

World Literature, Cosmopolitanism, Globality

Latin American Literatures in the World

Literaturas Latinoamericanas en el Mundo



Edited by / Editado por
Gesine Müller

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World Literature, Cosmopolitanism, Globality



Beyond, Against, Post, Otherwise

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Gesine Müller and Mariano Siskind

Introduction

The latest iteration of the concepts of world literature and cosmopolitanism in the second half of the 1990s was one of the ways the humanities and literary studies in particular attempted to address the process of neoliberal economic and cultural globalization that had begun to transform the planet (particularly, but not exclusively urban centers) since the 1980s. Even though the cultural politics of the different strains of world literary critical discourses that circulated over the past two decades varied greatly, their intellectual lineages can be traced back to Goethe's rejection of nation-bound signifying frames for the study of literature and culture ("Now national literature doesn't mean much"¹), which seemed to no longer shed light on objects of study marked by transnational contexts of production, linguistic intersection, and local manifestations of cosmopolitan culture. And all of them also shared a certain sense of euphoria regarding the potential of cosmopolitan critical discourses to resist, postpone and even reinscribe and redirect the ideological orientation of the universalist forces driving the process that produced (and was producing) the global hegemony of neoliberal capital.

The overwhelming sense of political, economic, institutional and humanitarian crisis that defines the state of the world in 2019 (understood as a set of necessary determinations which shapes the conditions of enunciation of academic and intellectual projects) makes it difficult if not impossible to continue to sustain that kind of self-affirming, hubristic culturalist confidence in the political power of world literature as a critico-theoretical frame capable of disrupting the process of neoliberal globalization or the resurgence of nationalistic and racist forms of xenophobia and ethnocentrism, or the disciplinary ability to make sense of the meaning of new kinds of global displacements and dislocations.

This historical juncture demands a general reevaluation of the conceptual scope and critical efficacy of world literature, cosmopolitanism and globality; to think beyond, otherwise, post or against conventional, inherited definitions of their signifying inscriptions. It seems to us that this is a historical challenge that all literary scholars interested in these problems have to face, but it is particularly relevant for Latin Americanists and critics specialized in other marginalized

¹ Originally, "National-Literatur will jetzt nicht viel sagen", from the entry "Mittwoch, den 31. Januar 1827" in: *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens* by Johann Peter Eckermann (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag 1982 [1836]).

literatures which entered world literary studies, debates and anthologies as a result of a tokenist logic according to which supposedly stereotypical texts established a metonymic relation with the totality of the culture they were supposed to express. So for Latin Americanists and critics of other marginalized literatures, discontent with the ways world literature, cosmopolitanism and globality have been conceptualized and put to work in romance studies, comparative literature and global history (among other disciplines) is nothing new. In fact, from the very beginning their participation in the collective making of an institutionally established field of studies has been marked by a sense of dissatisfaction with the terms of the debate and the attempt to correct the ornamental function assigned to the region's literature by proposing varied ways of interpreting the place of Latin American culture *in* the world, but also by thinking through the production of the world *from* Latin America, the wide array of local, particularistic enunciations of universalist discourses (of particularly Latin American worldly gazes), as well as the material circulation and appropriations of Latin American literatures in the world, and of the literatures of the world in Latin America.

This was always the case, and the current state of global and local affairs calls for a radical revision of these categories again, and asks to interrogate the meaning they produce. Indeed, the aim of this volume is to explore possible alterations, critiques, reconceptualizations, and abandonments of world literature and cosmopolitanism beyond, against, after or displacing globalization.

The articles gathered here are the result of a discussion which took place at the University of Cologne along several related axes: the theoretical making of world literature and the ways Latin Americanist scholars have subverted them, the need to reassess the cultural politics of cosmopolitanism when its emancipatory horizon seems to have been exhausted, and the concrete examination of how the book publishing industry, translation and cultural markets, and transnational academic relations function in a context where stable assumptions about the history of neoliberal globalization might need to be reconsidered. All contributions in this volume attempt to open new critical perspectives related to what we would tentatively call our post-global moment.

The book is organized around five different sections or clusters; each one of them articulates the aforementioned discontents and proposes new ways of thinking the past and the present from the point of view of the categorical crisis that defines our own context of enunciation. The first section is entitled "Revisiting world literary institutions: publishers, academic institutions and the way we read" and includes three articles. In "Debating world literature without the world: ideas for materializing literary studies based on examples from Latin America and the Caribbean", Gesine Müller calls for the greater consideration of material realities in

the debate around world literature. In order to explore how a critical material approach to world literature can be shaped beyond the market-centered dynamics of globalization, Müller considers literary sociology's most recent ideas in relation to the concept of world literature through an examination of specific publishing practices and the physical book industry. Using two very different examples – the international circulation of García Márquez's novels and the book series based on the *Les peuples de l'eau* expeditions, published by Édouard Glissant – Müller investigates what can be learned from the examination of the material basis of circulation.

Gustavo Guerrero's article, "Literatura mundial y multilateralismo: cambiando de rumbo", claims that the resurgence of the discussion around the idea of a world literature in the 1990s can be linked to the emergence of multiculturalist and postcolonial streams of thought and the consequent defense of a poetics of global diversity capable of embodying a new cosmopolitan ideal; and to prove this point, like Müller, he examines the work of the Martinican poet Édouard Glissant. On the other hand, in light of the expectations created during the 1990s, Guerrero examines the academic institutionalization of the project of world literature, and the critical reactions against it. He underscores the challenges faced by researchers invested in establishing a critico-theoretical paradigm open to cultural diversity and complex transnational inscriptions, less unilateral and ethnocentric while capable of accounting for the dynamic challenges posed to scholars by today's international translation market. Rather than giving up on the project of world literature in the face of the sense of dissatisfaction brought up by some of its hegemonic institutionalization, Guerrero's proposal is to double down on it and reorient its methodology towards modes of collective intellectual labor inspired by multicultural discursive formations. He suggests that this re-articulation of world literary research could be particularly fruitful in the case of large-scale studies of international literary circulation and the historical and material processes of translation, publishing, and reception.

Based on reflections drawn from Claude Lévi-Strauss' *La Pensée sauvage*, Nora Catelli's article, "Los críticos como *bricoleurs*: unas observaciones" states the need to rethink the changed historical conditions of possibility of theoretical discursivity today. Catelli argues that contemporary theoretical practices are defined by fragmentation, and thus critics have become *bricoleurs* freed from having to adhere to particular philosophical schools or theoretical frameworks. Instead, they combine concepts from varied sources according to what the objects at hand demand. In fact, Catelli argues that literary criticism today is set in motion without any self-imposed finality, driven by the productive instability of aesthetic value, liberated from the mechanism of epistemological control that used to found its discursivity. In support of her hypothesis, Catelli examines

certain features in the expository strategies of authors with an overwhelming presence in literary scholarship today, such as Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben; she shows how their theoretical gambits contain a return to philology or to a philosophy of language. To conclude, Catelli suggests that her reflections may work, not so much to exorcise this or that theoretical trend, but to insist on the need of positing the disciplinary horizon of literary studies (world literary or not) in relation to a demand of being structured as a system, and organized around the defense of its institutional specificity, which according to Catelli consists first and foremost in confronting language as a form, and the history of literature as a problem constituted in the intersection between criticism and comparison.

The second section, entitled “Challenging hegemonies: the local, material grounds of world literature”, groups three articles. In “Parochialism from below: on World Literature’s other other”, Héctor Hoyos proposes a resemanticization of the term parochialism as a resource for overcoming the cosmopolitanism/nationalism and global/local dichotomies that have burdened literary and cultural debates of late. Through the analysis of two poems by Leon De Greiff and their possible translations, Hoyos argues that the “parish”, in its reformulation, is only partially burdened with something as ethnic as the nation, as geographical as the region, or as narrow-minded as the province. Parochialism is neither determined by, nor separate from ethnic groups and recognizes the power of place without being blinded by it. Finally, although it seems to oppose cosmopolitanism – as that which occurs on a large scale – parochialism is not contrary to it. A good parishioner, Hoyos claims, can in fact be a cosmopolitan too.

Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado’s “La literatura mundial como praxis: apuntes hacia una metodología de lo concreto” looks into a conference given by Juan Rulfo in 1965 in Chiapas (later published as “Situación actual del novela contemporánea”) in order to trace a world literary cartography that differs from those put forth by scholars like David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, the Warwick Collective or Pheng Cheah. Rulfo’s mapping is entirely other. Both its place of enunciation and the system of references made up of non-canonical, peripheric texts and objects point to the existence of vectors producing world literature which are invisibilized by the totalizing critical accounts of the aforementioned critics. Sánchez Prado concludes his article by proposing a methodological shift that approaches world literature not through the kind of determinism – or, in some cases, voluntarism – seen in the framework of world-systems, but rather “from below”; in other words, beginning from the ways in which concrete actors produce and practice world literature.

In the last chapter of this block, “Los mundos subalternos de la literatura mundial: hacia una comparación de las literaturas indígenas en Abya Yala/las

Américas”, Anna M. Brígido-Corachán and César Domínguez underscore the enormous gap separating the field of world literature and the literature produced by indigenous peoples of Abya Yala/the Americas, which are often studied by anthropologists, historians, geographers and environmentalists, but rarely by literary critics. They find it shocking that these oral *and* written literatures (they are interested in a specific form they call *oraliterary*) are not part of world literature’s research and pedagogical agendas. Brígido-Corachán and Domínguez see an opportunity today to reinstitutionalize the field of Latin American literary studies via world literature, so that indigenous literatures can acquire the visibility they never had. Given the difficulty or the impossibility of working on the six hundred existing American indigenous languages, the analysis focuses on two case studies centered on the global circulation of contemporary Zapotec and Quechua poetry. One of the article’s main foci is the question of endangered languages in relation to one of comparative literature’s foundational principles: that texts must be read in the original language in order to attain a better understanding of the cultures from which they originate. They explain that translation and self-translation have been fundamental for the preservation of most known pre-Columbian texts, as well as for inscribing indigenous writing in global literary circuits. The authors emphasize the fact that indigenous writers create their texts both in indigenous and hegemonic languages, which are fundamental both for comparative and world literature. In conclusion, they argue that a real world literature should reform itself in order to be able to account for the “oralitura” created by Abya Yala/the Americas’s indigenous authors, and to read these textual formations and *oraliterary* practices in relation to the demands for justice and greater recognition at the center of their cultural production.

The third section is entitled “Figuring and reconfiguring the political in world literature” and is comprised of three texts. In the first one, “World literature/liberal globalization. Notes for a materialistic metacritique of *Weltliterary* studies”, Jorge J. Locane presents seven sections or notes in order to propose a critical reflection on *Weltliterary* studies in relation to the course that they have taken since Casanova, Moretti, and Damrosch sparked the current debate since the late 1990s. Based on the examination of world literature’s material conditions of enunciation, Locane argues that the emergence of global frameworks within literary studies were determined by specific transformations experienced by the publishing industry during that seminal decade. Accordingly, the theoretical discussions of world literature that have shaped the field can be seen as a superstructural phenomenon functional to the interests of a concentrated publishing industry hailing from metropolitan capitals. Locane concludes the article by suggesting a terminological reformulation capable of overcoming national and philological boundaries while resisting the hegemony of a liberal cosmopolitan notion of

world literature bent on accommodating the interest of global publishing groups and markets. Instead of world literature, he proposes the study of “pluriversal literatures”, which he understands as a heterogeneous corpus produced *in* the world and not *for* the world. The concept highlights the need to read these literary texts within their contexts of production, accounting for their multiple geocultural locations aside from metropolitan industrial mediations. However, he ends the piece by suggesting that “the most prudent thing to do today would be to discard all terminological speculation and overwrought adjectives to finally talk simply about literature”.

In “The *Global Alt-Write* or why we should read reactionary (world) literature”, Benjamin Loy argues that as a result of a devotion to reading literature based on paradigms of liberal cosmopolitanism and neoliberal globalization, recent approaches to world literature have barely addressed the question of how to treat texts that do not conform (aesthetically and/or ideologically) to the predefined notion of world literature, but that nevertheless unequivocally exist and circulate at a global scale. In this way, Loy intends to question some of world literature studies’ optimistic positions as their hypotheses are confronted with other kinds of texts, asking questions like the following: How can we approach literature’s capacity to “globalize” (Cheah) if this also applies to “reactionary” worlds? What kind of “alternative” networks of editors and readers are contributing to the international diffusion of these sorts of “reactionary” texts and ideas? How do writers occupy certain “reactionary” or right-wing positions within national and international literary fields? And what importance should be assigned to this “Global Alt-Write” in the context of teaching world literature? In the face of today’s both political and ideological worldwide reactionary backlash, Loy’s article investigates the forms that a more critical notion of world literature could take, based on examples and case studies from European and New World contexts.

The third and last text in this section is Alexandra Ortiz Wallner’s “Testimonio y literaturas del mundo. Notas para un debate”. The author explores how the production and circulation of knowledge within the critical frame of subaltern studies opened up back-and-forth dynamics within a wealth of concepts between sites of enunciation marked by an East/West and North/South geopolitics of localized knowledge. Ortiz Wallner studies the circulation of *testimonio* beyond Latin America, in the Global South, that is, the Sur/South axis through which, at the same time, she politicizes and specifies the notion of world literature. She concentrates on a network of intellectual exchanges between Central America and India during the Cold War, by looking into the global mobility and resignification of *testimonio* as a South-South epistemology that facilitated exchanges structured by research questions brought up by

subaltern studies. By looking into the Global South leftist feminist network that emerged during the Cold War and the discursive production that constitutes it, Ortiz Wallner brings to the surface an “other” world literature overlooked by the institutionalized archive of world literary studies. She concludes the piece by arguing for the need to trace forgotten modes of circulation and genres deemed “minor” in order to open up a space of critical enunciation for world literature capable of resisting the normative and totalizing forces that structure hegemonic discourses of world literature.

The fourth section of the volume, “Dislocating temporal, geographical and environmental mediations”, is also made up of three texts. In the opening essay, “Más allá del mundo: imaginación transtemporal para un cierto modo de habitar los confines”, Alejandra Laera traces three ways of understanding world literature that have organized the field since the 1990s and are now in crisis: world literature as a way of reading, as a functioning system, and as motivation (as global drive and transnational motif). Laera concentrates on the Southern cone literary manifestations of a generalized crisis of worldly spatial imaginaries that results in a temporal notion (rather than spatial) of globality. She explains that the post-global contemporary condition is structured around the notions *transtemporality*, *heterochrony* and *altertemporality* which render visible the coexistence, overlapping and muddled accounts of an addition of local worlds undone by an accelerated or decelerated experience of time brought up by ecological catastrophes, war and destruction or subjective trauma. Through a careful reading of the novel *Leñador* by Mike Wilson, Laera suggests that the post-global horizon of this and other novels published in Argentina and Chile by authors writing *elsewhere*, points to a process of *deglobalization* (“desmundialización”) signified by a broken down temporality – decelerated, repetitive, minimal time or *altertime*.

In “Reading without habits: a caribbean contribution to World Literature”, Guillermina De Ferrari invokes Paul Gilroy to remind us that ships brought slaves to the Caribbean, but they also transported the subversive, displaced and recontextualized books that contributed to its cultural hybridity and whose reception under specifically cosmopolitan readerly conditions also gave rise to the possibility of resistance and revolution in the region. De Ferrari’s essay is particularly interested in these moments of Caribbean cosmopolitan “bad” readings (interrupted reading, misreading, nonreading), and she traces these scenes in novels by Alejo Carpentier, Leonardo Padura, Marlon James and Mayra Montero in order to interrogate the opacities and misunderstandings at stake when imagining an Other, but also to think through the felicitous and dangerous consequences of dehistoricizing otherness in order to open up geographies of temporal cohabitation across cultural differences. She finishes her article proposing a Caribbean

inspired world literature made up of readers without reading habits who subvert (and revolutionize) the intended, established meaning of the text.

Reading two (a priori) world literary novels by Joan Benesiu and Gabi Martínez which portray cosmopolitan characters immersed in what the novel presents as wild, untouched natural spaces, Marta Puxan-Oliva's "The challenges of wild spaces to world literary cosmopolitanism" explores the mutual dislocations of new cosmopolitan discourses invested in ethically subverting processes of globalization, and ecocritical approaches to literature. Tracing representations of Tierra del Fuego and Sudd as natural pre- or post-political spaces of radical wilderness, Puxan-Oliva elucidates the complex ways in which the ethico-political and biosocial intersect in these novels. Her interpretation of the novels allows her to second-guess the politically progressive efficacy of world literature when trying to reconcile cosmopolitan demands and environmental concerns, that is, when examining the cosmopolitical efficacy promised by world literary approaches to literature.

The fifth and final section, "Precarious worlds: thinking through the crisis of cosmopolitanism", gathers two texts. In "The contemporary cosmopolitan condition: borders and world literature", Alejandra Uslenghi begins by historicizing a new brand of empirical, plural, descriptive, postcolonial cosmopolitanism from below that emerged in the 1990s as a response to a normative and rather abstract, institutional, disinterested, humanitarian and universalistic cosmopolitan ethical imagination. Uslenghi deploys this particularized cosmopolitanism of the underprivileged to think about the technological infrastructures that lend themselves to experiment with the reproduction and distribution of cosmopolitan narratives and images at an unprecedented speed, connecting local events with a worldwide audience through multiple platforms, and that may allow for brief moments of communal empathy and grieving. She concentrates on a literary *and* visual essay by Teju Cole about the conditions of migrants attempting to cross the United States/Mexican border, which he published entirely on a Twitter account especially created for this purpose, on March 13, 2014. She concludes her piece by vindicating a concept of cosmopolitanism like Cole's, capable of effecting a "societal shift in the treatment of marginalized people" and of bringing the experience of the border home "closer, accessible and comprehensible".

The section and the book concludes with Mariano Siskind's "Towards a cosmopolitanism of loss: an essay about the end of the world". Siskind's text attempts to recalibrate the political potential of the discourse of cosmopolitanism today, during a historical juncture defined by the total collapse of the imaginary function modernity had assigned to the world – the world understood as the symbolic structure that used to sustain humanistic, cosmopolitan imaginaries of universal emancipation, equality and justice. The world today can no longer

fulfill the role of a feasible signifying horizon for cultural and aesthetic forms of cosmopolitan agency. The generalized experience of crisis that defines the present (which Siskind calls “the experience of the end of the world”) renders evident the obsolescence of world literature, cosmopolitanism and globalization, which depended on an affirmative notion of the world as the ground for cosmopolitan cultural exchanges and translations that set the foundation for a universal (intellectual) community to come based on justice and equality, or for the capitalistic extraction of surplus literary and economic value and for the commodification of style, ideas and subject positions. Through a detailed reading of Roberto Bolaño’s “El Ojo Silva”, Siskind argues that this particular understanding of cosmopolitanism and world literature is untenable in the face of the end of the world: it has exhausted its ability to account for relevant contemporary engagements with the present state of suffering in what used to be the world. The essay ends with a polemical proposal regarding the role literature and the humanities could fulfill in the context of the structural suffering that defines what he calls the end of the world.

We do not want to conclude this introduction without expressing our gratitude, in particular to the European Research Council (ERC) for their generous financial support, and to the researchers in the project “Reading Global. Constructions of World Literature and Latin America”. We would also like to thank the researchers Benjamin Loy, Jorge J. Locane, Judith Illerhaus, Silja Helber, and Yehua Chen for the work they invested in the preparation of our symposium. Finally, we would like to thank Marion Schotsch, Jorge Vitón, Jordan Lee Schnee, and Jorge J. Locane for correcting this volume.

As mentioned above, this volume is based on a meeting that took place at the University of Cologne on January 24th and 25th, 2018, in the form of an “Exploratory Seminar”. It was part of a cooperative program between the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard University and the “Reading Global” project. For the occasion, we employed an experimental format that only allowed for very brief presentations in order to leave a lot of room for discussion. We are very grateful to the participants for their commitment to the experiment, which is reflected in turn in the contributions to this volume.

**1: Revisiting world literary institutions:
publishers, academic institutions and
the way we read**

Gesine Müller

Debating world literature without the world: ideas for materializing literary studies based on examples from Latin America and the Caribbean

The writer Ilja Trojanow recently pointed out a blind spot in the present debate on world literature: the business of literature as it is actually practiced. In an article in Switzerland's *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, whose title translates as "Invitation to World Literature: Down from Mont Blanc", he writes: "Isn't it astonishing that Central European mountain climbers attempt to scale every peak of the Himalayas while European intellectuals have made themselves cozy on Mont Blanc, from which vantage they look down upon all other mountain ranges?" (Trojanow 2017). He is referring to the widespread discrepancy between the idealized self-image of European intellectuals – who profess a world literature perspective to keep up with the times – and their true ignorance of literatures beyond the canon of Europe and the United States.¹ In light of the purportedly globe-girdling perspectives adopted in recent years, this ignorance is no longer as conspicuous as before. To illustrate his thesis, he analyzed numerous lists of authors considered canonical by influential Western media outlets and institutions, including The Guardian and the BBC. According to Trojanow, even today, the one and only author from the Global South who repeatedly appears on such lists is Gabriel García Márquez. But Trojanow's reproof does not stop there. He also argues that the theorists, having made themselves comfortable in their airy altitudes, are at risk of losing touch with the ground. Trojanow's point, by one interpretation, is that it is high time we climb down from Mont Blanc and genuinely take stock of the world as it is.

The debate over the term "world literature", waged with ever-greater intensity over the past twenty years or so, is among the controversies of cultural studies that are tightly linked to issues of global connectedness in a polycentric world, as scholars such as César Domínguez have persuasively shown. Despite

¹ See also Stefan Weidner's arguments in his 2018 book *Jenseits des Westens: Für ein neues kosmopolitisches Denken* ('Beyond the West: For a New Cosmopolitan Way of Thinking'), which the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* calls an "appeal for numerous, always preliminary narratives on equal footing instead of Western cosmopolitanism" (Rühle 2018).

persistent hegemonic implications, most leading theorists of world literature have tried to join in on analytical discourses over the workings and crises of the current surge of globalization, discourses that catalog the Global North's institutional, economic, and cultural hegemony over the Global South. The latest rounds of the debate are now tackling these problems and asking whether the notion of world literature has been overly complicit in globalization's political and economic dynamics. (If so, these scholars argue, it is a dead end). In my view, we should not be posing that question until we have investigated the material side of the production of world literature with greater rigor. Before we ask whether current notions of world literature are still productive, and to what degree they must be revamped or discarded in order to illuminate worldwide literary phenomena and processes that exist outside the dynamics of globalization, we must obtain accurate knowledge of the concrete workings of selection, circulation, and canonization processes and we must evaluate how such material knowledge can differentiate and lend greater nuance to theoretical positions. During our conference titled "World Literature, Cosmopolitanism, Globality: Beyond, Against, Post, Otherwise", which took place in Cologne in January 2018 and for which this essay was written, the discussion kept coming back to the question of how we can incorporate into our analysis *la localización del discurso crítico* ('the localization of critical discourse') around texts and their contexts.

So how can we ensure that the debate names and triumphs over geographies of critical discourse that are sympathetic to globalization while doing justice to the process-based nature of the literary industry? Rather than approaching this problem philosophically, I will draw a connection between recent notions of world literature in literary sociology and the specific practices of publishers and the literary industry. The current state of theory on world literature, I hypothesize, rightly questions the excessively positive connotations of "world" as a reference point in its various conceptual variations,² but the top-level models risk losing sight of another dimension of "world": its concrete manifestations, and especially the potential subversiveness of its materiality. In short, efforts to investigate world literature from a critical material perspective are too few and far between.

² Mariano Siskind even goes so far as to proclaim "the end of the world", in the sense of a "very stable notion of world as globe produced by hegemonic discourses of cosmopolitanism and financial and consumerist globalization". In particular, he views optimistic and utopian visions of the world as unsuccessful and asks how we can adequately cope with the immense loss signified by the "symbolic closure of the horizon of universal justice and emancipation" (see Siskind's essay in this book; I am citing the manuscript).

Against this backdrop, I believe we must also more intensively investigate the question, in light of concrete materials, as to whether we possess concepts that transcend an affirmative notion of the world as established by global economic forces. How successful are efforts to replace unipolar perspectives and those of national literatures, as measured by research into archival materials documenting circulation processes? Take, for example, discussions around non-national or transnational concepts such as “parastate”, “translingualism”, “diasporism”, “post-colonial de-territorialization”, “circum-Atlantic”, “îles refuges”, and the “Global South” (Apter 2008: 582). The inadequacies of alternative models to replace the concept of national literature have been frequently invoked.³ These include concepts such as “world literatures” associated with Goethe, Casanova’s *res publica literaria* (‘world republic of letters’), and Spivak’s planetary model, for example. One of the most common critiques of such models of world literature is that they rely on cultural circulation, book markets, and literary translation and hence continue to reproduce neo-imperialist cartographies. Tied to the institutions of the West, which are organized according to capitalist structures, the material access to world literature does not function unquestioned if we take established canons as a given. Therefore, in my view, it is critical that we pay special attention to those processes of (world) literature production that take place outside well-trodden, market-friendly pathways. I will return to this later with the specific example of the project *Les peuples de l’eau* (‘The water peoples’) by the Martinican author Édouard Glissant.

My thinking centers on newer approaches to literary sociology (such as those of Sarah Brouillette or Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen, built on by Ignacio Sánchez Prado), which critically interrogate concepts of “the world” and make reference to the economic dynamics of a global market. According to Brouillette, the important fact is not that literature is a consumable product shaped by market demand, but that the entire system of literary production is fundamentally determined by capitalistic social relationships. These relationships only allow a small number of individuals to participate in the process of producing and circulating literature (Brouillette 2016: 93). For that reason, world literature is characterized not by a momentum of global circulation, but by an international social disparity that limits access to literature and the

³ See Apter 2008. Venkat Mani asked the legitimate question of whether we must view world literature as an emancipation from national literature. He famously answered no, rejecting the binary perception of literature as permanent or ephemeral, homogenizing or heterogenizing, comparative or assimilationist, universal or particular, original or translated (Mani 2017: 33).

literary industry. To what extent can we confirm this by working with materials? To what extent can we pick apart the nuances?

If we are to orient our research more closely toward concrete materials and production conditions, we cannot keep circling back, as we have in the past few years, to the same conclusion that the defining centers are still located in the United States and Europe or are transferred to a second tier: the former colonial powers' postcolonial centers. This answer is simply not enough. What more can a material perspective on literature achieve? The very question of how world literature is *made* seeks implicitly to deconstruct any affirmative usage of "world". If we take into account the global asymmetries in the production of world literature as underscored by Brouillette, but do not solely adopt translation counts and sales figures as our yardstick, we have an opportunity to add previously overlooked literatures to the canon of world literature – which has been enshrined by the Western book market's dominance – and, importantly, an opportunity to view these literatures from a new perspective.

Latin American studies, especially, can and must ensure that critical concepts of "world" are examined in conjunction with materials-based archival research. After all, Latin American literatures have played a pioneering role in the Western literary industry and have become a proxy for other literatures (formerly) perceived as peripheral. Trojanow's current research has affirmed this. Latin America serves virtually as a paradigm of the problems and opportunities of a global perspective on processes of cultural and especially literary circulation.

There are various reasons for Latin America's paradigmatic function. No global region has overtaken the construct of Latin America as a geographical, cultural, and political space defined by processes of exterior projection and classification with Western origins. Unlike the considerably more heterogeneous cultural zones of Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa; Latin America possesses a linguistic, historical, and cultural homogeneity that makes it possible to investigate the process of constructing world literature beyond individual authors or works. Also, the timeline and various sub-stages of its heightened global reception since 1959 can be pinned down with relative accuracy, which also contributes to its unique practical suitability as a case study for comparison among world regions.

During a new phase of accelerated globalization from the 1980s onward, this example gives us a spectacular view of acceleration processes in the realm of cultural and literary marketing. For example, the tensions between globally operating media companies and new small presses formed in opposition to them have yet to be systematically investigated but offer possibilities as

a heuristic for investigating the changing processes of the global cultural marketplace in the context of a worldwide audience that is being fundamentally reshaped by new media.

A materials-based study of world literature must expose the implicit mechanisms of literature's selection and the concrete conditions under which global literature is circulated and received. At the same time, it should accommodate a view of a world that is not only characterized by economic asymmetries within a global market order but is also proving on a more fundamental level to be ever more unequal, asynchronous, contradictory, and internally contested. In linking these two dimensions of "world", I see abundant critical possibilities for extracting the concept of world literature from rigid frameworks and exposing its cracks and incoherencies. Even beyond the euphoria about globalization, we must continue to question the division between center and periphery in literary production and reception and, more broadly, forge a new perspective on the canon of world literature by paying special attention to resistant literary practices.

If we wish to embark on such a new perspective, what exactly – in concrete terms – should we be rethinking, and how should we go about it? I will illustrate my theses with two examples. First, let us return to Trojanow's observation that García Márquez is the only author from the Global South to appear in the world-literature rankings of Western media. What exactly does García Márquez represent as the only Global Southern author on such a list? What destined him for that role apart from the extensive circulation of his novel *Cien años de soledad*? In my second example, I will move away from the topic of a new perspective on canonical authors and present a project that on several levels clarifies processes of (global) literature production that are distinct apart from the familiar ones: the book series *Les peuples de l'eau*, edited by Édouard Glissant for Éditions de Seuil, which in some ways combines theory with literary production. But before we turn to that project, let us discuss García Márquez,⁴ the sole Latin American author who is visible from Mont Blanc as the "localization of Western critical literary discourse".⁵

His canonization passed through Barcelona, Paris, and New York to the centers of former colonial empires such as Bombay and Cape Town, where

⁴ In connection with my upcoming points about Gabriel García Márquez, see also Müller (2018).

⁵ This phrase was used several times during the discussion of my lecture at the January 2018 conference "World Literature, Cosmopolitanism, Globality: Beyond, Against, Post, Otherwise". I am grateful to those who pointed out the extent to which the debate revolves around the need to localize such discourses.

English has a canonizing function as a privileged language. Let us not forget that according to Escalante Gonzalbo, 70% of books and academic articles in global circulation are published in English, 17% in French, and 3% in German. Scarcely 1% appear in Spanish⁶ (Gonzalbo 2007: 278–279). The widespread global impact of García Márquez is even more significant in light of these statistics. If we pay close attention not only to his reception in the United States but also to perspectives that account for the Global South concept on an epistemological level, looking towards Asia or the Arab world, for example, we can discern useful nuances in this picture.

I will employ the widely contested and problematic notion of the Global South below as an epistemological designation for world regions situated outside old, established centers of Western thought. After all, these can be located anywhere on the globe: “The ‘Global South’ is not an existing entity to be described by different disciplines, but an entity that has been invented in the struggle and conflicts between imperial global domination and emancipatory and decolonial forces that do not acquiesce with global designs” (Levander/Mignolo 2011: 3). Jean and John Comaroff have expressed another important aspect: “‘The Global South’ has become a shorthand for the world of non-European, postcolonial peoples. Synonymous with uncertain development, unorthodox economies, failed states and nations fraught with corruption, poverty and strife, it is that half of the world about which the ‘Global North’ spins theories” (Comaroff/Comaroff 2012: 13). As early as 1988, Ketaki Kushari Dyson pointed out the risk raised here of reducing the concept of Global South to a form of “Third Worldism” (Kushari 1988: 8).

