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Towards a polylogical Philology of the Literatures of the World

The world of world literature

Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis – The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, written in Turkish exile between May 1942 and April 1945, ends on a concluding note of highly ambivalent nature, expressing both hopes and fears. It brings to mind a letter, dated 3rd January 1937, the great Romance philologist had sent from his refuge in Istanbul to his friend Walter Benjamin in Parisian exile. It reads:

It is becoming increasingly clear to me that the current state of the world is nothing but a ruse of providence, in order to lead us along a bloody and torturous road towards an International of triviality and an Esperanto culture.¹

As with this passage, the conclusion of *Mimesis* (and many more of Auerbach's texts) voices the exile's concern about the danger he saw looming for highly varied forms of cultural diversity – not in Europe alone, but in the entire world. Did not evidence clearly indicate that further down the road the 20th century would witness a reduction of cultural forms of expression, and a process of standardization on a global scale?

For Auerbach, a forced *modernization as occidentalization* as he observed it in his country of exile under the rule of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk² (and which, in part, he himself propelled by his academic work), was a rather double-edged affair: He recognised a myriad of chances and opportunities (which had saved

¹ Erich Auerbach, "Brief an Walter Benjamin" [3.1.1937], in "5 Briefe Erich Auerbachs an Walter Benjamin in Paris", ed. Karlheinz Barck, *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 6 (1988): 692. (The German original says: "Immer deutlicher wird mir, daß die gegenwärtige Weltlage nichts ist als eine List der Vorsehung, um uns auf einem blutigen und qualvollen Wege zur Internationale der Trivialität und zur Esperantokultur zu führen." – Translation by Agnes Bethke).

² Cf. Martin Vialon, "Erich Auerbach: Zu Leben und Werk des Marburger Romanisten in der Zeit des Faschismus", in *Marburg-Bilder: Eine Ansichtssache: Zeugnisse aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, ed. Jörg Jochen Berns, Vol. II., (Marburg: Verlag Stadt Marburg, 1996), 383-408; and (id.), "Exil - Literatur - kulturelle Gegenwart - Suheyly Artemel, Müge Sökme und Saffet Tannan im Gespräch mit Martin Vialon", *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung* (2010): 62-100.

his and his family's life after all), but also a process of one-sided Westernization, which, on further expansion, would unfold into a process of homogenization, supersession, and leveling down. Having experienced two world wars and the horror of the Shoah, Auerbach regarded this contemporary trend both as promising and precarious (writing the certainly most important German-speaking book of Romance studies clearly proves this point)³: promising with respect to the development a common future; precarious with respect to the level of cultural dedifferentiation, and its repercussions on world history, world society, world culture, and not least world literature. So, what was one to do? Which visions or ideas could possibly open up new perspectives as far as both philology and society were concerned?

No other text by Auerbach captures this egregious tension and ambivalence, but also the horizon of future developments in a more exact, even seismographically precise way than does his treatise about the “Philology of World Literature” (1952). In this essay, which can also be read as a profound reflection about the preconditions and results of *Mimesis*, Auerbach starts from an observation that echoes both the letter to Walter Benjamin, and the final chapter of his *magnum opus*:

Our planet, the Earth – which is the 'world' of world literature – is growing smaller and becoming less diverse. But world literature does not refer merely to what we share or what is common to all humanity. Rather, it concerns, how what we share and the great diversity of what we do not share can be mutually enriching.⁴

The 'world of world literature', hence, is not a static given, but originates from its respective interactions in a context of multifariousness that Auerbach considers worth preserving. These interactions, though, ultimately presuppose substantial differences and utmost differentiation, not an increasing dedifferentiation on a literary, linguistic, academic, and social level. Even more categorically than in *Mimesis*, Auerbach identifies a turn of eras (or

³ For a historical contextualization and a history of the discipline, see Ottmar Ette, “Atlanten: Die Aufgabe der Philologie: Von Klassikern romanistischer Literaturwissenschaft”, in (id.), *ÜberLebenswissen: Die Aufgabe der Philologie* (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2004), 51–96.

⁴ Erich Auerbach, “The Philology of World Literature”, in *Time, History and Literature*, ed. James I. Porter, transl. Jane O. Newman, (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press: 2014), 253–265. (The German original says: “Unsere Erde, die die Welt der Weltliteratur ist, wird kleiner und verliert an Mannigfaltigkeit. Weltliteratur aber bezieht sich nicht einfach auf das Gemeinsame und Menschliche überhaupt, sondern auf dieses als wechselseitige Befruchtung des Mannigfaltigen.” – Erich Auerbach, “Philologie der Weltliteratur”, *Weltliteratur: Festgabe für Fritz Strich*, (1952), 39–50; republished in Erich Auerbach, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur romanischen Philologie*, eds. Fritz Schalk und Gustav Konrad (Bern/München: Francke, 1967), 301–310, here: 301).

perhaps on a more hopeful note: a juncture in the history of humankind).

At this point, Erich Auerbach was able to provide profound reflections upon an epistemology of philology, owing to his vast experiences in devising new academic structures, as he had done in Marburg, but above all in Turkey and the US. The changes that were taking place on the level of world history and world politics were of immediate concern to him, and fundamentally shaped his own *knowledge for living*. He stated an ongoing specialization of all fields of research (which was as inevitable a development as a desirable one). However, he argued that said specialization ought not lead one to lose sight of the big picture. This is why Auerbach in *Mimesis* had attempted to present an overall context as regarded the represented reality in occidental literature, by means of his tour through the centuries.

The insights of his essay of 1952, which was written down in the US, but nourished largely by his previous experiences as a philologist without a fixed abode, called for a new layout of disciplines, and ultimately, for a shift of emphasis within an open philology interested in and abundant with reciprocal relationships. It is evident to me, that such demands could not be met by the comparative studies of Auerbach's time. In his small, but momentous paper, he writes:

Yet, our philological home *is* the earth. It can no longer be the nation. The most precious and necessary thing that philologists may inherit may be their national language and culture. But it is only in losing – or overcoming – this inheritance that it can have this effect. We must now return – albeit under different conditions – to what the pre-nation state culture of the Middle Ages already possessed, to the knowledge that the human spirit itself is not national.⁵

The category of ‘human spirit’ here doubtlessly refers back to Hegel. In connection with the *Weltgeist* it forms the historico-philosophical precondition for drawing on a premodern, medieval insight (as Auerbach did in *Mimesis*) but also for drawing on Goethe's decisive term ‘world literature’, which from the start had been a polemical answer to the dawn of national literature. In a concise way, Goethe's much cited dictum (dating from 31 January 1827) exemplifies the polemical, as well as programmatic dimension which also Auerbach's essay seeks to explore: “National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand, and everyone must

⁵ Auerbach, “Philology”, 264. (“Jedenfalls aber ist unsere philologische Heimat die Erde; die Nation kann es nicht mehr sein. Gewiß ist noch immer das Kostbarste und Unentbehrlichste, was der Philologe ererbt, Sprache und Bildung seiner Nation; doch erst in der Trennung, in der Überwindung wird es wirksam. Wir müssen, unter veränderten Umständen, zurückkehren zu dem, was die vornationale mittelalterliche Bildung schon besaß: zu der Erkenntnis, daß der Geist nicht national ist.” – Auerbach, “Philologie”, 310).

strive to hasten its approach.”⁶ To the “humanist of Goethean persuasion”⁷, as whom Auerbach regarded himself, a contrasting pair like this must have made perfect sense, especially when taking into account the “practical seminar in world history” he and his contemporaries “[had] been and [continued] to be participants” of.⁸

This was hence about *experiencing* history first-hand: an experience Auerbach had just lived through and - not without luck - narrowly survived.

With his book on the representation of reality in Western literature, and even more so with his outline of a future “Philology of World Literature”, Auerbach wanted to substantially contribute to the acceleration the author of *Wilhelm Meister* had prognosticated. In doing so, he addressed the basic problem in the history of philology: since its origins at the close of the 18th century and, in particular, during the course of the 19th century, philology had developed in contexts precariously close to both national, respectively nationalistic ideas, and racist thinking, and had often sought to scientifically substantiate contemporary racism.⁹

Resorting to Goethe's term, which stands in a long tradition of German compound words with ‘world’ (which, for their part, nearly all date back to the second phase of accelerated globalization), had one main purpose: to broaden the horizon of philology from a national context to a, as it were, planetary context, or to use Auerbach’s term: the context of the ‘earth’. The global dimension that comes into play here could still - in the Goethean sense of ‘world’ - be rooted in the occidental tradition. For Auerbach, it was indispensable that the occidental tradition should position itself beyond nationalism, but also beyond racism and antisemitism.

What did the world of this occidentally conceived world literature look like? And how could it be described today in a philologically adequate way?

At best, Erich Auerbach's essay from 1952 constituted an attempt about the philology of world literature in which the contours of things to come were already discernible, as one might say, in form of the intention of research. However, Auerbach did not yet present clear methodological or institutional

⁶ Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe*, ed. J.K. Moorhead, transl. John Oxenford (London: Dent & Sons, 1946), 165 f. – (The German original reads: “Nationalliteratur will jetzt nicht viel sagen, die Epoche der Weltliteratur ist an der Zeit, und jeder muß jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen.” – Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, Vol. I, ed. Fritz Bergemann (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1981), 211.

⁷ Auerbach, “Philology”, 257/ “Philologie”, 304.

⁸ Auerbach, “Philology”, 260/ “Philologie”, 306.

⁹ Cf. Markus Messling / Ottmar Ette, eds., *Wort Macht Stamm: Rassismus und Determinismus in der Philologie (18. / 19. Jh.)*, in cooperation with Philipp Krämer and Markus A. Lenz (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2013); and the PhD thesis by Markus A. Lenz, *Genie und Blut. Rassedenken in der italienischen Philologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2014), PhD thesis, Universität Potsdam 2013.

options and structures. At the same time, one must keep in mind that already *Mimesis*, which had been published six years previously, for the most part could claim to be a postnational-philological book about Occidental literature, a book about the variety and the unity of the literatures of Europe. In 1952, Auerbach pinpointed the ideas that naturally followed from *Mimesis*: what was needed was a changed *mapping* of Occidental literature, due to the dawn of a 'world literature' he saw rapidly approaching.

This can be seen as the *prospective* strength of *Mimesis*: to provide a dimension that later, in "Philology of World Literature", would mature into a more concise and programmatic version, echoing its author's changed circumstances of life. For Erich Auerbach's masterpiece was written deliberately from a perspective of flight and periphery, exile and transterritoriality, whilst displaying an acute awareness of the transition from being a denaturalized citizen to being a *world citizen*. And unlike the Odysseus in the first chapter of his *Mimesis*, Auerbach had not returned to his home country after 1945. Instead, he tried to make the best of the constellation of a *philology without a fixed abode* which so decisively shaped and influenced his writing.

In the essay about the philology of world literature, then, his experiences unfolded into the outline of a method; a method which at the close of the book one last time assures itself of its occidental roots, and then concludes in a Latin quotation by Hugh of Saint Victor: "*mundus totus exilium est*".¹⁰ Two very last sentences followed this reflection about being an outsider, about being *in terra aliena*: Hugh's intended audience consisted of those individuals whose goal it was to free themselves from their love of this world. But it is also a good path to follow for anyone who desires to secure a proper love *for* the world.¹¹ As in *Mimesis*, the philologist's love for history, for the world, for life, forms the actual final chord into which all dissonances and tensions seem to resolve. Love, as a power, is inherent to philology.

This undoubtedly is the strong point of Auerbach's innovative philological work. For it is a practice anchored in a love for the world. It confirms his own experience of exile, of a life without a fixed abode, which provided him with the points of reference for his philology of world literature. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the occidental basis is not only to be found in Auerbach's *Mimesis*, but also in his outline of a philology of world literature. Apparently, to Auerbach it was not much of a problem, to orient his essay along the lines of *the* literature of *the* Occident; he rather worried about the wealth of material:

I have argued that we are in principle still capable of meeting the challenge that the creation of a philology of world literature presents.

¹⁰ Auerbach, "Philology", 264.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 265.

