitulée « Comparer ? » attire utilement l'attention, par son point d'interrogation et par sa première section « Comparables et incomparables », sur les grandeurs et les servitudes de la littérature comparée quand elle est envisagée dans sa seule dimension « comparante », ce qui n'est – rappelons-le – qu'un type de réflexion « comparatiste », un parmi d'autres, quatre en tout, selon une optique toute personnelle. Unir en un même mouvement de lecture et de pensée littérature et gastronomie, comme le propose Laura Gilli, suppose la promotion de la gastronomie comme « science » (83), mais d'abord, semble-t-il, des procédures pour faire dialoguer deux « mondes à part »



(79). Rassembler, comme le fait Ken Ireland, dans une lecture partagée, Thomas Hardy et Gottfried Keller, c'est vaincre une « incomparable distance » d'ailleurs mise en question (97), un problème ou un préalable déjà relevé par J.-P. Costa. Ou encore sacrifier au « démon de l'analogie » pour reprendre les mots de Mallarmé (114), défi ou fatalité sur lesquels revient Montserrat Cots.

C'est un autre défi que le comparatiste s'adresse à lui-même quand il se tourne vers l'étude monographique, souvent discutée et récusée par certains comme étant incompatible avec la démarche non point comparatiste, mais « comparante ». De fait, c'est la première « lecture » que le comparatiste peut se proposer d'entreprendre, exigeante mais passionnante : mettre au jour dans un texte, une œuvre, un auteur sa dimension comparatiste, transformer ceux-ci en objets comparatistes. Cette perspective d'études a depuis longtemps nos faveurs – nous l'avons souvent défendue, et, point plus important, elle a sa pleine légitimité « comparatiste » comme il ressort des six communications retenues. Le regretté Philippe Chardin choisit Proust et Musil qu'il a longuement fréquentés pour mettre en évidence « l'apport » de l'étude monographique quand elle choisit « l'écriture de soi », sans nier « les dissimilitudes irréductibles » et « les spécificités essentielles » (128). La lecture du roman *Austerlitz* de W. G. Sebald proposée par Caroline Ruprecht sert à cerner le thème de l'Holocauste en suivant la structure même du roman qui se confond avec ce que d'autres appelleraient une thématique, en l'occurrence architecturale (144). La stratégie ou le recours aux procédés citationnels sous forme de palimpseste et d'écholalie servent à Genviève Noiray de guides pour sa relecture de Pierre Michon. C'est encore l'analyse – la lecture – de certains procédés narratifs qui sert à Roxana-Anca Trofin pour revisiter l'univers du roman de Vargas Llosa, ses formes d'engagement (170) et son credo poétique : la création comme mensonge ou révélation d'une vérité supérieure. Le jeu, l'enjeu comparatiste par excellence de la « ressemblance » et de la « différence » sert de guide pour une nouvelle lecture (comparatiste) d'*Elephant Man* proposée par Catalina Florina Florescu. C'est enfin la mise au jour d'un « double décentrement » (203) qui permet à Souad Yacoub Khelif de dégager, le principe d'écriture de *Vaste est la prison* d'Assia Djebar : par rapport à l'arabe classique et le français et par apport au statut de la femme maghrébine.

La deuxième « partie », avec son titre suggestif « Archéologies », propose cinq plongées dans nos pratiques, dans le choix de nos thématiques comme dans celui des concepts opératoires utilisés ou des champs disciplinaires

interrogés. Chloé Chaudet reprend utilement la notion d'engagement qui n'est pas une notion surannée lorsqu'elle se distingue de la simple transmission d'une idéologie politique, à partir de quelques exemples (Salman Rushdie, Orhan Pamuk, Toni Morrison). Rachel Esteves Lima revient sur l'entrée des lettres brésiliennes dans la « modernité », sous le signe du manifeste « anthropophagique » d'Oswald de Andrade pour suivre ses inflexions dans deux romans contemporains d'Alberto Mussa et de Milton Hatoum. Chiari Lombardi offre de substantiels compléments à la conférence de Bernard Franco en reprenant la question du comparatisme comme humanisme. Divers exemples (Vargas Llosa mais aussi Paul Auster, Javier Marías et en arrière-plan Bakhtine) mettent en évidence un humanisme « réflexif » et « critique » (235–37). C'est une sorte de bilan prospectif que Mathilde Lévêque propose sur un champ qu'a illustré naguère Isabelle Nières-Chevrel : la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, en traçant de « nouvelles frontières » et des « approches transmédiatiques » (278). On retiendra enfin, avec une attention toute particulière, la belle synthèse ou le programme synthétique présenté par Juliette Vion-Dury portant sur « l'invention littéraire de la psychanalyse » ou l'étude « poétique » de la psychanalyse (255), en particulier la mise en parallèle de l'archéologie et de ses découvertes fondamentales contemporaines des découvertes freudiennes (259), mais aussi « l'importance extrême » de l'écriture épistolaire dans la « poétique » mise en œuvre par Freud lui-même (265).