So how did the novel *Cien años de soledad* open the door to Latin American literature in the United States? US readers’ previously indifferent or critical attitude towards Latin American literature – usually either rejecting the greater continent for political reasons or classifying it as “useless” along political and/or economic dimensions – changed overnight in 1970 upon the publication of Gregory Rabassa’s translation of *Cien años de soledad* as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The publishers of the *New York Times Book Review* promptly selected it as one of the twelve best novels of the year. The paperback edition, published by Avon in 1971, began to circulate among a less bookish readership (Johnson 1996: 133). Reading the translated edition of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was most North American’s very first introduction to Latin American literature,

⁶ Cited in Weinberg (2016: 73); see also Sánchez Prado (2015: 15).

which led to a perception of the novel as a microcosm of the entire “exotic” Latin American world. Thanks to the novel’s success, as is well known, much more Latin American literature was published in the United States and prompted a considerably broader public reception (Shaw 2010: 27). Shaw calls the veneration of García Márquez’s work by Anglophone scholars of Spanish literature, beginning around 1977, as the “consecration of Gabriel García Márquez as a world author” (2010: 33).

The previously mentioned exotic reading of *Cien años de soledad*, whereby the microcosm of Macondo represents the “foreignness” of Latin America, is only one side of the book’s US reception. The other side is the novel’s performance of archetypal universalisms and anthropological constants. Its connections to multiple contexts made it easy for readers and literary scholars alike to weave the novel into a web of universalist world literature. Scholars of intertextuality have identified innumerable allusions to the Bible, Faulkner, and Dostoevsky (McGrady 1981, as cited in Ortega Hernández 2007). Such Western lines of interpretation have contributed in no small part to the breakthrough success of *Cien años de soledad* in major cities of the Western hemisphere and especially North America (Marling 2016: 38; Düsdieler 1997: 335).

Furthermore, García Márquez’s style of storytelling, often characterized as “premodern” or “fantastical”, has been credited with influencing post-Modernist writing considerably. He is said to have triggered a “narrative turn” and sparked a rediscovery of narrative (Düsdieler 1997: 324). What is meaningful here is the departure from fragmentary Modernist storytelling and a “return to a consciously anachronistic orality” (Düsdieler 1997: 324) whose fantastical aspect is a reaction to the *nouveau roman* and the temporal regime of modernity. In this sense, the oeuvres of Thomas Pynchon and Toni Morrison can be viewed as continuations of García Márquez’s poetics.

The anti-rational and mythical concept of reality that the characters of *Cien años de soledad* take for granted made Macondo into a role model for literature throughout Latin America, as well as for many United States authors. García Márquez’s art brings together disparate and incompatible schools of writing that became reference points for US writers after 1970: the blending of literature and anthropology, fact and fiction, the trivial and the unusual. Because the United States had canonized the work of Gabriel García Márquez in English translation, the country became the primary driver of its reception in the Anglophone Global South. How can we view the reception there in comparison to the US?

In India, *Cien años de soledad* was first read in English. The first translations from English into regional Indian languages – Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, and Tamil – were published after the immense popularity and

reputation boost that came with the Nobel Prize of 1982⁷ (Maurya 2015: 252). Interest in García Márquez saw a second, dramatic surge after his death in 2014. According to Indradeep Bhattacharyya, the gradual history of its reception there began in the early 1970s:

Way back in 1971, when Manabendra Bandyopadhyay introduced him in the comparative literature syllabus at Jadavpur University, nobody had heard of the author, but he noticed an instant liking among students for *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. “The first sign was that students read the text themselves, which was definitely not the case with someone like Joyce”, Bandyopadhyay said. (Bhattacharyya 2014)

Another key to Gabriel García Márquez’s success in India lies in its deliberate literary “familiarity” and the attendant “accessibility” that appeals to all readers – no matter their education levels or cultural backgrounds – thanks to its use of orality and fantastical elements. This was joined by magic realism, a “reception amplifier” that appealed to experiences common to the Global South. For example, in 1982, Salman Rushdie wrote in the *London Review of Books*:

El realismo magical [sic], “magic realism”, at least as practiced by Garcia Marquez, is a development of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely “Third World” consciousness. It deals with what Naipaul has called “half-made” societies, in which the impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new, in which public corruptions and private anguishes are more garish and extreme than they ever get in the so-called “North”, where centuries of wealth and power have formed thick layers over the surface of what’s really going on. (Rushdie 1982)

In reference to *Cien años de soledad*, Mariano Siskind brings home the nature of this phenomenon: “Macondo is the mediation between the idiosyncratic hyper-localism of the Colombian tropical forest and the general situation of the continent. Macondo is the village-signifier that names the difference of Latin America, and later, perhaps of the Third World at large” (Siskind 2012: 854). The universalist dimension of magic realism is what made Indian readers so fascinated by a Colombian’s prose, in conjunction with such a specific blend of fact and fiction. García Márquez’s success in India was fueled, in no small part,

⁷ The four-volume *Bibliographic Guide to Gabriel García Márquez* (ed. by Nelly Sfeir de González) lists the following translations, among others, between 1949 and 2002: Malayam: *Cien años de soledad* (trans. Kottayam, India: Di. Si. Buks, 1995), *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (Vi ke Unnikrsnan, trans. Kottayam, India: Di. Si. Buks, 1997, 1998); Gujarati: *La Mala hora* (Nirañjana Taripathi, trans. Amadavada, India: Gurjara Grantharatna Karylaya, 1991).

by the success of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). At that point, and especially after the Nobel Prize of 1982, scholarly investigations picked up speed.

The Nobel Prize also sparked a major resurgence of interest in his work in the Chinese publishing market. In 1983 and 1984, however, there was a state-led campaign against magic realism, which was said to propagate an anti-socialist "contamination of the mind". As a result, China had to wait until 1994 for a complete translation of *Cien años de soledad*. In fact, an authorized Chinese edition was not released until 2011.⁸ The 1980s saw the formation of China's Xungen literary movement, which aimed to get back to the roots of Chinese civilization and aspired to an artistic style that would harmonize tradition and modernity. The poetics of García Márquez resonated with the Chinese literary community, which grew practically "feverish for Latin American culture" (Gálik 2000: 161). The most famous member of the movement is Mo Yan (born in 1955), who won the Nobel in 2012 and released his epochal novella cycle 红高粱家族, *Hóng gāoliang jiāzú* in 1986 (published in English as *Red Sorghum*, 1993). Mo Yan hews very closely to García Márquez's magic realist model in works such as 丰乳肥臀, *Fēng rǔ féi tún* of 1996 (published in English as *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, 2005), in which he rewrites China's volatile twentieth-century history.

To take another example, contemporary Arabic literature once again found magic realism to be a space for airing thoughts and memories from groups that have been marginalized and suppressed by externally imposed, imperialist structures; a space in which the ghosts of nature and the ancestors inhabit ritual and myth; a space that blurs the lines between fact and magic, reality and dreams, past and present (Jarrar 2008: 305–307). The first Arabic edition of *Cien años de soledad*, a translation from the French version, was published in 1979. In this context, the novel *1001 années de la nostalgie*, which was written by the Algerian Rashid Boudjedra and also published in 1979, is an excellent example of a link to the literature of the Arab world.⁹ Not only does the novel's title allude to both *Cien años de soledad* and *One Thousand and One Nights* (also known in English as *Arabian Nights*), but it borrows narrative structures from both books (Jarrar 2008: 307; Rabia 1981: 96).

⁸ All previous editions of *Cien años de soledad* in China were unauthorized by the writer. According to press accounts, Chen Mingjun, publisher of Thinkingdom House press, purchased the rights for a million dollars (see Flood 2011).

⁹ Published by Denoël (Paris) and also released in Arabic in 1981 under the title *Alf wa'ammin al-hanin*.

As we jointly consider the various filters of reception, we can observe two intra-literary tendencies that had an impact on the history of Gabriel García Márquez's canonization. For a book to succeed in finding Western reception in the 1970s and 1980s, it was imperative it could be woven into a tapestry of both Orientalism and universalist world literature from the Western canon. In the countries that are considered here to be part of a Global South, a specific common experience and aesthetic relating to the postcolonial situation seems to be significant. These two filters of reception are also manifest in the oft-cited formula for success, which proclaimed that the worldwide appeal of *Cien años de soledad* was because it uniquely paired connections to the universals of modern history with particular examples of local forms of oppression (Siskind 2012: 855).

It is the combination of these factors that provides important context for García Márquez's destined status as the only author from the Global South on Western rankings of world literature today. We can read García Márquez's rock-solid place in the Western canon of world literature as a token of Western self-satisfaction for having created some space for marginalized voices' thoughts and memories; there is therefore no need to revise the coordinate system of established Western thought, the thinking goes. In that sense, García Márquez doesn't expand the horizons of an otherwise Eurocentric selection. Instead, sadly, he enables the posturing of European intellectuals – to return to Trojanow's image – who have set up shop on Mont Blanc, where they are carrying on a high-and-mighty discourse without climbing down and truly taking in the real world.

Let us move on to my second example, the world of the internationally renowned poet, essayist, and cultural theorist Édouard Glissant from Martinique, who is well known to be working with experiences that are equally formative for Latin American literature.¹⁰ I will first mention the topos of Caribbean studies that, since the 1990s, the Caribbean has become a port of call for the most varied of influences, a “laboratory of modernity” that increasingly is not just supplying raw materials for European (postcolonial) theory, but is rising to produce its own theory. This euro-centrifugal development appears to be underway worldwide if one considers the origins of leading postcolonial theorists. This is generally attributed to the constant movement and rootlessness of the intellectuals there or to their connections to such a wide variety of geographical spaces, a phenomenon of de-territorialization that is not based solely on the players' own migrations stories and therefore is not confined to the category of migrant literature.

10 For a broader treatment of concepts of creolization, see Müller/Ueckmann (2013).

In the early 1990s, Glissant publicly distanced himself from *créolité* (a relationship between self and territory), which he considered to be too locally restricted, and called for a philosophy of a universal *créolisation* (a relationship with totality, which functions via connections rather than exclusions). In his view, this concept embraces more possibilities of anthropological and cultural mixing. Over the past fifteen years, Glissant's work has found significant reception, especially his reiterated preference for a view of the world "that replaces the negative tendencies of globalization with an affirmative model of chaos that forges non-hierarchical relationships between diverse elements, not a rigid network but an ongoing process" (Ludwig/Röseberg 2010: 9–10). For Glissant, creolization is much more about "thinking creole" than writing creole. French texts link up with Antillean mythemes and creole wordplay, moving among different times and cultural spaces. He successfully asserted new positions from the turn of the millennium onward, notably striking a chord with *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* (1996), in which he writes about his concept of creolization:

The creolization that is happening in Neo-America – and the creolization that is making inroads in the other Americas – is underway throughout the world. I contend [...] that *the world is creolizing*. In other words, that today, as the world's cultures are placed into contact with violent speed and absolute awareness, they shift in the exchange through inevitable clashes and merciless wars, but also through outposts of awareness and hope. [...] Creolization assumes that cultural elements placed into contact must be 'of equal value', or else such creolization cannot truly occur.¹¹ (Glissant 1996: 15–16)

Creolization is therefore an expression of a multiethnic society of colonial origin. It formulates a postcolonial cultural critique of the current phase of accelerated globalization, a critique that is prominent but so far under-recognized in Europe.

Against this backdrop, I would like to make a few points about the series *Les peuples de l'eau*, which Édouard Glissant published with Éditions du Seuil in Paris, a series that exposes and questions Eurocentric approaches to the

¹¹ In the original French, "La créolisation qui se fait dans la Néo-Amérique, et la créolisation qui gagne les autres Amériques, est la même qui opère dans le monde entier. La thèse que je défendrai [...] est que *le monde se créolise*, c'est-à-dire que les cultures du monde mises en contact de manière foudroyante et absolument consciente aujourd'hui les unes avec les autres se changent en s'échangeant à travers des heurts irrémédiables, des guerres sans pitié mais aussi des avancées de conscience et d'espoir. [...] Car la créolisation suppose que les éléments culturels mis en présence doivent obligatoirement être 'équivalents en valeur' pour que cette créolisation s'effectue réellement".

purportedly exotic Other – and thus responds concretely to a very central topic that has shaped the whole debate over world literature for the past two centuries. Glissant conceived this series and the underlying project of sailing around the world in collaboration with Patrice Franceschi, the captain of a three-mast sailing ship. Under UNESCO patronage, the *Boudeuse* set sail from Corsica with a twenty-four-person crew in July 2004 and returned in June 2007. During the voyage, twelve exhibitions culminated in visits to eight “peoples of the sea”, who live on secluded islands, inaccessible riverbanks, or outlying coasts, groups such as the Yuhup in the Amazon Basin and the Rapa Nui on Easter Island. Writers and journalists selected by Glissant – including Régis Debray, Patrick Chamoiseau, J.M.G. Le Clézio, Antonio Tabucchi, and André Velter – each accompanied the team of scientists on one of the exhibitions, in a testimony to the project’s large impact, which of course cannot be measured by conventional metrics such as the number of translations. This specific mode of travel opens reflective spaces that, in turn, offer a new vantage point for “the resistant” as I have termed it. For Glissant, this project is about real non-hierarchical encounters, about attending to and exploring the “Other” on a concrete level of global experience that flows into literature. This is made possible by authors coming face to face with ethnic groups who are only reachable by water. During the three-year circumnavigation, periodically welcoming someone new aboard for a few weeks or months at a time; the sailing ship visited the Yuhup Indians, the Rapa Nui, the Bati on the Seram Island in the Molucca archipelago, the Bajau, a nomadic group who travel the Celebes Sea, whale hunters in the village of Lamalera, Indonesia, and the Moken people in Burma (Chaliand 2006: 13). Franceschi’s documentation reveals the following (simplified) route: “Corsica – Colombian Amazon – Easter Island – Tuamotu and Marquesas Islands – Futuna – Vanuatu – Sulawesi – Oman”. “What we call adventure consists, first of all, of dead time and misadventures¹²”, writes Gérard Chaliand (2006: 11) in reference to the repairs to the *Boudeuse* in Tenerife, which were necessary before he could cross the Atlantic as a member of the crew to visit the Yuhup in the Amazon in the first of the twelve sub-expeditions. Chaliand is a scholar of conflict who has written more than thirty volumes on subjects including the history of terrorism from Antiquity to Al-Qaeda. His account demonstrates that, in his experience, the journey was about realms of movement and dynamics that stand apart from those of globalization, which are conditioned by geopolitical power, but it was also about

12 Originally, “Ce qu’on appelle l’aventure est d’abord constitué de temps morts et de mésaventures”.

different spaces of reflection that shape writing. The German publisher Manfred Metzner, who published the series in German for Heidelberger Wunderhorn press under the title *Völker am Wasser*, wrote the following:

Glissant's entire oeuvre is a kind of slowed-down writing and deceleration of this society. [...] Someone who travels by sailing ship has, without a doubt, quite different reflections from a traveler by powerboat. [...] In the case of Chaliand, I noticed that for someone who had basically dealt with guerilla warfare for thirty or forty years, who fought with Amilcar Cabral to liberate Cape Verde and fought alongside Cabral for Guinea-Bissau, it was a novel experience to spend months on the ship and to have time to think.¹³ (Klingler 2009)

Chaliand's first volume in the series is particularly a document of the journey itself, the slow progression towards Amazonia, always thinking back critically to the expeditions of past centuries, centralizing colonial and postcolonial patterns of perception by European travelers, or in other words localizations of critical discourses. Alongside his reflections on his encounter with the Yuhup people and members of neighboring tribes, part of what makes Chaliand's volume so interesting is his examination of the background conditions for the round-the-world voyage and the literature it produces. This allows us to trace the production of a collection of (world) literature that emerges entirely off the beaten track of the market.

The ship on which this literature is written, which in one sense became the vehicle for this spatial and conceptual realignment, was built in Vlaardingen, the Netherlands, in 1916 and sailed the North Sea as a fishing vessel before being sold in southern Sweden in 1931. In 1942, it was converted to a three-mast schooner and renamed *La Vida*. From 1999 to 2001, Franceschi had embarked on a previous voyage around the world in a junk by the name of *Boudeuse*, attempting to retrace Antoine de Bougainville's famous route after two hundred years, but he had a shipwreck (Chaliand 2006: 23). He bought *La Vida* for a second attempt without knowing how he would finance his scheme, then co-conceived the *Peuples de l'eau* project with Glissant. The ship was modified for the journey and equipped to accommodate a crew of twenty-four. In addition to

13 In the original German: "Das ganze Schreiben von Glissant ist ja auch eine Art von entschleunigtem Schreiben und von Entschleunigung in dieser Gesellschaft. [...] Man kommt bestimmt auch zu ganz anderen Reflexionen, wenn man sozusagen mit einem Segelschiff reist statt mit einem Schnellboot. [...] Gerade bei Chaliand ist mir das besonders aufgefallen, dass jemand, der sich praktisch 30, 40 Jahre lang mit Guerillakämpfen beschäftigt hat, der mit Amilcar Cabral für die Befreiung der Cap Verden und für Guinea Bissau gekämpft hat, an der Seite von Cabral, dass es für ihn eine ganz neue Erfahrung ist, Monate auf dem Schiff unterwegs zu sein und Zeit zu haben zum Denken".

the new technological facilities – a computer cabin, a video editing cabin – the ship's library was stocked with around a thousand books.¹⁴ The documentary films that Patrice Franceschi made of the voyage and the individual expeditions give detailed views of the ship and the great effort it must have taken to prepare it for such a voyage. Chaliand stresses Franceschi's enormous financial audacity in attempting a second world voyage and making the *Peuples de l'eau* project possible in the first place.

The *Boudeuse's* round-the-world expedition is first and foremost Patrice Franceschi's achievement. [...] Fundraising was obviously the major obstacle. Franceschi made the rounds of the banks. Almost all of the one he approaches turn him down. Too many risks. Who puts their faith in adventure, that is, in happenstance? With the amount he was able to raise, he was forced to keep borrowing more in the face of rising needs.¹⁵ (Chaliand 2006: 24)

In France, there were no special tax provisions for large sailing vessels, unlike in Britain, the US, and the Netherlands, which treated them like normal freighters. Chaliand continues: "Finding a sponsor was conceivable, but Franceschi always said no. That was a price he was unwilling to pay. Instead, he took on many more obstacles, such as uncooperative insurance brokers and delays at the port, which he had to stubbornly tackle and overcome"¹⁶ (2006: 24).

So what sorts of (world) literature were produced by this project, with its almost innately resistant sensibility? Certainly, the project's design implies a shift of perspective in recognition of the fact that the oceans comprise 70% of the globe, the "real world", but very few authors have told stories from maritime perspectives – perhaps with the lone exceptions of Derek Walcott, Le Clézio, and several Caribbean writers in Édouard Glissant's circle. In the book *La terre magnétique. Les errances de Rapa Nui, l'île de Paques* ('The Magnetic

14 Before leaving port, the *Boudeuse* again received the thirteen sails it was originally built for. Including the bowsprit, the ship was forty-two meters from stem to stern with a steel hull and a 360-horsepower Scania diesel engine. For more on the sailing ship's equipment, see Chaliand (2006: 19–20).

15 Originally, "L'expédition autour de la Terre de *La Boudeuse* est, avant tout, l'œuvre de Patrice Franceschi. [...] L'argent est évidemment l'obstacle majeur. Franceschi fait le tour des banques. Presque toutes celles qu'il sollicite se refusent. Trop de risques. Mise-t-on sur l'aventure, c'est à dire sur l'aléatoire? Ce qu'il finit par obtenir oblige, devant les nécessités croissantes, à réemprunter sans cesse".

16 Originally, "Trouver un sponsor aurait été envisageable, mais Franceschi l'a toujours refusé. C'est un prix qu'il ne consent pas à payer. L'alternative est faite d'une multiplication des obstacles, de la réticence des assurances, des délais des chantiers qu'il faut, avec obstination, affronter et réduire".

Earth: The Wanderings of Rapa Nui, Easter Island'; Glissant, 2007), Glissant writes about the connection between the subject and the work of writing:

Variations and driftings were borne out of the magnetic land, and thus bring unexpected delays in your writing when you have set out to illustrate or describe something but you hesitate to make the right decision. It is speech that makes no progress. All these disturbances are caused by the quivering island and by its mission to put things in disarray, its unhesitating rejection of all convention, even something touching on the most fundamental of instincts: survival.¹⁷ (Chaliand 2006: 25)

Glissant co-wrote his book about Easter Island, his account of the “unhesitating rejection of all convention”, with his wife, who was there on location and sent him source material: “I wanted to comment in my own way on what she sent or brought back from there – the notes, impressions, drawings, films, and photos – so that I could transfer it into the order or disorder of literature”¹⁸ (Glissant 2007: 9). Glissant could no longer handle such an arduous journey himself, but just a few years before his death in February 2011, he found ways to absorb the routineness and concreteness of this secluded world and to combine the concrete details with the rituals, traditions, and stories that make up Easter Island’s ancient cultural heritage.

J.M.G. Le Clézio’s work of cultural reportage *Raga: Approche du continent invisible* (‘Raga: Approaching the Invisible Continent’; 2006) about his travels in the South Pacific highlights in another way how deeply such a shift of perspective can alter ingrained patterns of perception. “They say Africa is the forgotten continent”, writes Le Clézio. “Oceania is the invisible continent. It has remained invisible because the travelers who first ventured there did not perceive it as a continent and because Oceania still lacks international recognition, as though it were a passageway or an absence of some kind”¹⁹ (2006: 11). Burkhard Müller’s

17 Originally, “Des variantes et des dérives nées de la terre magnétique: les retards inattendus de votre écriture, quand vous aurez entrepris de deviner ou de décrire, et puis les hésitations précisément à décider, et c’est bien la parole qui n’avance pas, toutes ces perturbations provoquées par le frémissement de l’île et par sa vocation à désordonner et par son immédiat refus de toute convenance, et s’agissant même de ce qui concernait le plus élémentaire des instincts, celui de la survie, et par son obstination à maintenir le vacarme du temps en ce qui concernait par exemple ce qui suit et ce qui précède”.

18 Originally, “et moi par les commentaires que je ferais de ce qu’elle enverrait et de ce qu’elle rapporterait, notes, impressions, dessins, films et photos, et par l’ordre ou le désordre de littérature qu’avec son aide j’apporterais à ces documents et à son sentiment ainsi abruptement saisi”.

19 Originally, “On dit de l’Afrique qu’elle est le continent oublié. [. . .] L’Océanie, c’est le continent invisible. Invisible, parce que les voyageurs qui s’ont aventurés la première fois ne l’ont

description of the book emphasizes this shift away from traditional perspectives and associated patterns of interpretation: “Le Clézio does not perceive these island peoples primarily as endangered. Rather, in their exposed position, he sees an opportunity for friction, for them to adapt – preferably in an active and even revolutionary manner – to that which is invading their space from all directions”²⁰ (Müller 2009). Le Clézio had joined the expedition in 2005 as part of the *Peuples de l’eau* project. A native of Pentecost Island (known as Raga in the Apma language) in the island nation of Vanuatu took an interest in him as a traveler from afar, although a European. She helped him make contact with other locals, who were still suffering from the lingering effects of the colonial period, especially the inhuman practice of blackbirding. The resident was Charlotte Wèi Matansuè, a women’s rights advocate. In 1980, after the New Hebrides archipelago finally gained its long-fought independence and became Vanuatu, the traditional system of payment in kind was threatened by the introduction of currency. Charlotte Wèi was able to secure the continued acceptance as currency of the grass mats that are traditionally woven by women on Easter Island – and thus assured these women a meaningful measure of independence in their patriarchal society. In 2011, a few years after Le Clézio’s visit, some of the mats she wove reappeared somewhere else entirely: at the Louvre in Paris, where Le Clézio curated an exhibition titled “Les musées sont des mondes” (‘Museums are Worlds’) that assembled objects of wide-ranging origin in one room under the slogan “Here we speak of art; there we speak of artisanry”.²¹

What is art? What is artisanry? Who decides which is which? The debate over world literature revolved around very similar questions. At the Louvre, Le Clézio had made a point of exhibiting artefacts of many kinds – not only those to which the market, in this case the art market, ascribes special significance (Bopp 2011). His book *Raga* shows his appreciation for the beauty of the Easter Island *pandang* mats and their painstaking production (Bopp 2011). He describes how the mats have become a tool enabling their women producers to gain influence in their society, but he also writes about their prized patterns that harken back to the origins of Raga culture. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one of Germany’s largest newspapers, praises his attitude as “the unprejudiced curiosity and fundamental sympathy with which he has always traveled the

pas aperçue, et parce que aujourd’hui elle reste un lieu sans reconnaissance internationale, un passage, une absence en quelque sorte”.

20 Originally, “Le Clézio nimmt die Inselvölker nicht in erster Linie als etwas Bedrohtes wahr, sondern erblickt in ihrer Exponiertheit die Chance der Reibung, der bevorzugt aktiven, ja der revolutionären Anverwandlung dessen, was von allen Seiten auf sie einströmt”.

21 Originally, “Ici on parle d’art, là on parle d’artisanat”; see Bopp (2011).

world” (Bopp 2011). This recalls the official motivation for Le Clézio’s 2009 Nobel Prize, which called him the “explorer of a humanity beyond and below the reigning civilization”.²²

It is important to acknowledge such works that take stock of and communicate the world, especially when they come from establishment institutions. A new world literature – if we continue to spread this term – must be cognizant of and liberated from all streams of Eurocentrism, inclusive of new dynamics, new spaces of reception, and new theories of power. Only then can we interpret the latest rendition of a hypercomplex system of global selection and circulation processes; only then can we reflect critically on that system’s asymmetries. Setting aside projects like *Les peuples de l’eau*, let us hope that the publishing industry sees beyond arguments about sales figures and strives for a position of inherent value.

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²² Cited in <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2008/clezio/facts>> (last visit: 20/08/2018).

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Gustavo Guerrero

Literatura mundial y multilateralismo: cambiando de rumbo

“Hoy la condición universal —escribe Bruno Latour— es vivir entre las ruinas de la modernización, buscando a tientas dónde habitar” (2017: 133). Aunque acaso peque por exceso, esta sombría descripción de nuestro momento actual refleja, creo, bastante bien la doble articulación de una crisis que concierne a la vez la deriva última del proyecto moderno y nuestro modo de estar en el mundo. Somos como los naufragos o los supervivientes de una aventura que toca a su fin ante la amenaza de una espeluznante catástrofe medioambiental y el regreso de las formas más autoritarias y excluyentes del nacionalismo. No en vano asistimos a una proliferación de los imaginarios distópicos en las ficciones del nuevo milenio. Insistentemente, teleseries tan difundidas como *The Walking Dead* (2010) o *Black Mirror* (2011) nos ofrecen las representaciones más variopintas de un futuro aciago. Todo ocurre como si, en unos pocos años, nos hubiéramos alejado varios siglos de aquel clima de optimismo suscitado por la caída del Muro de Berlín y el final de la Guerra Fría; o como si nuestro presente no fuera el heredero de aquella coyuntura que supo redorar los blasones del sueño ilustrado de una humanidad al fin reconciliada e hizo posible, entre otras cosas, replantear el debate en torno a la idea de una literatura mundial.

Lo uno condujo a lo otro, ya lo sabemos, tanto más cuanto que, en aquellas últimas décadas del siglo XX, el salto modernizador se acompañó de una crisis política del modelo del Estado-nación, cuyas consecuencias, en el plano simbólico, se tradujeron en un cuestionamiento de la referencia nacional como fundamento de las identidades y horizonte de las dinámicas sociales. Corroído desde adentro por la emergencia de reivindicaciones regionales, étnicas, lingüísticas, generacionales y de género, por un movimiento que Jesús Martín-Barbero bautizó como “la liberación de las diferencias” (Martín-Barbero 2001: 153), lo nacional se vio asimismo atacado, en ese fin de siglo, por una revolución tecnológica e ideológica que relativizaba la importancia de las fronteras y promovía la apertura de los espacios nacionales a los flujos e influjos foráneos. Hacia ese horizonte globalizador parecía que avanzaba la flecha de la historia y los estudios literarios no dejaron de advertirlo, tal y como lo muestran un sinnúmero de encuentros y publicaciones dedicados por aquel entonces a discutir el advenimiento de una literatura *postnacional* (Castany-Prado 2007), o *transnacional y sin límites* (Hansberg/Ortega 2005) —esa que, entre nosotros, pudo llamarse asimismo *literatura atlántica* (Ortega) e incluso *en lengua*

española (Iwasaki 2008). Las profecías de Goethe y de Marx parecían cumplirse finalmente, pues no solo para muchos críticos universitarios sino también para un buen número de autores y lectores, las literaturas nacionales pronto formarían parte del pasado al disolverse en ese futuro que sería el tiempo globalizado de una literatura mundial.

Sobran testimonios de este optimismo entre escritores jóvenes y menos jóvenes de distintos orígenes y condición. Uno de los más elaborados es, sin lugar a duda, el que nos dejó el martiniqueño Édouard Glissant (1928–2011) a través del imaginario y las ideas que nutrieron sus especulaciones teóricas y su práctica poética en sus últimos años. Recordemos que, para el gran antillano, con el fin de siglo, habíamos entrado en un proceso de hibridación acelerada (*créolisation*) que ponía en contacto a comunidades hasta entonces alejadas y dispersas en los múltiples archipiélagos culturales del planeta. Dicha puesta en relación producía una diversidad intercultural imprevisible, destinada a engendrar una experiencia inédita del mundo: la de una desmesurada totalidad (*le Tout-monde*) y la de una virtual comunidad de comunidades que el poeta definía como “caos-mundo” (*chaos-monde*). En ese espacio abierto a los intercambios y reapropiaciones más inesperadas se escribiría una literatura hecha en presencia de muchas lenguas y tradiciones diferentes, y cuya prefiguración acaso existiera ya en las proteicas y políglotas literaturas del Caribe. “Sueño con una nueva aproximación, con una nueva apreciación de la literatura —escribía a mediados de los años noventa—, con la literatura como descubrimiento del mundo, como descubrimiento de la desmesurada totalidad del mundo” (Glissant 1996: 91).

En esos mismos años, su acción dentro del Parlamento Internacional de los Escritores (1993–2003) prolonga y acompaña, en un plano político, la agenda de esta poética de la diversidad que, oponiéndose a los discursos de la globalización como proceso de uniformización, preparaba el ascenso de una literatura multilingüe y pluricultural, sostenida por una red de interconexiones planetarias. Salman Rushdie, Adonis, Jacques Derrida y Pierre Bourdieu, entre otros, participaron en las sesiones del Parlamento y compartieron a la sazón el proyecto cosmopolita que lo animaba. “No quiero ser profeta —escribía Glissant—, pero pienso que un día la sensibilidad de los hombres los llevará hacia lenguajes que dejarán atrás a las lenguas, que integrarán todo tipo de dimensiones expresivas, de formas, silencios y representaciones. . .” (1996: 127). En un estadio último de su desarrollo, la literatura por venir debía realizar, como literatura del mundo, esta utopía post-babélica que concilia lo uno y lo diverso entre las diferentes lenguas y culturas, en condiciones de equilibrio e igualdad.

Mi resumen de la visión del poeta es, sin duda, incompleto y bastante apresurado, pero da una idea de las expectativas que se crearon en aquel fin de

siglo y que constituyen históricamente el lecho imaginario, diría casi *fantasmático*, sobre el que se alza el debate teórico sobre la literatura mundial. Hoy sabemos que las cosas no ocurrieron tal como Glissant y algunos otros las soñaron. “Es posible que, a partir de un contexto de creciente interconexión transnacional y de mayor porosidad cultural —constataba a comienzos de esta década Alejandro Grimson— surjan nuevos y más fuertes fundamentalismos” (2011: 129). Como un retorno de lo reprimido, la crítica situación actual pone al descubierto el error de unas interpretaciones de la historia que, desde perspectivas idealistas o materialistas, postularon una correlación casi necesaria entre los procesos de globalización, una hipotética desaparición de las naciones y la emergencia de un espacio literario mundial que signaría el triunfo de la diversidad. Lo uno no ha llevado ciertamente a lo otro y ni siquiera se ha reflejado en una atenuación de las desigualdades y asimetrías en la circulación entre lenguas y literaturas dentro del mercado internacional de la traducción.