This is possible, first, because we have an infinite amount of material at our disposal (this material is in fact always increasing) and, second, because we still possess the sense of historical perspective that was bequeathed to us by the historicism of the age of Goethe. Regardless of how promising such a project might appear overall, the individual, practical challenges that face us in realizing it are considerable. For instance, in order to complete the task of gaining intimate access to and giving shape to world literature, there must be at least a few scholars who command the material in its entirety – or at least large portions of it – as the result of their own experience and research. Yet, it has become virtually impossible to attain this degree of mastery because of the glut of material, methods, and approaches we face. We possess texts ranging over six millennia, from all parts of the globe, and in some fifty different literary languages. Many of the cultures with which we now are familiar were still undiscovered one hundred years ago; others were known, but only piecemeal when compared with what we have now.¹²

Auerbach counters the ‘glut of material’ with the ‘historical perspective’, which – being a heritage of Goethe's era – keeps alive the hope that eventually it will be possible to carve out the *one* underlying sense explaining it all. The *one* sense, much longed-for, that makes everything – the globally dispersed, the newly discovered, and the radically heterogeneous – fall into place.

Just as European philosophy (and in the light of Kant and Hegel in particular German philosophy) had provided *world history* with the notion of ‘sense’, so the philology of Goethe's time projected ‘sense’ to the newly created term of *world literature*.

The obvious limitations of his concept do not change the fact that Auerbach in his *Mimesis* succeeded in offering a reflection about the occident which turned its disadvantages into advantages (e.g. the lack of a large library, difficulties in gathering material, being excluded from the *scientific community*, but also persecution, flight and exile). From the periphery of Europe it attained a perspective which outshines everything that Niall

¹² Auerbach, “Philology”, 257f. (“Oben wurde gesagt, daß wir grundsätzlich dazu fähig sind, die Aufgabe einer Philologie der Weltliteratur zu erfüllen, da wir über unendliches Material verfügen, das ständig wächst, und da wir noch den geschichtlich-perspektivischen Sinn besitzen, den wir von dem Historismus der Goethezeit ererbt haben. So hoffnungsvoll es aber im ganzen aussieht, so groß sind die Schwierigkeiten im einzelnen und Praktischen. Damit die Aufgabe der Durchdringung und Gestaltung erfüllt wird, muß es wenigstens noch einige geben, die das gesamte der Weltliteratur oder doch wenigstens große Teile derselben aus eigener Erfahrung und Forschung beherrschen. Das aber ist, wegen der Überfülle des Materials, der Methoden und der Anschauungsweisen beinahe unmöglich geworden. Wir besitzen Material aus sechs Jahrtausenden, aus allen Teilen der Erde, in vielleicht fünfzig Literatursprachen. Viele der Kulturen, von denen wir jetzt Kenntnis haben, waren vor hundert Jahren noch unentdeckt, von anderen kannte man nur einen Bruchteil der heute vorliegenden Zeugnisse”. – Auerbach, “Philologie”, 304).

Ferguson, as a representative of current US-American *Global History*, has to say about the occidental civilization in his bestseller *Civilization: The West and the Rest* as late as 2011.¹³ Unquestionably, up to the present day the innovative potential of a literary criticism like this has not been fully exploited: a literary criticism of *basic problems*¹⁴, a literary criticism that maintains its closeness to life.¹⁵ Even today, a philology without a fixed abode, which we get a glimpse of in Erich Auerbach's academic work and eventful life, is still in its infancy: There is much more to it than its being a mere transition from Romance languages to world literature, and it would be a complete misinterpretation if one were to classify it as a transition from Romance studies to Comparative studies.

Auerbach demanded a lot of himself and of his philology of world literature, in fact, it could not have been a more large-scale, more ambitious project. At the close of his reflections of 1952 he requested a change of paradigm not only on a disciplinary level, but also on an educational and even more so, on an ethical one:

As far as I know, there have been no attempts to engage in a philology of world literature of this synthesizing kind. Only a few initial approaches have been made by those concerned with Western culture. But the more that the globe contracts, the greater the imperative will be to expand our efforts to engage in synthetic and perspectival work – It is an enormous task to make people conscious of themselves within their own history. And yet, it is actually also a limited undertaking – indeed, even a kind of renunciation – if we consider that we live not just on the earth, but in the world, in the universe. We no longer dare to determine the place mankind ought to take in that universe as earlier ages did. All of that seems quite alien to us now.¹⁶

This passage indicates that Auerbach was fully aware both of the shortcomings of research in this discipline, and of the fact that his conception of a philology

¹³ Cf. Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (New York: Penguin Books 2011).

¹⁴ Cf. Werner Krauss, *Grundprobleme der Literaturwissenschaft: Zur Interpretation literarischer Werke*, expanded re-edition, (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1973).

¹⁵ Cf. Ottmar Ette, “Erich Auerbach oder Die Aufgabe der Philologie”, in *Traditionen der Entgrenzung: Beiträge zur romanistischen Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, eds. Frank Estelmann, Pierre Krügel and Olaf Müller (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), 39–42.

¹⁶ Auerbach, “Philology”, 264. (“Wir besitzen, soviel ich weiß, noch keine Versuche zu synthetischer Philologie der Weltliteratur, sondern nur einige Ansätze dieser Art innerhalb des abendländischen Kulturkreises. Aber je mehr die Erde zusammenwächst, um so mehr wird die synthetische und perspektivistische Tätigkeit sich erweitern müssen. Es ist eine große Aufgabe, die Menschen in ihrer eigenen Geschichte ihrer selbst bewußt zu machen; und doch sehr klein, schon ein Verzicht, wenn man daran denkt, daß wir nicht nur auf der Erde sind, sondern in der Welt, im Universum. Aber was frühere Epochen wagten, nämlich im Universum den Ort der Menschen zu bestimmen, das scheint nun ferne.” – Auerbach, “Philologie der Weltliteratur”, 310).

of world literature was based epistemologically on “the cultural sphere of the occident” alone. I consider it quite significant that Auerbach should use the plural here, not talking about the place of *man* (in singular sense), but about the place of *mankind*. Does not his wording suggest that Auerbach is still trying to cope with the “abundance of life”/ (“Lebensreichtum”)¹⁷ which he had talked about in the concluding chapter of *Mimesis*, and which now was to be researched on a global level? And yet: In our days, resorting to an ultimately homogeneous, purely occidental concept of *a single* world literature is no longer an appropriate approach to tackle the multicultural, intercultural, and, even more so, transcultural complexity of the literatures of the world. How, then, could we escape from this epistemological dead-end?

Outlook on the world of the Literatures of the World

An attentive reading of the last chapter of *Mimesis* reveals the problematic nature of how Auerbach interpreted the works of Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust or James Joyce – even when one takes into consideration that these were amidst their respective processes of canonization.¹⁸ On the one hand, the enormous accelerations which Auerbach detected for that period (and which from a global perspective can be linked to the third phase of accelerated globalization at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century) allow to regard *To the Lighthouse*, *A la recherche du temps perdu* and *Ulysses* as belonging to the great occidental lines of tradition. On the other hand, said accelerations also open up and dynamize a much wider – that is: global – horizon. Within this (new) horizon, the above-cited works of literature acquire (and keep acquiring) new dimensions of meaning.

It needs to be pointed out clearly: The question of what is occidental literature can no longer be answered from the ‘occident’ alone. It is no longer solely within the discretion of German, English, French, Italian, Polish or Portuguese commentators and exegetes to decide what is to be included. The figure of the exegete in Auerbach's *Mimesis* is still that of a European sign reader who writes, researches and publishes, in the first instance, for a European audience, and in the second instance, for an audience European-oriented.

In his essay “The Philology of World Literature” Auerbach opens up this configuration, which in *Mimesis* had been as well figural, as narratological, as

¹⁷ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis – The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, transl. Williard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1953), 553. For the German quotation, see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis – Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Tübingen, Basel: A. Francke, 2001), 514.

¹⁸ Cf. Ottmar Ette, *Mimesis. Ausblicke von Erich Auerbachs Philologie der Weltliteratur auf eine künftige Philologie der Literaturen der Welt* (in print).

epistemological, and which, additionally, had served as a strategy for writing. From both a temporal distance to *Mimesis* and a spatial distance to Europe, one last time he broadens the perspective of what it means to be a philologist, the perspective of philology. In his day this constituted a bold attempt, a tremendous advance that was soundly based on the Auerbachian ethics for the philologist and fully aware of one fact: “*mundus totus exilium est*”.¹⁹

Goethe's term of ‘world literature’ had been a response to the rise of national literatures, but also to the fundamental changes that came along with the second phase of accelerated globalization. Auerbach may have felt that it failed to do justice to the accelerations connected with the third phase of accelerated globalization. His above-mentioned restrictions concerning the ‘occidental sphere of culture’ may well stem from that.

It would be unjust to accuse Auerbach of not having found an effective terminological remedy. As few others in his day, he developed a sensitivity as to how the constant changes of perspective had influenced his own work, and to how his journeys had shaped his method. At all events, Auerbach's *Mimesis* and his essay “The Philology of World Literature” still ought to serve as a powerful incentive and a high standard for all those dealing with literary and cultural phenomena in search of the future of literature studies. Despite all the merits of Auerbach's methodological concept of 1952, and despite its probably being the first place where – due to his experiences of exile - we get a glimpse of a philology without a fixed abode, one has to admit: On an epistemological level, Auerbach's concept can no longer provide us with the basic points of reference for devising a future philology, a future criticism on a worldwide scale.

Even though ‘world literature’ with respect to its conceptual history cannot be thought without the process of globalization, as a notion it has become obsolete all the same. Its historical framework needs to open up in order to tackle current phenomena of globalization and the multiple challenges that come along with it. In a conceptual sense, the term ‘world literature’ requires a translation and restructuring for present-day and the future - in particular as regards a critical philology of prospective character.

This is why today it seems of vital importance to cease speaking of ‘world literature’ –which is still aligned with European forms and norms– and start speaking of the *literatures of the world* in an open, polylogical sense.²⁰ Similar to the above-mentioned plural ‘place of mankind’, such impulse of pluralization briefly flashes up in the essay of 1952, when Auerbach²¹

¹⁹ Auerbach, “Philology”, 264/ “Philologie”, 310.

²⁰ For a more elaborate presentation of this topic, see Ottmar Ette, *Viellogische Philologie. Die Literaturen der Welt und das Beispiel einer transarealen peruanischen Literatur* (Berlin: Walter Frey, 2013), 47-59.

²¹ Cf. Aamir R. Muft, “Erich Auerbach and the death and life of world literature” in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, eds. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, Djelal Kadir,

addresses Goethe's knowledge of 'the literatures of the world'.²² Yet, referring back to Vico and Herder, Auerbach attributes the actual success of philology to the fact that its purpose was "the realization of a *unified* vision of the human race in all its *variety*" ("de[r] Erwerb einer in ihrer *Vielfalt einheitlichen* Vorstellung vom Menschen").²³ Hence, we can observe a movement here that is characteristic of philology, of world literature, but also of Auerbach's philology of world literature: a movement from variety towards *one* uniform notion. The gesture behind it is strikingly obvious: a keen intent to homogenize.

Even at this point of our discussion, one aspect needs to be emphasized: A notion of world literature based on a perspective as Eurocentric and Occident-centric as that, cannot possibly counter the complexity nor the polylogical structuration of the literatures of the world – neither on a conceptual, nor a methodological level. We must keep in mind that the polylogical system of the literatures of the world was not invented from one single place, was not distributed from one single area, was not pushed forward by a single idea of *man*. Instead, its cultural and geographical origins are utterly heterogeneous, as are its traditions.

Worlds as diverse as the epic of *Gilgamesch*²⁴ and the *Shijing*²⁵ help us understand a variety of facts (supreme examples of written and circulated texts that they are as regards cultural history or the aesthetics of the media): from their beginnings (which always refer to other 'beginnings') the literatures of the world have been not only polylogical, but also polylingual; due to their many origins they have had at their disposal a tremendous diversity of aesthetic forms of expression; their inherent ambiguity, their untameable polysemy constantly asks for commentaries and interpretation, for continuations and overwritings, which, in turn, increase the complexity of the polylogical system of the literatures of the world. The threads of literature come from many ends. Since all beginnings they have been interwoven to form texts and textures that cannot be reduced to one pattern, to one fabric – even if such fabric stretched from Penelope's shroud in the first chapter of *Mimesis* to Virginia Woolf's brown stocking at the end of Auerbach's summa.