La troisième et dernière « partie » (« Pratiques critiques » et « Approches des genres littéraires et artistiques ») offre une suite de douze communications dont on ne peut que souligner, là encore, la richesse par l'ampleur des domaines et des questions abordés. Carmen Popescu montre l'intérêt d'une approche comparative des phénomènes intertextuels qui redonne un « statut ontologique » au texte littéraire (288). Maria Elena Aguirre plaide pour une « écocritique », voire une « zoocritique », à partir d'un parallèle entre *Don Segunda Sombra* de l'Argentin Ricardo Güiraldes et de *The heart of Redness* du Sudafricain Zade Mda. Chloé Angué explore les relations entre postcolonialisme et comparatisme en prenant comme corpus la littérature polynésienne, en particulier le roman de Chantal Spitz, *L'île des rêves écrasés* (Papeete, 2003). C'est la chanson (américaine, argentine et costaricaine) qu'a choisi d'étudier Gilda Pacheco pour suivre le passage d'une littérature comparée fondée sur une dimension nationale à une perspective interculturelle. Arata Takeda montre l'intérêt heuristique d'un paradigme « postculturaliste » dans une approche

comparatiste à partir de trois exemples judicieusement analysés : *Les Perses* vus par les Grecs, *Die Hermannsschlecht* de Kleist dans lequel les Romains et les Germains sont « interchangeables » (347) et *Neige*, le roman d'Orhan Pamuk qui met en place un principe « transpatial » (351). Dans une perspective théorique, Blas Zabel pose la question de la « compréhension » de l'œuvre littéraire. Enfin, Odette Jubilado retrouve les vertus du parallèle dans l'étude de *La peste* de Camus et *Essai sur la cécité* de Saramago que réunit la thématique de l'épidémie.

Centrée sur l'étude des genres, la dernière section propose des lectures critiques, diverses et d'inégale portée : le fantastique revisité par Maria João Simões avec un corpus regroupant Calvino, Borges, Mélanie Fazi et Michel Tournier, pour dégager « la question essentielle » : « l'excès représentationnel » ou « l'affaiblissement des relations » établies entre les choses et les personnages (395). Deux genres mal définis sont utilement examinés à la lumière de l'approche comparatiste : le roman en vers (Julia Bacskai-Atkari) et la ballade (Georgeta Tcholakova). Enfin Soma Marik accorde une attention méritée aux mémoires de femmes communistes en contexte bengali, en particulier Manikuntala Sen, « leader de premier plan » (425).

C'est à Ute Heidmann et à Haun Saussy qu'a été confiée la délicate tâche de proposer, en séance plénière, quelques perspectives théoriques ou générales. Dans le premier cas, c'est une très ferme et subtile défense de la « différenciation » (opposée à l'universalisation) qui a été proposée, mais aussi un plaidoyer pour la construction de comparables pour éviter tout ce qui relèverait du « préconstruit » (32–35), mais encore un éloge de la « différence » comme une propédeutique, dans le sillage de Glissant, à la « relation » (57). D'une façon tout à la fois profonde et primesautière, le second est revenu sur quelques-unes de nos pratiques : le « détail », la « *close reading* » et a dispensé de salutaires mises en garde contre l'informatisation de la critique et une « mondialisation » à outrance (70–72).

Après tant de jugements portant sur le qualitatif – inépuisable – de ces deux volumes, je prends la liberté de conclure sur un aspect purement quantitatif. On découvre, non sans quelque stupeur, que le XXème congrès a réuni 1.500 participants, reçu 500 propositions de communications et retenu 170 (seulement), après « lecture en double aveugle » (8). Il faudra qu'un jour un autre parallèle soit entrepris entre les performances comparatistes et sportives puisqu'il est clair que, selon la formule olympique, « l'essentiel est de participer ». On ne peut toutefois

s'empêcher de se demander ce que sont devenus ceux qui ont été laissés pour compte et les simples participants, certains étant les mêmes. Sans doute, chacun est-il revenu dans son pays respectif, « plein d'usage et raison », pour mettre en pratique – ou essayer – quelques-uns des exercices proposés lors du Congrès, auprès de ses étudiants qui, souhaitons-le, lui proposeront ou lui suggéreront, à leur tour, de nouvelles « approches critiques ».