En efecto, si bien es verdad que el número de traducciones ha aumentado masivamente desde 1989, el estudio de las estadísticas más fiables muestra asimismo que los procesos de concentración y dominación se han agravado. “La globalización —señala Gisèle Sapiro— ha implicado una reducción del volumen de interconexiones entre las lenguas y, por tanto, una menor heterogeneidad” (2010: 438). Como puede verse en sus trabajos recientes sobre los mercados del libro, la evolución de estas últimas décadas arroja datos muy dispares en función de los idiomas: seis lenguas se reparten hoy más del 50% de las traducciones que se hacen a nivel global (francés, alemán, español, inglés, japonés y portugués), pero lo que traducen solo representa respectivamente entre el 2 y el 3% de su producción en el caso del inglés, el 6% en el del alemán, el 9% en el del español y el 15% en el del francés (Sapiro 2010: 423). Si invertimos las perspectivas, veremos que la lengua desde la que actualmente más se traduce es, sin sorpresa, el inglés con un 60% de los títulos totales, seguido por el francés, alemán, ruso, italiano y español que se reparten un 25%, lo que deja la producción de las restantes lenguas del mundo en un residual y apretado 15% (Sapiro 2010: 424).

A la luz de estas cifras, y dada la importancia del inglés y la influencia de sus productos culturales a nivel planetario, el bajísimo porcentaje de traducciones que se realizan en dicha lengua, ha acabado convirtiéndose en un motivo de preocupación y discusión recurrente: es ya una suerte de *tópico del 2 o el 3%* que constituye objeto de verificaciones, comentarios y análisis estadísticos por parte de plataformas como Literature Across Frontiers (Donahaye 2012). Salman Rushdie, que fue justamente uno de los fundadores del Parlamento Internacional de los Escritores en los años noventa, no dudó en calificarlo de “chocante” en 2005, al descubrir que, de los 185.000 libros editados en los Estados Unidos, solo

874 eran traducciones (Smith 2005). Le debemos también a Gisèle Sapiro un detallado estudio sociológico sobre el problema de la traducción en el mercado norteamericano que, desde perspectivas francesas, pone de realce algunos de los principales obstáculos que han hecho que la parte de los libros traducidos no haya cesado de disminuir en ese país desde los años setenta (Sapiro 2012: 57). Lo cierto es que, hoy por hoy, la cruda realidad de estos datos no solo pone de manifiesto lo lejos que estamos del sueño de Glissant, sino que justifica ampliamente la preocupación de aquellos que ven que mucho de lo que se enseña y se teoriza en las universidades de los Estados Unidos bajo la etiqueta de “literatura mundial”, solo tiene en cuenta el corpus de las obras traducidas al inglés, es decir, uno de los más restringidos y menguantes del planeta.

¿Cómo se articula la presente crisis del debate universitario en torno a la literatura mundial con estas realidades de la globalización y con sus ilusiones perdidas? La respuesta no es sencilla, pues, si, por un lado, existe un consenso bastante general para ver en los procesos globalizadores, el multiculturalismo y el pensamiento poscolonial de fines del siglo XX tres corrientes que marcan el resurgimiento del interés en el tema, por otro, las numerosas críticas a las propuestas e hipótesis de unos y otros acusan a menudo el desfase, cuando no la contradicción, entre las expectativas que suscita la investigación, su teoría y sus resultados. Así, por ejemplo, los consabidos estudios sistémicos de Pascale Casanova y de Franco Moretti (2000; 2003), reconocían por igual que las circulaciones literarias internacionales se erigen sobre la base de relaciones geopolíticas de poder cuyo trasunto es la desigualdad; pero, al mismo tiempo, métodos como el de la “lectura distante” (*distant reading*), esquemas como los de un centro-periferia cuyos meridianos son Londres y/o París, o bien corpus cuyo género único o principal es la novela, todos estos aspectos que han sido repetidamente cuestionados en sus trabajos (Spivak 2003; Damrosch 2003; Prendergast 2004; Kristal 2006), mal reflejan la defensa de la diversidad que debería haber animado el resurgimiento de una disciplina destinada a superar el eurocentrismo de la vieja literatura comparada y a enfrentar los retos que hoy le plantea la evolución del mercado internacional de la traducción.

Es de reconocer, sin embargo, que, en muchas de las investigaciones que se han ido publicando en las dos primeras décadas del siglo XXI, se hace patente el esfuerzo por compensar el pesado déficit de las propuestas sistémicas iniciales. Tanto en lo que respecta a los autores y a los géneros estudiados, como a las definiciones del campo y a las herramientas metodológicas que se emplean, hemos asistido a una floración de escritos que tratan de abrir nuevas perspectivas y que han hecho de la cuestión de la literatura mundial una de las problemáticas más vivas y disputadas entre los críticos universitarios. Publicaciones como las de David Damrosch (2003; 2009), Christopher Prendergast (2004), Ignacio Sánchez-

Prado (2006), Sandra Bermann (2005), Theo D'haen (2012), Emily Apter (2013), el colectivo WReC (2015) y Pheng Cheah (2016), entre otros, han ido trayendo así a la discusión a las literaturas latinoamericanas, africanas y asiáticas, han hecho énfasis en la necesidad de incorporar el estudio de la traducción y de asociarlo política y culturalmente al pensamiento postcolonial, han inventado nuevas definiciones de la disciplina como espacio de circulación global, modo de lectura o examen de nuestras formas de *hacer mundo*, y, en fin, han mostrado que no solo existe una geografía, sino también una historia de la literatura mundial cuyo archivo está aún por estructurar. A todo ello habría que sumar la aparición de un sinnúmero de instituciones académicas, programas de estudio, grupos de investigación, seminarios y publicaciones periódicas que han ido instalando la disciplina dentro del sistema universitario, principalmente en Europa y en los Estados Unidos.

El balance que se puede hacer hoy no es, pues, un balance en blanco y negro, aunque, en las condiciones actuales, algunas de las críticas más severas subrayan la ausencia de una definición clara del objeto de la disciplina, la confusión que reina en torno a sus metas y a sus métodos, y el anclaje netamente occidental y esencialmente anglófono de una discusión cuyo telón de fondo suele ser el de los problemas pedagógicos de una enseñanza monolingüe de las humanidades en las universidades de los Estados Unidos (Zhou 2017). De ahí que no sean pocos los que piensan que, a pesar de sus aciertos, la literatura mundial constituye, como la vieja literatura comparada, una problemática unilateral y fuertemente centralizada, que no ha superado aún las críticas de Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak y de Emily Apter por lo que toca a la cuestión de las posiciones políticas y culturales en torno a las cuales se articula y, sobre todo, por lo que respecta a su incapacidad para reescribir una historia literaria global, diseñando nuevas cartografías planetarias (Spivak, Apter).

No creo que sea el momento, sin embargo, de echar al bebé por la ventana con el agua sucia del baño. Siguiendo el planteamiento de la convocatoria, quisiera más bien imaginar vías alternativas para tratar de preservar lo que, a mi modo de ver, merece ser preservado en el sueño de Glissant y en el proyecto concomitante de crear una disciplina cuyo objeto sea el estudio de la literatura mundial. Pheng Cheah acaso lo describe bastante bien cuando insiste, en su último libro, en la necesidad de reorganizar la discusión alrededor de eso que llama “la fuerza normativa” que la literatura puede ejercer en el mundo, o sea: “el horizonte ético-político que abre en el mundo real” (Cheah 2016: 5). En la Francia de mediados del siglo XX, dicho horizonte era el de una superación del trauma de la Segunda Guerra Mundial y el Holocausto, como lo recuerda Roger Caillois en el prólogo a un atlas de las literaturas del mundo donde escribía con su habitual elocuencia: “A guerras mundiales, literatura

planetaria” (Caillois 1961: 12). También René Etiemble, valga añadirlo, pensó hasta el final de sus días que la literatura comparada era uno de los pocos remedios de que disponíamos para conjurar la amenaza nuclear de una destrucción total del planeta (Pivot 1988). Hoy, cuando la euforia de los años noventa ha sido reemplazada por el miedo, la idea de una literatura mundial probablemente tenga un papel distinto que cumplir en las condiciones post-humanistas y de crisis ecológica propias del Antropoceno: acaso la de concitar y encauzar las solidaridades necesarias a la supervivencia de una conciencia común ante problemas que no son ya los de un individuo o una nación sino los de la especie. En cualquier caso, si de lo que se trata es de contribuir a la reorientación del proyecto y a su consolidación no solo como herramienta pedagógica sino como campo de investigación y terreno de acción, parece importante apoyar los esfuerzos de apertura intercultural e interdisciplinaria del mismo que se han venido haciendo desde el área universitaria; pero, al mismo tiempo, no resulta menos crucial acentuar su descentralización y su difusión internacional, para acercarlo a la realidad multipolar en que vivimos. Y es que, si citando a Moretti, se puede decir que “la manera como imaginamos a la literatura comparada es un espejo de nuestra manera de ver el mundo” (2003: 81), tanto más cuando se habla de *literatura mundial* este isomorfismo impone un modelo y un modo de funcionamiento con un evidente contenido político. De ahí la propuesta de apurar la salida del individualismo y el unilateralismo actual inspirándonos en la experiencia de las metodologías de trabajo multilateral en Relaciones Internacionales y en Ciencias Sociales, sobre la base de agendas de trabajo colectivas, consensuadas, inclusivas e igualitarias.

Este cambio de modelo supondría una transformación de nuestra manera de concebir nuestro campo de investigación y de realizar nuestra labor. Por un lado, conllevaría traer nuevos interlocutores a la mesa y reinstalar a la literatura mundial en el seno de un foro internacional, descentrado y políglota que correspondería mejor a la naturaleza multicultural, multilingüe, multitemporal e interdependiente de su objeto. Por otro, en el plano de las realizaciones, significaría que, junto a los trabajos personales, habría que hacerle un lugar cada mayor a los trabajos de investigación en red entre varios equipos de nacionalidades y lenguas distintas, con perspectivas complementarias y cruzadas sobre la base una agenda común concertada, por ejemplo (y en nuestro caso), desde y hacia América Latina.

Partiendo de una definición de la literatura mundial como el estudio de las circulaciones literarias entre áreas culturales y lingüísticas diversas, según la versión hoy más aceptada, sería posible así imaginar proyectos de investigación multilaterales sobre la traducción, la edición y la recepción de las obras traducidas en diferentes países y en distintas épocas, no solo desde un punto de vista

teórico o filosófico, sino asimismo material, histórico y geopolítico, basándose en un trabajo sobre archivos, libros y mercados editoriales. Tal investigación haría indispensable teorizar el peliagudo asunto del estatuto ontológico de la obra traducida que, si bien puede representar en el campo de la literatura mundial “una refracción elíptica de las literaturas nacionales”, como enseña Damrosch (2003: 281), no constituye menos una versión o variante de la obra original que no se desprende enteramente de ella. Cabe citar aquí a Gérard Genette cuando nos recordaba en su análisis de la inmanencia plural del texto literario que la traducción a distintas lenguas de una obra no altera su unidad operal, pues la obra preserva convencionalmente su identidad, tal y como ocurre, en filología, con las distintas versiones o variantes de un romance o un poema medieval (Genette 1994: 202s.). Lo que cuenta para la lectura es justamente el sentido que aporta esta traslación o desplazamiento cuando hace visible, derridianamente, su *différence* entre dos o más lenguas, entre dos o más contextos, entre dos o más culturas. La literatura mundial podría ser concebida, desde este punto de vista, a la manera de un carrusel o una intersección de variables geometrías donde se cotejan y se confrontan las distintas maneras de leer y de entender una obra en traducción y su original; digamos una cámara de eco para su movilidad y sus diferentes recepciones a través del espacio y el tiempo.

Por otro lado, dicha investigación no podría prescindir de un marco histórico que situara la obra en un momento determinado de las circulaciones literarias internacionales y examinara las modalidades de su inscripción en el proceso de constitución del corpus de las obras latinoamericanas traducidas a ese idioma. Como un requisito previo, y tomando como punto de partida el viejo proyecto del *Index Translationum* de la UNESCO, es posible imaginar una reconstrucción, una estructuración y puesta a disposición del archivo que representan esos corpus en distintas lenguas y países, gracias a los instrumentos que nos ofrecen las bases de datos en humanidades digitales. Es verdad que este tipo de tarea antaño podía parecer muy difícil de realizar, pero hoy es perfectamente factible, ya que existe la posibilidad de reconstruir la composición de una bibliografía enlazando diversos repertorios y utilizando los datos para ordenarlos cronológica o espacialmente, en pruebas visuales o cartografías. Así se podría seguir, por ejemplo, la circulación de una novela como *Paradiso* (1966) de José Lezama Lima (1910–1976) entre sus distintas traducciones y ediciones, resituándola no solo dentro del proceso de reconocimiento internacional de la obra del maestro cubano sino en el de la difusión global de la novela cubana y latinoamericana durante los años sesenta y setenta del pasado siglo.

Aunando los aportes del giro circulatorio y del giro materialista, la pesquisa tendría que apelar a la sociología de los intermediarios o *gatekeepers* (Marling 2016; Sapiro 2018), así como también debería darle un lugar

preeminente a la propia mediación editorial internacional, que a menudo somete a una ruda prueba la unidad operal de la obra traducida. Recordemos que el concepto de *mediación editorial* fue acuñado a fines de los años noventa por los investigadores italianos que trabajaban en la teoría de los archivos literarios (Cadioli/Decleva/Spinazzola 1999) aunque también se empezó a utilizar en Francia, con algunas variantes, en los trabajos de Roger Chartier (2002) y de Emmanuël Souchier (2007). De hecho, este último prefiere hablar de una “enunciación editorial” y la define como “el conjunto de acciones de establecimiento, de transformación y de transmisión de un texto de acuerdo con las normas y restricciones específicas que imponen una obra y sus formas de publicación, a fin de determinar de antemano los términos y condiciones de su recepción” (Souchier 2007: 56). La enunciación editorial, según Souchier, alude a la idea de una elaboración plural del objeto textual, es decir, de la obra como el resultado de una colaboración polifónica en la que intervienen los distintos agentes que participan en el diseño y la producción de un libro o cualquier otro medio o dispositivo que asocie texto, imagen y sonido. Se trata de no considerar el texto fuera de su realidad material y social, y de no considerar la obra en sí misma, sino dentro de una situación que remite a sus condiciones de producción, difusión y recepción (Souchier 2007: 58).

En el campo de la publicación de literaturas extranjeras, como lo ha señalado Sara Carini (2014), la mediación editorial, en tanto acto de enunciación o gesto de imposición de un sentido, toma la forma de una traducción compleja: es un intento de recreación o de busca de una equivalencia entre la obra original y la que se edita en lengua extranjera. En dicho proceso de descontextualización y recontextualización, se forjan y reforjan los signos de identidad de un autor, una obra y una literatura a través de la inscripción del texto traducido en un ámbito nuevo que lo transforma adaptándolo a sus propios valores, intereses, posibilidades y necesidades. Hablar de la mediación editorial internacional supone así hablar de un proceso complejo que comporta, por un lado, una selección de autores y de obras, un arbitraje entre valores, una reescritura, un reformateo y una transformación de los textos en libros y de los libros en libros; por otro lado, estamos hablando de la mediación como de una máquina de leer y de apreciar las traducciones, una fábrica del valor literario y de las identidades culturales que funciona a menudo en condiciones asimétricas.

Finalmente, combinando la perspectiva que va de lo local a lo global con otra que nos lleve, en sentido inverso, de lo global a lo local, habría que imaginar también un trabajo multilateral sobre lo que no circula y no se traduce, o solo se traduce parcialmente, o solo circula entre ciertas lenguas y áreas culturales y no en otras: esa vasta cartografía de agujeros negros sobre la que se dibuja, en un momento y desde un lugar dado, el mapa visible de una literatura mundial. Creo

que un proyecto viable, dentro del área latinoamericana y también fuera de ella, debería tener en cuenta esta negatividad si no quiere seguir fungiendo de instrumento represivo de lo local y si aspira a ser algo más que una instancia de convalidación de los mercados dominantes y de una cierta crítica norteamericana y europea; dicho de otro modo: si aspira no solo a describir las circulaciones internacionales sino a influir en ellas. De ahí que parezca esencial la incorporación a la discusión no solo de escritores sino de agentes editoriales, pues, como lo muestran algunas publicaciones recientes (Helgesson 2016; Müller/Locane/Loy 2018), una reflexión sobre la situación de los productos culturales en el nuevo milenio arroja luces para entender las dificultades actuales de cualquier tentativa por diversificar la publicación de obras traducidas.

Para concluir, y volviendo al espíritu de esta convocatoria que nos invitaba a explorar posibles ajustes, críticas, reconceptualizaciones y abandonos de la idea de una literatura mundial a la luz del presente, creo que hoy uno de los correctivos posibles para paliar la excesiva centralización y el déficit de diversidad del proyecto está en una transformación de su diseño y de nuestra manera de entender nuestra labor, susceptible de acercarlo a las expectativas más progresistas que marcaron su reaparición en el ámbito de la cultura a fines del siglo XX. Efectivamente, tratar de implementar una metodología de trabajo multilateral en el campo de la literatura mundial supondría reorientarse hacia un proyecto participativo, abierto y llamado a reestructurar las articulaciones entre lo local y lo global, situándolas en contextos de enunciación históricos y materiales específicos que pueden renovar nuestras lecturas sobre la pluralidad de los procesos de circulación y *mundialización*, o sea, sobre las distintas maneras en que la literatura ha hecho y hace *mundos* por acción, pero también por omisión. Estaríamos hablando, además, de un proyecto cuya imagen no sería solo la de un foro, sino la de un taller donde se construyen, se deconstruyen y se reparan, a través de la traducción, las relaciones entre las literaturas, las lenguas y el mundo. Preservar ese plural me parece importante, tanto como tener en cuenta que hoy disponemos de herramientas tecnológicas sin precedentes para rediseñar las cartografías existentes y para reciclar visualmente la metáfora de las *múltiples ventanas* de Damrosch (2003: 15), insistiendo en que se deben poder abrir desde los dos lados. O, incluso, desde más.

Hace unas cuatro décadas, en plena Guerra Fría, el ya citado René Etiemble emprendió una revisión del concepto de *Weltliteratur* que le hizo entrever la necesidad de un comparatismo planetario, acaso no menos utópico que el sueño post-babélico de Glissant, pues eran tantas y tales las dificultades para llevarlo a la práctica que acababan convirtiéndolo en una quimera. “Esta es una de las contradicciones del mundo en que vivimos, en que vivirán nuestros estudiantes —escribía parafraseando a Eric Auerbach—: estamos al mismo tiempo llenos

de información y agobiados por su exceso, hasta el punto de que justo en el momento en que la literatura mundial se hace al fin posible, se vuelve, a la vez, imposible”. Y añadía a renglón seguido con su humor habitual: “Por supuesto, cuento con que cada uno de nosotros se sienta obligado a hacer lo imposible” (Etiemble 1975: 26).

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Nora Catelli

Los críticos como *bricoleurs*: unas observaciones

Este texto es la versión escrita de una intervención oral, en un contexto de conversación entre colegas en el encuentro en el que discutíamos sobre los problemas que expone su título. De allí su carácter un tanto abrupto y caprichoso. Desarrollar cada punto habría desvirtuado el tono y la agilidad de nuestro diálogo y, por eso, he conservado esos rasgos.

No tenemos proyecto. Un *bricoleur* se enfrenta a lo que debe hacer con lo que posee o con lo que tiene a su alcance. Debo evocar muy ligeramente a Lévi-Strauss para recordar qué tipo de estrategia supone esa definición y aceptar que, por diversas razones históricas, practicamos hoy, en nuestras disciplinas, algo parecido a ese tipo de pensamiento “salvaje” que, para Lévi-Strauss, opera con fragmentos de estructuras preexistentes que responden a un mundo extinto y que, sin embargo, sirven para crear taxonomías nuevas. Así, esos elementos estructurales no se abandonan, sino que se conservan porque se supone que de algo habrán de servir. La figura opuesta al *bricoleur*, en *El pensamiento salvaje* (1962), era el ingeniero que concibe esos instrumentos como subordinados a un proyecto. No es mi intención forzar la oposición de Lévi-Strauss para aplicarla a nuestras prácticas en las diferentes disciplinas de la teoría, pero sí reflexionar, a partir de aquélla, acerca de ciertos movimientos o posiciones críticas que nos muestran —en nuestras operaciones de análisis, crítica o comentario— más cerca del uso casual del *bricoleur* que del modo exhaustivo del ingeniero. Es decir: no poseemos un proyecto.

Estas observaciones son apenas recorridos acerca del presente de la teoría que apelan a una larga experiencia propia, que se formó con el materialismo histórico y la estilística (a la vez), se instaló en el estructuralismo —que considero aún, como muchos, un hito insoslayable— y aceptó después, quizá, que el centro de nuestras disciplinas era la relación histórica y genérica entre sujeto y lenguaje, éste en su dimensión de objeto de la lingüística y la semiótica más que como problema de la filosofía.

Creo que en la teoría se es hoy más *bricoleur* que pensador sistemático o, al menos, radical (radical en el sentido de mantener una atención permanente y extensa a los fundamentos epistemológicos del propio discurso). La teoría se ha transformado en una caja de herramientas más que en un conjunto de proposiciones que exijan un espesor conceptual argumentado de algún tipo, es decir, que sostengan una exposición explícita de los fundamentos o condiciones de conocimiento de los que el discurso se hace responsable.

Trabajamos sobre objetos cuya entidad se ha vuelto muy difícil de definir: ¿hechos artísticos? ¿hechos de lenguaje de borrosos límites entre ficción y experiencia vivida? ¿manifestaciones múltiples plásticas, verbales, performances? Lo hacemos con artilugios aproximativos, que encontramos en diversos archivos críticos provenientes de un pasado inmediato pero que habíamos abandonado y que ahora tenemos en derredor en forma de visitantes inesperados. Esos artilugios son previos a la tradición de la teoría del siglo XX y han sustituido saberes estrictamente específicos. Se nos exige, ante esos objetos, una atención sostenida ya no por sistemas sino por disposiciones, aficiones o gustos adiestrados: un poco de filosofía, otro de teología, otro de etimología, restos de la filología, intervenciones variadas e impresiones sobre el arte y hasta reelaboraciones de la historia del concepto de literatura, que, asombrosamente, parecen novedosas cuando solo lo son si hemos olvidado las fuentes inmediatas de las que se nutren.

Por ejemplo, *La palabra muda. Ensayo sobre las contradicciones de la literatura* (1998) de Jacques Rancière, que se apoya en la secuencia más transitada de la literatura francesa de los siglos XIX y XX para parafrasear con elegancia indudable una línea conceptual muy evidente respecto del surgimiento de la noción e institución de la “literatura”. Puede decirse que este libro se basa en y glosa un constructo tradicional de literatura. Sus desarrollos siguen un curso fácilmente reconocible que va de Michel Foucault (“Lenguaje y literatura”, 1964) a Raymond Williams (“Literatura”, 1977), quien, según señala en el prólogo a *Marxismo y literatura*, en el que está contenido “Literatura”, que ya había empezado a leer lo que por entonces se denominaba “crítica continental”, incluido el estructuralismo. No se trata de que Rancière los haya leído o utilizado, ni siquiera que ellos se hubiesen frecuentado, aunque es evidente que Williams conocía a Foucault, sino de que *La palabra muda* los resume —inadvertidamente— de un modo muy poco novedoso, casi de manual académico:

No se entenderá entonces aquí por “literatura” ni la idea imprecisa del repertorio de las obras de la escritura ni la idea de una esencia particular capaz de conferir a esas obras su calidad “literaria”. De aquí en adelante se entenderá este término como el modo histórico de visibilidad de las obras del arte de escribir, que produce esa distinción y producen por consiguiente los discursos que teorizan la distinción, pero también los que la desacralizan para remitirla ya sea a la arbitrariedad de los juicios, ya sea a criterios positivos de clasificación. (Rancière 2009 [1998]: 13)

Lo que se realiza en *La palabra muda* es un rodeo filosófico de este resumen, y en su conclusión Rancière se apoya en Proust para efectuar un ejercicio de artes comparadas también reconocible. Afirma entonces la primacía del arte verbal sobre las manifestaciones visuales, ya que aquél no puede prescindir de su propia contradicción, que proviene de su estructura compleja desde el punto

de vista de la articulación. Por ello, al revés de las artes visuales, conserva su enigma: al estar hecho de palabras incluye estratos cuyas relaciones pueden proponerse como aporías —semióticas, semánticas y retóricas, siguiendo la deconstrucción—, mientras que las artes de lo visible de nuestra época son artes seguras de hacer arte de todo. Al conseguir ese inquietante objetivo (este “arte de todo”), “termina por no manifestar más que su propia intención, aunque convierta esta manifestación en su propia denuncia. Entre el énfasis de la autoproclamación y el énfasis de la autodenuncia, un arte se ve en dificultades para forjar su capacidad escéptica” (Rancière 2009 [1998]: 235). ¿Por qué ese rodeo filosófico seduce ahora, cuando en realidad consiste en un exquisito comentario sobre los debates del siglo XX acerca de la índole de las relaciones entre las artes, y un diagnóstico conocido acerca del carácter abismal del lenguaje verbal que, no obstante, Rancière no somete a una prueba de lectura de textos específicos, como última confirmación o refutación de sus rodeos, sino que constriñe a las consecuencias filosóficas de su conclusión?

Desde luego Rancière, como los autores a los que me referiré, son todos maestros; solo quiero señalar que ellos mismos se apoyan en los restos de los sistemas de los que participaron y que, en muchos casos, construyeron.

No soy la única en advertir estas singulares modificaciones. Con diferentes objetivos, hay coincidencias con las observaciones de Beatriz Sarlo en la conferencia de clausura del Año Saer (2017), que contiene penetrantes observaciones respecto de las variaciones en las lecturas de Saer según los cambios en el curso de la teoría literaria en la Argentina.¹ Así, señala el abandono de las restricciones que imponía la exigencia de los protocolos de la semiótica de Greimas y posteriormente de los de *Tel Quel* y el resurgimiento, en las aproximaciones a Saer, de nociones que la teoría del siglo XX había arrinconado, como la de “personaje”. Y en el nuevo libro de Julio Premat, *Non nova sed nove. Inactualidades, anacronismos, resistencias en la literatura contemporánea*, se encuentra una muy sutil presentación de similares problemas críticos acerca no solo de cómo leer literatura sino de qué leer como literatura en el presente. Premat realiza, al principio de su texto, un análisis de las herramientas teóricas con que se lee lo literario y no es casual que el título contenga un latinazgo, que se puede traducir como “No nuevo sino de otro modo”. Ese “otro modo” podría aproximarse, creo, a lo que se hace hoy para pensar el arte verbal: usar lo que se tiene de maneras inesperadas, pero no aspirar a la invención de algo nuevo o abarcativo (véase Premat 2018).

¹ Véase: <<http://conexionsaer.gob.ar/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2.-No-tenemos-apuro-Beatriz-Sarlo.pdf>>.

Sé que soy restrictiva en mi afirmación y aceptaré todas las matizaciones, pero afirmo que la diferencia entre aquello que fue nuevo y lo que es hoy “de otro modo”, es que los grandes pensadores radicales de los setenta compartían y aceptaban una explícita o implícita base lingüístico-semiótica y retórica. No importaban las diferentes posiciones (filosóficas, sociológicas, psicoanalíticas) respecto de esa base. Fueran las de Jacques Lacan, de Michel Foucault, de Gilles Deleuze, del propio Pierre Bourdieu. Lo que importaba era la conciencia de que su responsabilidad intelectual empezaba con el problema de la lengua y no podía evadirse de ella. Quizá lo que ha retornado ahora es la tentación del abandono de las exigencias del campo de la lengua en aras de la filosofía del lenguaje, como se ve en Rancière.

Mencionaré apenas algunos movimientos que contienen ese retorno, acompañado además de otros rasgos característicos de la disolución de lo sistemático de la que he hablado antes: el retorno supone también una suerte de historicismo variable, fragmentario, a veces caprichoso. Por ejemplo, se vuelve a los recursos de la etimología, la ecdótica, la filología, es decir, a los instrumentos tradicionales que de uno u otro modo aseguran una *presencia* textual: una *prueba*. Mientras que la teoría operaba, en cambio, por inferencia, asociación, interpretación, recurrencia u homología estructural. Nada más lejos de la teoría literaria del siglo XX que la exigencia de una huella textual que recordarse el positivismo historicista del que huíamos. La consecuencia es que ahora nos encontramos con una mezcla de filosofía de la literatura y retornos positivistas, a los que se pueden agregar, sin cuestionamientos de base, nociones tan clásicas como la de “personaje”, cuya reaparición observó Sarlo.

Esta oscilación entre extremos se comprueba en Giorgio Agamben, cuidadoso e imprescindible glosador de Foucault en *¿Qué es un dispositivo?* (cuya primera edición en francés es de 2007), quien no duda, en esa misma glosa, en combinar la invocación etimológica con la teología o la filología para dar cuenta del término de Foucault y de sus usos. No puedo dejar de reconocer, en mi exposición, la inmensa y extraordinaria producción de Agamben, ni quiero disminuirla en absoluto; solo mostrar con qué sorprendente presteza es capaz de imponer su propia variedad de usos de la erudición a un texto de Foucault de 1977 —quien no dudó en ser erudito a su manera en otras etapas de su obra— para incluir en el Foucault más severo y suspicaz ante las trampas epistemológicas de la crítica tradicional un propósito que el propio Agamben formula como su voluntad de investigar, en *¿Qué es un dispositivo?*, “una genealogía teológica de la economía y el gobierno” (2007: 32).

La misma oscilación entre erudición y, en este caso, impresión sensible, sucede en Georges Didi-Huberman y tal vez explique la omnipresencia actual de

Jean-Luc Nancy. Se dan así cruces entre la teoría y los accesos “materiales” al texto (una fuente, una variante, una huella visual que puede rastrearse en su acepción más clásica) o, se allanan discursos filosóficos que rodean los textos, como sucede con Rancière o Nancy, este último proveniente del germanismo y la filosofía. Podemos comprobar que, si seguimos las diversas estrategias en que se los citan, hoy prevalecen, en esas invocaciones y autorizaciones, unas maneras difusas de acceder a algo que muy vagamente he podido denominar “hecho estético”, ligado, en Nancy, a la primacía del discurso sobre el cuerpo. Ha habido desplazamientos o relegaciones sorprendentes: ¿quién recuerda ahora la gran impronta de los trabajos sociológico-psicoanalíticos de Michel de Certeau, quien sostuvo gran parte de los estudios culturales, en Latinoamérica, en los años noventa del siglo pasado?

La primera impresión, leyendo estos nuevos modelos, es de flexibilidad; la segunda, de una despreocupación respecto de los problemas sistemáticos de la exposición, despreocupación que en los maestros de los setenta no se podía encontrar. No es un demérito, sino que invita a una manera de pensar no dialéctica sino acumulatoria.

En ellas se superponen diversas flexiones. Además de ejercicios de erudición, se comprueba la emergencia de discursos que trabajan sobre la exhibición de las modulaciones —individuales, confesionales, experienciales— de quien piensa. Creo que es la herencia atenuada de Maurice Blanchot —exponente clásico y último, a mi juicio, de la lectura como impresión— reconocible en Nancy.

Se da así una mezcla: por un lado permanece el recuerdo de las severas maneras de especulación que se apoyaban en *close readings* a la manera —insuperable— de Jacques Derrida leyendo a Freud acerca del *bloc mágico*. Por otro, son frecuentes, como en Agamben, las reutilizaciones de una filología casi fantasmagórica; o las intervenciones microscópicas sobre las artes visuales de las que se derivan, como en Didi-Huberman o Rancière, implicaciones diagnósticas —sobre el planeta y su destino, las migraciones, los géneros, los *media*— de alcance general. Y por fin, encontramos registro de tono elevado e impresionista ante los hechos estéticos: un registro Blanchot cuya obra ocupa, como dice Marlène Zalader, “una función de *espejo* —con todos los límites (sobre todo, los efectos de circularidad) que le son indisociables” (2001: 20).