The knowledge about life in life and for life characterizes the literatures of the world in manifold ways – crossing centuries and millennia, crossing continents and archipelagoes, crossing cultures, crossing languages. It penetrates current and future literatures in diverse filiations, and hence, possesses not only a historical, but also a present-day and a prospective

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²² Auerbach, "Philology", 254/ "Philologie", 302.

²³ Ibid. –Italics by Ottmar Ette.

²⁴ Cf. the epilogue of the German edition, *Das Gilgamesch-Epos*, newly translated and with notes by Stefan M. Maul (München: C.H. Beck, 2005).

²⁵ Cf. Stephen Owen, "Reproduction in the «Shijing» (Classic of Poetry)", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, LXI, 2 (2011): 287-315.

aesthetic power, which unfurl according to radically different logics, but can also be scientifically researched.²⁶ The *knowledge for living*, *experiential knowledge*, *knowledge for survival*, and *knowledge of (and for) living together* of the literatures of the world are preserved exactly because they continuously transform, and because they transculturally circulate between the cultures in a translational as well as an intertextual way.

There is no single logic anymore - even if it were that of the representation of reality in Western literature – that could possibly encompass the complex system of interrelated logics, and reduce them to *one single* notion of man. The literatures of the world form a laboratory, but also a school of thinking in disparate logics. Starting from this polylogical space of circulation, we have to devise an ethics of philology that is oriented towards a notion of life and structured along the life sciences.

The literatures of the world constitute experimental spaces of life in the latter's diverse cultural or bio-political contexts. As such, they offer highly condensed models of understanding and of high aesthetic claims, which can respectively be translated, read or made readable from other cultural or 'epochal' positions. Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* clearly highlights the major significance of life, for the lexeme 'life' occurs with an astonishing frequency. It is not fully thought through in terms of a literary theory or cultural theory, though. The two processes of 'making readable' and 'becoming readable' create a polyphonous graphosphere and logosphere within the literatures of the world. These facilitate the readability of the world from many places, through many places and for many places, naturally also from outside the occidental traditions.²⁷ It cannot be the aim of a polylogical philology to reduce the variety of life to a uniform idea of humankind (not even if it is the metaphorology of the *grande famille des hommes* Roland Barthes so zestfully attacked).²⁸ Because this is not about the "mythe ambigu de la «communauté» humaine"²⁹, which for Barthes in his *Mythologies* represented but the alibi of a humanism long overcome. But how then could we think the history of humankind in its interactions and interdependencies, without falling into a system of thought that is patriarchal (or matriarchal for that matter), and describes the world along family structure with its respective grandchildren, children, parents and grandparents, but also several uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews, half-sisters and mother-in-laws?

From the perspective described in the following, the literatures of the world do not inevitably acquire 'planetary totality'. They do, however, take into

²⁶ For further discussion of this term, see Christoph Menke, *Kraft: Ein Grundbegriff ästhetischer Anthropologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2008).

²⁷ Cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1986).

²⁸ Cf. Roland Barthes, "La grande famille des hommes", in (id.), *Mythologies* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957), 173-176.

²⁹ Ibid., 173.

account Auerbach's concluding reflection of his “Philology of World literature”, that “our philological home is the earth” - not a nation, that is, not a national literature.³⁰ A future philology of the literatures of the world must be committed to the fact that its subject matter, the literatures of the world, are utterly remote from any totalizing thought of unity, or from any essentialization coming along with it. The futures of philology are polylogical. How could one determine this open, polylogical structuration more precisely, and how could it be linked to an ethically grounded, polylogical philology that is capable of defying the danger of reducing everything yet again to the binarism of national literature versus world literature?

If, from the most diverse angles and languages, the literatures of the world do allow for us to understand our world as a polylogical one, then also a future philology must feel committed to the fact that this system of circulation of knowledge features a polylogical structure and a transareal dimension.³¹ Its subject matter – and that was true already for the bold outline of a new philology by the Romance philologist Erich Auerbach – goes far beyond the realm of the literary.

What seemed long lost and forgotten, both in form of an ethical claim and as an epistemological challenge, will be undertaken by the still to be developed polylogical philology of the literatures of the world: to determine the space and, what is more, the choreographies of humankind in a universe beyond totality and beyond totalization, and, literally, render possible to aesthetically experience and re-live them. There is far more to the question about whether to speak of ‘world literature’ or the ‘literatures of the world’ than what meets the eye; this is not just about a certain perspective or perspectivation of literature. Ultimately, it boils down to this: how to design and create a world - with the aid of literatures coming from many places, many languages, and many cultures – that is not *one* world in the sense of a 'big family', which would allow only one predominant logic, but *one world* in the sense of its ultimately unlimited number of diverse logics of life, of experience, of survival and, above all, of living together. This is a question of first-order importance.

World literature versus national literature

Even though in the above-mentioned passage of Erich Auerbach's programmatic outline the expression ‘literatures of the world’³² briefly flashes up, his thinking is still substantially influenced by Goethe's foundational discourse, where world literature is contoured by its opposition to national

³⁰ Auerbach, “Philology”, 264/ “Philologie”, 310.

³¹ For this terminology, which will be further discussed in the following, see Ottmar Ette, *TransArea: Eine literarische Globalisierungsgeschichte* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012).

³² Auerbach, “Philology”, 254/ “Philologie”, 302.

literature. This means that Auerbach joined the ranks of those who opposed the notion of national literature (a notion which also institutionally had been immensely successful), and countered it with the term world literature. Thus, the realm of literature was to be freed from its national or nationalistic (not to mention its National Socialist) limitations. Erich Auerbach had learned his historical lesson with the National Socialists: he had witnessed how the logic of nationalism could be transposed to the realm of the sciences and the arts with inconceivable radicality and brutality, thoroughly despising both art and humaneness. In view of the persecutions of dissidents in the National Socialist 'Reich', for Auerbach, opposing nationalist tendencies in philology, was a matter close to his heart and the order of the day. At this vital point, Auerbach's philological aesthetics was deeply rooted in his ethical convictions, which, for their part, were shaped by his own historical experiences and supported by his knowledge for living (*Lebenswissen*) and his knowledge of/for survival (*ÜberLebenswissen*). It is only too understandable, then, that Auerbach in his outline of a postdictatorial philology, of a Romance philology after dictatorship, should adhere to the clear distinction between national literature and world literature. He is oblivious, though, to perceiving and exploring the intermediate space, that is: to what lies (and moves) *in-between* national literature and world literature. However, if we want to understand today's global interplay of the most diverse literatures, it is of vital importance to explore said interstices. Or to put it differently: It is indispensable to leave behind the idea of a clear dividing line between national literature and world literature, and reach the notion of a complex intermediate space of ambivalent, often contradictory movements. Against which backdrop - or rather against which backdrops - of current theory and practices, then, could we further develop those perspectives that were adumbrated above in the reflections on the literatures of the world?³³

In her monography *La république mondiale des Lettres* (1999), which received much attention, but was controversially discussed³⁴, Pascale Casanova converted the notion of world literature into the imagery of a literary 'world republic' – (admittedly, a rather French use of metaphor). As the blurbs [of the French original] inform us, such literary 'world republic', as a powerful factory of universal literature, had its own Greenwich meridian, along which were measured the novelty and the modernity of literary works.³⁵ Such imagery is far from being innocent. Historically, it stems back from those cartographies and cartographers during the first phase of accelerated

³³ Cf. the historical overview provided by Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir, eds., *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (London /New York: Routledge 2002).

³⁴ Cf. Joseph Jurt, "L'espace littéraire international: A propos de «La République mondiale des Lettres» de Pascale Casanova", *Lendemain* 93 (1999): 63-69.

³⁵ See Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des Lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), fourth cover.

globalization, who, serving diverse power interests, cast their nets of maps across the globe, the respective prime meridians being arbitrarily fixed by the according European powers, such as Spain, Portugal, France, or England.

It was only during the International Meridian Conference of 1884 – and that is, during the third phase of accelerated globalization – that a common zero longitude was established which is still used today; a prime meridian of reference passing through the Observatory of Greenwich, against which the coordinates of the world could be measured. The choice of meridian clearly reflects that, at the time, the British Empire was the leading imperial power. Its rise had begun already during the second phase of accelerated globalization.³⁶

The green hills of Greenwich, therefore, are more than a mere cartographical mark.

Thus, from the start, the 500-page attempt to rethink and restructure world literature according to the *one* world of a literary world republic, is closely linked to the European history of expansion. Also Goethe's draft can be related to it, even when he reflects on phenomena of acceleration of his own time. Casanova associates the global dimension of literature with the exceptional nature, the uniqueness of great pieces of literature, as the latter, she argues, are connected to an invisible totality, made “of all the literary texts through and against which [they have] been constructed: everything that is translated, published, theorized, commented upon, celebrated – all these things are so many elements of a vast composition”.³⁷ Does she want to suggest here an all-encompassing totality, present and co-present in each great work of literature that is created in this world republic? It almost appears so: “Each work that is declared to be literary is a minute part of the immense 'combination' constituted by the literary world as a whole”.³⁸ But just almost.

We need to be careful here. The ‘world’ of this world literature, and what is considered world literature in this ‘world’ is extremely restricted and highly regulated. For a few lines later, the seemingly vast “world literary space” (“*espace littéraire mondial*”)³⁹ is associated with an “*ordre littéraire*”⁴⁰, with a “world in which what is judged worthy of being considered literary is brought into existence; a world in which the ways and means of literary art are argued

³⁶ For the four phases of accelerated globalization, see Ottmar Ette, *TransArea: Eine literarische Globalisierungsgeschichte* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 1–49.

³⁷ Casanova, *World Republic*, 3 (The French original reads: “[...] tous les textes littéraires à travers et contre lesquels elle a pu se construire et exister, et dont chaque livre apparaissant dans le monde serait un des éléments: Tout ce qui s'écrit, tout ce qui se traduit, se publie, se théorise, se commente, se célèbre serait l'un des éléments de cette composition” – Casanova, *République mondiale*, 13 f.).

³⁸ Casanova, *World Republic*, 3 (“Chaque livre écrit dans le monde et déclaré littéraire serait une infime partie de l'immense 'combinaison' de toute la littérature mondiale.” – *République mondiale*, 14).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

over and decided”.⁴¹ Who, however, determines (how? and from which vantage point?), what we understand by literature, the literary, and literary art? Thus, the image of an open landscape molds into something quite different on the very same page and within just a couple of lines: into the notion of a literary republic, or rather, of *the* literary republic, which, Casanova argues, necessarily requires its specific center, its capitol:

[...] territories [come into view] whose sole value and sole resource is literature, ordered by power relations that nonetheless govern the form of the texts that are written in and that circulate throughout these lands; a world that has its own capital, its own provinces and borders, in which languages become instruments of power. Each member of this republic struggles to achieve recognition as a writer. Specific laws have been passed freeing literature from arbitrary political and national powers, at least in the most independent regions.⁴²

World literature is sketched here as a republic that has withdrawn itself from the dominion of the political and the national sphere and has liberated itself from national constraints inasmuch as literature now has its own capital city. One begins to suspect here, what, indeed, later is reiterated again and again: the meridian of the *République mondiale des Lettres* does not run through London, as the capital of such world republic can only be Paris – it is hence, the capital of that country which for such a long time understood itself as an *exception culturelle*. It is not for no reason that David Damrosch – we shall discuss him in more detail at a later point – in his outline of world literature suggests not without mockery that Casanova's volume should have been titled *La République parisienne des Lettres*.⁴³

Written at the end of the 90s quite evidently against the backdrop of the *spatial turn* long since proclaimed, Pascale Casanova's study is concerned with a spatialized history (“histoire spatialisée”) and with ‘situating’ (“situer”) both

⁴¹ Casanova, *World Republic*, 4 (“[...] un univers où s'engendre ce qui est déclaré littéraire, ce qui est jugé digne d'être condiéré comme littéraire, où l'on dispute des moyens et des voies spécifiques à l'élaboration de l'art littéraire.” – *République mondiale*, 14).

⁴² Ibid. (“Des contrées où la seule valeur et la seule ressource seraient la littérature; un espace régi par des rapports de force tacites, mais qui commanderaient la forme des textes qui s'écrivent et circulent partout dans le monde; un univers centralisé qui aurait constitué sa propre capitale, ses provinces et ses confins, et dans lequel les langues deviendraient des instruments de pouvoir. En ces lieux, chacun lutterait pour être consacré écrivain; on y aurait inventé des lois spécifiques, libérant ainsi la littérature, au moins dans les régions les plus indépendantes, des arbitraires politiques et nationaux.” – *République mondiale*, 14).