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**Anne Tomiche, dir. *Le Comparatisme comme approche critique/Comparative Literature as a Critical Approach. Tome 4 : Traduction et Transferts/Translation and Transfers.* Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2017. Pp. 625. ISBN : 9782406065319.**

Ce volume fort de 625 pages, composé de 41 articles issus du vingtième Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée organisé en juillet 2013 par l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, atteste excellemment de l'attention soutenue que le comparatisme mondial continue d'accorder à l'étude de la traduction. En dépit de l'autonomie accrue de la traductologie (l'équivalent anglophone *Translation Studies* est la dénomination savante aujourd'hui la plus largement répandue), une discipline (ou interdiscipline) mondialement reconnue et solidement ancrée dans les universités, le comparatisme n'a cessé d'investir la traduction et, par-delà, les modalités du transfert interculturel. Il possède pour cela trois atouts précieux : en premier lieu, une grande réceptivité pour les concepts et méthodes élaborés au sein de disciplines qui se situent dans son voisinage immédiat ou même croisent son propre parcours : les études littéraires, l'histoire de la circulation des productions culturelles, l'histoire des sciences et des savoirs sociaux et culturels, les études culturelles, etc. ; en second lieu, une longue et solide expérience des échanges littéraires et culturels entre des cultures rapprochées et lointaines, sans distinction d'époques ou d'aires culturelles ; enfin, une autoréflexion poussée qui le conduit à se réinterroger constamment et à s'adapter en conséquence aux grandes évolutions paradigmatiques qui se sont rapidement succédé en sciences humaines et sociales, particulièrement au cours des dernières décennies.

Cela étant, le comparatisme subit aussi des revers bien connus, en particulier celui d'un objet difficile à définir et donc à délimiter : comme

la notion de traduction – autant que celle de transfert, peut-être – coiffe une panoplie d'usages courants et savants, les comparatistes (comme les traductologues) l'appliquent à des unités de taille et de sens variables : en l'occurrence à des opérations textuelles aussi bien qu'à des sortes de transpositions – certes métaphoriques – d'espaces culturels ou d'univers symboliques. À quoi s'ajoute naturellement que ces définitions se réclament à leur tour de visées ou de théories diverses, divergentes et souvent opposées. Rien d'étonnant que pareilles difficultés obligent constamment les comparatistes à expliciter et le cas échéant à justifier les choix conceptuels et méthodologiques qu'ils opèrent dans le domaine de la traduction. À moins de morceler ce dernier et de le reconfigurer au gré de tendances et d'écoles comparatistes. Or, sans exclure le débat, les grandes rencontres comparatistes encouragent le dialogue plutôt que la division, fût-ce au prix d'une lisibilité amoindrie des contributions qui n'explicitent pas au départ leurs partis pris. Ainsi, nombre d'articles contenus en ce volume attestent de l'ampleur et de la profondeur des perspectives adoptées lorsque celles-ci relèvent d'un programme homogène et mûrement réfléchi. Il serait vain de les mettre en regard et à plus forte raison de les comparer avec des articles qui mettent en relief leur singularité ou ne précisent pas la tradition de pensée ou le modèle théorique concret dont ils s'inspirent et qui varient naturellement d'une aire culturelle à l'autre.

D'entrée de jeu, la structure complexe du volume se ressent de ces difficultés : non pas la structure en deux parties, qui respecte bien les deux centres de gravité que sont la traduction et le transfert culturel, ni même celle en subdivisions, correspondant à des ensembles qu'il est sans doute périlleux d'agréger selon des principes d'ordonnance homogènes (ils sont peut-être éloignés de ceux qui avaient convenu à la programmation d'un congrès à portée mondiale). La première partie intitulée (je ne reprends que la version française) « Traduction / Traductologie / Translation Studies » coiffe deux sous-ensembles : « Traductions, réception, création » et « La traduction à l'épreuve de la pensée et du marché ». Le premier sous-ensemble, qui compte plus de contributions (14 contre 7) se décline en trois blocs thématiques : « Traduction et rencontre de civilisations », « Traduction et tradition littéraire arabe » et « Questions et variations linguistiques ». Quant à la deuxième partie, intitulée « Transferts culturels », elle comprend un sous-ensemble considérable, « Les tribulations des concepts littéraires occidentaux dans leur transfert vers l'Est » (13 chapitres), et un second plus court (4 chapitres) et sobrement intitulé « Transatlantiques ».

La première difficulté concerne le lien *entre* les parties et leurs sous-ensembles : ainsi, comme l'indique son titre, la première partie coiffée à la fois des contributions sur la traduction et sur la traductologie ; or, les deux champs ou pratiques ne correspondent pas à autant de sous-ensembles. S'ajoute la curieuse position en tête du volume (*avant* la première partie) de trois contributions à caractère théorique qui auraient pu trouver place au sein d'un sous-ensemble séparé et nommément consacré à la traductologie et aux études de transfert.