Estos apuntes quedarían inconclusos si no advirtieran que junto a las tendencias antes descritas —cuyo alcance es académicamente planetario, ya que se encuentra en todas las maneras de estudios culturales, ecocrítica, estudios postcoloniales, etc.— se encuentra agazapada una pulsión esteticista, elevada, aquello que Zalader llama “espejo” Blanchot, y que se halla,

por ejemplo, en Nancy, más allá de sus desarrollos: el arte es como un cuerpo que provee de todas las oportunidades diagnósticas.²

Por encima de esta mezcla ilustre sobrevuela, como el murciélago que aleataba entre el señor Bloom y Gerty MacDowell en “*Nausicaa*”, el capítulo XIII del *Ulises* de James Joyce, la silueta omnipresente de Walter Benjamin, que parece unir todas las posibilidades antes descritas sin que ninguna le sea ajena o extemporánea: la filosofía del lenguaje, el comentario infinito acerca del carácter mortal de la experiencia, la actualización de la teología y su inmediato abandono, la mirada inquisitoria del moderno ante las ruinas de lo moderno. Es imposible establecer un catálogo de las citas de Benjamin en todos los estudios, artículos, libros o ponencias, y delimitar antipáticamente cuáles son pertinentes y cuáles no. Acaso la vieja distinción semántica de *uso* —cuando un término sirve para el argumento— y *mención* —cuando solo es útil porque está allí para ser definido, no incorporado al discurso porque carece de continuidad argumental para la exposición— serviría para distinguir unos de otros.

Pero este murciélago en particular —que parece eterno— no siempre estuvo allí. Para demostrarlo, partiré de un ejemplo que tiene que ver con mi propio recorrido. En 1998 Marietta Gargatagli y yo misma publicamos *El tabaco que fumaba Plinio. Escenas de la traducción en España. Relatos, leyes y representaciones de los otros*, una voluminosa antología comentada (por nosotras) de textos sobre la traducción en castellano desde Alfonso el Sabio, la tradición árabe, la bíblica —judaica, erasmista y luterana— y los escritos fundamentales de la conquista de América, las independencias y las vanguardias.

En ese año, en 1998, en nuestros prólogos a los textos aparecen, además de historiadores, algunos hitos del pensamiento lingüístico: Roman Jakobson, por supuesto, y Émile Benveniste. No está Benjamin.

Sin embargo, lo conocíamos; conocíamos ese aspecto específico de su obra. Es significativo que casi diez años antes yo hubiese traducido el artículo póstumo de Paul de Man sobre “La tarea del traductor”; lo publiqué en *Taifa*, una efímera revista de Barcelona, y, al mismo tiempo, en el *Diario de Poesía* de Buenos Aires. Lo conocíamos, pero no lo vinculamos, Gargatagli y yo, con la historia de las escenas sobre la traducción. Considerábamos —quizá de manera irreflexiva— que el conjunto reunido en el libro eran exponentes de las *herramientas de la historia de la*

2 En ocasiones creo que se puede adivinar cierta tendencia actual a un psicologismo de nuevo cuño, un psicologismo más del crítico que de la obra. Y resulta por ello sorprendente que una de las mejores lecciones de lectura no psicologista de las figuras del poeta a través de sus relaciones formales y no biográficas, *La angustia de las influencias* (1973), de Harold Bloom, haya sido arrinconada por la popularidad o superficialidad de las que adolecen muchas de las producciones de Bloom posteriores a esa obra extraordinaria.

cultura, no instrumentos de la filosofía del lenguaje. Por eso “La tarea del traductor”, que había traducido al castellano Héctor H. Murena en Buenos Aires en 1967, en la editorial Sur, estaba colocado fuera de nuestra antología.

Solo a finales de los años noventa —nuestro libro se confeccionó entre 1993 y 1995— la teoría cambió de estatuto: más que un sistema o un conjunto de sistemas se transformó en esa caja de herramientas, que se metía en los pliegues de todas nuestras intervenciones.³

Estos apuntes no tienen una función admonitoria ni quieren caer en el cliché de denunciar modas críticas. Pero quizá sirvan para que ante la escucha de nuestras propias exposiciones y trabajos, y más allá de la natural tendencia a reconocer nombres, no abjuremos de la exigencia sistemática ni rechacemos la vindicación de la especificidad de nuestro oficio, que es enfrentarse con la lengua como problema formal y con la historia de la literatura como problema del cruce entre crítica y comparatismo. Acaso no volvamos a poseer un proyecto, eso que Lévi-Strauss oponía al pensamiento salvaje, pero seremos conscientes de que la caja de herramientas es producto de la caída de los proyectos, y que en la caja se encuentran, también, sus egregios restos.

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³ Es casi innecesario señalar que justo al final del siglo XX Beatriz Sarlo describió la banalización de la silueta de Benjamin planeando sobre los estudios literarios y la crítica en “Olvidar a Benjamin” (2000).

2: Challenging hegemonies: the local, material grounds of world literature

Héctor Hoyos

Parochialism from below: on World Literature's other other

Today's "cosmopolitanism" is a moving target – in more ways than one. Rather than focus on the more pressing question insinuated by this opening salvo, that is, on the real dangers that threaten this ideal in the current political climate, I will examine the narrower and not entirely unconnected question of its elusive quality. I shall not seek to provide a new "final" definition of a term that already has a long history, competing genealogies and interpretations, both in connection to the revived notion of World Literature and otherwise.¹ In this short essay – and I stress the word "essay", as opposed to scholarly article – I will attempt to somewhat shift the terms of the debate on cosmopolitanism by bolstering what I regard as its under-examined Other, namely: parochialism. As we shall see, parochialism is more complex than meets the eye. My goal is not to defend the local: this has already been done. Nor the national: ditto, with fences and drones. Rather, it is the system of oppositions that I modestly seek to bring into question. (Derrida does something similar on a grand scale, with the problem of right of asylum in mind, rather than literary historiography). The approach I will attempt to outline may or may not assuage credible concerns that, as Omid Azadibougar and Esmaeil Haddadian-Moghaddam put it, World Literature could very well be a "dead-end concept" (Azadibougar/Moghaddam 2016: 8), but it will reveal an overlooked aspect in the ongoing conversation about cosmopolitanism.

It's worth remembering the role that modern linguistics grants to opposition in signification. To produce meaning, a signifier must distinguish. I cite an explanation from the English translation of Saussure's 1916 *Cours de linguistique générale* apropos words borrowed from a different language: "a loan-word no longer counts as such whenever it is studied within a system; it exists only through its relation with, and opposition to, words associated with it, just like any other genuine sign" (Saussure 1966: 22). (One such words is, felicitously, "apropos", above). The defining opposite of cosmopolitanism is, most commonly, nationalism. I find this problematic – a false dilemma leading to false

¹ For a state-of-the-discipline collection of critical-theory inspired essays, look no further than Robbins/Horta (2017). For a bold attempt to reconcile the alternative new materialist (Stengers, Latour) and deconstructive (Derrida) veins of the cosmopolitanism debate, see Watson (2014).

compromise. So has César Domínguez, as early as 2011. He summarizes a lengthier argument, rich in source review: “Losing/gaining in translation and ‘authentic expression’/ventriloquism should not be considered as direct counterparts of nationalism/cosmopolitanism” (Domínguez 2011: 251). “Gaining in translation” alludes to David Damrosch’s much-discussed 2003 definition of World Literature – which, let me note in passing, elides the question of *differential* gain (Damrosch 2003: 289). The remaining poles all map onto the original dichotomy. So much for aligning World Literature with cosmopolitanism, then, as if it were its natural ethical correlate. And yet the view is shared by Aníbal González’s “Más allá de la nación” guest-edited number of *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, published a year after Domínguez’s essay in 2012. Regardless, taking the latter’s conclusions further, it’s not a matter of a term being an asymmetrical opposite to its Other – cosmopolitanism doesn’t (yet) have a corresponding polity, the way nationalism does –, the task that interests me is that of questioning the opposition itself.

Something analogous could be said about the pair “local” and “global”, which lead to the compromising neologism “glocal”, the theme of several studies, notably Jesús Montoya and Ángel Esteban’s eponymous collection, *Entre lo local y lo global*, from 2008. My own *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel* from 2015 builds on this opposition as well, along with that of Latin Americanism/World Literature, favoring productive contradiction over compromise. For its part, Mariano Siskind’s *Cosmopolitan Desires* (2014) opposes cosmopolitanism to lack: to become a citizen-of-the-world (*kosmopolitês*) is an unattainable object of desire that, in turn, fuels the drive towards global modernity. “World Literature” itself is a loan-word in Latin Americanism. When it does enter into that conversation, it swiftly generates a system of oppositions that, whether it interrogates the poles or not, pre-supposes them. World Literature is progressive and Latin Americanism regressive, or vice versa; Ángel Rama suddenly finds himself sitting across the table from Goethe; one camp gets accused of cultural imperialism, the other of nativism, and so on. The specter of cosmopolitanism haunts these discussions. From a slur waged against *déracinés* to a globally-aspired condition, wherever cosmopolitanism (and its cognate, World Literature) go, they reconfigure signification by entering into field-defining oppositions.

Here is where parochialism comes into the picture. In common usage, the term is, at best, synonymous with small-mindedness and quaintness; at worst, with conservatism and outright exclusion, even xenophobia. The assumption is that villages can never be the site of revolutions or miscegenation. This might perhaps be the case for some idealized European small cities, though it certainly is not true for, say, Cuzco. (It’s also debatable of many *actual* European locales).

Still, parochialism, with its etymological ties to the base structures of the Catholic church, is object of casual derision. However, geographers and social scientists do not necessarily concur. This I find particularly relevant for literary studies, given that so much of our critical vocabulary – case in point, “globalization” – originates in those disciplines, yet has become numbingly naturalized and ingrained into our own. For one, John Tomaney, who teaches Urban and Regional Planning at University College London, remarks that “cosmopolitanism is a kind of provincialism (. . .) it doubts the social and artistic value of the parish” (Tomaney 2013: 659). This thoughtful dialectical inversion draws on the work of Patrick Kavanagh, the Irish poet and novelist, for whom parochialism and provincialism are in fact opposites. The provincial aspires validation from the metropolis; the parishioner, so to speak, is self-assured in the local scene.

Let me illustrate this by turning to León de Greiff, the great Colombian poet (1895–1976). Born in Medellín of more-or-less direct German and Swedish descent, de Greiff is known for the erudition and musicality of his work. His alter egos (“Leo le Gris”, “Gaspar de la Nuit”, etc.) place him in the company of the Portuguese Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935), his senior by less than a decade. His deliberately archaic lexicon and overall formal complexity make him, at times, illegible – reminiscent of better-known avant-garde contemporaries, the Peruvian César Vallejo (1892–1938) or the Chilean Vicente Huidobro (1893–1948). (De Greiff outlived them all, and carried on cultivating and contorting the Spanish language well beyond the prime of experimentalism). The Colombian produced a rich and vast oeuvre; he enjoys cult following to this day in a country known to fill stadiums for multilingual poetry recitals (“Festival Internacional”). His work continues to have a significant “social function” by any standard: university auditoriums and public libraries bear his name (“La Ladera”). Moreover, his poetry has been translated to multiple languages – in small print-run, mostly boutique editions, but still (*Antología multilingüe*). In sum, León de Greiff could very well be the poster child of those left behind by the historiographical grand narrative of modernism.

Before the critical wheels start turning in an attempt to reconcile the anomaly with current consensus – is he another “master in the periphery of capitalism”, to borrow Schwarz’s framing of Machado, or rather a case-study for Casanovan diffusionism or heterochronic global modernism? – it’s best to consider how his verses reflect on their own positionality.² Take one of his early poems, “Villa de la Candelaria”, dated 1914:

² For alternative takes on the expanded canon and critical apparatus of global modernism, see Hayot and Walkowitz’s edited collection (2016).

Vano el motivo
 desta prosa:
 nada..
 Cosas de todo día.
 Sucesos
 banales.
 Gente necia,
 local y chata y roma.
 Gran tráfico
 en el marco de la plaza.
 Chismes.
 Catolicismo.
 Y una total inopia en los cerebros..
 Cual
 si todo
 se fincara en la riqueza,
 en menjurjes bursátiles
 y en un mayor volumen de la panza.³ (1925: 28)

D'après Damrosch, De Greiff's poetry might not count as World Literature, for it certainly loses in translation. From the original, I tried to convey the odd syntax and slowly punctuated ennui, not without compromise. To a Spanish native, "inopia" sounds more archaic than "indigence" to an English native. De Greiff's word choice mirrors the poetic subject's benign mockery of his contemporaries, most of whom would have had to pull out a dictionary to understand a deceptively vernacular ("prosaic") poem. "Inopia" is still occasionally used in cultivated Bogotá Spanish — "me dejaron en la inopia" ("they wiped me out [of money]"), and presumably more so in the 1910s. Alternatively, "impecuniousness" could convey the pomp, if only it didn't ruin the rhythm. And then I did not want to overstate the haughtiness, for it's all rather sweet: a parodically condescending homage to the village at the heart of the city. La Candelaria is today's historical, colonial, downtown neighborhood. It was a bigger portion of Bogotá back then. Here it's a synecdoche for the entire city, even for the nation, as well as a metonym for a state of mind both industrious and quaint — modernity at a standstill. This contradiction is best captured in the couplet "menjurjes bursátiles". Note the spelling, a Colombian variation of the standard "menjunje" (Diccionario RAE). The allitera-

³ My own working translation: "Vane the reason/for this prose:/no thing. . ./happenstance.// Events//banal.//Dumb folk//local and flat and blunt.//Major traffic//surrounding the square./ Gossip./Catholicism./And complete indigence in the brains. . ./As if/everything/hinged upon wealth,/stock-market brews/and a greater volume of the paunch".

tion that follows hinges upon the extra “r” (menjurjes bursátiles), wrapping the whole affair in a guttural, swallowing sound. Bellies are growing and minds are none the wiser.

Or are they? After all, De Greiff is crafting a sophisticated artifact from all this inanity. With some displacement, I translated the polysyndeton “local y chata y roma” as “local and flat and blunt” because “blunt”, like “chata”, can be both a personal attribute and the description of an instrument. The verse breaks down into the absurd. As readers encounter the phrase “local y chata [‘short’]”, they picture the poetic voice as a tall (European?) man literally looking down on his countrymen; when they come across the additional “roma”, which is how one would describe a knife that has no edge, they chuckle. For elucidation, what would the opposite of the original phrase be? “Universal and tall and edgy”? The racialized undertones play out in different ways, however, for “chata” is a term of endearment in Bogotá (similar to “shorty”); “chata and roma” can also be attributes of a small nose (adding to the absurd); and “roma” is but a capitalized letter away from “Rome”, the center of the (Catholic) world. The poet’s mockery is self-directed, because he is one with the folk; the poem a prankster’s testament. All this goes to showing how “Villa de la Candelaria” renders parochialism in all its richness and complexity.

In simple terms, Tomaney characterizes parochialism as caring for one’s parish. This includes passers-by and more or less settled foreigners – there is nothing “blood and soil” about it. Neither is it about navel-gazing and glorified local color, for “places are characterized by disputes which act as a simulacrum of larger conflict [. . .] emplacement is the basis for engagement with the world” (Tomaney 2013: 668). Reading the likes of León de Greiff as World Literature brings these points home, no pun intended. The emplaced, dull disputes in the poem above echo major debates about the ownership and telos of modernity. They are not, however, *peripheral* to them, and neither are they belated – by whose standard? The system of oppositions surrounding cosmopolitanism changes when it’s defining Other, instead of nationalism, regionalism, or provincialism, is a self-centered, caring ethos. The parish, thus understood, only partially overlaps with something as ethnic as the nation, as geographic as the region, or as small-minded as the province. It is neither circumscribed by ethnicity nor oblivious to it; parochialism acknowledges the power of place without being exhausted by it. More importantly, although opposed to cosmopolitanism – which forcibly happens at a bigger scale – parochialism is not inimical to cosmopolitanism: the good parishioner, so to speak, can also be a cosmopolitan.

Again, one may look at De Greiff for illustration. By his seventh book of poetry – “mamotreto” in his parlance – a full-fledged *neo-culteranista* poet has

emerged.⁴ In “Relato de los oficios y mesteres de Beremundo”, a long poem dated 1955, the Colombian Góngora features the heteronym – itself a homophony for ‘seeing the world’, *ver el mundo* – recount his life of travel, reading, drinking, writing, and loving. Less adventurous, literal-minded Jaime Tello translates the title as “Narration of the Jobs and Trades of Beremundo” (De Greiff 1995: 437). “Ballad of the Trades and Crafts of Worldogle”, might be going too far, but “ballad” touches upon the medieval poetry and musicality implicit in “mester”, while “Worldogle” conveys the amorous staring-at-the-world of the wondering, bard-like hero. Regardless, let me rely on Tello, as his 1995 version is the most recent of only two English translations available in print. (Moreover, what is lost in translation is of interest here). De Greiff is thoroughly cosmopolitan *and* parochial. Unfortunately, the translation makes him provincial. Consider the following stanza, from about a fifth of the way down in this 25-page enumeration of a poem:

Viajé con Julio Verne y Odiseo, Magallanes y Pigafetta,
Salgari, Leo e Ibn-Batuta,
con Melville y Stevenson, Fernando González y Conrad
y Sir John de Mandeville y Marco Polo,
y sólo, sin de Maistre, alrededor de mi biblioteca, de mi
oploteca, mi mecanoteca y mi pinacoteca.
Viajé también en torno de mí mismo: asno a la vez que
noria.⁵ (De Greiff 1995: 402)

Where did the bewildering, musical “tecas” go? Tello’s two museums and one painting collection are clearly poor choices, at least as far as rhythm and rhyme are concerned. The translator favors meaning, despite an *ars poetica*, later in the poem, where Beremundo claims to have returned to Semantics “a la diabla, en broma:/semanto-semasiólogo tarambana pillín piruetante” (De Greiff 1995: 406). I read this as an indication that sound *is* meaning; Tello translates it “as a joke, in disorder:/semanto-semasiologist crackpot little rascal pirouette” (De Greiff 1995: 444). More importantly, these choices reveal the overall rationale

⁴ The indispensable glossary to navigate the dense sea of De Greiff’s references is Macías Zuluaga and Velásquez Velásquez (2007). For a heuristic, critical exercise in drowning in that sea, see Mazzoldi (2013). Hjalmar De Greiff, the poet’s son, sets the record straight regarding idiosyncrasies, lacunae, and variant versions of the poems in De Greiff (2004).

⁵ “I traveled with Jules Verne and Odysseus, Magellan and/ Pigafetta, Salgari, Leo and Ibn-Batuta,/with Melville and Stevenson, Fernando Gonzalez and/Conrad and Sir John Mandeville and Marco Polo,/and alone, without De Maistre, around my library, my/arms museum, my toy museum and my paintings/collection./I also traveled about myself: donkey and noria at the same/time” (De Greiff 1995: 440).

that drives his translation. Tello takes De Greiff more seriously than the poet takes himself, and in so doing, turns the parochial, emplaced citizen of the world into a lacking, aspiring cosmopolitan. De Maistre doubles as reference to Xavier de Maistre, the 18th century digressive, Sterne-like novelist, and as wordplay: the self-taught De Greiff, in a sense, had “no master”. In his library, per his more or less explicit avowal, he went around in circles like an ass. As if this were all too unseemly, Tello over-explains and levels idiosyncrasies. Extrapolating: his awareness of presenting a semi-peripheral author to the potentially canonizing readership of the English language plays out several of the complexes of World Literature.

For one, there is the issue of how to deal with (literary) inequality: the insurmountable fact that some parishes matter more than others. One can ignore this or try to redress the situation – a lot goes into the “how”. Tello is a symptom of the prevailing trend, which is that of catering to the center. (Full disclosure: the present essay could be accused of doing the same, but that is only part of its dialectic). The periphery has to do the explanation; the center just has to be. For instance, the worldly reader is expected to appreciate the cemetery of Père Lachaise, in Paris: to always already recognize its cultural heft. That is not the case with, say, the monument to Benkos Biojó on the main square of San Basilio de Palenque, despite its world historical significance. Beremundo's travels through places and books are cognizant of this, make light of it, and demand more of cosmopolitanism. Tellingly, one of the trades of Beremundo has been teaching “these little summer courses on comparative Berber literatures” (De Greiff 1995: 443, translation modified). We also read, in a notoriously hilarious passage:

–y [platiqué con] el Manco y Sancho y Don Quijote–
 y trafiqué en “ultramarinos”: ¡qué calamares –en su tinta–!,
 ¡qué Anisados de Guarne!, ¡qué Ronces de Jamaica!, ¡qué
 Vodkas de Kazán!, ¡qué Tequilas de México!,
 ¡qué Néctares de Heliconia! ¡Morcillas de Itagüí!
 ¡Torreznos de Envigado! ¡Chorizos de los Balkanes!
 ¡Qué butifarras cataláunicas!⁶ (De Greiff 1995: 404)

De Greiff collapses highbrow and lowbrow, plausible and implausible. Cervantes is a character among his own characters, themselves not far from the

6 “– [I did have chats] with Cervantes, Sancho and Don Quixote –/and trafficked with groceries: what squids – in their ink –!,/what Anisettes from Guarne! what Jamaican Rums! What/ Vodkas of Kazan! what Mexican Tequilas!/what Nectars from Heliconia! Blood Sausages from/ Itagüí! Fried Bacon from Envigado!/Sausages from the Balkans!/Catalan Sausages!”.

colonial goods (not “groceries”) that Beremundo smuggles. It would be a different world where someone dealt in that precise constellation of liqueurs and delicacies – a world as unlikely as the existence of a centuries-old interlocutor of the “manco” who had also met the filaments of his imagination. Tequilas from Mexico (or Jalisco, rather) are known the world over, as arguably Vodkas from Kazan are, but you truly have to be an *antioqueño*, or otherwise well-traveled in Colombia, to have had the anisettes, blood sausages, and fried bacon listed.⁷ “Nectars from Heliconia”, for all its classic overtones, alludes to shots of *aguardiente* taken at a town named after a bright red flower from the region. (Not to the flower itself, lest Beremundo be something of a frantic bee). But why stop there? Balkan and *cataláunica* – an archaism for Catalanian – sausages bring the passage to its unlikely crisis. In a comic register, the take-away is twofold: parochialism and cosmopolitanism co-exist; parish differentials are negotiated over time, at least in part, through wit.

Tomaney notes that “parochialism is not an end state but one of becoming; we are always becoming native” (Tomaney 2013: 668). In De Greiff, decisively, becoming native is a two-way street. Colombian readers see the world through his eyes; *ultramarino* readers, urgent new translations permitting, get to dwell in his unique highland parish. This is an asymmetrical exchange, to be sure. Moreover, the asymmetry is an essential part of the poetry. Parochialism eschews questions of simultaneity or centrality – the prevailing elucidating metaphors of the cosmopolitanism debate. Instead, it favors values such as specificity and internal consistency. It teaches how to care for communities beyond those of primary belonging, including one where De Greiff, to borrow Borges’s phrase, is met with “anticipated fervor and mysterious loyalty” (Borges 1975: 617). Repairing the inequities of World Literature and adopting a truly cosmopolitan axiology require deeper engagement with the literary events of others. De Greiff’s euphoric word play is at a disadvantage, for his parishioners have yet to find ways of conveying its singularity. Rather than try to render legible an indigenous writer, the task is to indigenize the world. As Beremundo might put it, untranslatably:

–trueque y trastrueque– del cuyo mío y de entrambos. . .
 ¿Trabalenguas? ¿Enigma?
 –¡No que nó!: paradigma del mutuo entregarse, del en
 mutuo donarse. . .
 ¡metafísica física! (De Greiff 1995: 421)

7 At the time of De Greiff’s writing, tequila was not yet a globalized spirit. See Williams (2015).

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Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado

La literatura mundial como praxis: apuntes hacia una metodología de lo concreto

Uno de los objetos más interesantes de lo que hoy en día llamamos “literatura mundial” aparece en uno de esos textos literarios poco leídos, de difícil acceso, pero cuya leyenda es de amplia circulación. El 21 de agosto de 1965, Juan Rulfo pronunció una conferencia en el Instituto de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas (ICACH), ubicado en la ciudad de Tuxtla Gutiérrez, que poco después sería transcrita y reproducida por la revista de dicha organización con el título “Situación actual de la novela contemporánea”.¹ Importa para mis fines el contexto original de publicación. Rulfo, un escritor consagrado por dos grandes obras publicadas una década antes, enuncia uno de los mapas más completos y originales de la literatura mundial de su época en Chiapas, lugar en el cual había emergido al mismo tiempo una literatura indigenista de gran importancia que, encabezada por Rosario Castellanos y otros autores, buscaba tratar a Chiapas y su historia racial como un “subject of history” (Gollnick 2008: 131) a través de *Bildungsromane* que articulaban al problemático sujeto mestizo con el declive del capitalismo rural (Taylor 2009: 39–66; Beckman 2018). El ICACH (hoy convertido en la Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas) era en ese entonces un organismo planteado como punta de lanza de la modernización cultural y tecnológica del estado, abarcando el aparato educativo desde la educación media y la superior. La revista *ICACH*, donde aparecería transcrita la conferencia, fue un órgano central de la historia intelectual de Chiapas. Estaba bajo la dirección de Andrés Fábregas Roca, un intelectual catalán miembro del Ejército Republicano que, tras ser asignado a Chiapas por el régimen cardenista, desarrolló una trayectoria amplia que incluyó la fundación del Ateneo estatal y una trayectoria docente que lo llevó a ser maestro de la plana mayor de la intelectualidad chiapaneca. El contexto en el que Rulfo enuncia su versión amplia de la novela de su época, es notable porque no es uno de los lugares de Latinoamérica donde uno esperaría la emergencia del gesto cosmopolita (no es Buenos Aires, ni la Ciudad de México), sino un espacio cuya

1 El texto original se publica en el número 15 de la revista *ICACH*, correspondiente a julio-diciembre de 1965, pp. 111–122. En 1979 es reproducida con omisiones por la *Revista de la Universidad de México*. Cito aquí de la reproducción hecha en la edición de Claude Fell de la obra de Rulfo para la colección Archivos, que se basa en la publicación de la revista (Rulfo 1996: 401–411). A mi entender, estas son las tres únicas versiones disponibles de esta conferencia, aunque es posible que exista alguna más en las publicaciones auspiciadas por la Fundación Rulfo.

historia cultural ha sido definida por el indigenismo, por una rica tradición de novelistas y poetas de raigambre regional y popular, y, posteriormente, por la rebelión indígena del Ejército Zapatista, pero que rara vez sería pensado como un espacio autorizado de la literatura mundial.

Rulfo mismo es un autor que, pese a su amplio reconocimiento, circula de manera más bien accidental en los circuitos transnacionales. De gran sofisticación formal y de una brevedad que ha fascinado al grado del culto a generaciones de críticos y lectores, la obra de Rulfo es frecuentemente considerada dentro de un canon de la especificidad literaria latinoamericana, debido a la manera en que da forma literaria a los violentos procesos sociohistóricos de México y América Latina o sujeta a lugares comunes sobre su universalidad que borran la riqueza histórica y cultural que subyace a su trabajo con la forma literaria.² Su estética friccional, en el punto de encuentro de tradiciones heterogéneas que no son necesariamente legibles en traducción, ubica a Rulfo junto a autores como el peruano José María Arguedas y el brasileño João Guimarães Rosa no solo como alguien cuya importancia nacional y regional nunca ha derivado en el reconocimiento transnacional que hubiera ameritado. Es también cifra y ejemplo clave de esfuerzos críticos como la teoría de la transculturación narrativa, con la que Ángel Rama (1982) buscaba dilucidar el friccional encuentro de las culturas regionales con las olas de influencia occidental. O, como lo pone Ericka Beckman, Rulfo ejerce de manera paradigmática una de las formas de escribir que ilustran “how Latin American literature written in the mid-twentieth century – a high point of concerns surrounding land tenure systems and the so-called ‘peasant question’ – register of uneven dynamics of rural modernization within paradigms of peripheral capitalist development and accumulation” (Beckman 2016: 814). Dentro de estas constelaciones literarias, solo García Márquez fue celebrado por la literatura mundial, consagrando al realismo mágico como una tendencia central a ella. Esto a pesar de que historiadores del realismo mágico global como Wendy Faris han especulado la posibilidad de influencia directa de Rulfo en autores centrales al mercado transnacional del género como Salman Rushdie (2004: 13). Muchos de los coetáneos de Rulfo no alcanzarían dicho reconocimiento, que le sería dado a autores más legibles desde la clave cosmopolita como Carlos Fuentes —cuyo trabajo con la mitificación operaba en imaginarios decididamente urbanos y modernos y para el cual la *Nouvelle Vague* parisina era una influencia quizá más central que los mitos mexicanos.

Incluso reconociendo la conexión que García Márquez tiene con la narrativa de lo que Beckman llama “la dialéctica de la modernización rural” (Beckman

2 No abundaré en este punto, porque lo he hecho en otra parte. Véase Sánchez Prado 2017.

2016), su integración simbólica a la teoría de la literatura mundial (notablemente en *Modern Epic* de Franco Moretti) se basa en la borradura de este imaginario sociocultural para integrarlo más nítidamente a la idea de la existencia de un solo “sistema-mundo” (Moretti 1996: 233–50), volviendo ilegibles predecesores latinoamericanos como Rulfo. Esto es incluso un problema desde las primeras formulaciones del realismo mágico: como recuerda Siskind, teóricos como Ángel Flores empaquetaron en la categoría a autores diversos que tenían poca o nula relación con el modelo de Carpentier o de García Márquez, mientras que Rulfo ocupa una posición al menos ambigua en esto: es legible como realista mágico pero su mundo narrado excede la categoría (véase Siskind 2014: 82s.). No se ha hecho mucho de esto, pero es conveniente notar que el argumento de Moretti sobre García Márquez es ambiguo: hay un intento claro y explícito de reconocer una superioridad estética y política respecto a sus contemporáneos europeos, pero, significativamente, el capítulo que le dedica no es una conclusión sino un “epílogo”, algo que mantiene al escritor colombiano en un nivel simbólicamente periférico, negándole la posibilidad de ser la culminación de la historia literaria que inicia con Goethe, y dejándolo en el rol de simple apéndice. Es, también, una afirmación del alto modernismo, que se difunde de manera desigual y combinada por las semiperiferias, condenadas siempre al realismo (como se ve en Warwick 2015), imaginando una dialéctica entre modernismo central y realismo (mágico) periférico como la literatura-mundial del único y desigual sistema-mundo.