⁴³ See David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 27. As regards the reception of Casanova's approach, also see Helena Carvalhão Buescu, “Pascale Casanova and the republic of Letters”, in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, eds. Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir, 126–135.

authors and their works of literature, thus accurately locating them.⁴⁴ She is not interested in a history of movement, but in a history of spaces, which is oriented along clear, evident and centralized spatial structures. As a consequence, she can postulate the centeredness and the centralization of a literary *République mondiale*. Ultimately then, such republic, is capable of determining the coordinates of all literary phenomena around the globe from a restricted space.

To substantiate this gallocentric perspective, Casanova not only invokes the authorities of French authors, but also admirers of French literature and culture from around the globe. She frequently refers to *De la littérature allemande* by Frederick the Great of Prussia. As a motto, one passage of this work precedes her chapter “Principles of a World History of Literature” (*Principes d'une histoire mondiale de la littérature*).⁴⁵ But she also refers to the modernist Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío⁴⁶, who, like so many of his Latinamerican colleagues, admired Paris as the ‘capitol of the 19th century’ – to use an expression of Walter Benjamin here⁴⁷, who was much revered by Auerbach. She also is rather fond of citing the words of Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, who in his essay on Paris from 1938, described the French capital as “the universal bank of foreign exchange and commerce” (“banque universelle des changes et des échanges”).⁴⁸ From this, Casanova deduces a “universal recognition of a literary capital” (“reconnaissance universelle d'une capitale littéraire”)⁴⁹ and defines it as “a place where literary prestige and belief converge in the highest degree” (“un lieu où convergent à la fois le plus grand prestige et la plus grande croyance littéraire”).⁵⁰ This is why in this *République mondiale*, in this *littérature mondiale*, there can be only one capital, only one preeminent center: the *ville lumière* Paris.

It is fairly obvious, that an outline as focused on and restricted to France as this, utterly fails to grasp, let alone adequately present, the complexity of literature and its various logics on a global level. The particularity of Pascale Casanova's model of the world probably lies in the fact that a national, and especially a national literary model, is expanded to global dimensions. The national literary model is clearly oriented towards Paris as the undisputed center of France, and is accustomed to speaking of provinces and far away *confins*, as can be seen in the above-mentioned quotation. The global

⁴⁴ Casanova, *World Republic*, 5/ *République mondiale*, 16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9/ *ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19/ *ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁷ Cf. Walter Benjamin, “Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts”, in (id.), *Das Passagen-Werk*, Vol.1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), 45–59.

⁴⁸ Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, *Paris: Notes d'un Vaudois* (Lausanne: Editions de l'Aire, 1978), 65; cited in Casanova, *World Republic*, 24; *République mondiale*, 41.

⁴⁹ Casanova, *World Republic*, 24; *République mondiale*, 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

dimensions, for their part, are defined and determined from an ultimately unquestionable center situated on a prime meridian.

From the beginning, in this book ‘the national’ constitutes an alternative model; paradoxically, though, it is employed in such way that it – quasi ‘naturally’ – assumes the role of the universal. (This is what Barthes described as the way in which a myth functions⁵¹) Paris, Casanova argues, does not only constitute a figure of universality⁵², but is the very “City of Literature” (“ville de la littérature”).⁵³ For Casanova, Paris, like no other city, stands for the two components of world literature: both for literature *and* the world.

If, subsequently, there is a discussion on male and female writers who look to Paris from the *confins du monde*, they all appear as products of a “decolonization [...] of Africa, Asia, and Latin America”⁵⁴, notwithstanding the fact that these are substantially different processes, with centuries between them. Everything and everyone is measured against the same yardstick:

The unification of literary space through competition presumes the existences of a common standard for measuring time, an absolute point of reference unconditionally recognized by all contestants. It is at once a point in space, the center of all centers (which even literary rivals, by the very fact of their competition, are agreed in acknowledging), and a basis for measuring the time that is peculiar to literature. [...] Just as the *fictive* line known as the prime meridian, arbitrarily chosen for the determination of longitude, contributes to the real organization of the world and makes possible the measure of distances and the location of positions on the surface of the earth, so what might be called the Greenwich meridian of literature makes possible to estimate the relative aesthetic distance from the center of the world of letters of all those who belong to it.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, „Le mythe, aujourd'hui“ in (id.), *Mythologies*, 91–247.

⁵² Casanova, *World Republic*, 26; *République mondiale*, 44.

⁵³ Ibid., 23/ibid., 44.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 79/ibid., 117.

⁵⁵ Casanova, *World Republic*, 87f. (“L’unification de l’espace littéraire dans et par la concurrence suppose l’établissement d’une mesure commune du temps: chacun s’accorde à reconnaître d’emblée, et sans conteste possible, un point de repère absolu, une norme à laquelle il faudra (se) mesurer. C’est à la fois un lieu situable dans l’espace, centre de tous les centres, que même ses concurrents s’accordent, par leur concurrence même, à saluer comme le centre, et un point à partir duquel on évalue le temps propre à la littérature. [...] De même que la ligne *fictive*, dite aussi « méridien d’origine », choisie arbitrairement pour la détermination des longitudes, contribue à l’organisation *réelle* du monde et rend possible la mesure des distances et et l’évaluation des positions à la surface du globe, de même ce que l’on pourrait appeler le « méridien de Greenwich littéraire » permet d’évaluer la distance au centre de tous ceux qui appartiennent à l’espace littéraire. La distance esthétique se mesure, aussi, en termes temporels: le méridien d’origine institue le présent, c’est-à-dire, dans l’ordre de la création littéraire, la modernité. On peut ainsi mesurer la distance au centre d’une œuvre ou d’un corpus d’œuvres, d’après leur écart temporel aux canons qui définissent, au

Like a burning glass, this passage (and a few others as well) focuses the basic problems of a literary criticism that speaks of world literature in singular, and understands the latter as a consistent, continuous system with clear hierarchizations. Everything is evaluated from a single vantage point, subjected to a single logic. The world is turned into a vast territory that, firstly, has to situate itself in time and space, facing a single center; secondly, has to align itself along the rules of a single modernity (of “self-evidently” European provenance); and thirdly, has to function following the same values and criteria, the same forms, and even more so, norms. On this global map all instruments of navigation - and above all the watches – are set according to one single time zone. Thus, both the temporal and the spatial distance can be measured and quantified from the center – which is reminiscent of the second phase of accelerated globalization where this was done by means of extremely precise marine chronometers. The *République mondiale des Lettres* is a highly centralized state, which can acknowledge only one time, one space, one modernity, one norm. The rest is *écart* (discrepancy) and at the same time, *à l'écart* (marginalization): a deviation at the periphery of (the one) history.

Not surprisingly, then, the phases of a world history of literature, as here depicted, are aligned with the national literary model of French literature: A clear indicator is the reference to the French Pléiade and Joachim Du Bellay's *La Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoise* (1549), which marks the first phase in this model.⁵⁶

It is not particularly astonishing either that no other literatures are taken into account, not even other European literatures, e.g. the literatures of Spain, Portugal, England or Italy – not to mention the extra-European literatures, such as the early American, Indian or Chinese literatures. The abundance (or ‘glut’) of world literature, mapped in its seeming totality, is proclaimed and governed from the capitol of a literary world republic that has expanded its national paradigm into universality. World literature parades draped in *La Tricolore* of an expanded national literature.

Without a doubt, in philologists as Karl Vossler, Ernst Robert Curtius, Erich Auerbach or Werner Kraus, the two world wars with their exaggerated nationalism had created a deep mistrust towards any attempt of identifying the borders of literature with the political borders of a nation state. Even if they formed a minority: many assumed an increasingly critical attitude towards the history of philology, since from its origin, philology had been enmeshed in demarcation processes of national and racialist nature. Philological procedures and classifications had been used and abused, and had made possible and fostered fascist as well as National Socialist ideologies. Within this context,

moment précis de l'évaluation, le présent de la littérature.” – *République mondiale*, 127).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 46f./ibid., 72.

the ongoing pressure to specialize with its absurd consequences must have seemed intolerable to a Romance philologist like Erich Auerbach. More and more resolutely, Auerbach emphasized the importance of mutual exchange between languages and literatures, but also of academic communication across disciplines and specializations. Thus, he stated in his essay “The Philology of World Literature”: “[...] someone who wants these days to become an authority in Provençal poetry, but commands nothing more than the relevant knowledge in linguistics, paleography, and the history of the time, will hardly be considered even an adequate scholar in the field”.⁵⁷

For Auerbach, taking a critical stance on academic procedures also implied to overcome the boundaries of diverse disciplines, and to put into question those ways of academic ‘disciplining’ which ensured that national literary conceptions of fields of study seemed ‘perfectly natural’. His philological outline displayed an orientation that could be called ‘transversal’. Its fundamental question challenged the horizon of traditional philology, especially if the latter defined itself in national philological terms.

In face of growing specialization and differentiation, but surely, also in face of recent political, military and social catastrophes, Auerbach was not the only one among philologists (not even among Romance philologists) who questioned the predominance of the national, respectively nationalistic paradigm.

For instance, from an entirely different perspective, Ernst Robert Curtius wrote the following in a letter to Karl Eugen Gass on May 18, 1944:

It obviously hasn't occurred to anybody yet, that this modern segmentation of labor into national languages, national literatures and national philologies is utter nonsense. What would one think, though, of a mediaeval historian, reporting only German incidents, or citing only German sources?⁵⁸

In the wake of German National Socialism, but also in face of other totalitarian systems of the 20th century, the idea of the national began to show cracks. Indubitably, this constituted a major driving force behind a critical re-

⁵⁷ Auerbach, “Philology”, 258. (“Wer heute etwa ein Provenzalist sein will und nichts anderes beherrscht als die einschlägigen Teile der Linguistik, der Paläographie und der Zeitgeschichte, der ist kaum auch nur noch ein guter Provenzalist.” –Auerbach, “Philologie”, 305).

⁵⁸ Ernst Robert Curtius, “Letter to Karl Eugen Gass” [18.5.1944] in Universitätsbibliothek Bonn, legacy of E.R.I. Curtius. Cited here apud Anne Kraume, *Das Europa der Literatur: Schriftsteller blicken auf den Kontinent (1815 - 1945)* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2010) 18. (German original: “Der ganze Unsinn der modernen Arbeitsteilung nach Nationalsprachen, Nationalliteraturen und nationalen Philologien ist noch niemandem aufgegangen. Was würde man aber von einem mittelalterlichen Historiker denken, der nur deutsche Vorgänge berichtete und nur deutschsprachliche Quellen verfolgte?”)

evaluation of academic structures and ‘natural’ disciplinary classifications as they were to be found during the 19th and 20th century and had shaped (and keep shaping) the national literary structures of European philology.

Far away from any fictitious Greenwich meridian of world literature, in fundamentally different cultural constellations, one can observe simultaneous developments that played a crucial role in softening the opposition between national literature and world literature, and in shaping polylogical philology. This is why at this point we will go back once again to the time, when Auerbach wrote his two seminal contributions, and have a look at the writings of some of his contemporaries. For this purpose, quite deliberately, we shall move out of Europe.

The world of the American expression

In 1949 the Cuban anthropologist, historian and cultural theorist Fernando Ortiz published his magnum opus *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*⁵⁹, a sophisticated contribution both on the theoretical and the literary level. In this essay, he proposed a new interpretation of Cuban history deriving from movement, from the vectorization of all areas of life. The shift of emphasis from a rather static spatial history to an exceptionally mobile and globally conceptualized history of movement is indicated in many of the book's passages. Said shift of emphasis has become groundbreaking not only for the invention of the term ‘transculturality’, but also for a changed angle when analyzing territorial questions. Ortiz writes:

No hubo factores humanos más trascendentes para la cubanidad que esas continuas, radicales y contrastantes transmigraciones geográficas, económicas y sociales de los pobladores, que esa perenne transitoriedad de los propósitos y que esa vida siempre en desarraigo de la tierra habitada, siempre en desajuste con la sociedad sustentadora. Hombres, economías, culturas y anhelos, todo aquí se sintió foráneo, provisional, cambiadizo, «aves de paso» sobre el país, a su costa, a su contra y a su malgrado.