Une seconde difficulté à relever se rapporte à l'agencement des démarches : ce dernier n'apparaît pas dans l'ordonnance des chapitres, qui se réclament, on l'a dit, de théories et de méthodes souvent distantes les unes des autres, sans bénéficier toujours de mises en perspective aptes à éclairer le lecteur. Un exemple : la contribution d'E. Apter intitulée « Non equivalent, non-translated, incommensurate » se réfère à des travaux majeurs sur la notion d'équivalence (Jakobson 1959, Nida 1964, Catford 1965, Baker 1992), mais néglige les développements et synthèses plus récents qui accèdent à l'actualité et la flexibilité de ce concept demeuré central en traductologie (e.a. Halverson 1997, Pym 2010). On ignore en conséquence à quel point l'article s'adresse délibérément à un public de comparatistes plutôt qu'à des traductologues.

Il est loisible de penser que ces deux problèmes reflètent la position ambivalente, sinon la « crise » de la littérature comparée et du comparatisme. Pour d'aucuns, comme l'éditrice A. Tomiche, il conviendrait même d'arguer d'une « *permanence* de la crise de la discipline » (11), une crise plus que jamais aiguë à notre époque, qui fait face à une globalisation galopante et aveugle. Le titre du colloque (et de l'ouvrage) exprime bien le défi à relever (« une approche critique ») : il s'agit désormais « de prendre la mesure effective de la diversité des pratiques » et de procéder « à une comparaison des comparatismes » (12). Cette invitation aux auteurs s'adresse également aux lecteurs : qu'ils choisissent des parcours de lecture et qu'ils comparent des enjeux et des démarches. Le signataire de ces lignes ne peut évidemment passer en revue l'ensemble des articles, même si la qualité intrinsèque de ces derniers mériterait bien plus qu'un simple résumé. On s'en tiendra donc à relever quelques tendances.

Pour commencer, une dizaine d'articles théoriques (répartis en deux blocs) prennent pour objet des concepts (non-équivalence, violence, métaphore, etc.), des méthodes (transfert, comparaison, performance critique, etc.) ou des institutions (médiation, marché de la traduction) : ils

donnent lieu à des réflexions et à des prises de positions intéressantes et souvent originales, qui invitent à poursuivre le dialogue, en particulier avec les théoriciens de la traduction.

Notons ensuite l'ampleur géoculturelle des pratiques traductives recensées, où les continents se croisent et où les cultures cibles non-européennes occupent une place majeure : principalement le monde arabe (avec 2 contributions), l'Inde (3), le Brésil (4) et surtout la Chine (14). Les études d'œuvres singulières l'emportent sur celles qui s'attachent à la fortune traductive d'un genre ou d'une littérature. S'ajoute que les échanges unidirectionnels ont la faveur des chercheurs, au détriment des échanges mutuels ou croisés et des circulations internationales des œuvres : celles-ci, on y reviendra, sont toujours bien au cœur des préoccupations comparatistes, même si plusieurs articles se penchent sur le rôle des médiateurs, surtout des critiques, des éditeurs et des traducteurs.

Une mention particulière doit être faite du dossier du transfert de concepts, genres et esthétiques littéraires occidentaux vers la Chine : il est novateur par le choix de l'angle d'approche et fascinant par la vigueur des analyses, surtout lorsque celles-ci focalisent les dialogues, les tensions et plus encore les métissages entre les pratiques et les visées européennes et chinoises. Tout historien de la traduction qui s'intéresse aux échanges littéraires et culturels entre l'Occident et la Chine y trouvera son miel.

Au total, nous sommes en présence d'un ensemble éloquent de contributions qui procurent une image nette de maints thèmes traductifs et de plusieurs démarches traductologiques caractérisant la recherche actuelle en littérature comparée. Cette image est certes incomplète, y compris pour les articles à caractère historique, où l'on aurait davantage pu s'attendre à la mise en œuvre de méthodes qui ont désormais droit de cité en histoire de la traduction : des méthodes bibliométriques et sociologiques, notamment, à côté de modèles historiques proprement dits tels que l'histoire croisée, l'histoire comparée, la micro-histoire, etc. Comme quoi, des passerelles interdisciplinaires entre le comparatisme et la traductologie prouvent et continueront de prouver, aujourd'hui et demain, leur utilité.