La lectura de los escritores de la transculturación y de la modernización rural latinoamericanas desafían esta idea, no necesariamente por negar la existencia del sistema-mundo, sino por entender que existen distintas formas de circulación literaria y distintas tradiciones estéticas más allá del difusionismo y de la hegemonía modernista aceptada como axioma por teóricos desde Moretti hasta el Warwick Research Collective. Basta leer la descripción de Rulfo de este último para ver la insuficiencia del modelo de literatura mundial basada en el desarrollo desigual y combinado para entender a un autor así. Su lectura parte de un problemático recuento de la literatura latinoamericana de Phillip Swanson para afirmar que la autores como Rulfo marcan “the transition from the emulation of received forms to the manufacture of new ones capable of capturing more adequately the temper of social life in the (semi-)peripheries and of articulating more sharply the scepticism of intellectuals towards their distorted state formations and their sense that earlier revolutionary aspirations had been betrayed and incorporated” (Warwick 2015: 80). Esta lectura general reproduce un lugar común prevalente en mucha de la crítica del Boom, que confundía la visibilización internacional de la literatura latinoamericana con el descubrimiento de la originalidad en sí, pero que carece de sentido cuando uno lee trabajos como los estudios de Roberto Schwarz sobre Machado de Assis (Schwarz

2000), citado en las primeras páginas del capítulo que concluye con las aseveraciones de Rulfo, o de Ericka Beckman sobre la literatura de la era de las exportaciones (Beckman 2013), que, desde el mismo paradigma de estudio marxista de la literatura, cuestionan abiertamente la tesis de que la literatura latinoamericana es original solo a partir del realismo mágico. Quizá por esta razón, *Pedro Páramo* es descrito en una nota como “a Mexican gothic irrealism couched in a fragmentary structure drawing on indigenous Amerindian mythology and orality. Rulfo’s novel expresses a profound crisis of confidence” (Warwick 2015: 80), una caracterización pobre del libro que demuestra la manera en que la borradora de los ricos contextos sociohistóricos de la forma literaria de una región como Latinoamérica reduce historias literarias enteras a lugares comunes para poderlas disciplinar a una noción de sistema-mundo literario único y desigual que, simplemente, no da cuenta de cartografías literarias enteras que no se sujetan a las reglas de alto modernismo o del “realismo periférico”. Lo curioso es que la lectura que propongo aquí no contradice en lo más mínimo la tesis de Warwick en torno a la existencia de “A single but radically uneven world-system; a singular modernity, combined and uneven; and a literature that variously registers this combined unevenness in both its form and its content to reveal itself as, properly speaking, world-literature” (2015: 49). El problema más bien es que su metodología de base (aunque no la de los estudios concretos de la segunda parte del libro que a veces se centran en el texto a expensas de la idea general) puede leer el sistema pero no la materialidad misma de los registros literarios del desarrollo desigual y combinado en contextos culturales específicos.

Sin profundizar más en este preámbulo, creo que queda claro hasta aquí que en las formas en que se alinea a la literatura latinoamericana a las tesis de las teorías de la literatura mundial, autores como Rulfo, de importancia regional tan central como García Márquez, son marginalizados, borrados y hasta expulsados de las geografías del mundo, a pesar de que ellos mismos han construido mapas enteros de su tradición cosmopolita. No es de extrañar, entonces, que la “Situación actual de la novela contemporánea” de Rulfo, al igual que sus influencias cosmopolitas, resulten peculiares ya no digamos para un lector contemporáneo, sino incluso para el canon que ya se manejaba en la época. Rulfo parte de la influencia de William Faulkner y John Steinbeck, para después dar centralidad a la novela italiana. Tras reconocer el carácter desigual de la obra de Alberto Moravia, cita figuras como Vasco Pratolini, Cesare Pavese y Carlos Casola (Rulfo 1996: 403s.). Su recuento francés no subraya a autores canónicos sino a Jean Giono, un autor cuyo olvido atribuye a salir de las normas de la academia francesa (1996: 404s.), pero cuyo pasatismo y regionalismo provenzal en realidad lo marginaliza tanto de la vanguardia como de la *nouveau roman*, a la que Rulfo considera simplemente “una antiexpresión y un

antídoto para caer en la nada” (1996: 405). Las identificaciones centrales a mi argumento están un poco más adelante, después de su recorrido por la literatura alemana y estadounidense. Ahí, afirma su admiración por la literatura nórdica: “es una literatura que siempre me ha interesado mucho, porque creo —es mi opinión— que toda la literatura europea nace en el Norte, en esos países brumosos, como Islandia, Noruega, Suecia y luego desciende y se extiende por Europa” (1996: 407). Esta literatura, de la que destaca al noruego Knut Hamsun y al islandés Halldor K. Laxness, tiene un rol central en la idea de literatura mundial de Rulfo, como discutiré en un momento. Antes de ello, conviene subrayar que Rulfo no identifica al realismo mágico necesariamente con América Latina (esto se pronuncia dos años antes de la publicación de *Cien años de soledad*), e identifica a la corriente con tendencias como la ciencia ficción al estilo de Ray Bradbury o el escritor yugoslavo Miodrag Bulatovich, al que considera “el máximo representante del realismo mágico en la literatura europea contemporánea” (1996: 408).

El recorrido completo de Rulfo es notable no solo por la considerable cantidad de autores desconocidos o poco leídos en la actualidad, sino porque varios de sus centros de gravedad (la Francia rural, la Italia de los sesenta, la cultura nórdica) son generalmente ignorados en recuentos generales de la literatura mundial. Sería realmente inusitado encontrar hoy en día un recuento de la literatura mundial que dé un lugar central a escritores como Dino Buzzati, Knut Hamsun o Miodrag Bulatovich, mientras que Jean Giono y John Steinbeck, pese a su pertenencia a sistemas nacionales hegemónicos, difícilmente son leídos más allá de sus claves regionalistas. Por supuesto, no todo el canon de Rulfo es sorprendente para un lector mexicano: *Hambre* y *Pan* de Hamsun han tenido amplia circulación en habla hispana y en México en particular son tan leídos que fueron editados juntos por la colección de clásicos Sepan Cuantos de Porrúa, de distribución masiva. Steinbeck pasó una cantidad considerable de tiempo en México y su trabajo tiene varios legados a nivel del campo literario y cinematográfico nacionales (Pineda Franco 2018). En realidad, lo que cabría decir de esto es que el recorrido de Rulfo tiene mucho sentido si se consideran dos cuestiones: la circulación de literatura mundial en el campo literario de su época y el tipo de preguntas que plantea no solo su propia literatura sino también contextos sociales como el chiapaneco. No es casual que los escritores indigenistas de Chiapas —como Castellanos, Ramón Rubín o Eraclio Zepeda— activos en la época de la conferencia estuvieran confrontando (como demuestran los estudios arriba citados de Beckman) el mismo problema de la modernidad rural que Rulfo. Curiosamente, todo este canon tiene relación directa con las ideas guía de la versión de la literatura mundial atada a la teoría del sistema-mundo, pero su lógica cultural y estética no tiene nada que ver con el alto modernismo sino con contextos rurales y provinciales a los que

se niega su participación en lo mundial más allá de atribuirles una cierta magia semiperiférica en la cual sus realismos (siempre rezagados de la tradición modernista) ejercen resistencias abstractas al poder. Rulfo, escritor del Bajío mexicano enunciando una literatura mundial en Chiapas, muestra que existen otros vectores de la literatura mundial que las narrativas unificantes no alcanzan a ver.

Quien sí vio estos vectores hace ya más de veinticinco años fue Rama, quien discutió este peculiar canon de Rulfo en *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*. Rama propone comparar los cosmopolitismos de Rulfo y de Juan José Arreola, ambos estrictos contemporáneos de la misma región y cuyo nacimiento literario se dio en espacios comunes como la revista *Pan*. Partiendo de una caracterización de Jean Meyer, quien contrasta los viajes al exterior de Arreola con la estancia en México de Rulfo, Rama identifica la “distinta recepción del mensaje modernizador de parte de ambos escritores, es decir, a las opciones que hacen dentro del amplio abanico de las literaturas extranjeras que les son propuestas por la modernidad, las que incluso pueden religarse a su peculiar situación de ascenso o descenso dentro de los grupo sociales en que han surgido” (Rama 1982: 106). Así, pues, mientras Arreola se interesa en autores similares al “parnaso de las preferencias borgianas” y “una confianza imprecavida en las proposiciones intelectuales de la modernización, cuya fundamentación pretendidamente universalista es asumida sin recelo”, Rulfo se “inclinará por la producción de la periferia europea de la zona nórdica” a la vez que “su inclinación por las letras norteamericanas se dirigirá a la periferia sureña representada por Faulkner en detrimento de la línea más urbanizada e industrializada neoyorkina” (1982: 106). Tras rastrear las muchas veces que Rulfo afirmó en ensayos y entrevistas sus afinidades nórdicas y de partes similares, Rama concluye recordando que estas literaturas primaban en los años veinte y treinta (varios autores de esta línea recibieron el Premio Nobel) aunque fueron borradas por la vanguardia. Según Rama, las literaturas periféricas que interesaban a Rulfo constituían

un realismo raigal, mayoritariamente construidas en torno a sucesos reales en ambientes reales conocidos de los autores y manejando rezagadamente la escritura de la escuela realista-naturalista francesa, pero impregnadas de un ímpetu lírico poderoso capaz de arrastrar situaciones y personajes y confundirlos con las desencadenadas fuerzas naturales en un solo movimiento rapsódico. (Rama 1982: 109s.)

En este punto Rama inicia su conocido estudio sobre la lengua regional y la oralidad y las formas en las que Rulfo opera en estos términos. Para mis propósitos, lo importante radica en subrayar algunas cuestiones de su recuento. La proverbial relación de Rulfo con la literatura nórdica, que ha sido discutida con amplitud en otros lugares (Martínez-Borresen 2006; Zerlang

2010), no es necesariamente una lectura de una literatura que Rulfo mismo descubrió, sino un diálogo con una tradición literaria predominante en las orillas europeas en los treinta, cuya relevancia y circulación han sido relegados en la crítica de la literatura mundial por el enfoque en el modernismo (tanto el global como el latinoamericano), la vanguardia y la globalización neoliberal como los motores de mundialización en Latinoamérica. Por supuesto, con esto no quiero decir en lo absoluto que dichos procesos no existen: Siskind da cuenta en *Cosmopolitan Desires* de la importancia que el “deseo de mundo” tiene en la relación bidireccional de América Latina con la modernidad global (Siskind 2014). No obstante, Rulfo pone sobre la mesa la existencia de formas literarias y tradiciones de la literatura mundial que la perspectiva modernista considera “rezagadas” (término que el propio Rama usa para caracterizar, incorrectamente a mi parecer, el realismo nórdico) pero que en realidad plantean la posibilidad de pensar el mundo y relacionarse con lo mundial sin estar guiados por el deseo de pertenencia (a ser parte del “banquete de la civilización” como caracterizaba Alfonso Reyes los deseos latinoamericanos de universalidad [1997: 90]) o la vocación cosmopolita. Más bien, la transculturación o la dialéctica de la modernización rural, términos que subrayan la especificidad de los procesos culturales latinoamericanos en relación con la hegemonía global del capital, tienen su fundamento en el engrazamiento de experiencias cosmopolitas (y cánones de literatura mundial) donde lo que importa no es la validación del centro cultural o la dinámica de reconocimiento de los escritores periféricos en el centro, sino la comprensión de la literatura como archivo ideológico, estético y sensorial de experiencias de modernidad y modernización que se vuelven legibles en contextos materiales y prácticas literarias concretas. Es importante señalar que estas prácticas literarias concretas no son siempre resistentes. Rulfo fue un escritor con lazos institucionales claros con el Estado mexicano: trabajó por mucho tiempo en el Instituto Nacional Indigenista en proyectos de modernización de ese PRI que según el colectivo Warwick era objeto de la crítica de Rulfo (Warwick 2015: 80; Rivera Garza 2017). Y aun si uno reconoce en la obra de Rulfo una brutal crítica a la devastación de las áreas rurales ante la modernización capitalista, esto no quiere decir que su obra no estuviera también problemática y contradictoriamente alineada a estructuras de capital simbólico del campo cultural mexicano, en el que participaba con más frecuencia de lo que se discute.

La preocupación central de Rama es, como sabemos, la especificidad de la literatura latinoamericana, y *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* es quizá el más logrado estudio del problema de la forma literaria latinoamericana en su original historicidad. Sin embargo, la (injusta) comparación de la lucidez

de Rama al leer a Rulfo con su superficial incorporación a la discusión del colectivo Warwick (que, por otra parte, tiene méritos indiscutibles respecto a su teoría de la literatura mundial, sobre todo en su crítica a ciertas herencias del poscolonialismo y de los modelos de Moretti y Casanova) habla no tanto de un problema en el proyecto de estos últimos, sino de una pregunta en torno a la literatura mundial que, pese a su aparente obviedad, no es ponderada de manera significativa en muchos trabajos sobre el concepto: ¿desde dónde se enuncia la literatura mundial? La respuesta a esta pregunta en los libros que han modelado la discusión sobre el tema básicamente naturalizan a las instituciones literarias y al mercado de los países centrales, sea a través de mistificaciones como el “Meridiano de Greenwich” de Casanova (2001) —que no es sino un eufemismo de una versión francocéntrica que otorga a París la enunciación de lo mundial— o alguna variante del mercado, como está implícito en el argumento de David Damrosch (2003) de que la literatura mundial es lo que circula mundialmente, como si esa circulación no se diera siempre con base a prácticas socioeconómicas del comercio literario. Variantes de este problema se encuentran en modelos de sistema-mundo como el de Moretti o el de Warwick que imaginan a la literatura mundial como un reflejo difusionista de las dinámicas del capital con cierta resistencia creativa de las zonas periféricas, dejando de lado el principio de autonomía relativa teorizado por Pierre Bourdieu (1995) para sustentar una falsa equivalencia entre la univocidad del sistema-mundo capitalista, y una supuesta superestructura literaria siempre da cuenta de su singularidad. Ciertamente Rulfo es un autor que ha circulado fuera de América Latina, y cuya obra puede plausiblemente ser leída como una instancia del desarrollo combinado y desigual, pero estos puntos pierden la riqueza de la literatura rulfiana *vis-à-vis* la literatura mundial: la cristalización en las zonas rurales de México, en los años cincuenta y sesenta, de un escritor que participaba de una literatura mundial concreta, una figura que quizá no habría tenido sentido en otros ámbitos, pero que en ese espacio logró escribir dos de las mayores obras de la literatura en habla hispana en diálogo con autores que estaban lejos del canon modernista-vanguardista de otras latitudes. Para decirlo de manera más abstracta, el ejemplo de Rulfo que he venido desarrollando hasta aquí, que responde la pregunta de la enunciación de la literatura mundial desde un espacio concreto, periférico a los centros culturales hegemónicos y fuertemente atravesado por historias socioculturales friccionadas y hasta contradictorias, pone en evidencia el punto ciego de las teorías más importantes: la forma en que la literatura mundial opera en la práctica, no como un constructo que va de lo general a lo particular o de olas de influencia del centro a la periferia, sino como una constelación de prácticas individuales, en situaciones sociohistóricas concretas.

Las relaciones de Rulfo con una peculiar tradición literaria occidental pueden ser descritas con el término “occidentalismo estratégico” que uso en mi libro más reciente para estudiar las relaciones de autores como Sergio Pitol, el grupo del Crack, Carmen Boullosa y Cristina Rivera Garza con las estructuras, cánones e instituciones de la literatura mundial (Sánchez Prado 2018). El ejercicio que propongo en el libro busca ensayar de manera más detallada una versión de las ideas que presento aquí respecto a la existencia de literaturas mundiales en plural, descritas desde su materialidad y enunciación. En el libro me interesan casos como la forma en que las traducciones que hace Sergio Pitol de la literatura del Este de Europa dialogan con la experiencia mexicana del fin del PRI y permiten crear un canon en habla hispana distinto al de la literatura mundial de la época, la manera en que el grupo del Crack se afilia a tradiciones idiosincráticas como la Ruritania de la literatura centroeuropea decimonónica o el archivo cultural de la melancolía para resistir la idea de escritor latinoamericano impuesta por el mercado global, o la forma en que escritoras mexicanas usan el cosmopolitismo para establecer una compleja dialéctica con el concepto de escritora producido desde formas ultracomerciales de la literatura. Aunque el libro se interesa en revisar fenómenos a contrapelo de la globalización y la consolidación corporativa de la literatura en la era neoliberal, la obra de Rulfo opera desde principios similares, concretamente el pensar alternativas a la naturalización de los proyectos modernistas y vanguardistas atados a la ampliación del sistema-mundo capitalista posterior a 1960. Tanto el ejemplo de Rulfo como los casos estudiados en mi libro indican la necesidad de un cambio metodológico en el estudio de la literatura mundial para estudiarla desde abajo, es decir desde la forma en que se practica y se enuncia en contextos concretos. Esto, creo, crearía una dialéctica productiva con los métodos predominantes que asumen axiomáticamente la univocidad del sistema-mundo y la modernidad y que, en consecuencia, asumen cierta unidimensionalidad de la literatura mundial. Curiosamente, la fortaleza del libro del colectivo Warwick no radica en sus postulados generales, sino en sus análisis concretos, sus excelentes capítulos sobre autores como Halldor Laxness o Victor Pelevin, basados en sólidas lecturas a ras de texto y discusiones sobre el problema de distintas formas literarias. Desafortunadamente, ante la metodología jamesonian que pone énfasis en la forma como historicidad, Warwick deja de lado las discusiones sobre la institución literatura y las genealogías de lectura de sus autores estudiados, lo cual hubiera permitido, quizá un modelo general más rico y menos simplificador.

Algunas líneas de estudio de la literatura mundial comienzan a ir en esta dirección, desafiando tanto el determinismo de los modelos de sistema-mundo como la reciente tendencia de corte heideggeriano (manifestada en libros como Cheah 2016 o Ganguly 2016) que opone al mundo del sistema-mundo una idea

de mundo habitado que presume un carácter utópico de la forma literaria, pero desatiende las condiciones materiales de producción y circulación. Sin embargo, el trabajo de autores como Sarah Brouillette, en particular, pone de manifiesto que el reconocimiento de las condiciones materiales de producción del libro no anula el problema de la subsunción de la cultura al capitalismo ni la cuestión de la autonomía relativa, y que es perfectamente posible tener una versión de la literatura mundial donde se engarce la idea del sistema-mundo con el estudio de la materialidad de los campos literarios. El libro del colectivo Warwick, sin duda, se beneficiaría de esto, en parte porque su axiomática afirmación de “a *single world-literary system, rather than for world-literary systems*” (2015: 8) requeriría ser revisión. El colectivo Warwick se distancia de Bourdieu y de Casanova (cuya representación de las posibilidades de Bourdieu en el estudio de la literatura mundial es problemática, por decir lo menos), aun reconociendo el trabajo de autores más recientes como Brouillette o Anna Boschetti, que han mostrado la importancia de atender los espacios materiales de producción cultural. Tan solo el ejemplo de los estudios de Brouillette (2014; 2015) sobre el rol de la UNESCO en la formación de circuitos de la literatura mundial relacionados con fenómenos y espacios como el movimiento de países no alineados y el bloque socialista, creando formas de pensar el libro en espacios periféricos que han sido borrados por la teoría poscolonial y las teorías de literatura mundial. El canon de Rulfo de 1965, sin duda, tenía ecos del internacionalismo construido a partir de la Revolución Cubana, la UNESCO, la CEPAL y otras formas de la política de los tres mundos de la época. Incluso, en “Situación actual” Rulfo afirma que “El Tercer Mundo no es una tercera fuerza militar, simplemente es un tercer mundo de ideas, de ideas que no pueden ser contenidas” (1996: 402). Este Tercer Mundo era representado por una lista de escritores latinoamericanos como Arturo Uslar Pietri, José María Arguedas, Benjamín Carrión y Rosario Castellanos. Además, Rulfo da la charla días después de su participación en el Congreso Latinoamericano de Génova, donde se crea una “Comunidad Latinoamericana de Escritores”, con sede en México, bajo los auspicios las jornadas “Tercer Mundo y Comunidad Mundial” de la UNESCO (1996: 401). En estos momentos es que emergen sistemas (en plural) de la literatura mundial que solo pueden estudiarse desde la materialidad y la praxis, y que desaparecen bajo la luz de la metodología difusionista o las tesis de la modernidad singular.

A manera de conclusión, quisiera simplemente afirmar la idea de que el estudio de la literatura mundial es por fuerza colectivo y que parte del problema que ha plagado al término desde su reactivación en la obra de Moretti y otros es la ambición de totalizar el sistema-mundo de la literatura a través de afirmar la singularidad de la modernidad y, por tanto, del modernismo como su

manifestación estética. Esto no quiere decir que sea necesario. Franco Moretti intuye este problema en su concepto de “lectura distante” (2013) pero, al señalar que el trabajo del crítico de literatura mundial es delegar las realidades nacionales a los especialistas, invisibiliza el acceso desigual de los académicos de espacios periféricos a la publicación en lenguas dominantes como el inglés, así como al capital simbólico en general. Esta es la razón por la que el colectivo Warwick descansa su interpretación de América Latina en autores como Phillip Swanson, quien adquiere visibilidad gracias a su distinguida carrera en la Gran Bretaña (desde donde escribe el colectivo Warwick también) y cuya obra es indiscutiblemente importante pero no necesariamente paradigmática en el contexto general de los estudios literarios latinoamericanos, o Roberto Schwarz, cuya obra ha sido promovida desde hace tiempo por la editorial Verso y la revista *New Left Review*. Sin embargo, se siente la ausencia de la obra de autores como Rama, muchísimo más importante en los estudios latinoamericanos, pero cuya publicación al inglés sucedió treinta años después del original. Asimismo, si existe una literatura-mundial central, identificada como argumenta el colectivo Warwick con el sistema-mundo, esta no es ni un agregado de literaturas nacionales, mucho menos de modernismos regionales y realismos periféricos que contestan a desafíos que llegan al centro, sino procesos dialécticos y transculturadores de gran complejidad que producen literaturas mundiales individuales, regionales y nacionales en función a las redes socioculturales en las que están inscritos. El método bourdieusiano, que implica un recuento material de los campos literarios realmente existentes, es un complemento útil al método wallersteniano/jamesoniano del sistema-mundo y la modernidad singular porque permite entender como los procesos que intervienen de afuera hacia adentro y de arriba hacia abajo en los espacios culturales operan en fricción con las fuerzas que provienen desde abajo y desde adentro. Anna Boschetti describe así el valor de la teoría de los campos:

Changes in literature (status, way of functioning, canons) are intimately connected with transformations of the galaxy of various printed works, audiovisual media, more or less disciplinized forms of knowledge, education. The interactions between these sectors are not anarchic, they are structured by power relations. The impact each produces also depends on the materials and technologies they employ. (Boschetti 2012: 18)

Esta idea se ve de manera clara en la literatura mundial descrita por Rulfo en “Situación actual de la novela contemporánea”. La enunciación de esa literatura mundial está rodeada por la reformulación de las ideas del escritor latinoamericano y del Tercer Mundo en los sesenta, la circulación de ciertos cánones de clásicos en edición impresa, cambios en las instituciones educativas (espacios como el ICACH), todos los cuales reflejan lógicas de poder cultural social

y económico y prácticas materiales que hacen el canon de Rulfo inimaginable en otras circunstancias. Incluso, el análisis de Rama demuestra que Rulfo se distingue de Arreola, un escritor cuya carrera comienza prácticamente en los mismos términos, por la diferencia en posiciones sociales, y un análisis sociológico como el descrito por Boschetti mostraría, por ejemplo, la importancia de instituciones democratizadoras de las humanidades en espacios como Chiapas, un lugar de importancia simbólica para Rulfo (quien reconoce por ejemplo sus “joyas ancestrales” [1996: 401]), pero no para Arreola. Esta literatura mundial es distinta a la producida por Sergio Pitol, cuyo acceso a las literaturas del Este de Europa se dio en una combinación entre las instituciones del servicio diplomático y aperturas democráticas y culturales como la Primavera de Praga o el movimiento estudiantil mexicano del 68 (Sánchez Prado 2018: 25–76), o por Carlos Fuentes, cuyo canon de la novela contemporánea a inicios de los noventa (Juan Goytisolo, Milan Kundera, György Konrad, Julian Barnes, Artur Lundkvist, Italo Calvino, Salman Rushdie) está informado tanto de relaciones personales dentro del campo literario como de una noción particular de la relación entre la novela y lo político ejercida por estos autores (Fuentes 1993). Y existe asimismo un canon de literatura mundial en proyectos como la serie Sepan Cuantos, que ha publicado casi ochocientos títulos de todo el orbe en ediciones rústicas de bajo costo que siguen siendo a la fecha asequibles y de amplia distribución. La curaduría de esa serie de Porrúa, junto con las traducciones de las universidades y de editoriales contemporáneas que apuestan a la traducción, como Almadía o Sexto Piso, tienen más impacto en la praxis de la literatura mundial mexicana que cualquier fenómeno exógeno del sistema-mundo. El reconocimiento de estas materialidades nos daría una visión colectiva, móvil y necesariamente incompleta de la literatura mundial que, sin embargo, sería más rica que los intentos de sistematización que hemos visto hasta ahora.

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Anna M. Brígido-Corachán y César Domínguez

Los mundos subalternos de la literatura mundial: hacia una comparación de las literaturas indígenas en Abya Yala/ las Américas

La distancia entre el campo de la literatura mundial y las literaturas de los pueblos nativos de Abya Yala/las Américas es tan vasta como sorprendente.¹ A pesar de que los trabajos que abordan la indigeneidad desde una perspectiva comparatista y/o global están convirtiéndose en un área de interés crítico creciente (especialmente desde la aprobación de la Declaración de las Naciones Unidas sobre los derechos de los pueblos indígenas en 2007), estos trabajos suelen ser llevados a cabo desde campos como la antropología, la historia, la política, la geografía o los estudios medioambientales, pero rara vez desde la literatura mundial. Una consulta cruzada de los lemas temáticos *indigenous literatures* y *world literature* en la MLA International Bibliography arroja tan solo dos resultados, de los que únicamente es pertinente el estudio debido a Elvira Pulitano sobre la enseñanza de las literaturas indígenas de Australia, Nueva Zelanda y América del Norte. Su utilidad, sin embargo, se ve seriamente limitada cuando se constata que Pulitano no discute los asuntos seleccionados (calidad artística, traducción y transliteración, desafío epistemológico planteado a los lectores occidentales) en conexión explícita con el marco de la literatura mundial.

Si esto acontece en una obra colectiva destinada a “personas ocupadas en pensar de nuevo sobre cómo enseñar literatura mundial en contextos y circunstancias muy diversos” (Damrosch 2009a: 3),² la situación no es más alentadora cuando el foco se sitúa sobre herramientas específicamente concebidas para el estudio de las literaturas nativas. Así, en el reciente *Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literatures* se incluye una única referencia a la literatura

¹ “Abya Yala” (“tierra en plena madurez”), autotopónimo dulegaya para América, es ampliamente aceptado en la actualidad por numerosos pueblos indígenas frente a “América” o “Nuevo Mundo” como parte de una lucha más amplia por sus derechos. Un segundo autotopónimo, utilizado especialmente en América del Norte, es el de Isla Tortuga o Turtle Island.

² A menos que se indique lo contrario, todas las traducciones de fuentes críticas son nuestras.

mundial, reducida a la nada esclarecedora afirmación según la cual “los poetas indígenas [...] interactúan de forma amplia, diversa y estratégica con y como parte de las literaturas mundiales” (Mayer 2014: 245).

A la hora de aquilatar las relaciones entre las literaturas nativas de Abya Yala/ las Américas y la literatura mundial, cuestión que ha sido claramente desatendida hasta el momento, una vía expeditiva la proporcionan las antologías de literatura mundial. Se trata en concreto de tres antologías que, con este objeto antológico específico (*world literature*), se publicaron entre 2002 y 2003 como resultado del interés por los estudios de literatura mundial en la academia estadounidense, en especial en su vertiente pedagógica. Significativamente, las tres editoriales responsables —Bedford (Davis et al. 2003), Longman (Damrosch/Pike 2008 [2003]) y Norton (Lawall et al. 2002)— no cuentan en sus respectivos catálogos con antologías exclusivamente dedicadas a las literaturas nativas, a diferencia de lo que acontece con otras literaturas. Estas tres antologías construyen un mismo paisaje literario mundial para las literaturas de los pueblos nativos al coincidir en la inclusión de un representante textual de la inmediata postconquista: *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* (Bedford), *Cantares mexicanos* (Longman) y *Popol Vuh* (Norton). En los tres casos, además, hay una fuerte mediación europea en el proceso de recopilación, transcripción y conservación de las fuentes nativas (el franciscano Bernardino de Sahagún para la *Historia general* y los *Cantares*, y el dominico Francisco Ximénez para el *Popol Vuh*). Al situar en la línea cronológica un único ejemplo nativo con ocasión de la conquista de Abya Yala, resulta evidente que las tres antologías subscriben (implícitamente) y abundan en aquello que Christopher B. Teuton ha llamado “historia literaria teleológica” (*teleological literary history*) (2014: 172). Las literaturas nativas se presentan así como una expresión propia del pasado frente a la modernidad grafocentrada de la literatura mundial, a la que las lenguas nativas no habrían contribuido tras su canto de cisne durante la segunda mitad del siglo XVI.

Cualquier diálogo crítico con este paisaje literario exige aclarar qué concepción de literatura mundial se está manejando. Mientras que las antologías Bedford y Norton no están acompañadas de un aparato teórico fuerte que delimite el objeto antológico, este no es el caso (en principio) de la antología Longman, publicada en 2003, ya que David Damrosch, uno de sus editores generales, publicó ese mismo año *What Is World Literature?*. El objetivo de este libro es precisamente demostrar que la “literatura mundial no es un canon infinito e inasible de obras, sino un modo de circulación y un modo de lectura que se puede aplicar tanto a obras concretas como a conjuntos de obras, y está disponible para leer tanto clásicos establecidos como nuevos descubrimientos” (Damrosch 2003: 5). Damrosch, además, analiza en su libro de 2003 los poemas de los *Cantares mexicanos* incluidos en la antología Longman, por lo que parece

lógico inferir que la delimitación de la literatura mundial realizada en el monográfico de horizonte más teórico informa (en alguna medida) la selección antológica.

En *What Is World Literature?*, Damrosch sitúa la circulación como factor *sine qua non* de la literatura mundial. Todas las obras que circulan más allá de su contexto original presentan uno o más de los siguientes tres rasgos: 1) refracción elíptica de la literatura nacional, 2) ganancia en traducción y 3) modo de lectura que consiste en un compromiso distante con mundos más allá de nuestro lugar y tiempo (Damrosch 2003: 4s. y 281; véase Domínguez 2018: 120–121). La inclusión de los *Cantares mexicanos* en la primera sección del libro, dedicada de forma exclusiva a la circulación, viene a subrayar que estas obras debidas a poetas mexicas entre 1550 y 1580 responden de forma fehaciente a este criterio por excelencia de mundialidad. Pese a la importancia de esta cuestión, la circulación de los *Cantares mexicanos* no es objeto de discusión, lo que resulta profundamente sorprendente toda vez que el manuscrito de los *Cantares* (ms. México, Biblioteca Nacional, 1628 bis) no se redescubrió hasta la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. Además, no fue hasta las décadas de 1930 y 1940 cuando se publicaron los trabajos a cargo de Ángel María Garibay Kintana que contribuyeron al conocimiento de esta antigua poesía nahua (León-Portilla 2011: 173, 187), siempre dentro de los estrechos límites de un público académico.

A diferencia de lo que sucede en las tres antologías, en *What Is World Literature?* se discute también una obra contemporánea que, con todas las precauciones debidas, puede ser calificada de “nativa”. Se trata de *Moi, Ribogerta Menchú*. A la publicación en 1983 en “traducción” francesa siguió un año más tarde el “original” en castellano bajo el título de *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* y, poco tiempo después, su traducción a once lenguas (según el Index Translationum), que la convirtieron en un *best seller* internacional bajo la autoría de Elisabeth Burgos. Damrosch apoya en estos datos la circulación de la obra en la que intervino Menchú, a quien en 1992 se le concedió el Premio Nobel de la Paz, “el primer *escritor indígena* al que se le tributó este honor”, en palabras de Damrosch (2003: 231; el énfasis es nuestro), “y el segundo guatemalteco en recibir el Premio Nobel, habiendo sido el primero el novelista Miguel Ángel Asturias en 1967”. La discusión de la obra de Menchú/Burgos en clave mundial, sin embargo, no modifica sustancialmente el paisaje que para las literaturas nativas proporcionan las antologías Bedford, Longman y Norton. En uno u otro caso es notorio el papel desempeñado por la transcripción y autoría a cargo de una “autoridad” occidental, que sitúan los textos nativos, en virtud de la organización eurocentrada del saber académico, en el campo de la etnografía más que en el de la literatura.