Con los blancos llegaron los negros, primero de España, entonces cundida de esclavos guineos y congos, y luego de toda la Nigrícia. Con ellos trajeron sus diversas culturas, unas selváticas como la de los ciboneyes, otras de avanzada barbarie como la de los taínos, y algunos de más complejidad económica y social, como los mandingas, yolofes, hausas, dahomeyanos y yorubas, ya con agricultura, esclavos, moneda, mercados, comercio forastero y gobiernos centralizados y efectivos sobre territorios y poblaciones tan grandes como Cuba; culturas intermedias entre las taínas y las aztecas; ya con metales, pero aún sin

⁵⁹ Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, foreword and chronology by Julio Le Riverend (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1978).

escritura.⁶⁰

Unlike other analyses, the attempt of the Cuban anthropologist to determine and define what in contemporary Cuban discourse was called *cubanidad*, does not aim at establishing a fixed national and territorial identity of the insular state. Instead, 'cubanity' is determined vectorially, that is, by the crossings and traversing movements of a large number of highly diverse cultures. In his evaluation of different cultures, the cultural historian's own background as a lawyer shines through (with regard to the criminology of Cesare Lombroso with its close links to Italian philology), as does a racist undercurrent which had been characteristic particularly of Fernando Ortiz' earlier works.

For the purpose of this paper, though, these references to a Eurocentric racism are of minor importance. Rather, we are concerned with the new line of horizon that this complex text of 1940 was able to unveil, oscillating between literature and science. For from Fernando Ortiz' perspective, the seemingly static proves extremely mobile and is subjected to constant changes, faulting, transfers and transformations. Territory is not defined once for all by means of a static geography and topography, but by means of all the migrations and transversals crossing this space. National identity is not presented as something essential, or intrinsic, but turns out to be the fundamentally precarious coexistence of radically different cultures, which – situated on diverse levels - get caught up in a true whirlwind of transculturality.

Within a field of tension between colonial, as well as postcolonial movements, migrations and deportations, the question of coexistence assumes paramount importance for the life and the survival of the young state. The relation between territory and nation does not completely disappear in Fernando Ortiz. However, it is structured and put into perspective in a fundamentally different way. In the foreground of his anthropological analysis and vision of society there are migratory birds, migrants, slaves kidnapped from Africa, and their descendants: they serve as representatives of those dislocations that shape the living together.

Unlike the conceptions of José Martí which, during the last third of the 19th century, had aimed at *mestizaje*, the unification of Cuban society, Ortiz does not resort to any imagery of fusion or that of a *melting pot*, which was still propagated in the second half of the 20th century for the sake of the nation's intended homogeneity. Instead, territory, nation and identity are redefined into terms of movement. In this way, they are integrated into complex patterns of motion that can be neither reduced to a homogeneous logic, nor to a logic of the homogeneous.

Within the space sketched out by Fernando Ortiz, which forms a transatlantic field of tension between Europe, Africa and America, all spaces turn into

⁶⁰ Ibid., 95.

spaces of motion and are created by the traversing movements of migratory birds, the *aves de paso*. These stand for a life without roots, for a *vida siempre en desarraigo de la tierra habitada*. In this way, they represent life without a fixed abode which inscribes the coordinates of the world into every limited space, thus imparting a knowledge for living and a knowledge for survival that cannot be thought from one single place.

Fernando Ortiz very deliberately links this new interpretation of Cuban – but also of American – history with the fate of his newly created term ‘transculturation’. The latter had been introduced to present a new perspective featuring transit and the transitory. For the Cuban cultural theorist, these notions permeated all manifestations of Cuban life: working, eating and living alike. Thus, he writes at the end of a chapter of his *contrapunteo cubano* dedicated to *transculturación*:

Estas cuestiones de nomenclatura sociológica no son baladíes para la mejor inteligencia de los fenómenos sociales, y menos en Cuba donde, como en pueblo alguno de América, su historia es una intensísima, complejísima e incesante *transculturación* de varias masas humanas, todas ellas en pasos de transición. El concepto de la *transculturación* es cardinal y elementalmente indispensable para comprender la historia de Cuba y, por análogas razones, la de toda América en general.⁶¹

This innovative reading of American history, which was presented in 1940, highlights the necessity to reconsider the history of other parts of the world too. Does not the very myth of Europa exhibit the inherent tension between seduction and abduction, transplantation and procreation, being taken to a place and being taken in a sexual sense, between continental provenance and insular future? Is not all this embedded in the impossibility to understand Europe out of its circum-Mediterranean as well as global, extra-European contexts?

The example of Cuba, but also the example of Europe or any other nation in constant motion, clearly emphasizes the importance of renouncing to simple binarisms, such as nation and world, national culture and world culture, national literature and world literature in favor of a point of view attaching due importance to the motions of transfer and the implied transformation, as well as to translocation and the implied translation. This is about developing a fundamental poetics of movement.

As regards most notably the field of literature, but also the field of culture, the works of the Cuban poet and novelist José Lezama Lima offer crucial and groundbreaking contributions to this discussion. Highly-accoladed as a poet, under-estimated as a cultural theorist (even today), Lima compiled five of his talks in the literary essay *La expresión americana*. These talks, of archipelagic

⁶¹ Ibid., 97.

structure, had been given in the *Centro de Altos Estudios* of the *Instituto Nacional de Cultura* of Havana, on, respectively, January 16, 18, 22, 23 and 26 of 1957.

Lima was well acquainted with European philology, notably with Spanish and German philology. His attempt to illuminate the cultural world of American expression by analyzing its global interconnections, could be regarded as a well-wrought contribution to reassessing the literatures of the Americas, as it were, on the far side of nationalism and on this side of world literature.

From this vantage, *La expresión americana* represents an exploration trip by means of literature, which interprets the spaces between the national and the global in a new way: as spaces of motion. It is not for nothing that the decisive configurations of Lima's lyrical works are forms of expression denoting withdrawal, disappearance, transformation and metamorphosis.

Right at the beginning of the first talk, in a passage titled “Mitos y cansancio clásico”, we come across a typical example of Lezama Lima's way of thinking, the “forma en devenir”⁶²: a form which includes not only its origins, but also its futures, and which, so to speak, collects and incorporates all trajectories of its vectorial symbolism. Thus, the vectorial character of a form in constant transformation does not only comprise the retrospective dimensions of a cultural landscape, but also, and even more significantly, its prospective dimensions. For Lima this approach is closely linked to the open structure of the Cuban, as well as the Caribbean, archipelago.⁶³

From the start, special importance is attached to transareal configurations: nothing is ever regarded from the vantage point of a static space or a fixed territoriality. Instead, it is integrated into vectorial pathways which have little to do with a history of spaces, but quite a lot to do with a history of motion.

In his concluding talk, which he held on 26th January 1957 and which was included in *La expresión americana* as the last chapter titled “Sumas críticas del americano”, the Cuban essayist pokes fun at all attempts to territorialize highly divergent forms of art and to thus reduce them to a single place of origin:

A Picasso se le quería extraer de la tradición francesa en sus primeras manifestaciones en esta secularidad, de la era de la experimentación y de las mutaciones, para apegarlo, según su propio gusto de lince contemporáneo, a la tradición española, menos riesgosa, que avanza con más lentitud y por lo mismo de un hueso más resistente para las exigencias de lo temporal. (Se olvidaba esta maliciosa tradición, que tanto el Greco, como Goya, se debían a síntesis histórica y no a

⁶² José Lezama Lima, *La expresión americana* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1969), 9.

⁶³ Cf. Ottmar Ette, “Weltsichten Amerikas: Hemisphärische Konstruktionen in José Lezama Limas »La expresión americana«”, *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte / Cahiers d'Histoire des Littératures Romanes* XXXVI, 1 – 2 (2012): 175–208.

productos del indigenismo).⁶⁴

In “Sumas críticas del Americano” Lezama Lima reduces to absurdity the habit of linking an artist or his art to a national tradition – howsoever defined – or to a national purpose. This is because from the perspective of the ‘American expression’ art can never be reduced to something ‘national’. At the same time it becomes apparent that the worldwide interconnectedness of Cuba’s, America’s, or the Caribbean’s cultural output should not lead us to believe that this was about letting everything disperse, everything dissolve into the ‘global’, into, as it were, world culture or world literature. *La expresión americana* contains the seeds of what, later, in TransArea Studies is brought into a new perspective from an episteme of a history of movement: phenomena are analyzed as transit and translation, as transfer and transformation between different areas, in order to overcome the seclusiveness and the logic of exclusion inherent to Area Studies. In *La expresión americana* this is done from the constantly changing perspective of an American writer who, like Jorge Luis Borges in “El escritor argentino y la tradición”, does not perceive culture as being rooted in territory. Instead, he de-essentializes the notion of tradition, and cuts it off from “its” territory. Tradition and territoriality are not simply dismissed, but are put into a context of the history of movement: Before the reader's very eyes, notably the seemingly static is transformed into a term of movement.

In this way, José Lezama Lima also stresses the point that one has to distinguish between the synthesizing power of Goethe's times and present-day forms of artistic, respectively literary synthesis:

Las grandes figuras del arte contemporáneo, han descubierto regiones que parecían sumergidas, formas de expresión o conocimiento que se habían descuidado, permaneciendo creadoras. El conocimiento de Joyce del neotomismo, siquiera sea como diletanti, no era un eco tardío de la escolástica, sino un mundo medieval, que al ponerse en contacto con él se volvía extrañamente creador. La llegada de Stravinsky a Pergolesi, no era una astucia neoclásica, sino la necesidad de encontrar un hilo en la tradición, que había estado tan cerca de alcanzar el secreto de la mística, el canon de la creación, la fijeza en las mutaciones, el ritmo del retorno. La gran excepción de un Leonardo o de un Goethe, se convertía en nuestra época en la expresión signaria, que exigía un intuitivo y rápido conocimiento de los estilos anteriores, rostros de lo que ha seguido siendo creador después de tantos naufragios y una adecuada situación en la polémica contemporánea, en el fiel de lo que se retira hacia las sombras y el chorro que salta de las aguas.

Si Picasso saltaba de lo dórico a lo eritrero, de Chardin a lo provenzal,

⁶⁴ Lezama Lima, *La expresión americana*, 159.

nos parecía una óptima señal de los tiempos, pero si un americano estudiaba y asimilaba a Picasso, *horror referens*.⁶⁵

This text creates a landscape of theory which, what with its surfaces of water, its submerged areas and shipwrecks, is unmistakably structured as an archipelago. Movement patterns become keys to understanding the arts in the 20th century (literature, paintings, music): the leap (rather than a constant – continental – movement) and the dive (which includes exploring what has been inundated, what has sunk). As it were, forms of movement shaped new norms of understanding. This was nourished by a sense of empowerment, by an acute awareness of one’s discretionary power over historical heritage.

Discontinuity and relationality appear here from a quasi-aquatic perspective which keeps an eye on both the forms above and the forms beneath water surface, thus connecting the visible with what is usually considered invisible.

Lezama Lima refuses to accept the counterargument which claims that already Leonardo and Goethe had achieved “ese tipo de cultura, hecho de grandes síntesis vivientes”.⁶⁶ He counters Goethe’s model of continuities – and apparently, also Goethe’s model of world literature – emphasizing both discontinuities and, so to speak, ‘submarine’ connections, which can emerge where one least expects it – as is the case with Joyce. It is not the lively – and lived – synthesis of the manifold that gets center stage here, but the celebration of diversity, (lived to no lesser degree) which does not need to be transferred into any concept of continuity or continentality. The arts cannot be reduced any longer to *one* single form or *one* single norm. The “Sumas críticas del Americano” do not aim at an accumulation of cultural elements, but at an open and critical aggregate of relational logics. Written from a perspective of the 50s, they are fully aware of prevailing hierarchies within the transatlantic field of tension.

The quest of literature and culture described in the above-mentioned passage from *La expresión americana* does not lay open the sustained traces of old traditions; instead, it reveals astonishing links between what, at first glance, seem to be disparate elements, and which, therefore, do not follow a consistent logic. In his volume of essays, Lezama powerfully demonstrated that since quite some time Americans had been able to claim with good reason that they had not only succeeded in delocalizing European knowledge (that is taking it away from the cultural meridian of the European center to another place at the periphery), but had indeed succeeded in translocalizing knowledge: thus, said knowledge could be re-thought, rewritten and re-lived from the vantage point of diverse logics. For in the European-American space of motions each transfer implies a transformation, each transit includes a *translatio*: the process of translocalization determines the translation.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 162 f.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 162.