Rappelons, pour terminer, que la sélection et la réunion en un seul volume thématique de contributions issues d'un congrès aussi foisonnant que celui de l'AILC a dû constituer une véritable gageure. Louons aussi les autres qualités du travail éditorial : une impression impeccable, une



présentation brillante qui contextualise et prépare la lecture des chapitres, qui se trouvent assortis de résumés brefs et limpides. On pourrait certes regretter l'absence d'un index des noms de personnes, mais qui aurait peut-être surchargé le volume. On louera également la politique éditoriale qui consiste à donner les citations dans la langue originale avant de les faire suivre de leurs traductions françaises : c'est une prise de position qui tranche avec le monolinguisme progressif des publications internationales, un monolinguisme qu'il faut évidemment qualifier de paradoxal en relation avec des questions de traduction.

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**Anne Tomiche, dir. *Le Comparatisme comme approche critique/Comparative Literature as a Critical Approach. Tome 5: Local et Mondial : circulations/Local and Global: Circulations. Pp. 561. Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2017. ISBN: 9782406065340.***

Successfully editing conference proceedings is a notoriously difficult task. In the impressive 6 volumes collecting selected presentations made at the 2013 ICLA Paris congress, Anne Tomiche and her editorial team achieved such a *tour de force*. Volume 5 mirrors the complex cathedral-like structure of the whole set of books. Usefully reprinting at the outset the bilingual introduction penned by Anne Tomiche in order to frame the entire series, the volume subsequently tackles its main focus, the much debated nexus between the local and the global in contemporary literary scholarship. The secondary motif of the present volume is effectively ushered in by Florence Delay's poetic mediation on "Paysages et Pays." In this promenade-like essay on the origins of the author's love of comparative literature, the notions of linguistic domains and cultural exchanges supersede any attempt at confrontation. Extolling her admiration for the neglected French writer Valéry Larbaud, Delay privileges change of scenery and strangeness in shaping her vision of comparative poetics.

The remainder of the volume is divided into three main parts, entitled respectively "Literature and Space in a Global Context," "Oriental/Occidental: Beyond Essentialism," and "Eastern, Western, Oriental, Occidental: What World?" The wealth of material contained in the volume precludes any exhaustive summary. Like this reviewer, every reader will have its favorite section.

The first part opens up with a series of essays, curated by Jean Bessière and Gerald Gillespie, offering new perspectives on the fraught concept

of world literature. In “Confectioning World Literature: Reader’s Guides and the Uniformity of Taste,” Keysan Sarkosh examines how popular reader’s guides such as Peter Boxall’s *1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die* introduce a “new wave of world literature” (64) based on questionable, cult-based, criteria. This is especially true as these reader’s guides privilege fiction and contemporary literature only. In “The Real Problem with World Literature,” Ken Seigneurie argues that the “common criticism that World Literature flattens cultural specificities into a world market idiom is misplaced” (80). Instead, he underlines “the more widespread and fundamental problem of ideological rigidity in the North American classroom and in North American publishing” (80). Thibaut Casagrande concludes this section on World Literature with an astute contribution entitled “Le personnage romanesque de l’actrice, une figure mondialisée?” Drawing from examples as diverse as *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone* by Tennessee Williams, *Lit défait* by Françoise Sagan or *Blonde* by Joyce Carol Oates, the critic contends that novels focusing on the figure of the actress could be regarded as a globalized genre, inspired by and critiquing Hollywood stereotypes.

The second sub-section of Part I, “Literature, Space, and Territories,” comprises equally challenging essays. Let it suffice to mention how some contributions prompt us to rethink the boundaries of comparative literature. In “Inhabiting Spatial Fissures. Marginal Subjects and Thirdspaces,” Ana Avalos and Nadia Der-Ohannesian examine how “spaces of resistance” they call “Thirdspaces” (160) are articulated in Annie Proulx’s “Brokeback Mountain” (1999) and Edwidge Danticat’s “The Bridal Seamstress” and “The Funeral Singer” (2004). This “Thirdspace,” they conclude, “questions homogenizing forces and exposes the suffering of those who inhabit the cracks of an allegedly even social space, which, examined up close, is not uniform at all” (168). In “Geopoetics and Comparative Literature,” Oksana Weretiuk shows how the interdisciplinary dimension of comparative methodologies could be enhanced through the link geopoetics provides between science, politics and literature, thus enabling comparisons of “the artistic text with geographic, geological and ecological concerns” (180). In “Crossing the Lines. Passports and Borders as Motifs in Contemporary Migration Literature,” Jesper Gulddal shows how passports and borders, i.e. expressions of movement control, can become a narrative resource (196), particularly in T. C. Boyle’s *The Tortilla Curtain* (1995) and Herta Müller’s *Der Mensch ist ein grosser Fasan auf der Welt* (1986). Thus, the

author concludes that the “chronotope of movement control” becomes a “principle of narrative organization” (204).