Ciertamente, el recurso a otras concepciones de literatura mundial podría contribuir a cuestionar seriamente el lugar reservado a las literaturas nativas por la academia estadounidense mediante sus modelos dominantes de literatura mundial que Bedford/Longman/Norton o Damrosch/Longman representan. Esta vía no será objeto de exploración aquí, ya que exige un tipo de investigación que excede con mucho los límites del presente trabajo. En todo caso, no se descarta su proseguimiento en un futuro próximo. Aquello sobre lo que queremos llamar la atención, sin embargo, es el hecho de que tanto los artistas nativos como la academia del Sur no han adoptado una noción de la episteme noratlántica como literatura mundial “de boca para afuera, con gesto reverencial o plagiarlo”, en palabras de Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018: 29). De las distintas razones que pueden explicar esta situación, sin duda la más relevante es que, como algunos han advertido desde la propia academia del Norte, la concepción eurocentrada de literatura mundial mantiene una relación conflictiva con la oralidad, que desempeña, precisamente, un papel central para las literaturas nativas. Caroline Levine, una de las editoras de la antología Norton, ha señalado, por ejemplo, que la “literatura mundial ha adoptado su forma actual de tres instituciones basadas en la imprenta: los movimientos de alfabetización masiva de finales del siglo XIX, la industria editorial y la universidad, las cuales han valorado la escritura a expensas de una atención significativa a la oralidad” (2013: 217). Ante esta situación, Levine propone que los investigadores en literatura mundial “abandonen una dependencia irreflexiva de lo literario y una concepción evolutiva de la alfabetización que va desde las culturas orales primitivas y estáticas a culturas modernas, progresistas, democráticas y críticas” (2013: 234).

El paisaje varía, sin embargo, si aquello que se consulta son antologías de literatura latinoamericana y estadounidense, en las que es más habitual incluir testimonios en lenguas nativas. En todo caso, sigue sin respuesta el interrogante de por qué las literaturas nativas no superan el límite nacional/ (latino)americano y permanecen ausentes del campo mundial. Articulado en torno a ideas ya clásicas dentro del campo de las literaturas nativas (procesos y conceptos como tradición oral, oralitura, resistencia y revitalización lingüística), así como de otros conceptos que pueden resultar más novedosos como los “estudios literarios trans-indígenas” (*trans-indigenous literary studies*), de Chadwick Allen, el presente trabajo propone abordar este necesario encuentro entre las literaturas nativas y la literatura mundial.

Basándonos en la definición de Allen, entendemos la trans-indigeneidad como un enfoque que privilegia la práctica lectora a modo de acción que transita *a lo largo de, a través de y más allá de* textos y contextos indígenas interpretados generalmente desde su idiosincrasia tribal y nacional, sin menoscabar o excluir de ningún modo sino, más bien, complementando los estudios que

analizan las literaturas indígenas desde esta necesaria perspectiva idiosincrática (tribal, étnica o nacional) específica (Allen 2012; 2014: 378).³ Nuestra intención al aplicar la trans-indigeneidad como enfoque alternativo en los estudios de literatura mundial es, además, “desnaturalizar el estado-nación colonizador como territorio supuesto [...] y horizonte implícito” que ha de ser aplicado *de facto* en el campo de las literaturas nativo-americanas o indígenas (Allen 2014: 378), al mismo tiempo que contribuimos precisamente a la “construcción de decolonialidad” (Arias 2013: 155) en los estudios literarios contemporáneos.

Como existen actualmente más de 600 lenguas indígenas en Abya Yala/las Américas, cantidad y complejidad que no pueden ser abarcadas por este breve trabajo, limitaremos nuestro análisis a dos estudios de caso, los del “poeta” yanakuna mitmak Fredy Chikangana/Wiñay Mallki y el novelista zapoteco Javier Castellanos. A caballo entre dos lenguas (quichua/castellano y zapoteca/castellano respectivamente), estos autores, que auto-traducen o, más bien, componen dos versiones de sus propias obras en lenguas tradicionalmente en conflicto, complican así el “problema de la traducción” (Barisone 2013), un dilema clásico en los estudios de literatura comparada y mundial. La traducción y la auto-traducción han sido instrumentales a la hora de preservar una gran parte de los textos pre-coloniales y de situar la escritura indígena en los circuitos literarios internacionales. Por otro lado, la existencia de una doble versión de los textos nos invita a realizar una “lectura bivalente”, ya que son muchos

3 La definición original de “estudios literarios trans-indígenas” esbozada por Chadwick Allen (2014: 378) es la siguiente: “un amplio conjunto de prácticas emergentes diseñado explícitamente para privilegiar una lectura *a lo largo de, a través de y más allá de* textos y contextos indígenas específicos”. En *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*, Allen introduce la siguiente aclaración: “De forma similar a términos como traducción [translation en el original], transnacional y transformar, trans-indígena puede transmitir la asimetría contingente y compleja y los riesgos potenciales de encuentros desiguales soportados por la locución preposicional *a través de* [across en el original]. Puede indicar la agencia específica y el impulso situado que transmite la locución *de un lado a otro* [through en el original]” (2012: xiv). Por otro lado, cabe destacar que la idea de trans-indigeneidad como enfoque que traslada el contexto indígena desde lo nacional a lo planetario tampoco es nueva; ya fue identificada por el crítico Arnold Krupat (2002) con el término “perspectiva indigenista” (*indigenist perspective*), aunque ha sido arrinconada por los estudios de corte soberanista estos últimos años. Por otro lado, el indigenismo que señala Krupat no debe ser confundido con la literatura de corte *indigenista* (escritores criollos o metropolitanos abordando la cuestión indígena durante los siglos XIX y XX en Latinoamérica). Lo que diferencia el indigenismo de Krupat del nuevo trans-indigenismo de Allen es que para el segundo la práctica o actividad *comparativa* (literaturas indígenas comparadas) resulta esencial.

los escritores indígenas que escriben sus textos en lenguas originarias (especialmente en Latinoamérica, aunque también podemos encontrar algunos casos en Estados Unidos y Canadá), así como en lenguas imperiales que han sido y siguen siendo centrales en los campos de la literatura comparada y la literatura mundial: inglés y castellano.⁴ A través de este estudio introductorio esperamos pues cuestionar y analizar esta jerarquía lingüística colonialista, así como tender puentes entre ambos campos, el de las literaturas indígenas de Abya Yala/las Américas y la literatura mundial.

Otra literatura mundial es posible: la oralitura

El 17 de agosto de 1997 el poeta yanakuna mitmak Fredy Chikangana/Wiñay Mallki publicó en el magacín dominical del periódico bogotano *El espectador* un artículo titulado “La oralitura”.⁵ Dicho artículo se presenta como resultado de la experiencia de haber participado en el Taller de Escritores en Lenguas Indígenas, que se celebró en abril de ese mismo año en Temuco, Purén y Pucón (Región de La Araucanía, Chile) bajo la dirección del escritor y activista mapuche Elicura Chihuailaf. Dicho Taller fue singularizado con el término “oralitura” por los medios de comunicación, que Chikangana/Mallki (Campo Chicangana 1997: 10) define inicialmente como “el gran encuentro con la palabra y los cantos de los pueblos ancestrales de América”. El artículo, en el que Chikangana/Mallki incluye sendos poemas de los mapuches Graciela Huinao, el propio Chihuailaf y Lionel Lienlaf, el quichua Ariruma Kowii, el nahua Natalio Hernández y él mismo, anuncia la oralitura como un movimiento hemisférico en tanto que “la situación de nuestros pueblos indígenas es similar en América, por eso nuestros cantos, cuando nombran diversas cosmovisiones se hallan hermanados en sus sonidos, espiritualidad y esperanza” (Campo Chicangana 1997: 11).

La genealogía y el significado del concepto “oralitura” son ciertamente confusos, incluso los más inmediatos. Así, el propio Chihuailaf, en una entrevista

4 Proponemos la idea de “lectura bivalente” modificando sustancialmente, a su vez, la propuesta de Damrosch (1991: 108) acerca de la lectura bivalente de poemas del mundo azteca precolombino “como si fueran productos tanto de 1450–1520 y de 1521–1570”, pues nuestra lectura bivalente atiende la dimensión bilingüe y bicultural del corpus de estudio aquí presentado.

5 Nacido Fredy Romeiro Campo Chicangana, posteriormente se dará a conocer como Fredy Chikangana y, de forma paralela a la profundización en su identidad quichua, como Wiñay Mallki, literalmente “raíz que permanece en el tiempo”. Las entradas bibliográficas se recogen de acuerdo con el nombre empleado en las respectivas publicaciones.

concedida a Viviana del Campo en el año 2000, afirma que este concepto “no está en todo caso en el diccionario convencional, [...] últimamente yo vi en México que también se habla de *oralitura*, [...] incluso me mostraron un estudio a raíz del planteamiento que yo hacía; un estudio que estaba por ser publicado, de un autor argentino que también abordaba la oralitura o algo parecido” (Campo 2000: 51). Aunque Chihuailaf sostiene que “el taller que hicimos en México” tuvo lugar “hace un par de años atrás” (Campo 2000: 51), se trata en realidad del Encuentro de Escritores Indígenas que tuvo lugar en Tlaxcala en 1995. En dicho contexto y en conversación con Jorge Cocom Pech, Chihuailaf comentó: “había llegado a la transitoria conclusión de que yo era un ‘oralitor’, porque me parecía que mi escritura transcurría al lado de la oralidad de mi gente, de mis mayores [...]. En definitiva, concordamos que era necesario continuar en el intercambio de ideas en torno a la Oralitura para ir acotando su reflexión” (Chihuailaf 2007 [2001]: 12s.).⁶ El ya mencionado Taller de La Araucanía fue el escenario de ese siguiente intercambio de ideas, que tanta influencia tuvo en Chikangana/Mallki.

La propuesta del concepto “oralitura” por parte de Chihuailaf parece haberse realizado no solo de forma independiente con respecto al “autor argentino” aludido, sino también en relación con el investigador senegalés Yoro Fall. Significativamente, Chikangana/Mallki, a través de la intermediación de Nina S. de Friedemann, reúne a Chihuailaf y Fall en un trabajo reciente de corte más académico.⁷ Fall dictó en enero de 1990 en El Colegio de México una conferencia que, en su versión revisada e impresa, se titula “Historiografía, sociedades y conciencia histórica en África”. En este trabajo, Fall indica que “[l]a palabra

⁶ Para Jorge Cocom Pech, la oralitura nos remite a “las formas estéticas de nuestra literatura oral, pues, aunque no estén traspuestas a la escritura, reflejan la belleza en sus indistintas formas de expresión; además, esa estética no sólo se halla en el qué, sino está inmersa en la hondura filosófica manifiesta en la narrativa, la poesía, el conjuro o en los cantos tradicionales” (comunicación personal 31/08/2018).

⁷ “En América y particularmente en el mundo indígena el término *Oralitura* es nuevo, el primer escritor indígena en retomarlo fue el poeta mapuche Elicura Chihuailaf [...]. Pero dicha expresión no es reciente cuando hablamos de otras culturas, algunos autores atribuyen el término a un neologismo africano y a un calco de la palabra literatura (Yoro Fall 1992 [...])” (Chikangana/Mallki 2014: 76s.). En el caso de Friedemann (1997a), el uso del concepto de “oralitura” a través de la formulación de Fall se debe a su participación en el proyecto “Atlántico Sur: Hombres, productos, ideas y técnicas, intercambios entre América Latina y África”, coordinado por Fall desde la Universidad Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar y Celma Agüero Dona, traductora de la conferencia mexicana de Fall, desde El Colegio de México (véase Friedemann 1997b). Según el escritor y crítico keniano Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, el término *orature* fue acuñado por el lingüista ugandés Pio Zirimu en los años 60 (1998: 105).

‘oralitura’ [...] es evidentemente un neologismo africano y, al mismo tiempo, un calco de la palabra literatura”. Con este neologismo se persigue “oponerse al [concepto] de literatura, y que tenga los fundamentos y la forma específica de la comunicación”. Y añade: “la oralitura, que es una estética al igual que la literatura, tiene mayor riqueza que ésta” (Fall 1991: 21).

Aunque Fall no llegó a desarrollar teóricamente el concepto de oralitura, ello no ha impedido que se haya convertido en el principal referente a la hora de presentarlo. Tanto es así que la propuesta de Fall sobre la oralitura como “neologismo africano” se ha impuesto sobre una trayectoria conceptual previa que conduce hasta el Haití de las décadas de 1970 y 1980, cuando el escritor y etnopsiquiatra Ernst Mirville hizo uso del concepto *oraliture* en un artículo y una entrevista publicados en *Le Nouvelliste* (mayo de 1974 y julio de 1984, respectivamente), así como en el epílogo a *Pwezigram*, de Jean Mapou, con el objeto de solucionar la contradicción inherente al concepto “literatura oral” (Laroche 1991: 19). Es más, la “oralitura” de Fall bien podría ser una opción traductológica debida a su traductora Celma Agüero Dona, ya que, debe recordarse, la publicación de Fall por El Colegio de México tiene como base un texto inédito en francés. De hecho, en la traducción al castellano, junto a la primera aparición del término “oralitura” se dice entre paréntesis “*orature* en francés” (Fall 1991: 21).

Sea *ora(li)ture* un neologismo africano/haitiano o no, lo cierto es que el concepto “oralitura” en cuanto producto del diálogo teórico Sur-Sur (Haití-África-América Latina) nombra un movimiento hemisférico promovido por artistas (los oralitores) y académicos del Sur con apoyo institucional. Construido por oposición a “literatura”, la oralitura toma distancia también de otros conceptos como “oralidad”, “tradición oral” y “literatura oral”. En sus definiciones, no siempre coincidentes, sino muchas veces contradictorias, se aprecia que el fin último es apelar a la dimensión estética de las expresiones verbales orales en pie de igualdad con las escritas. Entre sus presentadores nativos, Chihuailaf (2007 [2001]: 13) subraya que “[l]a Oralitura, desde luego, no implica negación de la validez de la escritura, ni pretende el reemplazo del canto de nuestra gente en nuestras comunidades”. Chikangana/Mallki (2014: 75), por su parte, destaca que “en la escritura indígena hay una propuesta de puente con la sociedad en general”. Con independencia de las deudas (reales o no) con el concepto de “oralitura”/*orature* por parte de Fall, la novedad en el viaje conceptual (en el sentido de los *travelling concepts* de Mieke Bal [2002]) Sur-Sur de “oralitura” reside en su reformulación como hibridación entre lo oral y lo escrito con fines estéticos, políticos y culturales.⁸

⁸ En este sentido, recomendamos consultar la teorización del término *orature* popularizada por el escritor keniano Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, para el que tanto la “oratura” como la literatura

Volvamos ahora sobre la presencia de las literaturas nativas en los modelos noratlánticos dominantes de literatura mundial. Frente a la inclusión de testimonios orales de la inmediata postconquista, rescatados de la extinción provocada por los modernos códigos del imperio grafocéntrico gracias a una autoridad occidental que da voz al Otro en lengua nativa y traducción a la lengua imperial como se mostró en la Introducción, la oralitura se presenta como un “aporte a la construcción de una sociedad multicultural y multilingüe” (Chikangana/Mallki 2014: 75) en el que es el yo marginado quien toma la voz para decirse a sí mismo mediante la combinación de la oralidad aún viva de la comunidad nativa y la literatura *otra* en una búsqueda de la memoria y la lengua.

Un ejemplo oraliterario: “Takina”/“Poema”, de Chikangana/Mallki

El poema titulado “Takina”/“Poema” pertenece al segundo poemario de Chikangana/Mallki, *Samay piscok pponccopi muschcoypa/Espíritu de pájaro en pozos del ensueño*, de 2010. A diferencia de su primer poemario (*Kentipay llattantutamanta/El colibrí de la noche desnuda*), que fue publicado en 2008 en una tirada muy limitada (100 ejemplares) por la editorial bogotana Catapulta, el segundo forma parte de la colección “Biblioteca Básica de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia”, una iniciativa del Ministerio de Cultura colombiano con la que se pretende visibilizar el legado y los valores de las obras de los pueblos nativos, así como su amplia circulación mediante su descarga gratuita en línea. *Samay piscok/Espíritu de pájaro* cuenta además con otro soporte desde 2014, *Voces originarias de Abya Yala*, en el que el poemario de Chikangana/Mallki se sitúa entre los de Vito Apüshana (*En las hondonadas maternas de la piel/Shiinalu'uirua shiirua ataa*) y Hugo Jamioy (*Danzantes del viento/Bínýbe oboyejuayëng*). Esta compilación contó con el apoyo de la Embajada de Noruega en Colombia y la Fundación Sol y Serpiente. “Takina”/“Poema”, además, ha sido incluido en la antología editada por Miguel Rocha Vivas *Pütchi Biyá Uai. Antología multilingüe de la literatura indígena contemporánea en Colombia*, también de descarga gratuita en línea desde su segunda edición.

funcionan como repositorios transmisores del “conjunto de valores a través de los cuales nos percibimos a nosotros mismos y nuestro lugar en el mundo” (2007: 16).

Takina

kaytashuk
 siranashuk
 makishuk
 huarmishuk
 takinashuk
 ucjuqan
 waira paypi
 inti uraypay

Poema

un hilo
 una aguja
 una mano
 una mujer
 una rosa
 una poema
 en el viento
 bajo el sol
 tu cuerpo

(Mallki/Chikangana 2010: 60–61)

En sus dos poemarios, Chikangana/Mallki ofrece cada *takina* primero en ruma simi (autoglotónimo para el quichua) y, a continuación, en castellano, lo que podría recordar el ejercicio etnográfico de transliteración en alfabeto latino y traducción al castellano. El ejercicio oralitor de Chikangana/Mallki se inicia, sin embargo, en castellano, como lo testimonia la composición monolingüe “En verbo ajeno”, en la que la lengua de la colonización y evangelización se presenta como “verbo ajeno” pues “Sobre mi gente hablo / y no soy yo / escribo y no soy yo” (en Rocha Vivas 2016 [2010]: s.p.).⁹ En este sentido, es la versión en ruma simi la “(auto)traducción”, tanto para el propio oralitor, quien aprendió “el quechua como lengua literaria en los Andes centrales” (Rocha Vivas 2018: 5), como para su propia comunidad indígena, en la que el castellano es la lengua dominante. El “viaje a la memoria” a través de la oralitura que Chikangana/Mallki plantea en su poética de 2014 comprende “la vida de las lenguas indígenas y desde luego un sistema de pensamiento que se fundamenta en las comunidades nativas” (Chikangana/Mallki 2014: 77s.).

Si mediante la oralitura la comunidad indígena re-aprende su lengua, la comunidad *otra*, que ha venido ocupando la posición hegemónica, se convierte en *analfabeta* y, por tanto, también en un colectivo que debe re-aprender. ¿Qué puede hacer un lector eurocéntricamente alfabetizado ante un poema como “Takina”/“Poema”? Con seguridad, habrá una inclinación por un sentido de lectura izquierda-derecha que transcribe el texto al modo grafo-centrado occidental.

Pero también hay otros sentidos posibles de lectura que el modelo dominante borra, como los que se detallan a continuación (véanse Figuras 1–4).

⁹ Si bien “En verbo ajeno” aparece recogido en la antología publicada por Juan Carlos Gamboa Martínez y Gregorio Moradas Larín en 2000, su composición data de 1992 (nótese su significado en el marco del Quinto Centenario), según indica Rocha Vivas (2018: 7).

Poema

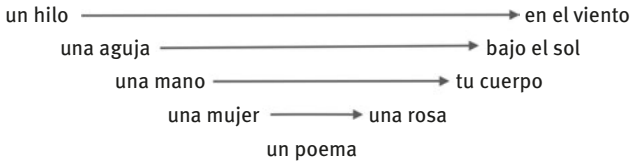


Figura 1: Trazado de lectura de izquierda a derecha.

Poema

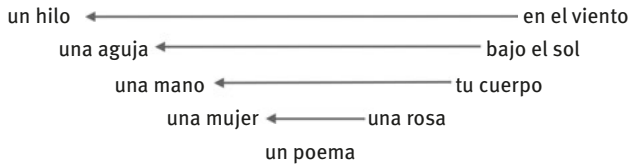


Figura 2: Trazado de lectura de derecha a izquierda.

Poema

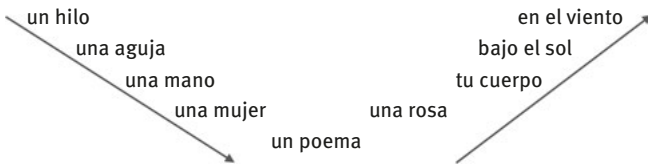


Figura 3: Trazado de lectura de izquierda-descendente a derecha ascendente.

Poema

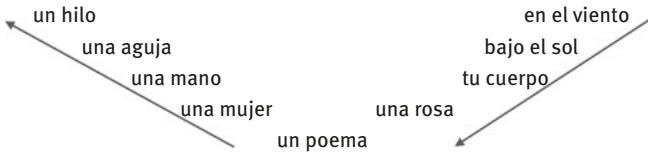


Figura 4: Trazado de lectura de derecha-descendente a izquierda-ascendente.

“Takina”/“Poema” es pues múltiples poemas a un tiempo, un “canto” (significado de *takina*) desde y hacia lo oral-colectivo que ofrece múltiples itinerarios de decodificación mediante una estructura que recuerda el glifo y tocapu inca “V” (Figura 5), que aparece tejido, bordado y pintado en vasijas y *qirus*, entre otros soportes. Desde las investigaciones fundacionales de Victoria de la Jara en la década de 1960, se sigue debatiendo si estas figuras representan un sistema de notación escrito. Significativamente, la “rama izquierda” de “Takina”/“Poema” incluye categorías del acto de escritura humana (*kayta*/hilo, *sirana*/aguja, *maki*/mano, *huarmi*/mujer) en correspondencia con las categorías naturales de la “rama derecha” (*waira*/viento, *inti*/sol, *ucju*/cuerpo, *sisa*/rosa), ramas que “takinasuk”/“un poema”, en posición central, anuda.



Figura 5: Representación del glifo/topacu “V” (izquierda). El Inca Túpac Yupanqui con vestimenta con topacus que representan glifos incas y números arábigos (derecha; Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, *Primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, ms. København, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, GKS 2232 4º, fol. 110’).

Rocha Vivas (2018: 104) propone incluso unir las versiones en ruma simi y castellano de “Takina”/“Poema”, lo que daría lugar a una estructura en forma de *chakana* (Figure 6).

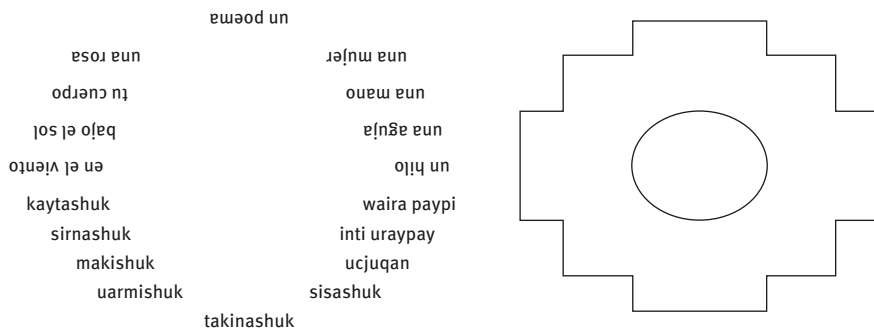


Figura 6: Versión unida de “Takina”/“Poema” y diagrama de *chakana*.

Dado que la *chakana* es un símbolo cosmológico panandino y panquichua de la “escalera” o “puente” entre dos mundos, no parece impropio proponer aquí que, metaliterariamente, este “*takinashuk*”/“*un poema*” actúa como representación de toda la oralitura, esto es, en palabras de Chikangana/Mallki, “la conexión entre lo oral indígena y la palabra escrita que llega además a otros interlocutores para aportar así al encuentro real entre diversas culturas indígenas y la cultura mestiza en nuestra América” (2014: 75s.).

De las dos clases de oralidad —“oralidad dialógica” y “oralidad de los discursos estatales”— diferenciadas por Rivera Cusicanqui, la oralitura de Chikangana/Mallki y otros oralitores pertenece sin duda a la primera, “más íntima, la conversación de ida y vuelta, que ocurre en los contextos del hogar o del *akhulli* (consumo de coca en el descanso laboral o ritual)” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018: 124). En diversas ocasiones Chikangana/Mallki ha señalado que no solo “hay una fuente principal para la creación que está en lo oral de cada colectivo indígena” (2014: 75), sino que la oralitura, en cuanto el acto de “pulir la palabra para transmitir esos gestos, imágenes, la música, la sonoridad de una lengua indígena y la poesía que se encierra en el momento” (2014: 78), debe ponerse a prueba, reactualizarse en la oralidad de la comunidad indígena. Los múltiples poemas que es “Takina”/“Poema” bien podrían apuntar a ese retorno y hacer comprender que “la mayor riqueza” aludida por Fall (1991: 21) no pretende reemplazar la tradicional jerarquía “Escritura/oralidad” por otra “Oralidad/escritura”, sino subrayar la inherente “teoría performativa” —en palabras de Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o— de la ora(li)tura, ausente de las propuestas noratlánticas sobre literatura mundial.

Novela y oralidad en la literatura zapoteca contemporánea

Aunque urge crear espacios de diálogo entre los textos literarios escritos en lenguas indígenas y otros textos de lenguas “mayores” en el campo de la literatura mundial, aún más interesante nos parece el encuentro de la literatura en lengua zapoteca y la literatura en lengua quichua contemporáneas en un marco literario bilingüe, trans-indígena y transnacional, establecido a partir de conceptos como el ya presentado de “oralitura” a modo de descolonización literaria. En este sentido, cabe resaltar que la literatura zapoteca contemporánea no es una *literatura oral*, aunque sí ha bebido y sigue nutriéndose activamente de la tradición oral zapoteca hasta el día de hoy.

Los zapotecas o binnizá (‘gente de las nubes’) ocupan un extenso territorio en el estado de Oaxaca, en el suroeste mexicano, y la lengua zapoteca es la tercera con mayor número de hablantes del país (cerca de medio millón según la última encuesta inter-censal del INEGI, realizada en 2015). Es importante mencionar que en la lengua zapoteca o diidxazá suelen reconocerse decenas de variedades lingüísticas aglutinadas en torno a cuatro grandes variantes, Istmo, Valle, Sierra Norte y Sierra Sur, variantes que muestran un enorme grado de ininteligibilidad mutua. Es en este rico contexto lingüístico en el que podemos situar la escritura en lengua zapoteca, una tradición escrituraria que apareció hace más de dos mil quinientos años (es posiblemente la más antigua de Abya Yala/las Américas) y que ha sobrevivido inscrita mediante lenguajes pictoideográficos en lápidas, estelas y esculturas, como las encontradas en el complejo arquitectónico prehispánico de Monte Albán (Romero Frizzi 2003b: 13; Cruz 2003: 490).

Paralelamente a la actividad poética y narrativa que anida en la tradición oral desde la época prehispánica (como confirman los textos de Fray Juan de Córdova), a lo largo del siglo XX empieza a producirse también una literatura escrita en lengua zapoteca. Gestada por la Sociedad Nueva de Estudiantes Zapotecos en el Istmo de Tehuantepec y promovida a través de su periódico *Neza*, la primera gran generación de escritores zapotecas aparece en los años 1930–1940, y su herencia será recogida por los escritores e investigadores Víctor de la Cruz y Macario Matus cuatro décadas más tarde.¹⁰ Gracias a la

¹⁰ Aunque podemos encontrar poetas y escritores que se expresaron en lengua zapoteca en los albores del siglo XX (e incluso a finales del siglo XIX, como fue el caso de Arcadio G. Molina), el “renacimiento” de la literatura zapoteca moderna viene generalmente asociado a la generación *Neza*, que incluyó autores como Andrés Henestrosa, Gabriel López Chiñas,

revista *Guchachi' Reza* y a los frecuentes talleres literarios impartidos en la Casa de la Cultura de Juchitán durante la década de 1980, se ha logrado forjar una tradición literaria moderna y continuada en el Istmo de Tehuantepec, sostenida actualmente por reconocidos autores y músicos binnizá, entre quienes encontramos a Víctor Terán, Irma Pineda, Natalia Toledo o Víctor Cata, posiblemente los poetas zapotecas más internacionales a día de hoy.¹¹

La literatura zapoteca de la Sierra Norte no ha sido tan antologizada como la del Istmo, pero también cuenta con una relevante producción oral y escrita, entre la que claramente destaca la prolífica obra del escritor Javier Castellanos Martínez: novelista, poeta, músico, investigador, promotor lingüístico y cultural.

El caso del escritor zapoteco serrano Javier Castellanos es especialmente singular porque, a pesar de su interesante producción poética y ensayística, su fama literaria ha venido principalmente de la mano de sus cuatro novelas bilingües. La publicación de *Wila che be ze lhao/Cantares de los vientos primerizos* en 1994 supuso un acontecimiento extraordinario, ya que se trataba de la primera *novela* escrita en una lengua indígena mexicana, un género asociado generalmente a la literatura europea e inusitado en la tradición indígena. Tres nuevas novelas contribuyeron a afianzar su trayectoria literaria: *Da kebe nho seke gon ben xhi'ne guzio/Relación de hazañas del hijo del relámpago* (Premio Nezahualcóyotl en 2002), *Laxdao yelazeralle/El corazón de los deseos* (2007) y *Dxiokze xha... bene walhall/Gente del mismo corazón* (2015), una trayectoria que, a pesar de su riqueza y singularidad, sigue siendo prácticamente desconocida más allá de Oaxaca y de pequeños círculos académicos en México y Estados Unidos.¹²

Como argumentan Kimberley Blaeser (1996: 3s.) y Elvira Pulitano (2009: 216), la escritura arraigada en la tradición oral es liberadora puesto que permite subvertir los géneros literarios occidentales de los que se apropian los escritores nativos, escritores que han estudiado en instituciones académicas colonizadoras y en cuya

Názario Chacón Pineda y Pancho Nácar (Cruz 2003: 488). La clásica antología *Guie' sti' diidxazá (La Flor de la Palabra)*, compilada por Víctor de la Cruz en 1983, recoge algunos de sus textos más conocidos y reconstruye las genealogías literarias del Istmo a lo largo del siglo.

¹¹ De los cientos de lenguas originarias, los autores zapotecas han recibido el Premio Nezahualcóyotl de Literatura en Lenguas Indígenas en cuatro ocasiones (desde su constitución en 1993). Algunos de los poetas zapotecas más jóvenes e internacionales han aparecido en antologías recientes como las de Rocío González (2016) o Alejandro Beteta (2016) y están siendo publicados también por Pluralia Ediciones, una nueva editorial independiente dedicada a la difusión de la literatura en lenguas originarias de México.

¹² Castellanos ha sido investigador y promotor lingüístico para la Dirección General de Culturas Populares (1979–2010) y en 2013 obtuvo el primer premio concedido a las *Literaturas Indígenas de América*, como reconocimiento a su obra literaria.

producción literaria subyace una rebelde (y consciente) transculturación. En este sentido, las oralituras de Castellanos interrogan y reconfiguran muchos elementos de la novela como género paradigmático de la tradición occidental, estableciendo puentes entre los formatos narrativos de origen europeo y la tradición oral de la Sierra Norte. Castellanos incorpora habitualmente pautas narrativas y elementos retóricos de los géneros orales característicos de la sierra zapoteca, de los cuales identificamos los siguientes: *da chhak sheechho* ('cosas que nos pasan', es decir, anécdotas relatadas en un mercado, una cantina o un velatorio de manera espontánea e informal), *jemplos* (ejemplos morales utilizados para transmitir determinados valores culturales y que siempre incluyen una enseñanza, máxima o consejo), *dilla witj* (chismorreos y relatos de cariz humorístico), y *dilla bara'ani* o *dilla rha'na* (relatos más emotivos, líricos o poéticos) (Brígido-Corachán [por publicar]). En su impulso oralitor, las novelas suelen incluir también una función o agente performativo clave: el oyente o receptor diegético, cuya función es interactuar con el relato del narrador de una manera dialógica, recreando así el contexto de enunciación original de estos géneros.¹³

Para entender, pues, este contexto idiosincrático, las novelas exigen una "lectura bivalente" o *cross-cultural*/transcultural, es decir, requieren de un conocimiento profundo del contexto histórico y sociocultural en el que está enmarcado el texto y, además, nos obligan, como lectores, a aprender a reconocer y a aceptar los patrones retóricos y epistemológicos indígenas procedentes de la tradición oral, que son "incorporados como estrategias visibles de oralidad a un paradigma discursivo escrito" (Pulitano 2009: 221).