At the close of *La expresión americana* Lezama unmistakably spotlights the absurdity of the notion that it is possible to think and distribute ideas, outlines and innovations from one single place, while those places remote from the centering meridian could only ever attempt to reduce and minimize the aesthetic distance, the *écart*, by means of imitation. How could a world – with and in all its differences – possibly develop in a peaceful way, if there exists such tyranny, the tyranny of *one* logic, *one* literature?

This is why Lezama Lima's aesthetic practice vigorously opposes any attempt of celebrating the course of a single History, a single modernity. And this is why Hegel and his European conceptions are met with an abysmal and confident laughter. For the admitted purpose of making fun of him (“propósito de burlarlo”⁶⁷), the Cuban intellectual holds up a mirror to Hegel: the American mirror of an American who is acquainted not solely with European traditions. And he does so not only with regards to the Americas. Lezama argues that in his *Philosophy of World History* Hegel at most did have some respect for the white Creoles,⁶⁸ but that he thoroughly despised the ‘continente negro’, as he considered it incapable of education or improvement.⁶⁹ Criticizing Hegel, Lezama Lima attacks no less than the actual guarantor of the philosophical discourse of modernity⁷⁰ – that is: of the *one* modernity, hence a modernity in the European sense.

In his critical record Lezama Lima bluntly discards ideas and claims of so homogenizing a kind, referring to the open landscapes of the American expression. In *La expresión americana*, time and time again we come across the Cuban's and American's pride in his own transareal traditions which, far away from the European fictions of hegemony of Hegelian and post-Hegelian provenance, had assumed an independent existence. A world literature which were to develop along a single meridian, adjusted to one single center, at a prescribed time, to him would have seemed patently absurd. The knowledge of literature and its “espacio gnóstico”⁷¹ – as he calls it in the last sentence of his book - were not to be subjected to any singular logic of whatsoever latitude. In *La expresión americana* Lezama Lima traced the prospective outline of a future world of an – as he put it – *era imaginaria* which had already started to prefigure in his landscape of theory: a world seen as an archipelago that generates new and constantly changing combinatorics out of the variety and *self*-will of its islands. These combinatorics could not be possibly thought, nor dominated from *one* place. The global relationality of the literatures of the Americas does not reduce its vital forms to the norms of a world literature,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 177.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 178.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁷⁰ Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985).

⁷¹ Lezama Lima, *La expresión americana*, 189.

whose rules follow a single (cultural) logic. Precisely because it is fully acquainted with this logic, it does not fall to its spell.

Life of/in world literature

In his book *What is world literature?* (2003), which has been broadly received, David Damrosch discusses Nabokov's translations of verse and argues within that context:

Some literary works, indeed, may be so closely dependent on detailed, culture-specific knowledge that they can only be meaningful to members of the originating culture or to specialists in that culture; these are works that remain within the sphere of a national literature and never achieve an effective life in world literature. Yet many works, like our present quatrain, already begin to work their magic before all their references are understood and all their cultural assumptions are elucidated.⁷²

In these reflections the term 'life' is mentioned but in passing. At the same time it is brought into connection with the term 'knowledge'. The first part of the quotation asserts something that is clearly relativized, even revoked, by the second part of the passage: life in literature, it states, can only come into being where a certain knowledge is either shared within the framework of a community (*members*) or is acquired through specific research (*specialists*). What then is life in literature, and what does life of or life in literature mean?

In a second step, David Damrosch links the oppositions of life/non-life and of knowledge/non-knowledge with the opposition of national literature/world literature. An astonishing procedure, if we were unaware of the fact that from its Goethean formative beginnings the notion of 'world literature' has always carried with itself the term 'national literature' as its *other* – not unlike a snail that cannot be separated from its shell. Consistently, one term evokes the other. In Damrosch's concept, all that which can be known only by a national community (or its researchers) is excluded from life of/in world literature. Is it true, though, that what one has *read* only turns into what one has *experienced*, if one has (previously) *known* it? In other words: Does literature's knowledge of life only turn into an applicable knowledge for living, if it can be connected to a reader's *identical* knowledge of life in the first place?

In *What is World Literature?* David Damrosch scarcely mentions the term 'life'. Surprisingly, though, he does mention another term closely related: the one of habitation or inhabitation. He does so, right after making obligatory reference and showing obligatory reverence to Goethe's foundational act as recorded in the talks of the 77-year-old with young Eckermann: "The term

⁷² David Damrosch, *World Literature*, 158 f.

crystallized both a literary perspective and a new cultural awareness, a sense of an arising global modernity, whose epoch, as Goethe predicted, we now inhabit.”⁷³ Do we, however, really still live in, do we still inhabit that global era Goethe saw dawning? Or is it not rather that the creator of Wilhelm Meister was fully aware of having lived in an era of global acceleration, that is to say a global acceleration in *his* time, not the time we live in? Since it is precisely in those years between 1825 and 1827 – and thus even before defining and redefining the term ‘world literature’ – that Goethe uses the term ‘velociferic’ to describe a process that from his point of view was evolving rapidly, if not to say fiendishly fast.⁷⁴ Said process coincides with the second phase of accelerated globalization, during which the majority of German compound words containing ‘Welt-’ (world) were coined, e.g. ‘Weltverkehr’ (global traffic), ‘Welthandel’ (world trade), ‘Weltgeschichte’ (world history) or ‘Weltbewußtsein’ (global consciousness).

If, thus, we do inhabit a historical era and live in it, then most certainly it is not the one Goethe creatively responded to by introducing the term ‘world literature’ into a polemical debate that made increasing/increasingly started to speak of/ use of the term ‘national literature’. (Incidentally, the way Eckermann records it, the term ‘world literature’ is associated with a sense of acceleration.) The current fourth phase of globalization shares a number of structural traits with the era that influenced the terminology of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe or Alexander von Humboldt, but it is not reducible to it. We are a long way from inhabiting what Goethe considered “at hand”/ “an der Zeit”⁷⁵.

In the following we shall attempt to answer the question how to translate Goethe's term into the actual phase – recent coinages like ‘New World Literature’⁷⁶ indicate how imperative it is that such translation should be found. Before addressing that question, however, we will return for a moment to the question of life - and that is: life in/of world literature. How do we define the latter term? Damrosch gives a new meaning to the term ‘world literature’:

The idea of world literature can usefully continue to mean a subset of the plenum of literature. I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language (Virgil was long read in Latin

⁷³ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁴ Cf. Anne Bohnenkamp, “„Den Wechseltausch zu befördern“: Goethes Entwurf einer Weltliteratur“, in Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Ästhetische Schriften 1824 – 1832: Über Kunst und Altertum V – VI*, ed. Anne Bohnenkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1999), 937–964.

⁷⁵ Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe*, 165/ *Gespräche mit Goethe*, 211.

⁷⁶ Cf. for instance Elke Sturm-Trigonakis, *Global playing in der Literatur: Ein Versuch über die Neue Weltliteratur* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007).

in Europe). In its most expansive sense, world literature could include any work that has ever reached beyond its home base, but Guillén's cautionary focus on actual readers makes good sense: a work only has an *effective* life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture.⁷⁷

The life of a literary work as part of world literature is linked up here with its actual circulation outside the *original* context. Thus, there is a process of territorialization going on here, which constantly reconnects a literary work to a place and a language or a society of origin. Without a doubt, the reframing of the term 'world literature' with regard to circulation and distribution constitutes an important, innovative aspect in the discussion about world literature. However, an approach like this starts from the assumption that there is an origin of the literary work (or rather of its author), which is often, yet not always, defined in national terms. Truth be told, such origin is not always easy to determine. Does it really make much sense to answer the question of whether a piece of literature belongs to world literature by determining its *original culture* in the case of, say, the *Shijing*, the Bible, Leo Africanus, Vladimir Nabokov, or Melinda Nadj Abonji? Would it not be far more convincing to look for cultural spaces of motion, fields of tension and vectorial pathways, instead of looking for a 'culture of origin' (howsoever construed)?

The analysis of the two Cuban authors Fernando Ortiz and José Lezama Lima should have demonstrated, how difficult and contradictorial it is to strictly localize and classify a literary work— however convincing an approach like this seems at first glance. As a representative of the literatures without a fixed abode, the aforementioned Nabokov is a fine example of the necessity to replace static terms with mobile, vectorial terms (if we put aside for the moment that according to Pascale Casanova all people without a homeland do (or at least, should) consider Paris their proper home).⁷⁸ In lieu of determining the *original culture* of an author or the origins of a literary work, it often proves a much easier task to determine the places from where a text is read, commented and interpreted, that is, the places of its circulation. And in fact, David Damrosch is primarily concerned with world literature in its circulation and with "the ways in which works of world literature can best be read".⁷⁹ This, if you will, reader-response approach generates a new tension in view of the worldwide reading of world literature; it constitutes a conscious change of perspective by leaving behind the list of an established canon and moving toward, as one might say, the forms and norms of cultural (sometimes even transcultural) appropriation. Doubtlessly, this is the strong point of this

⁷⁷ Damrosch, *World Literature*, 4.

⁷⁸ Cf. Casanova, *World Republic*, e.g. 29–32; *République mondiale*, e.g. 48–50.

⁷⁹ Damrosch, *World Literature*, 5.

approach.

At the same time it becomes apparent from which place Damrosch himself ‘reads these readings’. For the readings read are readable themselves and tell us something about the ‘life’ of world literature that is analyzed here – not only analyzed, though, but also arranged and staged. It is quite astonishing to see the casualness with which the *MLA International Bibliography* is referred to as an impartial yardstick: it is cited as evidence when evaluating the world-wide presence of an African novel (three entries in 25 years⁸⁰ are said to be a negligible presence), the significance of Goethe’s *Egmont* with regard to world literature⁸¹ (the text is said to not appear in any single US-American anthology) or when stating a waning interest for Thomas Mann and a constantly increasing interest for Franz Kafka. All the statistics upon which these observations are based are taken from this indubitably significant US-American bibliography: in the 60s there are 142 entries for Thomas Mann alongside a mere 111 entries for Franz Kafka; in the 70s Kafka draws level (476 vs. 478), before in the 80s he finally secures a ‘commanding lead’ (289 vs. 411) which he succeeds in defending during the 90s (277 vs. 411). What does this tell us about the ‘life’ in/of world literature? That just like Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch is in a process of measuring, only that this time the prime meridian does not run through Greenwich or the huge publishing houses on the Seine River, but through the world's largest association within the Humanities, the *Modern Language Association of America*. If, with reference to Casanova, Damrosch talked with a certain relish about *La République parisienne des Lettres*, Casanova, in turn, could make an equally well-founded riposte, by only slightly changing Damrosch's title: *What is American World Literature?*

Despite the disparity of approaches and the differences in conclusions which clearly distinguish the studies by Pascale Casanova and David Damrosch from each other, they also have traits in common: On both a reader-response level and a level of the aesthetics of production, they tend to regard world literature as a unity and try to lay hold of it by registering it within a consistent, unbroken cartography, of which they believe themselves able to identify clear meridians of reference. World literature appears as a phenomenon in singular that can be represented in a cartography, which – albeit streaked with clear hierarchies, patent asymmetries and unmistakable power structures – still (re)produces a *single continuous* space. Such measuring from the centers cannot be done without (a certain) presumptuousness. Even though within this “world literary space” (“espace littéraire mondial”)⁸² different perspectives can be distinguished, in the end everything is grasped and explained from a single

⁸⁰ Ibid., 116.

⁸¹ Ibid., 134.