The second part of this volume, which collects essays edited by Jean-Pierre Dubost, could be likened to an embedded scholarly book devoted to a reassessment of Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism. In a detailed introduction, “Déconstruire l’orientalisme; des-essentialiser la relation orientale: quelle grammaire, quels outils?” Dubost articulates the aim of this section of the volume, i.e. to determine the ways in which Said’s concept of Orientalism could be reconsidered from a multiplicity of perspectives, thus entailing a de-essentialization (211). As Dubost indicates, towards the end of his life, Said himself acknowledged the necessity of rethinking the Orient in terms echoing Edouard Glissant’s concept of “relation,” as an ongoing process implying cross-cultural encounters (211). The contributions collected here thus stress the ambivalences inherent in Said’s dichotomous East/West binary (214) along the lines of Glissant’s central notion of “enmeshment” (217). Dubost argues that this infinite “enmeshment” between East and West is characterized by countless mutations as well as endless nomadism (218, 219). Dubost also privileges a kind of decentering akin to Julia Kristeva’s notion of “lateral contact” (“*prendre en écharpe*”) (221). According to such visions of the world, “il n’y a pas ‘l’Orient’ ni ‘l’Occident’, il n’y a que des tracés de devenir et des figures de relation” (224). All in all, the case studies collected in this part of the book precisely seek to find ways in which comparative literature could express a kind of “non-hegemonic universality” (234). In “Résistances orientalistes. Relire les voyageurs français à Constantinople (1ère moitié du XIXè siècle),” Sarga Moussa convincingly highlights a critique of Orientalist stereotypes in Gérard de Nerval’s works. While Orientalism has often been considered exclusively as epitomizing the opposition between Europe and Asia, the next three essays refreshingly focus on the Spanish and Portuguese contexts in America. While Axel Gasquet focuses primarily on Argentina (“L’orientalisme hispano-américain, entre l’oubli et la marginalisation”), Ignacio Lopez-Calvo examines the position of Chinese and Japanese minorities in Peruvian literature (“Constructing an Ethnic Space through Cultural Production. The Case of the *Tusan* and *Nikkei* in Peru”). Everton V. Machado devotes his essay to a reconceptualization of Portuguese orientalism (“Repenser l’orientalisme lusitanien”). Two essays further deal with travel narratives written by Egyptians touring Europe: Randa Sabry offers a new reading of Ahmad Zaki Pacha’s travel narratives, *Le Départ pour le Congrès* (1892)

et *L'Univers à Paris* (1900) (“Tourisme et humanisme chez Ahmad Zaki Pacha”). Rania Fathy reconsiders Arabic travel narratives in the anthology published in 1933 by the Egyptian journalist Ahmed El-Sawy (“Le voyage en France. Visions d’artistes égyptiens dans *Paris* (1933)”). The subsequent scholarly contributions lead us to the Indian sub-continent. In “De-orientalizing ‘Indian Literature’ and Indian Literary History? On Native/Foreign Dialectics and the Politics of Translation,” Laetitia Zecchini argues that “the entanglement of the ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident,’ of Eastern and Western histories and discourses is a defining trait of knowledge formation about India” (327). Finally, in “Indian Literatures as Comparative Literature,” Didier Coste comes to the conclusion that any comparative study of Indian literatures must foreground the “age-old glocal” (359).

The last Part of the book amplifies the concerns about the East/West dichotomy broached in earlier chapters. In the opening essay, “Whose World Is It Anyway?,” Dorothy Figueira raises pertinent questions as to the viability of pedagogies of alterity in the North American context. She detects failures in the efforts to address the Other in such American-based disciplines as multicultural, postcolonial and world literature studies. These theories of alterity, unlike comparative literature, rely too ostensibly on the English language. Indeed, as Figueira points out, learning foreign languages has increasingly ceased to be recognized as essential training in American academe over the past few decades. Instead, reading non-Western works in English translation only has become the norm. As she claims: “World Literature, like its cold war and more recent precursors, also seeks to market the Other for commodification and consumption in the West” (370). In other words, “in order ‘to be’ or ‘speak out’, the non-white and/or non-Anglophone culture must seek legitimacy and recognition from Anglophone white culture and use the language of that culture to produce itself” (373). As Figueira concludes, “a Euro-Amerocentric vision continues to articulate the meaning of the humanities and define standards as well as validate the insights of Euro-American academia” (377). In a subsequent section, “Literary and Cultural Inter-Relations between India, Its Neighbouring Countries and the World,” essays presented and compiled by Chandra Mohan prolong the de-essentializing approach to Indian literatures already tackled briefly in the preceding part of the volume. As Mohan indicates in his introduction, the contributions gathered in this section privilege pluralistic perspectives on the Indian subcontinent. Jasbir Jain focuses on cross-cultural narratives