Cabe recordar también que las oralituras de Castellanos aparecen siempre en versión bilingüe, zapoteca y castellana; ambas versiones coexisten en un mismo volumen impreso (generalmente en capítulos alternos) y muestran un claro afán descolonizador mediante la aplicación de dos procedimientos clave: ideológico y retórico. Desde un punto de vista ideológico, las novelas aspiran a revisar y preservar la memoria histórica y las prácticas socioculturales de los pueblos serranos, puesto que identifican y analizan de manera crítica y comprometida diferentes escenarios de colonización y aculturación forzada desde la llegada de los europeos a la Sierra Norte. Desde un punto de vista retórico-lingüístico, las novelas revitalizan la lengua originaria a través de la escritura y de su auto-traducción al castellano (un castellano impregnado de zapotequismos sintácticos, léxicos y epistemológicos).

¹³ Sobre la obra de Castellanos como oralitura y sus estrategias específicas de indigenización de la expresión en lengua castellana recomendamos consultar el estudio detallado de la obra de Javier Castellanos de próxima publicación *Redrawing the Americas* (Brígido-Corachán).

Dada su singularidad y creatividad nos preguntamos, ¿por qué siguen resultando tan desconocidas las oralituras de Javier Castellanos a nivel (inter)nacional a pesar de los premios recibidos? El limitado alcance de estos textos puede deberse, quizás, al débil compromiso del lector no-zapoteco a la hora de aceptar la retórica y patrones narrativos de la tradición oral serrana en la versión castellana en lo que sigue considerándose todavía un género predominantemente occidental. Además, entendemos que las novelas de Castellanos puedan resultar un tanto incómodas en el territorio de la ciudad letrada, puesto que critican el racismo endémico y violento de la sociedad mexicana de una manera muy directa, mientras pugnan por aleccionar a los lectores metropolitanos (y también a los zapotecos) en este nuevo espacio escriturario. Estas oralituras bilingües privilegian siempre al lector zapoteco serrano, quien es congregado, interpelado y también criticado por el texto como receptor diegético, testigo y objetivo central de la fábula pedagógica.

Por otro lado, y desde un punto de vista comercial, cabe destacar que el autor insiste en eliminar todo tipo de gestos indigenistas (denunciando incluso la invasión del realismo mágico y de los clichés folclórico-raciales de la literatura neo-indigenista e indígena que buscan el éxito mercantil; Castellanos Martínez desglosa esta crítica anti-indigenista en su ensayo “La narrativa de los que hablamos el Dilla Xhon”), reforzando así la crítica anticolonial mediante el cuestionamiento de la representación indígena realizada por la industria literaria dominante.

Quizás el objetivo último de las novelas de Castellanos como “acto de resistencia”, como “grito de guerra buscando recuperar lo perdido [y de] lucha contra todo”, como denuncia directa a la clase política e institucional que sigue considerando a las comunidades indígenas una “raíz en los cimientos del edificio que es México; pero una raíz [...] molesta, estorbosa” que ha de ser eliminada porque podría “hacer cimbrar el edificio en su conjunto” (Castellanos en Brígido-Corachán 2016: 183), puede explicar su todavía escasa difusión (inter)nacional. Aunque la raíz indígena continúa exhibiéndose convenientemente como origen fundacional, colorido trasfondo folclórico o atracción turística de la nación, su inclusión en el edificio de la modernidad escrituraria, al mismo nivel que las producciones occidentalizadas, parece quedar todavía lejana en el horizonte.

Consideraciones finales

La oralitura indígena, sin duda, supone una intervención estratégica en la esfera lingüística y literaria g/local, así como una contribución con el suficiente potencial para construir nuevos escenarios educativos y de intercambio

literario y cultural. La literatura no solo en contacto, sino especialmente *en tránsito* se convierte en un “canal de poder” (Cohen 2017: 120), un canal con capacidad de diseminar un amplio abanico de cosmo/visiones y de situar en proximidad un gran número de intereses y preocupaciones compartidas. El campo de la literatura mundial ha de abrirse necesariamente a estas cosmo/visiones, intereses y preocupaciones diversas, para lo que la propuesta de Damrosch sobre la literatura mundial como un “compromiso distante [*detached engagement*] con mundos más allá de nuestro lugar y tiempo” (2003: 281) abre una vía de investigación siempre y cuando se entienda que esos mundos no están *más allá*, sino *aquí* y, por tanto, el compromiso no puede ser en absoluto *distante*.¹⁴

¿Cuál es el papel de los textos literarios en este resurgimiento de los pueblos indígenas? O, como apunta Clare Sullivan, “¿Puede la poesía zapoteca [y quichua, añadimos aquí] salvar una cultura amenazada?” (2012: 42). ¿Son estos esfuerzos y proyectos personales suficientes para salvar estas lenguas en claro peligro de desaparición? Escritores e investigadores zapotecos y yanakunas como Javier Castellanos, Víctor de la Cruz o Fredy Chikangana/Wiñay Mallki han sido moderadamente pesimistas a este respecto, a pesar de sus titánicos esfuerzos por revitalizar tanto la lengua como la cultura de su pueblo, pero también han sabido identificar, en los nuevos procesos de transformación a nivel global, algunas señales que dan pie a la esperanza. Chikangana/Mallki sostiene que:

con mucha precaución y sin temores miramos que, frente al proceso de globalización en donde las culturas indígenas sufren cada día por situaciones de violencia y penetración de cultura foránea que permea lo propio, la oralitura ha sido como un encuentro para reafirmar desde el canto lo que está en lo profundo de la vivencia indígena y la esperanza en ese verdadero encuentro de respeto e igualdad con el otro. (2014: 82)

Para Cruz, aunque las ideologías y prácticas occidentales se extienden por el planeta con una supremacía aparentemente incuestionable, los indígenas continúan su lucha de resistencia:

La reactivación de las luchas interétnicas en la exURSS y en la vieja Europa, la rebelión indígena en Chiapas y Ecuador, hacen pensar que a lo mejor el modelo globalizador y unificador de culturas y lenguas está en crisis; a lo mejor se acercan tiempos de ajustar cuentas con el modelo civilizatorio colonizador europeo y de abrir nuevas perspectivas a las minorías étnicas y a sus formas de expresión literaria. (2003: 499)

14 Esta vía ha sido transitada recientemente por Pheng Cheah con su propuesta sobre la literatura como una fuerza modeladora de mundo. A ello nos referíamos en la Introducción con otras concepciones de literatura mundial que nos permitirían cuestionar el papel reservado a las literaturas nativas por la episteme noratlántica en cuanto futuro objeto de estudio.

En este ensayo hemos querido debatir el papel de la oralitura nativa en la construcción de redes trans-indígenas que logren abrir espacios anti-hegemónicos y fomentar prácticas decoloniales en el campo de la literatura mundial. En este sentido cabe destacar el papel de Internet, de las redes sociales y de muchos otros espacios alternativos comunitarios, paralelos a la esfera literaria, desde los que se está alimentando y dando difusión a estas literaturas y a su esfuerzo revitalizador. Por otro lado, es importante resaltar que las reivindicaciones lingüísticas y literarias de los escritores en lenguas originarias americanas van muy frecuentemente ligadas a la defensa de la identidad, la cultura, el territorio y la memoria histórica, a exigencias de mejoras sociales, legales y económicas, e incluso a proyectos de gestión de recursos, autonomía política, soberanía alimentaria y descolonización, por lo que cualquier estudio transnacional o trans-indígena de dichas reivindicaciones literarias habrá de tener estas otras dimensiones muy en cuenta. Claramente hacen falta investigaciones más concienzudas que analicen estas producciones ora/literarias desde un punto de vista socio-político, comunitario, retórico y estético, en los que la inclusión de una perspectiva mundial habrá de enfrentarse, a semejanza de lo planteado por Denny Moore y Ana Vilacy Galucio (2006) para la lingüística, al interrogante de cómo pueden los investigadores literarios ayudar a las comunidades indígenas.

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3: Figuring and reconfiguring the political in world literature

Jorge J. Locane

World literature/liberal globalization – Notes for a materialistic metacritique of *Weltliterary* studies

The following pages assume that, in view of the recent theoretical inflation in the field of world literature studies, it is necessary to introduce a critical consciousness that reflects on this theoretical discourse. Of course, this operation would not be aimed at restoring some kind of national, philological, or even areal-based reading scheme. All these are frameworks of understanding which I myself consider to a certain extent – since they were constituted as a response to specific and past historical circumstances – to be obsolete, or, it could be said, difficult to maintain from an updated analytical point of view. Rather, the proposal consists in interrogating the form, time, and place from which the theoretical statement is issued, that is, the material conditions of its production, in order to reveal ideological prescriptions that regulate it and that, by general convention, do not usually – perhaps as a preventive measure – get debated. On the other hand, just as it should be assumed that the Nation State constitutes a historical and historicizable event that does not make it possible to explain – nor would it be advantageous to do so – certain dimensions of the literary phenomenon; a similar premise would be applicable, as a starting hypothesis, to the “world”, understood, of course, not as a geographical unit but as support for an imagined community of a relatively organic nature, that is to say, a type of configuration that, despite containing in itself a multiplicity of temporal, cultural, political, etc., orders, would presuppose that these compartmentalizations, and in particular their “sub-” worlds, would be capable of being translated, without major distortions, into the lingua franca of the world. Josefina Ludmer once said, “Yo soy crítica, no soy el Mesías” (Ludmer/Achugar 1991: 42). This proposal assumes that the function of criticism would not be to elaborate answers or solutions, but just the opposite: to open questions, to break down hegemony – of whatever kind – and, in this way, to promote a constant improvement of the established systems of thought. Criticism would be, as Ludmer also reflected at that time, a destructive rather than a constructive practice. Thus, it would not seek to design a new order or offer remedial solutions for the existing one, but rather point out inconsistencies or expose fallacies, without having to measure the consequences of its intervention or offer tools for the eventual reconstruction. This, as Terry Eagleton would argue, would be the mission of critique: not to address texts within the reading conventions pre-established by the status quo. What

follows, then, if such postulates are given credit, is intended to be an exercise of criticism in a “literal sense”. As its title indicates, my text is deliberately going to take the form of “notes”, not of a linear text composed on the basis of conventional or orthodox argumentative principles. These notes should be evaluated as a concatenation of hypotheses or, simply, as a series of intuitions.

1.

In *América Latina en la “literatura mundial”*, the volume edited by Ignacio Sánchez Prado in 2006, Hugo Achugar writes that “este debate de hoy acerca de la ‘literatura mundial’ es producto – sí producto y no desarrollo autónomo – del momento histórico que vive la clase media académica en partes de Occidente y algunas de sus periferias” (Achugar 2006: 209).¹ As he does not provide further details, finding out exactly what it means involves some decoding work. I believe, however, that it is possible to extract two relevant points from this observation. The first is the placement of the theoretical debate in the place of object. This maneuver is of interest because it opens the door to a metadiscursive approach that is not often found in theoretical reflections on world literature. The central question that the procedure would lead to is: under what conditions do *Weltliterary* studies arise and develop? That is, not world literature, but the theoretical speculation that attempts to produce knowledge about it. But it would also seem to suggest that the best way to answer such a question is not through immanent postulates, those that would suppose that literature “evolves” “by itself” from national or regional stages to the world one, but through contextual elements or features of the literary institution. In order to explain the emergence and development of the debate on *Weltliterary* studies, it is thus necessary to appeal to a kind of sociology of literary (para)institutions and examine their

1 In the same volume, Mabel Moraña also points out that the impulse for the debate should be found in localized and conjunctural interests: “el tema de la literatura mundial que nos ocupa puede ser visto como un elemento más, sin duda significativo, que remite a la compleja red de intereses, reacondicionamientos, pugnas y negociaciones dentro del mundo globalizado, donde las áreas culturales luchan por su diferenciación y liderazgo, y compiten por sus campos de influencia. La re-funda(menta)ción de las redes transnacionales a nivel cultural tiene, entonces, un efecto doble: por un lado, las áreas periféricas son reapropiadas y rearticuladas simbólicamente; por otro lado, los núcleos culturales que reivindicaban la vigencia de antiguas influencias son re-centralizados, es decir, confirmados, desde nuevos discursos, en sus posicionamientos y roles específicos. En otras palabras, nos encontramos ante un problema de redefinición y legitimación de hegemonías que se corresponde con reajustes globales y regionales en el contexto del poscolonialismo” (Achugar 2006: 326).

evolution. World literature, therefore, would not be exactly a literary, textual phenomenon, but one determined by the institutions that regulate its functioning and negotiate its meanings. The second aspect of Achugar's statement that I would like to highlight is the restitution of a disused category, that of class. From here it could be concluded that the historical experience of a social sector would favour a redefinition of the perception of the world and its cultural artefacts. In other words, the implication is that the social groups benefiting from the cultural flows and reconfigurations promoted by the current phase of globalization would have been led to abandon other frameworks of interpretation in order to prioritize the global one. Thus, if sufficient value is assigned to the class category, this shift should be considered as a perception tied not only to certain geographical locations of enunciation but also restricted, partial, and exclusive to a minority group. In short, since a critical perspective that would displace the debate from its core would not be identifiable or contemplated, it would be, above all, a phenomenon of the ideological order. All of which – if I am not mistaken – finally converges into a Bourdieuan formula: that of turning the examiners, recursive practitioners of a faith, into the examined. This is, then, a possible starting point.

2.

In 1848, the duo Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published the *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* including the today well-known excerpt in which they asserted that the action of the industrial bourgeoisie had, already by the time of their manifesto, reconfigured the dynamics of consumption and production in all countries in a cosmopolitan way and, with it, disrupted the national constructs. In their words:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-

sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. (Marx/Engels 2010 [1848]: 488)

It is worth noting, however, that in the mid-nineteenth century Nation States were only beginning to show signs of conformation: as a nationalist reaction to Napoleonic France, Otto von Bismark, from 1862, led the unification/invention of Germany and its conversion into the modern State that we know today. The Argentine State, for its part, gained control of the national territory and design a unified identity – with its well-known exclusions – only at the end of the 19th century. Marx and Engels are, therefore, if not visionaries, our contemporaries: they speak rather about us – wherever we are, middle-class subjects who consume Starbucks muffins, Samsung smartphones, and hatha yoga – than about any subjectivity of nineteenth-century origin. Their postulates are more appropriate for our time of globalization, one that is characterized by having overcome the capitalist world/communist world dichotomy, and responding in turn to the utopian expectation of liberalism to unify the world as a potential market without any major protectionist or ideological resistance. Marx and Engels' reflection would, therefore, be fully valid today and would make it possible to introduce into literary studies a perspective that moves away from the idealistic side to concentrate attention on the material conditions of production. The same – one might think following the same Hegelian premises – applies to theoretical models: as national and regional markets tend to merge and acquire a global appearance, literature and literary studies also become global. But, on another note, it should be considered that the observation of Marx and Engels does not – just like Johann W. von Goethe's earlier famous musing on the topic, and the later contributions by Erich Auerbach in the twentieth century – enter into dialogue with other hypotheses and proposals, that is to say that it is not part of a dialogical system of discourse. One could argue that only now since the end of the last century, when *La République mondiale des Lettres* by Pascale Casanova, and Franco Moretti's "Conjectures" appeared, has Marx and Engels' observation found its system. They are, for this reason, our contemporaries. The debate enunciated today, on the contrary, should be considered as a product characteristic of its immediate context – of its time – but it should first be considered as a product of the place occupied by some subjects in the contemporary process of reconfiguration of global design, although they are not necessarily in a position to identify this place as a localized experience and liberal globalization as a system that, fundamentally, distributes inequalities. As Graham Huggan puts it,

Why are World Literature practitioners, by and large, so reluctant to deal with globalization? Why are they so intent on creating alternatives to globalization (Damrosch's "worldliness," Moretti's "planetary system") that explicitly or implicitly position World Literature against it? There are several possible answers to this, but the one I want to consider is that World Literature is obliged – to some extent at least – to rail against (or simply ignore) the conspicuous inequalities produced by globalization because the field is *itself* a relatively unacknowledged product of globalization, both in terms of economic disparities and in terms of what Mary Gallagher, in one of the few extended discussions of the topic, calls the "changing cultural and inter-cultural dynamics of the contemporary world". (Huggan 2014: 500–501)

3.

A hypothesis, with focus on the Hispanic subsystem and material dynamics, could be put forward as follows: in 1993, the Alfaguara publishing house, then part of the Prisa group, became "global".² Since 2001, the legendary South American publishing house in Argentina has belonged the Bertelsmann group; and since 2002, its counterpart Emecé has been part of the Planeta group. In 2007 the Spanish newspaper *El País*, also from Prisa, which until then was billed the "Diario independiente de la mañana", was regenerated as "El periódico global en español". Thus, since the mid-1990s, the corporations of culture have been detached from the last residual ties that kept them limited to the national order and have projected themselves towards the "world". The market, as Marx and Engels envisioned, now does take on a "global" character – or appearance. And with it – or rather *after* it – and this would be the point, academic studies. History is now *global history*, and, from Casanova and Moretti onwards, literature – which, despite Goethe, until now was national or perhaps simply literary – is now *world literature*. Everything seems to indicate that, since Berlin swept away its Wall and the world finally took on a unitary appearance – that of a unified market – the ruling classes have been disengaging themselves from the national construct which, in order to promote their interests, they had conceived and imposed on the populations two hundred years before. Now they have begun to dismantle it. They discard the already

² Since 2014, Alfaguara has been part of the Penguin Random House Group of Bertelsmann. On the group's website, the "Alfaguara global" project is characterized as follows: "Desde hace muchos años, Alfaguara es asimismo una editorial con vocación global, latinoamericana y española. Entre sus objetivos siempre ha estado el de acabar con las fronteras impuestas a la lengua común. De ahí que sus planteamientos no provengan nunca de una visión nacional de la literatura, sino de una visión globalizada en la que se incluyen todos los escritores y todos los lectores de nuestro idioma".

obsolete national order and propose another – as imagined as the first was – the world. An object, it should be noted with regard to the world, that can only be imagined from the privileged locus of enunciation of the North and its corresponding Hegelian enthusiasm. But what is evident is that, if there is a vanguard in this global future, it is the economic leadership, the big investors – Carlos Slim and Larry Page – all those who feel hindered by national borders in their market conquests. They are precisely the ones who create the material conditions that enable imagining *the* world, as just one unit. The academic class orbits this avant-garde. It is convinced that it is leading the way, but the truth is that literature first becomes global or global as a market prerogative, and only then as a theoretical convention and discussion. It could be said, therefore, that the theoretical enunciation of world literature follows evolutionary patterns determined by the publishing industry in an accelerated process of transnationalization, not by the literature itself, much less by a supposed autonomy of the intellectual and academic field.

4.

The article “Sobre las astucias de la razón imperialista” appeared in 1998. Therein Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant wrote: “Se podría analizar, también, en sus pormenores, la noción fuertemente polisémica de ‘mundialización’, que tiene por efecto, si no por función, ahogar en el ecumenismo cultural o el fatalismo economista los efectos del imperialismo, y hacer aparecer una relación de fuerza transnacional como una necesidad cultural” (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1998: 208). The *mundialization*, therefore, should be read as a covert or nominal purge of the asymmetries and aporias of (liberal) globalization. In other words, it would constitute an ideological demarcation of the cultural sphere from the political and economic order. While globalization as a material basis would not be put on trial – perhaps because no one in the field of cultural studies would be willing to publicly approve of Milton Friedman – the superstructural phenomenon of literature, now dubbed world literature, would possess a positive feature as an instance of overcoming national and, more particularly, nationalist limitations. But, following Bourdieu and Wacquant, one could ask what the role of the globalization of literature “in its details” actually is. One possible answer would be that the phenomenon – which we often think of first and foremost as (and might, in fact, be) a resource for the thwarting of national encapsulation – would also be playing the role of symbolic support for the liberal project to unify the world as an integrated whole. Whether we understand world literature in its pedagogical version, as formulated by David Damrosch, or as part of a proactive agenda of a post-colonial

programmatic, in Pheng Cheah's take; whether enunciated from a totalitarian or progressive point of view, world literature would not, in any case, cease to be aligned, in particular, with the agenda of the large corporations in the publishing industry and, more generally, with that of the capitalist expansion project.

5.

Another argument would be that certain premises that act as a catapult for the recent propagation of the *Weltliterary* studies are fallacies or, if necessary, alibis, responding to a market need for a mantle of humanism. For example, migrations, the flows of people and ideas, are constitutive of human ontology, not exclusive to our phase of globalization. This is confirmed by the master story of the West: the *Bible* is a narrative of forced migrants. It happens, of course, that the current geopolitical scenario is radically different. Nation states are an invention of European modernity which have already fulfilled their function, but which still remain formally constituted and with their pedagogical and repressive mechanisms in undeniable operation. That is the background today. Thus, today's flows are printed on a withered cartography, compartmentalized in nation states that no longer respond to the interests of the leading sectors. That is why the current reorganization is, above all, a necessity for the elites. The neo-nationalist reactions of Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen, on the other hand, are an expression of the repressed side of our time: through these figures, the lineages discarded by liberal cosmopolitanism talk by themselves. *Weltliterary* studies, therefore, do not respond exactly to reconfigurations of the socio-cultural order, but rather integrate the instrumental – a very well-intentioned one, and also in solidarity with the avant-garde economic elites – available to the liberal conscience to promote its project of invention and conquest of the world as a market. Terry Eagleton wrote in his 1984 book that “Modern criticism was born of a struggle against the absolutist state; unless its future is now defined as a struggle against the bourgeois state, it might have no future at all” (Eagleton 2005 [1984]: 124). Nowadays, the passage sounds anachronistic, but if we were to change “bourgeois state” for “liberal globalization”, the slogan would perhaps regain some validity.

6.

There is a very simple question which usually goes unasked and which, if asked, would perhaps trace a sort of diagonal crack in the hegemonic assemblage of *Weltliterary* studies, since it would in some way disturb the common

sense which unifies the different declinations of the paradigm and makes it precisely what it is: an entity relatively unified by some basic consensus. In a very succinct formulation, the question is: why is world literature supposed to be progressive? I believe that the possible answers would orbit around the idea that literature that projects itself beyond the geocultural order of its emergence accepts, recognizes, and protects the diversity of the world against encapsulation of any kind. I would like to propose, for my part, that world literature appears *a priori* to be progressive because it is enunciated from a representation of the world, that is to say, from an ideological place, which departs from the axiom that any form of cosmopolitanism – even the aristocratic – is necessarily better than any ethnocentric or national solution. This perspective, it should be pointed out, coincides with the liberal ideology that also disdains *a priori* any protectionist formula. No ethnocentric or national configuration is, of course, desirable or even defensible in theoretical terms, but this certainty – in my view – does not automatically make cosmopolitanism a positive solution. First of all, because there are minority, underground expressions that do not negotiate anything with the national regime or with the world. They are modes of existence that either cannot, or do not want to insert themselves into dynamics regulated by authoritarian subjectivization devices, whatever their type, and for that very reason are also illegible for cosmopolitanism. That is to say that the latter is opposed not only to national construction but also to emancipatory vernacular forms. On the other hand, the cheerful synchronization of cosmopolitan ideology and the liberal agenda would manifest itself not only in the rejection of borders but also in the lack of understanding of power relations, asymmetries, and symbolic violence. I would like to note, therefore, that the progressivism attributed to world literature is actually a property that stems from the complacent self-representation of the cosmopolitan consciousness that today holds the monopoly in the administration of the meanings of cultural artefacts. In objective terms, freed from ideological trappings, world literature can be as progressive as it can be reactionary, just like any literature.

7.

What, then, would a dissenting agenda from that of hegemonic *Weltliterary* studies be, that is, from that one that is consistent with liberal cosmopolitanism? Not, of course, a restorative one which would attempt to retake the models of approach based on the national or philological tradition. It is not exactly that such models have become obsolete, but that they have always been – although in some cases functional – insufficient and limiting. First of all, it would be

necessary to imagine alternative formulas, both to the classical theoretical assumptions and to a world literature that, in my opinion, is still being enunciated as an imperative of the post-national elites and, at the end of the day, also as a demand of the markets. In other words, how can we design a framework for reading that goes beyond the national regime without being servile to the interests of the concentrated publishing industry or organized for the convenience of the world's elites? As a first step, even in view of the already wide semantic dispersion, it might be necessary to abandon the term. In another contribution, I have proposed the category *pluriversal literature* as the necessarily heterogeneous corpus of literatures produced in the world – not deliberately *for* the world – which, by remaining rooted in their contexts and not entering into channels of circulation towards the world centres of cultural management, give an account of the multiple geocultural locations without being filtered or hierarchized by the metropolitan publishing industry. Ottmar Ette has also proposed a terminological shift: the term *Literaturen der Welt* would seek to decentralize any axis from which world literature, in accordance with Goethe's definition, appears organized, broadening thus the spectrum of possibilities even of what can be conceived as literature. These proposals, of course, do not exhaust the scope for critical conceptual alternatives. They are only valid as examples of cases in which the abandonment of the world literature category does not imply a return to the national or philological tradition. Though perhaps, the most prudent thing to do today would be to discard all terminological speculation and the use of grandiloquent adjectives to finally talk simply about literature.

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Benjamin Loy

The *Global Alt-Write* or why we should read reactionary (world) literature

(World) Literature in tumultuous times: three random (but telling) scenes from our present

Scene 1: The images that marked the 2017 Frankfurt Book Fair had nothing to do with literary prizes, memorable writers' speeches, or any other of the usual little storms in the teacup of the world's biggest marketplace and trade fair for books. On the contrary, it were not *words* but *fists* that flew at the exhibition booth of what currently has to be considered Germany's most important publisher of fiction and essays of the *New Right* that, as in many other countries around the world, has been gaining ground in the political and public sphere: the violent brawl between right and left-wing activists during a book presentation of Antaios was a rude interruption of the accustomed and undisturbed fluency of rights and licenses and the well-rehearsed rituals of mutual assurance of (World) Literature's importance and its progressive politico-cultural consensus.

Scene 2: Only a few months earlier, the Berlin-based bookstore *Topics* had to close its doors due to an incident that was not linked to direct physical violence but to the tremendous power and dynamics of internet flame wars: as a reaction to the announcing of a discussion about the work and life of the Italian fascist thinker Julius Evola a storm of protest ran over the little bookstore in Berlin's "alternative" neighborhood Neukölln. The campaign, orchestrated by several "leftist" groups, finally led into the store's economic collapse and was marked by a special kind of absurdity: both Amir Naaman and Doron Hamburger, the two Israeli owners of the bookstore, stem from families of holocaust survivors and had to face the accusation of "being Nazis" for providing a space of discussion about a controversial and reactionary author who has been gaining renewed attention in the context of the raise of the so called *Alt-Right*-movement in the US and beyond.

Scene 3: In January 2018 the literary world of France, used to political scandals and ideological feuds like no other, was shaken twice in a single month by remnants of its own past: First, the *Haut Comité aux Commémorations nationales* proposed to honor in its annual calendar the 150th birthday of Charles Maurras, best known for being one of the key figures of *Action française*. The decision caused

indignation among a wide range of organizations and politicians who criticized this act of recognition of an anti-democratic and anti-Semitic author. A similar discussion arose with regard to Gallimard's plan of a re-edition of Louis-Ferdinand Céline's anti-Semitic pamphlets. The protest, in which even members of the French government were involved, led to a postponing and modification of the plan by the publisher's head Antoine Gallimard who insists, nevertheless, in realizing the publication in order to present the author of *Voyage au bout de la nuit* as an example of the "coexistence du génie et de l'ignoble en un seul homme".

Three things become evident by considering these random but telling scenes of current debates in the literary world: first, the often neglected fact that the universal (and particularly Western) history of ideas and literature includes a large (and often too willingly ignored) tradition and an uncomfortable cultural heritage of authors and texts that are obviously incompatible not only with the values of the democratic, "enlightened", and (mostly) cosmopolitan societies of our times, but especially with the liberal ethico-political consensus of the cultural field and the Humanities as its academic counterpart; second, the evidence that the return of a new kind of right-wing and reactionary movements all over the globe is accompanied by a more or less explicit recourse to this tradition of the history of ideas and its key-figures; and third, the insight that this kind of "reactionary" thinking and politics are not – and against the deep convictions of what we might call the "liberal center" of Western societies¹ – confined to closed national realms but act with a high degree of mobility within a network on a global scale.

With this in mind, the first lesson to learn for this liberal center would be the recognition that many of its convictions regarding determinate forms of talking, living, and even thinking, considered to be essentially liberal or "leftist", are no longer compatible with this function of a political and cultural self-assurance and identity. For instance, "mobility" as a kind of "magic word" within the global and cosmopolitan imaginaries, discourses, and practices of our time, which the idea of World Literature (and its academic adaptations) perfectly coincided with, loses its euphoric notion of an end in itself if we consider the fact that circulation does not represent an exclusive value of the liberal center but equally of the *New Right* and its ideas. The images of Steve Bannon

¹ For a profound discussion of this "milieu" I would like to remit to Andreas Reckwitz' recent and luminous sociological study on the *Society of singularities* that is currently being translated into English and has to be considered one of the key-works of the discipline in the last twenty years. The study traces the multiple social, cultural, and political features of these new Western middle-classes based on a "apertistisch-differentieller Liberalismus" whose intrinsic relation to the cosmopolitan stances of the current field of World Literature studies will be addressed in the course of this article (Reckwitz 2017).

praising transnational cooperation between the enemies of the liberal order – “Reactionaries of the world, unite!” would certainly be the renovated (anti-) marxist formula for the 21st century – or the coincidence of the leaders of the Austrian *Identitarian Movement*, the leading thinkers of the German *New Right* and a figure like the masculinist and racist US-author Jack Donovan at a snowy manor in the woods of Eastern Germany may be proof enough that not everything that circulates is doing so for good. The same goes for certain formats of media performances and rhetorical strategies, originating in counter-culture and widely copied by reactionary movements² as well as for the conviction that historically discriminated forms of (sexual) identity would necessarily go hand in hand with other elements of emancipatory politics.³ It is in view of these multiple global crises, new political and cultural ambiguities, the fundamental shift in the optimistic notion of the global (neo)liberal order (and its related dominating discourses of universality and cosmopolitanism), as well as the new rise of a *Global Right* with a sharp consciousness of its own history of ideas and literature, that Humanities and, particularly, the field of World Literature studies have to interrogate themselves about how to *react* on their part to this situation and to rethink their own theoretical and ideological premises, as well as their analytical practices.

World Literature and (the limits of) cosmopolitanism

It is not really a new insight that the rise of the academic field of World Literature in the past two decades has to not only be situated within the framework of a historical phase of intensified globalization but that it must also be considered as a field of Literary Studies that – more than any other perhaps – is based on a specific set of normative ethical assumptions regarding the (beneficent) role of literature and, particularly, World Literature. This optimism about the “democratizing strand of World Literature” (Levine/Mani 2013: 147), however, stems from a determinate idea of cosmopolitanism, which is not surprising insofar as “both world literature and cosmopolitanism are closely related

² See, for instance, George Hawley’s study (2017) on media phenomena like 4chan and others in the context of the *Alt-Right-movement*.