⁸² Casanova, *World Republic*, 3; *La République mondiale*, 14.

logic, from a single vantage point. Concerning several aspects of world literature, David Damrosch's critical consciousness is certainly not to be doubted, in fact, right on the first page of his book he asks: "Which literature, whose world?"⁸³

The discursive pragmatics linked to the term *world literature*, however, seem to be of such enormous power that it is hard to avoid falling into *mental mapping* again, which casts its nets across the globe from one specific place. It is rather ironic, then, that for the jacket of his book the US-American comparatist should have chosen a historical illustration, taken from the *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte* (1802): it depicts French scientists during the Napoleonic campaign to Egypt in the act of measuring Egyptian relics, in particular the sphinx, by every trick in the (European) book. If indeed, as implicitly asserted, the really crucial processes of literary canonization almost exclusively happen in the US⁸⁴, then this tells us less about the plural logics of what is termed here as *world literature*, but about the single logic behind the process of drafting a global cartography from the US. This can never be a disinterested process. Instead, the reflections behind such canonizations reveal two aspects: the predominant belief that there is a single global system of literature, and what is supposed to be its shape and state. At the same time all this answers the question of what is *world literature* in a way that contradicts the author's intention to a rather great extent. This can best be seen by the example of Rigoberta Menchús testimonial text with its hugely complex genesis. On the one hand, the "vicissitudes that can attend a work's life in the world"⁸⁵ can be observed quite beautifully. On the other hand, one comes to realize that it is a rather specific perspective from which the author, Guatemala, Catholicism or the Mayas are described. This perspective can be regarded as a proxy for *the* perspective of *the* world, as devised in the United States. How could life within/of a world literary system be described more accurately – without the system being tied to a predominant single logic?

Beyond world literature: the literatures of the world

As goes without saying, apart from Paris and New York other prime meridians of world literary developments have been established in the literature on the subject, such as London and Barcelona – always depending on where the author comes from. Now, if one wants to leave the orbit of a way of seeing that is constantly re-centered and readjusted according to a succession of ever-changing prime meridians, the first thing to do is to renounce to the fundamental opposition Goethe first established on a fine day in January 1827,

⁸³ Damrosch, *World Literature*, 1.

⁸⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 232.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 259.

and that ever since has been a structural fixture in any talk about world literature. I am referring to the dichotomy of national literature and world literature. In its historical context this distinction was justified. It is not to be transferred, though, to the fourth phase of accelerated globalization with its notably more complex circumstances. We need to clearly differentiate here: one thing is to analyze the history of said opposition, and how it fundamentally shaped and influenced discourse. Another to acknowledge that the dichotomy itself is already history, and to determine the implications of this latter fact on a terminological and an epistemological level. In other words: the literatures that have developed and keep developing on this planet cannot be adequately grasped or reflected upon by means of the binarism of world literature and national literature. Consequently, in the future, it should be our first concern to crack open the dichotomy between the two terms once for all. (In reality, these have not always been as irreconcilable as they are depicted. Rather, they display a certain complicity.) Then we will be able to analyze what moves within the resulting space of thought that has opened up *between* national literature and world literature.

Secondly, if we truly want to permanently overcome this opposition (as effective as it is simple), we have to change our set of parameters: the literature written on our planet can no longer be grasped and captured by means of parameters that are based on a history of spaces. What is required here are parameters based on a history of movement. In contrast to the first phase of accelerated globalization, it is no longer adequate to stick with a static way of mapping with its concurrent determination of much-needed meridians of reference. Instead, we must aim at vectorizing all references in such way that it will be possible to thoroughly examine mobile relationalities by their trails and paths of motion – both with reference to the past and present, but also the future. This perspective is no longer merely retrospective or concerned with the present, but also prospective. It requires a poetics of movement and a foundation in TransArea Studies: each (ever-changing) space originates from and is formed by other motions, traversing it or connecting it with other spaces of motion; it is always integrated in a mobile relationality. The vectorization of all spatial references results in a simple fact: all motions create spaces. Due to the mobile perspective of diverse spaces of motion, these spaces can be perceived quite differently. To put it another way: a particular manifestation of world consciousness is always informed and shaped vectorially. It depends upon former paths of motion and engenders a specific positioning as concerns the past, present and future that fundamentally differs from the one of other spaces of motion. One key factor here is to examine both the inner relationality and the external relationality of such spaces of motion, that is: to examine those relationships which intra-spatially and extra-spatially determine the positioning in question.

Thirdly: this means that we should aim at grasping the polylogical structure

of the entire intermediate space between national literature and world literature, – including the implications of its binary terms ‘nation’ and ‘world’ – from the perspective of a poetics of movement. Against this backdrop, then, it is crucial to develop methodologies which deserve to be called polylogical – despite the obvious necessity to reduce complexity. Motions will have to be described transareally in their global vectorization. It is only possible to think them, to adequately analyze them, if their polylogical open structuration is examined by an equally polylogical philology, an equally polylogical science.

If we understand literary works as polylogical aesthetic structurations, which since the times of the Epic of *Gilgamesh* or the *Shijing* have been nudging their readers to re-live the interplay – or even the convivence – of diverse logics inherent in their text, then the resulting knowledge of re-living, which in diverse literatures is stored and saved in diverse ways, is a basic prerequisite to conceiving and drafting polylogical forms of thinking, as well as polylogical forms of life. Literature offers a knowledge of life/a knowledge for living that comes into being by (aesthetically) re-living a wealth of diverse logics, such as provided by different characters of a novel, divergent conventions of genre in poetry, or ambivalent ways of staging a play. Thus, dealing with literature opens up a space of experiment, a space for testing the polylogical: an object, an action or a habit are perceived simultaneously from diverse perspectives which all have a ring of truth. As a consequence, the reader learns to confront these truths with each other, without falling into an *either-or* or a *neither-nor*.

It is about time to realize that the term ‘world literature’ is an expression of a historical position that has now become obsolete. World literature ‘is now rather an unmeaning term’; it simply denotes a specific era which occupies a prominent place within the literary history of globalization. Without literature – or rather: without the literatures of the world – we could not possibly understand phenomena of the century-long process of globalization in its due, polylogical complexity or be sufficiently close to life. For nothing compares to the discursive knowledge offered by literature: the most diverse times, most diverse spaces (of motions), most diverse cultures, most diverse languages, most diverse societies *simultaneously* speak to us readers today.

It is hence high time to start using the widely spread term ‘world literature’ strictly as concerns a specific epoch. Taking into account both the history of its development and its having become history, we shall then replace it by the term ‘literatures of the world’. Within the historical development of the literatures of the world, the epoch of world literature thus represents a period of time that saw the specific formation of a literary corpus – or more accurately: of a literary canon – that was labeled ‘world literature’. Granted: as long as there will be a discourse on world literature, it cannot be denied nor disputed that such corpus or canon exists. What is interesting for our purpose is that the (usually dominant) logic of ‘world literature’ is but one out of many logics within the literatures of the world. This refers both to the level of its

categories of analysis and to the pragmatic dimension of literature (including its global commercialization). Thus, *the one and only* world literature constitutes a discursive axiom, which certainly still plays a crucial role e.g. when it comes to the commercialization of literature ('airport literature' representing an interesting case apart in this respect). However, it no longer sufficiently expresses the polylogical diversity of the literatures of the world.

In contrast, the term 'literatures of the world' succeeds in undermining the dichotomy of national literature and world literature. It grasps the transareal *history of movement* of literary developments, and does justice to the concept of a polylogical philology. The way of procedure of a polylogical philology can be described as follows: To approach a highly diversified and radically open system in a scientifically sound way, being aware of and moving within a field of tension created by many diverse (and overlapping) logics. Such system can no longer be reduced to a single logic, be it on a political or aesthetical, economic or literary, technological or medial level.

How, then, could one describe the space of motions that opens up between the concepts of national literature and world literature? In the first place, it seems to me, one has to acknowledge the enormous variety of diverse languages in which literature is written. One has to keep in mind that during the first phase of accelerated globalization there were three European languages (Portuguese, Spanish and Latin) that - due to the Iberian expansion - were globalized into America, but also into the African and the Asian space. In the second phase of accelerated globalization the languages of the leading powers of this new boost of expansion are added, e.g. French and English. In the third phase of accelerated globalization for the first time a non-European global player emerges (albeit shaped and influenced by Europe): the United States of America with their expansion into the Caribbean and the Pacific space. No European language acquires global dimension during this phase (neither does German during the short-dated expansion of the German Reich). In the current fourth phase, there is mounting evidence that in the rather near future Mandarin might turn into the first non-European language going global - although such prognosis, at the present time, still depends on a number of unknown factors and on developments not yet fully foreseeable.

Against this backdrop one can differentiate between literatures of lusophony (particularly in Europe, America and Africa), literatures of hispanophony (mainly in Europe and the Americas), literatures of francophony (primarily in Europe, Africa and America), and literatures of anglophony (represented on all continents). Although their origins are structurally related, these literatures follow widely diverse logics, and thus cannot be equated with each other. The analysis of the rise, spread and fall of Latin as a world language and language of scholars constitutes its own field of research.

The diverse logics of the respective globalized languages of literature can be examined here but briefly. As far as literature is concerned, the francophony

displays a structure that is strongly oriented towards France and, in particular, towards the Parisian publishing world.⁸⁶ This can be seen in the dominant use of the term ‘francophone literature’ for non-French literatures - a practice that has been frequently criticized during the recent years for its mechanism of exclusion.⁸⁷ At all events: French literature tends to demarcate itself from francophone literature quite categorically. The anglophony, in turn, exhibits a structural network that is multipolar, hence oriented towards diverse poles (albeit in an asymmetrical way), while the lusophony is increasingly oriented towards Brazil (the former colony, that is), without completely neglecting Lisbon, though. The space of motions of the Spanish-speaking literatures always has been subjected to considerable (mainly politically contingent) changes. During the 20th century Iberian publishing centers like Madrid and Barcelona rivalled with American points of reference, such as Buenos Aires or Mexico City. These differences (presented here but in a broad-brush way) have a profound influence on what kind of literature is written, printed, distributed and read in these transareal spaces of literature.

We cannot offer an exhaustive analysis here of their very diverse (field) logics.⁸⁸ Suffice it to say that they are of paramount importance for highly differentiated motion patterns as concerns authors and publishers; for immensely diverse conditions with regard to the aesthetics of production and reception; and for highly unequal conditions of distribution and circulation. It needs to be underlined, though, that the mere fact of belonging to a certain, linguistically determined system of literature – however heterogeneous it may be – constitutes an essential prerequisite for specific processes of reading and writing. Thus, the developments of aesthetics on the level of production, reception and distribution need to be analyzed in all their complexity.

The same goes for the analysis of respective strategies of writing and publishing. It is perfectly obvious that within lusophony, hispanophony, francophony and anglophony, logics of diverse national literary systems and of minority regional literatures do persist. To provide just one example: in particular agencies of consecration and award-bestowing bodies, which tend to be structured along national literary lines, are still supremely relevant to understanding the literatures of the world.

Within the Romance languages, there have always been ‘special’ relations

⁸⁶ For the use of this term, see Jürgen Erfurt, *Frankophonie: Sprache - Diskurs - Politik* (Tübingen/Basel: Francke Verlag UTB, 2005).

⁸⁷ Cf. the manifest, signed by numerous eminent intellectuals, “Manifeste pour une *littérature-monde* en français”, in: *Le Monde* (Paris) (16.3.2007).

⁸⁸ Cf. the introductory chapter of Ottmar Ette, *TransArea*, as well as earlier theoretical reflections, in (id.) “Asymmetrie der Beziehungen: Zehn Thesen zum Dialog der Literaturen Lateinamerikas und Europas“, in *Lateinamerika denken: Kulturtheoretische Grenzgänge zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne*, ed. Birgit Scharlau (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1994), 297–326.

between the francophone, hispanophone and lusophone literatures: these found expression in a heightened mutual awareness and special conjunctures. Thus, the processes of exchange (e.g. between the Spanish and French language, but also between French and Italian, Italian and Galician, Galician and Portuguese, or Portuguese and Catalan) intensified either by leaps and bounds or for longer periods. Within the framework of the Romance languages, all languages are interconnected and interrelated, albeit not always simultaneously or with the same intensity. It cannot be denied, though, that for centuries there has been a *special relationship*.

Naturally, the transareal networks of interrelations are not restricted to the globalized European languages. However, if the former emerge in non-European languages, they do not move within truly global systems of globalization. Arabic literature written in Argentina or literature written in one of the Indian languages in Surinam or Mauritius have their very own and highly complex logics, as does German literature written in Brazil. In particular, the migratory spaces of Surinam or Mauritius as highly condensed intersections of different boosts of globalization, develop multi-lingual systems of literature that are equidistant from national literature and world literature. They can be grasped, however, from the polylogical perspective of the literatures of the world. Thus, their networks of interrelations can be analyzed on the local, regional, national, areal, transareal or global level, without having to reduce them to the *one* logic of world literature or excluding them (not really) ‘in passing’.