of healing (“*Aman Ki Asha*. Initiatives and Narratives of Healing in the Subcontinent”), while Anisur Rahman compares Sufi music in India and Pakistan (“Love Songs to the Divine. Sufi Music in India and Pakistan”). E. V. Ramakrishnan examines how Faiz Ahmed Faiz can be regarded as a public poet, “one who shaped a unique lexicon and a syntax of experience rooted in the Urdu poetic tradition” (413). He convincingly demonstrates that the “poet resists and rejects the territorial concept of the nation-state in favour of a ‘human geography’ of neighbourhood” (420). Ipshita Chanda traces the intermedial/performance ramifications of the genre of *namah* in Indian West Bengal and Bangladesh. She defines it as follows: “originating in pre-Islamic Persia, the *namah* is generally identified with the epic narrative of the glory of ancient Persia, connecting it to the rise of Islam in Persia” (425). In “Shared Cultures and Different Spaces. A Conflictual Relationship with Subjectivity,” Asha Sundaram focuses on the common Tamil experience of Sri Lankan and Indian writers, respectively Jean Arasanayagam and Bama. In the final essay of this section, “Ramifications of the *Ramayana* in India, Indonesia and Thailand. A Comparative Study,” Soma Mukherjee submits that a number of “Southeast Asian versions of the *Ramayana* are not mere translations or adaptations of one Indian version; rather, they are a mixture of many versions.” (454). Thus, the critic concludes, “the *Ramayana* and its journey through Southeast Asia have become appropriate examples of cross-cultural literary transactions” (456).

The final section of Tome 5 of *Comparative Literature as a Critical Approach* further expands this debate on the differences “Between East and West.” It includes fascinating essays on such diverse topics as Asian-style letters by Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (Yorimitsu Hashimoto), the reception of the Fukushima disaster in German and Japanese literatures (Herrad Heselhaus), the Japanese reception of Stendhal (Julie Brock), literary representations of Shanghai as a city torn apart between Eastern and Western values (Lisa Bernstein and Richard Schumaker), an examination of the influence of Taine on a Bengali woman’s travels narratives in England (Sayantan Dasgupta), the reception of Frank Hardy’s *Power without Glory* and John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* in Communist Eastern Europe (Danica Cerce), as well as an analysis of the voices of Eastern European scholars exiled in America (Roxana Eichel).

All in all, *Local and Global: Circulations* contains a wealth of innovative scholarly material written in an engaging style. The sections devoted to world literature, the legacy of Said’s Orientalism and the literary relations

between India and its neighbouring countries truly contribute to a reassessment of comparative poetics today. This volume certainly deserves a place of choice in the library of any scholar interested in the pitfalls awaiting the discipline of comparative literature as it sets out to negotiate globalization.

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## NOTES BIOGRAPHIQUES/NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Daniel Acke** est professeur à la Vrije Universiteit de Bruxelles (VUB). Dans la littérature française à partir du surréalisme, il étudie le mysticisme non religieux, dans le prolongement de ses travaux sur Yves Bonnefoy (*Yves Bonnefoy essayiste. Modernité et présence*, Rodopi, 1999). Il s'intéresse à la place de la ville dans la littérature et a dirigé avec Elisabeth Bekers l'ouvrage bilingue *Brussel schrijven/ Ecrire Bruxelles. De Stad als inspiratiebron sinds de 19<sup>de</sup> eeuw. La ville comme source d'inspiration depuis le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, VUBPress, 1916. Enfin, en tant que dix-huitiémiste, il travaille sur la tradition des moralistes. Il a collaboré à l'édition des œuvres de Ch.-J. de Ligne et est associé à celle, en préparation, de Vauvenargues.

**Mark Anderson** is Associate Professor of Latin American literatures and cultures at the University of Georgia in the United States. His research deals with the cultural processes of modernity in Latin America, with a particular focus on Mexican narrative, ecocriticism, and disaster studies. He published *Disaster Writing and the Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America* (University of Virginia Press) in 2011 and co-edited a critical anthology on *Ecological Crisis and Cultural Representation in Latin America* (Lexington Books) with Brazilian professor Zélia Bora in 2016.