Crosswise of the phenomena mentioned above, and crosswise of the globalized hispanophone, lusophone, anglophone and francophone developments one can describe the literatures without a fixed abode. These are characterised by their translingual dimension (which means they cross diverse languages) and their very specific transcultural and transareal dimension.⁸⁹ I have repeatedly described these phenomena that are still gaining importance. As to the German-speaking literature, exponents are authors such as Emine Sevgi Özdamar (within a field of tension between Turkey and Germany) or Yoko Tawada (in the web of interrelations between Japan and Germany). Although I cannot enter here into a detailed analysis, there is one point I want to emphasize: Traversing languages in a translingual way, and writing beyond one's mother tongue have become common features around the globe. It is getting increasingly difficult (and pointless for that matter) to distinguish between national literary “origin” and world literary “future”, between “language of origin” and “translated language”, even between the very notions of “original” and “translation”.

⁸⁹ As regards the challenges that these literatures represent on a level of cultural theory and text analysis see Ottmar Ette, *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben: Literaturen ohne festen Wohnsitz* (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2005).

Thus, the literatures without a fixed abode constitute a primary component of the literatures of the world. During the 20th century, the century of migrations⁹⁰, they were mainly characterized by deportation and Shoah, exile and displacement. Since 1945, they have been increasingly shaped by boosts of migration from the global South to the North and from East to West. From a vectorial perspective concerned with the history of movement, the literatures of the world are no longer marginal phenomena, but life forms of literature which will shape the 21st century, maybe even turn into a decisive factor. They have become fundamental forms of mutual exchange in the life of the literatures of the world.

The polylogical life of the literatures of the world

More radically than ever, all dimensions and aspects concerning production, distribution and the aesthetics of reception are „out of (national philological) joint“, and thus cannot be related to exclusively national literary spaces of reference anymore. This also holds true for the authorities of legitimation and consecration of the respective literary fields that are based on national literary terms (the changed policies of literary awards perfectly exemplify this point, as they have notably opened up internationally). The reasons for this development are twofold: on the one hand, lusophony, hispanophony, francophony and anglophony have shown a tendency to fan out into increasingly divergent logics; on the other hand, in a large number of linguistic areas we can observe an increase of literary phenomena which – from a translingual, transcultural and transareal vantage – could be called literatures without a fixed abode.⁹¹ Only cultural and literary theories that are based upon mobility and vectorization and a history of movement seem to stand a chance to tackle the confusing number of changes. They do so by examining vectorial ‘trails’ or pathways from a, as it were, cubist, polylogical perspective, and are thus capable of grasping the concurrence, the convergence and the interplay of diverse logics, without turning a blind eye to the structural asymmetries of existing power structures.

⁹⁰ Cf. Klaus J. Bade, *Europa in Bewegung: Migration vom späten 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Beck, 2000), 11–16.

⁹¹ Cf. Ursula Mathis-Moser and Birgit Mertz-Baumgartner, eds., *La Littérature «française» contemporaine: Contact de cultures et créativité* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2007); Ursula Mathis-Moser and Julia Pröll, eds., *Fremde(s) schreiben* (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2008). For the relationship between the literatures of exile and the literatures of the world, see Ottmar Ette, “»Ma patrie est caravane«: Amin Maalouf, die Frage des Exils und das ZusammenLebenswissen der Literaturen ohne festen Wohnsitz”, *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte / Cahiers d'Histoire des Littératures Romanes* XXXII, 3 – 4 (2009): 413–445.

The objects of a polylogical science, a polylogical philology can easily turn into subjects. The literatures of the world certainly constitute the most complex medium of storage and transformation of knowledge, offering access to the most diverse times, spaces, languages and cultures. They provide us with a plethora of forms of life and norms of life featuring mobility. By means of aesthetic cognition, these help us to efficiently re-read our world, to literally think it through, and, above all, in Dilthey's sense, to *experience* it - in a polyperspective, polylogical way.⁹² The polylogics of a transareal science oriented along the lines of the literatures of the world circumvents any attempt to comprehensively map and systematize the world from one single point, from one single place of writing and reading. For there is no such single vantage point, no such single meridian from which the world and world literature could be seen in their entirety.

Unlike the Goethean term 'world literature', the literatures of the world are neither static nor centered from Europe. Instead, they form a highly dynamical field of power, which is characterized by its constant shifts and switches between diverse cultural logics, languages, literary and academic fields. This is why it cannot be thought, assessed or hierarchized from Europe or America alone, neither from Weimar, Paris, Barcelona nor New York. Within this context, translingual phenomena of the literatures without a fixed abode represent a special challenge. They require a new theory of translation. David Damrosch rightly addressed this issue in his concept of world literature (a concept, as we have seen, primarily based on the aesthetics of reception). The new theory of translation will certainly go beyond the scope of traditional translations sciences that are rather linguistically oriented.⁹³ At the same time, the literatures without a fixed abode show quite convincingly that in a given (literary) language are always already present the linguistic structures and literary horizons of other languages and literatures.⁹⁴

The life and thoughts of Erich Auerbach have shown that the 20th century saw a parallel development: alongside the literatures without a fixed abode emerged, as it were, a philology without a fixed abode, propelled by the feeling of uprootedness characteristic of exile. Such philology is capable of multiplying perspectives even in life-threatening circumstances (as was the case with Auerbach). This would hardly be possible within the boundaries of a national literary system of literature, or within a nationally structured academic field. TransArea Studies aim at an institutionally safeguarded

⁹² Cf. Wilhelm Dilthey, „Goethe und die dichterische Phantasie“, in (id.) *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing – Goethe – Novalis – Hölderlin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 139.

⁹³ Cf. Doris Bachmann-Medick, „Introduction: The Translational Turn“, *Translational Studies* II, 1 (2009): 2–16.

⁹⁴ Cf. Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On «Japan» and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 3 f.

polyperspectivity: within a transareal philology without a fixed abode, Indian scholars will be able to conduct research on Mexico in Germany, German scholars carry out studies on China in Canada, Chinese scholars work on Africa in Brazil, and African scholars will be able to investigate the Caribbean in Germany. As regards Romance studies, Erich Auerbach's decision (and Leo Spitzer's, for that matter) not to return to Germany initiated and spurred the development of a multiperspective writing style in philological texts. In the current fourth phase of accelerated globalization with its fundamentally improved infrastructure, it is vital now to keep abreast of developments and bring about systematic changes on an epistemological and institutional level, in order to pay justice to the altered framework of literature and literary criticism, but also of other artistic activities and academic disciplines. Thus, new forms of life and new forms of knowledge will be programmed, especially in the field of the arts and sciences. For its part, the resulting new kind of knowledge will produce new studies, which, in turn, will further accelerate the life of the literatures of the world and of the sciences without a fixed abode.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe's term 'world literature' constituted a polemical response to the limitations and narrowness of contemporary discourse on the nation and national literature. World literature, therefore, was characterized by its abundance – and if such abundance had not yet been achieved (on a world literary level), then, surely, soon it would be achieved. Goethe, as 'translated' by Eckermann, asked for a combined effort to accelerate such process. Said abundance was promised to everyone who truly dedicated themselves to world literature, whether a specialist or modest reader. On a variety of levels the talk about world literature staged a discourse of abundance as opposed to a discourse of lack. Crossing borders was presented as an additive driving force, since Goethe in his reflections on literature included *tout court* references to Serbian, Indian and Chinese literature. Up to the present day, the discourse on world literature still starts from these assumptions, and thus keeps propagating the tableau of abundance. Sure enough, there is a trap in that way of thinking: What is added to the national is incorporated in and subjected to the same rhetoric and, even more so, to the same logic that is inherent in the notion of the national. As a consequence, abundance fails to change the static tableau of the given mapping, fails to put it into motion.

The terminology 'literatures of the world' does not presuppose such abundance. Its polylogical thinking displays a constant awareness of the fact that there exists a plethora of other logics, which have not yet been included. What is more, it remains aware of the fact that its own discourse and its own conception of literature lacks the presence of many such unexplored, unknown logics. The discourse of the literatures of the world, hence, does not run under the banner of abundance, but under the banner of lack, deficiency, deprivation – a lack that cannot be glossed over by sheer accumulation. Within the interminable and spatially unlimited realm of the literatures of the world

discontinuous cracks and fissures keep appearing (and disappearing) in a continuous way, thus drawing attention to the fact, that there are further logics, further broken structurations that have not yet been integrated into the polylogical structuration. It is the awareness of discontinuity, the awareness of all the interstices that can be thought or intuited which serves as a counterbalance to any attempt of totalization, to any inclination towards discursively creating totality. At the same time, being aware of the missing and the (yet) invisible can be related to those disruptions, to those submerged landscapes which play such a crucial role in José Lizama Lima in the notion of the *sumergido*.

With the same gesture (and to the same degree) the discourse of lack opens up a space for self-inquiry and self-criticism, a space for an interminable process of completing (in the sense of a complexification). Thus, the perspectives of observation are incessantly changed and readjusted. In this picture of motions, nothing ever settles down, nothing ever comes to rest. This is the reason why, quite paradoxically, the structural *lack* actually means a *plus* on other levels, e.g. a plus of interminability, a plus of radical openness towards ever fresh transformations, and a plus of new transculturations which prospectively enable new forms of life. Under the banner of absence, lack and deprivation, the literatures of the world open up for what is to come, open up for a future which, in turn, will change them yet again.

It needs to be pointed out, here, that literature is not a representation of reality – as Auerbach put it. Rather, it is the representation of *lived* realities, *experienced* realities, or *re-livable* realities. It vividly shows, how we could have lived in former times, how we could live today, or how we should change our life in the days to come. By means of literary aesthetics and the aesthetic power of literature, what has been lived or experienced is translated into something that can be lived or relived. As to the danger of transferring what one has read onto the level of real life in a way rather too direct or unmediated, literature has always seen to putting up the warning signals itself. Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha* or Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* demonstrate quite graphically where an unbridled lust for reading may take you.

At the same time, literature – as a highly differentiated form of knowledge for living and experiential knowledge – is specialized in taking its readers on an experimental journey: it offers the opportunity to play through all that which can be *re-lived* because, in principle, it can be *lived*. This is because literature is a knowledge of life in life and for life, yet without being identical to (text-external) life.

The literatures of the world, hence, present ways of life which simultaneously follow multiple logics. Thus, the readers (who have grown to live by their respective norms of life) are given the opportunity to try out and experience substantially different forms and norms of life, which they would not have gotten in touch with or challenged by under ordinary circumstances.

The *knowledge for living together* assumes particular significance here: in and by reading, it tests e.g. the compatibility of diverse norms, the relatability of contrary logics, and the validity of different forms of life. The new information can be compared to one's own knowledge for living and be identified as congruent or dissonant. In contrast to world literature, the literatures of the world cannot be subjected to one consistent logic. On the contrary, they vigorously challenge their readers to shape their own life (be it on the individual or collective, communal or social level) according to coexisting diverse logics.

Little will be known about life in the literatures of the world by those who try to reduce them to one single political, medial, cartographical, geocultural or aesthetic logic. Those, however, who approach the polylogical life of the literatures of the world in such way that *life knowledge* transforms into experimental *knowledge*, and that the *knowledge for survival* turns into a *knowledge for living together*, will have seized the opportunities which the literatures of the world offer to all those who do not fall into the trap of contenting themselves with a supposed abundance: to all those who join the interminable quest under the banner of absence, of shortage, of deprivation.

Consequently, if one speaks of the life of the literatures of the world and of life within the literatures of the world, this is not about assigning *one* single meaning to the most diverse phenomena. Instead, this is about experiencing and playing through, in due intensity, the polysemy and polyphony of the most diverse texts and contexts, spaces and dreams, fictions and frictions. A poetics of movement, as conceived by TransArea studies, reveals the places beneath the places, the words beneath the words, the reason(s) beneath reason, the many truths beneath truth, and puts them into motion. Hence, it will never be possible again to measure them against a single world literary meridian.

As the world cannot be adequately understood from the vantage point of a single language, the literatures of the world can no longer be trimmed to a single world literature. Literature in singular does not really exist: Literature comes into being only if it is, and because it is, considerably more than it is. However, it can only be more, if – within the diversity of the literatures of the world – it stays aware of the void, the lack, the privation, the interminable: aware of the end that never is an end.

Translation by Agnes Bethke