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**Franca Bellarsi** is Associate Professor at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Belgium. Her research interests and publications are equally divided between the Beat Generation, ecocriticism and experimental eco-poetics, and English Romanticism. Having devoted her PhD to Allen Ginsberg as a poet of the ‘Buddhist Void,’ she has especially been interested in the mysticism and ecospirituality of the Beats, as well as in their debts to European Romanticism. Her articles include “William Blake and Allen Ginsberg: Imagination as a Mirror of Vacuity” (2000), “‘Alien Hieroglyphs of Eternit’ and ‘Cold Pastoral’: Allen Ginsberg’s ‘Siesta in Xbalba’ and John Keats’s ‘Great Odes’” (2013), and “Burroughs’s Re-Invention of the Byronic Hero” (2016). With the research assistance of Gregory Watson, she also authored the Belgian chapter for *The Reception of William Blake in Europe*, edited by Morton D. Paley and Sibylle Erle (Bloomsbury, 2019).

**Valérie-Anne Belleflamme** is currently working on a doctoral dissertation on temporality and the craft of fiction in Gail Jones’s literary oeuvre at the University of Liège, Belgium. She is also a member of the University’s postcolonial research unit CEREP (<http://labos.ulg.ac.be/cerep/>). Her research focuses on postcolonial studies, and Australian literature more particularly, as well as on narratology and phenomenology. Together with Marie Herbillon and Maryam Mirza, she has guest-edited the JEASA issue entitled “Australia-South Asia: Contestations and Remonstrances” (2017).

**Thomas Buffet** est Agrégé d’allemand. Il a soutenu sa thèse sous la direction de Jean-Yves Masson (Paris-Sorbonne) sur le renouvellement de l’écriture élégiaque sous la plume d’André Chénier et de Friedrich Hölderlin. Ce mémoire doit prochainement paraître en deux volumes aux éditions Classiques Garnier. Membre associé du Centre de Littérature Comparée (CRLC-EA 4510) de Paris-Sorbonne, il enseigne en Classes Préparatoires économiques et littéraires à Louis-Le-Grand et Sainte-Marie de Neuilly. Il publie régulièrement des articles consacrés à l’histoire de la traduction et au romantisme européen et prépare une Habilitation à diriger des recherches.

**Ipshita Chanda** has taught Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University in Kolkata since 1993 and is now affiliated with the Comparative Literature department at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She served as Indian Council of Cultural Relations Visiting

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**Christophe Den Tandt** teaches literatures in English as well as cultural theory at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). He is the author of *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism* (Illinois, 1998) and of articles on postmodern culture and cultural studies (crime fiction, SF, popular music).

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Have Human rights': A Conversation with Homi K. Bhabha," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 2018.

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## BRÈVE PRÉSENTATION DE L'AILC

Fondée en 1955, l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (AILC) offre un lieu d'accueil à tous les comparatistes dans le monde et encourage les échanges et la coopération entre les comparatistes, tant à un niveau individuel que par l'intermédiaire de la collaboration avec diverses associations nationales de littérature comparée. Dans ce but, l'Association promeut les études littéraires au-delà des frontières de langues et des traditions littéraires nationales, entre les cultures et les régions du monde, entre les disciplines et les orientations théoriques, et à travers les genres, les périodes historiques et les media. Sa vision large de la recherche comparatiste s'étend à l'étude de sites de la différence comme la race, le genre, la sexualité, la classe sociale, l'ethnicité et la religion, à la fois dans les textes et dans l'univers quotidien. L'Association vise à être inclusive et est ouverte à tous ceux qui s'intéressent à la littérature comparée, y compris les écrivains et les artistes. Elle encourage la participation d'étudiants de master et doctorat et de jeunes chercheurs en début de carrière. L'Association organise un Congrès mondial tous les trois ans. Elle supervise et apporte son soutien à des comités de recherche qui reflètent les intérêts actuels des membres et qui se réunissent plus régulièrement pour mettre en oeuvre des programmes conduisant à des publications dans des revues et sous forme de livres. La revue annuelle de l'Association, *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* regroupe des essais et propose des comptes rendus d'un grand nombre de travaux scientifiques dans le domaine.



## ICLA MISSION STATEMENT

Founded in 1955, the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) offers a home to all comparatists in the world and encourages exchange and cooperation among comparatists, both individually and through the collaboration of various national comparative literature associations. To that end the Association promotes literary studies beyond the boundaries of languages and national literary traditions, cultures and world regions, among disciplines and theoretical orientations, and across genres, historical periods, and media. Its broad view of comparative research extends to the study of sites of difference such as race gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and religion in both texts and the everyday world. The Association aims to be inclusive and is open to anyone with an academic interest in comparative literature, including writers and artists. It welcomes the participation of graduate students and early-career scholars. The Association organizes a world congress every three years. It also oversees and supports research committees that reflect the membership's current interests and meet more regularly to pursue agenda leading to publications in journals and books. The Association's annual journal *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* contains essays and reviews a wide range of scholarship in the field.



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