³ On this topic see the essay of the French LGBT-activist Didier Lestrade (2012) on reactionary tendencies within the gay-movement. I owe my thanks to my colleague Markus Lenz for this reference.

concepts” (Domínguez 2012: 245). In the recent past, the connection between reading fictions, its “sympathetic effects”, and cosmopolitanism was most prominently articulated by authors such as Martha Nussbaum and Kwame Anthony Appiah. For example, Nussbaum postulates in her widely-discussed book *Cultivating Humanity*: “[N]arrative imagination is an essential preparation for moral interaction. Habits of empathy and conjecture conduce a certain type of citizenship and a certain form of community: one that cultivates a sympathetic responsiveness to another’s needs” (Nussbaum 1997: 90). According to Nussbaum’s argument, the reading of fictional texts – and the study of “non-western cultures” in particular – as well as the associated capacity for putting oneself in another’s position in a gesture of empathy, enables literature to fulfill an essential task in the affective education of mankind and the formation of cosmopolitan citizens of the world: “When we see in how many different ways people can organize their lives we will recognize [. . .] what is deep and what is shallow in our own ways, and will consider that ‘the only real community is one that embraces the entire world’” (Nussbaum 1997: 158). Without neglecting the fact that the view articulated here by Nussbaum has given rise to manifold discussions, her position can hold to be representative for a dominant affirmative propagation of the cosmopolitan potential of (world) literature in current debates positing that “access to world literature might be a way out of what Susan Sontag calls ‘compulsory provincialism’” (Levine/Mani 2013: 246).

However, the notion of “diversity”, as conceived of by these concepts of cosmopolitanism and World Literature, is limited and normative in the sense that the very idea of World Literature as “windows on different parts of the world” (Damrosch 2003: 24) as a rule does not simply comprise texts from (theoretically) all parts of the globe or all “topics” but does so from a determinate perspective: “diversity” and “world” mean, from the vantage point of the cosmopolitan pedagogical agenda,⁴ basically the reading of “foreign” texts being suitable for reading experiences of those “different ways people can organize their lives” that actually meet emancipatory expectations, that is, to access in their majority historically disregarded and/or discriminated cultural, geographical, linguistic or identity-related representations in literary texts. We may consider, on the one hand and from an ethical point of view, this reading politics as a useful and justified means of breaking with established historical imbalances in terms, for instance, of a literary canon dominated by white, Western, and male authors in favor of a much more diverse range of texts, languages, and subjectivities; on the

⁴ See for example the contributions in Damrosch (2012).

other hand, we cannot deny that these (again: from an ethical and historical perspective fully justified and desirable) reading programs run the risk of transforming World Literature studies into a politically biased discipline unable to properly meet their own mission of giving important insights into the complexity of the (whole) world.

I am well aware of the fact that many scholars in the field may read my objection as conservative and inappropriate considering that every (re)formation of the literary canon implies unavoidably new (and even very reasonable) imbalances and that the critical potential of Humanities cannot be separated from certain ethical and normative stances. However, it suffices to examine some of the most prominent World Literature anthologies, collected volumes, or conference programs to make sure that the effective canon of World Literature studies does by no means comprise potentially “all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in the original language” (Damrosch 2003: 4) but possesses an intrinsic proximity to a rather narrow range of authors, texts, and topics strengthening the impression of redundancy and solipsism in parts of the field’s scholarship – a problem that arises, in my opinion, to a great extent from the specific cosmopolitan basis of World Literature studies. This relationship has caused a whole series of problems of “translation”, as César Domínguez has argued lucidly by asking: “How to translate, for example, cosmopolitanism as a project linked to ‘human rights’ and, indirectly, to ‘democracy’ [. . .] into world literature? As a globalized version of *littérature engagée*?” (Domínguez 2012: 248). Similarly, Emily Apter has criticized World Literature as “an encapsulating model of literary comparatism that, in promoting an ethic of liberal inclusiveness or the formal structures of cultural similitude, often has the collateral effect of blunting political critique” (Apter 2013: 41). The crucial point here, however, is not to dismiss completely the ethical substance of World Literature informed by this kind of cosmopolitanism (or of the Humanities as a whole) but to stress “the need for a more critical stance towards cosmopolitanism” (Domínguez 2012: 246) in the sense Peter Hitchcock does when he posits “an indifferent methodology, one that does not presume that a celebration of difference in world literature [. . .] exhausts the ethical responsibility which the crisis in ‘world’ involves today” (Hitchcock 2012: 367).

In view of the fact that “the concept of ‘world’ does not allow us to posit it as an ethical resource” any more,⁵ Hitchcock argues that “attending to the process of contravention itself is more important than producing a moral guide premised

5 On the problematization of the concept of world understood as a horizon of expectations and emancipation see also Mariano Siskind’s article in this volume.

on the otherwise implicit gesture of worldly accumulation (gathering the world, as it were, through literature)” (Hitchcock 2012: 372). This perspective on the concept seems closely related to what Gerald Delanty has coined “critical cosmopolitanism”:

Cosmopolitanism can be held to be a critical attitude [. . .], an analysis that is essentially critical in that it is an approach to social reality that views social reality not only as an empirical phenomenon, but also as a given form by counter-factuals. [. . .] The cosmopolitan condition emerges out of the logic of the encounter, exchange and dialogue and the emergence of universalistic rules rather than by the assertion of a higher order of truths. (Delanty 2012: 42)

Consequently, such a definition of cosmopolitanism does not aim to foreground a certain set of values which, applied to World Literature studies, should be “contained” in texts suitable for the pedagogic purposes of “sympathetic” readings; rather, it focuses on a radical openness, understanding the idea of “world” primarily as an assemblage of highly contingent views of the world that hardly can be subsumed under normative ethical concepts the way “traditional” cosmopolitanism does. Critical cosmopolitanism implies, as Delanty argues further, a concept of “post-universalistic truth”, which means that “statements of truth and justice, etc., are not absolute, immutable or derivable from an objective order of universal values, but nonetheless it is still possible to make judgments and evaluations” (Delanty 2012: 42). Hitherto this kind of critical cosmopolitanism has been applied in World Literature studies particularly to non-Western or marginalized spaces and phenomena undermining the dominant materialist, formal or epistemological categories of the concept.⁶ However, I would like to give it a different turn by focusing not on the obvious possibilities of this radical openness in the form of “dissident” subjectivities, materialities or epistemologies but rather on “world views” situated *beyond* and *against* the very idea of cosmopolitanism (and its related optimistic assumptions on the world and human beings). The complex embodying this set of ideas is what can be addressed by the term “reaction” – a controversial concept, which does not seem to have much in common with World Literature at first sight but whose global dimensions and importance for current scholarship (not only) in this field I will try to explore in what follows.

⁶ See for example the study on alternative forms of circulation of World Literature in Colombia by Domínguez (2018) operating deliberately with Delanty’s concept of critical cosmopolitanism.

“*And yet it moves*” – “reaction” as “travelling concept” and dimensions of “reactionary world literature”

What is reaction? Consult any decent university library and you will find hundreds of books in all the world’s major languages on the idea of revolution. On the idea of reaction you will be hard put to find a dozen. We have theories about why revolution happens, what makes it succeed, and why, eventually, it consumes its young. We have no such theories about reaction, just the self-satisfied conviction that it is rooted in ignorance and intransigence, if not darker motives. (Lilla 2016: ix)

The observation formulated by Mark Lilla in his recent study on reactionary elements in the history of ideas can be perfectly applied to Literary Studies as well, where conservative and reactionary authors and topics hardly find their way into contemporary syllabi, canons, and scholarship. Actually, the study of conservative or reactionary literature seems to be a sort of “parallel world” as its authors and ideas are investigated mainly by scholars or philosophers exposing their own conservative political positions, and as the majority of these authors (and the corresponding scholarship) are published by specific publishing houses or journals. While there exists a strong and established tradition of literary studies on socialist, proletarian, or “leftist” literature, you will be hard put to find similar tendencies for “right” or “reactionary” literature – a fact deeply rooted in the history of the Humanities’ political orientations since the second half of the 20th century, or as Kate Macdonald argues in her study on conservative popular fiction in Britain:

Modern literary criticism has been interested in writing that focuses on political manifestations such as feminism, Marxism and its variations, and postcolonialism. It is predicated on writers of the Left as the norm, the model for literary activity, those who were deeply concerned with politics. Consequently those writers who were not solely political, and popular writers of the Right who focused most obviously on social rather than political disapproval, were not permitted the critical status that could have allowed them to function as counterbalancing voices. (Macdonald 2015: 14)⁷

⁷ A similar observation has been made by Ian Hall regarding the leading perspectives and theories in Political Science and International Studies that while being “dominated by realists and internationalists, it is also true that many others have made significant contributions from the fringe – whether radical or reactionary – and that those contributions have stimulated realist and internationalist thought” (Hall 2015: 2).

Reactionary literature seems to be suspect to the “enlightened” mainstream of Humanities and particularly to World Literature studies: while historians of ideas, for instance, have recently (re)turned to the global dimensions and forms of circulation of reactionary thinking and counter-enlightenment (continuing a tradition set up by thinkers like Isaiah Berlin),⁸ there does not exist anything comparable in World Literature studies.⁹ This is all the more astonishing in view of the historical proximity of enlightenment-cosmopolitanism (as the underlying idea of World Literature) and counter-enlightenment or reactionary discourses stressing the importance of the nation and national literatures. Maybe it was Goethe’s fault when he declared that “National literature does not mean much these days” that World Literature studies do not seem to have been interested at all in what has to be considered the ontological antipode of their global dreams. Be it as it may, this lack promotes the need to take into consideration “the twofold historical function of discourses of cosmopolitanism”, as Galin Tihanov argues, that is,

to trace and reflect upon the processes of expansion of the polis, and of the fields available to it for its cultural self-identification, but also to chart and register the reverse process [...] – that of erecting firmer barriers and directing the purposeful contraction, narrowing down, and self-isolation of the polis. (Tihanov 2011: 144)

If cosmopolitanism and World Literature are bound to specific historical fluctuations,¹⁰ so are their critical counterparts of reaction, from where arises the necessity to shift our attention to this “dark side of the globe” accompanying “progressive” discourses (cosmopolitanism forms part of) like a shadow. This kind of historical dialectics has been commented likewise by thinkers like Karl Mannheim in his seminal study on conservatism as a “historically embedded, dynamically changing structural complex” (Mannheim 1999: 75) or Albert O. Hirschman in his observation of different “reactionary waves” in the history of ideas in the face of determinate progressive demands like natural rights and universal suffrage in the 19th or politics of social welfare in the 20th century

8 See for example the globally-oriented works of Mark Sedwick and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke on anti-modernity and Nazism or Graeme Garrard’s book on counter-enlightenment.

9 This does not mean that there would not exist any important works on national literary traditions of reaction (see, for instance, the excellent and fundamental two-volume study by Julio Rodríguez Puértolas on fascist Spanish literature or Antoine Compagnon’s seminal work on anti-modern authors in France).

10 See for example the comments by Tihanov about post-World War II Soviet Union where – according to shifts in cultural and foreign politics at the end of the 1940s – “comparative literature became quite literally a dangerous profession” (Tihanov 2001: 145).

(Hirschman 1991: 11–42). The dominance of cosmopolitan discourses (and World Literature as its literary counterpart) in the context of the recent phase of globalization, I would argue, can be read in line with these dialectics and taken as one among different reasons for the contemporary and massive return of “reaction” as a formation of ideas and characterized, as Hirschman analyzed lucidly, by a specific “rhetoric”. Hence, both “Cosmopolitanism” and “Reaction” should be considered as mutually entangled, essentially dynamic and changing concepts within specific historic constellations. Consequently, they depend on a wide range of rhetorical and performative strategies (and should not be considered as a supposedly static set of determinate values). The terminological blurring of “reaction” likewise has to do with this sort of mutability, as Hall argues:

By its very nature, because it is reactive, responding to the theories and practices of others, reactionary thinking is arguably even harder to define than radical thought. It can look backward to an idealized past or forward to an idealized future. It can be near-anarchist and strongly statist, but it generally shares some core features with realist thinking – especially in its emphasis on the centrality of power and violence in politics. (Hall 2015: 8)

Against this background, the degree of “reaction” inherent to a literary text should be defined likewise, as Claus-Michael Ort proposes, in relation to its “connection to ‘conservative’ discourse [...] [and] situated on a scale of different degrees of manifestation and implications of ‘conservative’ figures of thought and semantics” (Ort 2013: 35–36).

The crucial point for World Literature studies, which makes “reactionary literature” a genuine object of interest for the field, is the fact mentioned above that “reaction” itself is not only a *historically* mutable phenomenon but also (to use an expression coined by Mieke Bal) a sort of “travelling concept”. At first glance, this idea may seem a little odd, given the essentialist and rather “anti-expansive” orientation generally ascribed to reactionary thinking. However, a closer look at different phenomena of cultural and literary reaction in the context of modernity reveals the essentially mobile and transnational character of this ideological complex and its institutions. In this context, fascism would probably be the most illustrating example (despite the fact that there could be more than one reason for considering the impetus of this ideological current more revolutionary than reactionary). It was in this spirit, for instance, that Hannah Arendt talked about a “Fascist International” arguing that “modern anti-Semitism was never a mere matter of extremist nationalism: from the very beginning it functioned as an International” (Arendt 1945: 141). On an institutional level, the recent and outstanding book by Benjamin Martin has pointed out the fundamentally transnational character of fascist cultural politics:

Founding multilateral institutions with regular conferences, subcommittees, and multi-language journals, Nazis and fascists deftly deployed what have been called “the mechanics of internationalism” for political ends antithetical to the internationalist spirit. [...] [T]he totalitarian internationalism of the Nazi-fascist Axis offered the specter of something else: a model of transnational cooperation based on the values of the most intense, aggressive, and racist national spirit.¹¹ (Martin 2016: 6–7)

In a similar way, other and more recent reactionary movements like the *Nouvelle Droite* in France, founded and shaped by a circle of intellectuals around Alain de Benoist, not only departed from a “‘Gramscism of the Right’ by which the intellectual extreme right could counter the metapolitical hegemony of the intellectual left” (Shurts 2017: 281) but were essentially conceived as a transnational projects with a specific vision of the world (and its cultural divisions) in the sense of what the actual *New Right* across the globe continues to call “ethnopluralism”, i.e. an idea of “diversity” absolutely contrarian to the cosmopolitan one but with precise internationalist implications, or as de Benoist has argued: “I define the Right as that attitude which wants to take into consideration the diversity of the world. Consequently the relative inequalities which necessarily follow from this diversity are good. The homogenization extolled in the discourse of egalitarian ideology is evil” (cited in Shurts 2017: 292). This notion of “diversity”, whose origins can easily be traced back to reactionary thinkers of the 19th century such as Joseph de Maistre, keeps operating in the political and cultural imaginary of the Global New Reaction from Bannon’s *Alt-Right* to the Polish *PiS*-party, from Le Pen’s *Front* (now: *Rassemblement*) *National* to the German *Alternative für Deutschland* and Putin’s, Erdogan’s or Modi’s nationalist programs that consider – exactly like Alain de Benoist – “Culture” as one of their primary battlefields. Even if this sort of “reactionary internationalism” is still in its beginnings there is no reason to suppose that the whole fuss would soon go up in smoke.¹² Considering these different movements as a whole, they represent what

11 Federico Finchelstein defines fascism in a similar way as “a global ideology undergoing constant transformation. Beyond national contexts and restricted theories, fascism then becomes a traveling political universe, a radical nationalism affected and, to some extent, constituted by transnational patterns” (Finchelstein 2010: 6).

12 To give just one example from the German context: as any other political party represented in the national parliament, the *Alternative für Deutschland* has the right to obtain substantial funds of millions of euros for its own political foundation. This kind of institutions traditionally function as think-tanks, cultural players, and (with their university awards system) as powerful ideological training grounds for the different political camps, which is why the presence and influence of reactionary positions particularly in the cultural sector will grow in the near future. Likewise, it can be expected that the degree of internationalization will augment as well, materializing itself in a similar way to fascist internationalism seventy years ago with

Kwame Anthony Appiah has called “counter-cosmopolitanism” in the sense “that they exemplify the possibility of a kind of universal ethics that inverts the picture of cosmopolitanism” (Appiah 2007: 140). With this in mind, the remaining question (of this topic’s very short outline) would be how World Literature studies might approach “Reactionary World Literature” in the context of the current political landscape and some of the sketched impasses of their traditional cosmopolitan orientations.

Reading the *Global Alt-Write*: perspectives for world(ly) literary studies

It is in the spirit of the outlined situation that World Literature studies should consider “reactionaries” or “counter-cosmopolitans” as a genuine object of study for the field (and far beyond the scarce existing examples in this context related basically to aspects of translation¹³). Certainly, this would mean dismissing some of traditional cosmopolitanism’s convictions with regard to literature, namely the cited idea of its “sympathetic” effects – a notion that has come under increasing pressure in contemporary research whenever authors, as Suzanne Keen does in her study *Empathy and the Novel*, have asserted that

[N]o evidence emerges [...] that would support a judgment about the importance or insignificance of novel reading in cultivating the sympathetic imaginations. [...] [T]his lack of information does not preclude influence through fiction reading, to be sure, but it does warrant caution when making claims about the formation of these particular good world citizens. (Keen 2007: 23)¹⁴

This consciousness of the fundamental ambivalence of narratives, as stated by Keen, would be a first step in this direction to break up the over-optimistic discourses dominating particularly in World Literature studies with regard to their

its “sustained effort to remake the international structures of European cultural life, creating a rival network of institutions and individuals from across Europe in a radical right-wing form of international cultural cooperation” (Martin 2016: 4).

13 As Gisèle Sapiro pointed out, “[p]olitical and broader ideological factors may trigger or hinder the circulation of literary texts. Translation may serve political or ideological objectives; it can be a means to disseminate a doctrine or a vision of the world” (Sapiro 2016: 83). A good example regarding the translation politics in fascist Italy provides the study by Giorgio Fabre (2007).

14 For an exemplary reading of this aspect see my comparative study on J.M. Coetzee and Roberto Bolaño (Loy 2018b).

object of study. When literary texts, as Pheng Cheah argues, possess a genuine quality of “worlding” – why should this fact only be applicable to “progressive” or cosmopolitan imaginaries and ideas? Or citing another point from Keen’s reflections in reference to the example of the Holocaust and the question to what extent the narrative of the inhumane, situated for example in language about the racial superiority of Aryans in Nazi ideology, must be discussed in connection with the power of fictions: “The content of stories is not a neutral matter. If narrative fiction has the capacity to alter readers’ characters for the good, it may also possess darker powers” (Keen 2007: 25). In a similar way and in line with the sketched global dimensions of reaction, World Literature studies would have to say farewell to the idea that their privileged categories of analysis like circulation, translation, or intellectual exchange remain limited to phenomena of progressive cosmopolitanism. This becomes apparent by considering the fact that their opponents have successfully developed their very own versions of World Literature as Mani has pointed out in his study of the literary politics in the Third Reich:

The irony with the Nazis – who denounced literature written by *Weltbürger* with a *Weltanschauung* – is that instead of completely denouncing world literature, they redefined, redesigned, and reinvented it to fit their ideological program. Much as they appropriated books and libraries as ‘weapons’ in the service of state ideology, so did they deploy world literature in the creation of a very specific political world for the German reader. (Mani 2017: 155)

Those who prefer to consider this sort of politics as a matter of the past should not ignore the fact that there already exist new attempts from *within* Literary Studies to revert established canons and readings of World Literature in order to adjust them to a reactionary world view. A fine example of this has been recently provided by the overtly reactionary German philologist and publicist Günter Scholdt reading a total of thirty classics, ranging from Aesop to García Márquez, and (re)politicizing them according to current topics of the *New Right*.¹⁵ Even if his readings do not lack a whole series of absurdities – erecting, for instance, figures like Don Quijote or García Márquez’s Coronel Buendía as conservative mavericks and examples to follow against an supposedly oppressive reality or a corrupt state – they give a good idea of what a reactionary literary criticism of the (very near) future might look like. Likewise, there has been hardly dedicated any attention by World Literature

¹⁵ See also my review of the book for the German newspaper *Die Zeit* (Loy 2018a).

studies to these otherwise so central “Institutions of World Literature”¹⁶ when it comes to reactionary texts. The translation politics of publishers like the already mentioned Antaios in Germany, for instance, publishing a wide range of historical and contemporary French reactionaries, and many others that contribute to the worldwide circulation of texts and ideas would certainly offer enough material for an analysis of this *Global Alt-Write* and its promoters.

While the latter would rather meet a certain type of materialist criticism prominent in World Literature, the question to what extent reactionary authors should be part of teaching and syllabi of World Literature concerns not only comparative approaches but traditional and nationally oriented philology as well. In times of growing “safe spaces” and “trigger warnings”, this step certainly represents the most radical counterproposal possible. However, I would argue that in view of the return of the *Global Alt-Write* the need for a deeper knowledge about the origins and trajectories of a reactionary history of ideas and literatures should be quite evident. As Umberto Eco stated in an essay on 14 general features of fascism,¹⁷ reactionary imaginaries are – like all imaginaries, I would risk adding – essentially syncretic working with different fragments of the history of ideas that – and this would be the critical pedagogical mission of teaching “Reactionary World Literature” – must be properly identified as such by contemporary readers. However, this kind of knowledge presupposes “uncomfortable readings” situated far beyond any kind of “safe space” – a fact that Martin Puchner highlighted as a general necessity for teaching, as he calls it, not *World* but *Worldly Literature* that is “literature in the thrall of empires, victim and facilitator of conquests. Worldly literature is not discrete, delicate, and benign, but embraced by the world, is made for the world, and put in the service of worldly purposes” (Puchner 2012: 258).

This kind of cultural knowledge about reaction as the “faithful shadow” of enlightenment, progress, and cosmopolitanism would also mean a significant contribution to a more balanced and informed behavior in face of deviant political opinions: instead of denouncing in an inflationary way every conservative position as either “reactionary” or “fascist” (as it is currently happening in numerous cases in public debates and over-politicized sections of the academia) the consciousness of determined traditions of terms like “conservatism”, “reaction”, and “fascism” doubtlessly would be a mean to regain a more civilized

¹⁶ See the outstanding volume by Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen (2016).

¹⁷ I owe my thanks for this reference to my colleague Markus Messling whose brilliant work on racism and philology in the 19th century gives another form of insight into the large and problematic history of our discipline and is of vital importance in the context of the entanglements between the Humanities and Reaction (see Messling 2016).

form of public discourse.¹⁸ However, the ability to recognize this kind of reactionary semantics and traditions would certainly require another form of reading as well, one that would not, as many recent currents in World Literature do, “require us to abandon *close reading*, with its stress on the subtlest linguistic nuances, in favor of world-systems theory and patterns of global circulation” (Levine/Mani 2013: 142). I certainly do not aim to argue here for a naïve return to an auratic concept of reading. Nevertheless, I cannot help feeling a growing unease with some tendencies of World Literature studies that consider with a sort of disdain or compassion every approach that does *not* perceive of literature merely as a commodity whose problematic conditions of production have to be denounced but as that what in first place contributes to the *existence* of something as World Literature, i.e. its capacity to *affect* readers as specific form of *language*. The search for such a form of reading of and in World Literature would lead backward (or forward?) to a stronger philological and historical approach whose idea of the world is, as Werner Hamacher has argued, certainly very different from the increasingly dominant forms of “reading” in World Literature with their economic-material orientations: “The fact that philology applies itself to detail, to the nuances of a detail, to the *intermundia* between these nuances, slows its movement in language and in the world” (Hamacher 2009: 35). If this (re)turn to philology doubtlessly possesses a conservative thread itself it is because it points to an idea as formulated in contemporary debates on the future of the Humanities by Simon During: arguing that the radically progressive orientation of the Humanities “is for the most part recent, being largely confined to the period of emancipation struggles in the 1960s” (2012: 54), During explores the question of how a reformed notion of conservatism might enable a new critical discourse in the Humanities in view of the fact that

the various post-1960s political programs that the academic humanities directed toward the larger world – the demand for justice, for recognition of oppressed identities, hopes for unimaginable revolutions to come, the description of ongoing social destitution, the demand for better and more democracy, and so on – in the end have just solidified the market-state’s instrumentalization of the education sector [...] leaving the humanities in a condition of recalcitrant obedience, a straitjacketed enmity toward the state-market combination and its academic-bureaucratic machinery, an enmity neither quite neutral nor engaged and in part protected by sheer organizational inertia, but which for all that does turn us, in our search for succor and a basis for (or replacement of) critique, toward lineages of conservative refusal of the postrevolutionary order. (During 2012: 57)

18 For a discussion of this kind of difference between a conservative and a reactionary (and racist) author see my study on contemporary French authors Philippe Muray and Richard Millet (Loy 2019).

It does not seem extremely polemic to consider the field of World Literature and particularly its materialist approaches – that even where they are able to achieve a critical potential, they fit perfectly well the academic funding systems’ logics of “useful” (as in “measurable”) research – as an essential part of this type of Humanities in absolute conformity with the neoliberal rules of what Derrida calls “democratic state capitalism”. Consequently, if “leftist progressivism” has become, “willy-nilly, an arm of social democratic capitalism”, as Derrida argues, “substantive negation of the system is, it would seem, being transferred to conservatism” (2012: 42). However, conservatism in Derrida’s sense should not be understood as some kind of *reactionary* return to a lost past but as a critical idea “that the academic humanities, insofar as they too conserve experiences of the world that oppose and stand outside technologico-Benthamitism, as F.R. Leavis famously called it, can themselves be regarded as conservative storehouses for resistances to come” (Derrida 2012: 49). In view of the vehemence of reaction’s return to the political world stage it is by no means impossible that the moment of an attack on the Humanities (and World Literature studies in particular) will occur sooner than later. Between the reactionary temptations of this (still dystopic) future, that probably will not fail to appear, and a problematic notion on World Literature studies in terms of a naïve cosmopolitanism or a sales-numbers counting economic variant, a critical-conservative (reading) position beyond these two poles may not be the worst.

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Alexandra Ortiz Wallner

Testimonio y literaturas del mundo – Notas para un debate

Testimonio, literaturas del mundo y la perspectiva desde el Sur I

Una de las columnas más leídas de la revista *World Literature Today*¹ titulada “What to read now” consiste en invitar a escritores de diversas regiones del mundo para que sugieran una breve lista de lecturas, ya sea a partir de coincidencias temáticas, por compartir la misma procedencia geográfica o abordar un mismo tema social o político de actualidad, o, porque las obras seleccionadas pueden ser agrupadas bajo un mismo género literario. El número de enero-febrero de 2013 presentó cuatro recomendaciones de narrativas testimoniales dentro de las que destacan las traducciones al inglés de *Biografía de un cimarrón*, de Esteban Montejo y Miguel Barnet, originalmente publicada en La Habana en 1966, y *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, de Menchú y Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, cuya primera edición en español data de 1983, también publicada en La Habana. ¿Cómo leer esta irrupción del género distintivo y ya canónico de la Guerra fría latinoamericana en la escena de la circulación mundial de la literatura del siglo XXI? ¿Cómo leer, en tiempos de literatura mundial, la vuelta de textos cuyas primeras ediciones de hace (casi) cincuenta y treinta años, respectivamente, marcaron el campo literario (latino) americano del mundo bipolar de la Guerra fría? ¿Se recupera acaso este género narrativo de la insurgencia y de las voces subalternas para otra literatura mundial, menos homogénea y normativizada? ¿Es posible re-leer la permanencia-irrupción del testimonio revisitando y releendo las interconexiones, dinámicas

¹ *World Literature Today* fue fundada en 1927 con el nombre de *Books Abroad* por el académico Roy Temple House, director de Departamento de Lenguas Modernas de la Universidad Oklahoma. A partir de 1977 la revista cambió su nombre por el actual. Se publica bimestralmente de forma impresa y digital, conservando su objetivo inicial de fungir como un índice informativo y divulgativo de las tendencias de la literatura contemporánea a nivel mundial. Así, da a conocer tanto textos literarios como autores y una considerable cantidad de reseñas. Entre sus muchos colaboradores a lo largo de sus más de noventa años de existencia destaca el nombre de la poeta y ensayista alemana Emma Kann. Para saber más acerca de la historia de WLT, consultar la sección dedicada a ella en su página web <<https://www.worldlitertoday.org/history>>.

de circulación y esferas de solidaridad que emergen más allá de las asimetrías del mundo bipolar, por ejemplo, en clave de lectura Sur/South²?

El amplio espectro de respuestas posibles constata la complejidad discursiva inherente al fenómeno testimonial tanto como modelo narrativo precursor y configurador del tiempo revolucionario de todo un continente (Gugelberger/Kearney 1991), como también como instancia de las “testimonial cultures” (Ahmed/Stacey 2001) que caracterizan a nuestra contemporaneidad. Así, en el marco de lo que considero su *reinserción* en la circulación global de la literatura (como bien simbólico y como materialidad), los debates podrían decantarse por diversos escenarios. Uno de estos se vincularía a cuestiones relativas a la colonialidad del saber (Lander/Castro-Gómez 2000), es decir, como expresión de una problemática vinculación implícita del testimonio con la noción ya fuera de uso de “Third World Literature” en las coordenadas espacio-temporales y discursivas de la “aldea global”, o, en términos de una crítica a la crítica postcolonial, tal y como Mabel Moraña escribiera, a finales de la década de 1990, en “El boom del subalterno”:

A pesar de esta salvedad, que intenta resguardar la historicidad en el proceso de asimilación y aplicación de la teorización india en otras realidades culturales, América Latina es *producida*, como tantas veces en su historia, como un constructo teórico legitimado desde la centralidad de discursos prestigiosos que transfieren sus categorías y agendas ideológicas a una realidad multifacética, cuya compleja especificidad histórica resulta inevitablemente nivelada y simplificada en el proceso de traducción teórica y negociación historiográfica. (1997: 52)

Si bien ambas posiciones, debidamente contextualizadas e historizadas, dan cuenta de debates más amplios dentro del campo de los estudios latinoamericanos y de una producción de conocimiento localizada, no dejan de configurar por ello escenarios que continúan anclados en una dinámica marcada por un pensamiento bipolar centrípeto (centro/periferia) y por su incapacidad de incorporar, en aquel momento, las *histoires croisées* del Sur global. Estas miradas insisten en

2 Al referir al término Sur/South lo hago en el sentido postulado en un trabajo colectivo anterior, esto es como: “[a deliberate shift in] the perspective from the often theoretically and conceptually determined cultural relationships within the Global South. Instead, it illuminates a concretely focused complex geocultural relationship, here denoted as ‘SUR / SOUTH’, based on examples of cultural, literary and intellectual exchanges and interrelationships between Latin America and India, in the past and present. The term ‘SUR / SOUTH’ thus serves as a figure of thought for a change of perspective, for a shift of focus towards the concrete framework of exchange, signified through the materiality of topics, forms of knowledge and experiences” (Klengel/Ortiz Wallner 2016: 9).

la articulación de la diferencia, es decir, permanecen imbuidas en la matriz de las políticas de la identidad que es hora de superar.

Así, para un manejo apropiado de posiciones, teorías, opiniones y declaraciones “desde el Sur”, capaces de fracturar la verticalidad discursiva que ha caracterizado a gran parte del latinoamericanismo, es necesario que toda localización teórica vinculada a intercambios concretos entre espacios y culturas trascienda los límites de un pensamiento basado en el concepto de la diferencia. En este sentido,

[...] in order to overcome a certain epistemic blindness with regard to the positions of the Global South, a blindness diagnosed using the postcolonial criterion of “colonial difference”, one *also* requires a precise understanding and appreciation of universal concepts – such as humanity or mankind, human beings, cosmopolitanism, the world – and claims to validity, which have been formulated from different positions in the South. These concepts are not necessarily based on a mindset of contrasts, boundaries and differences. The verticality deriving from asymmetries and power structures (“North vs. South”, “Centre vs. Periphery”) certainly plays a role in the articulation of such concepts. But within the South-South Relationship there is also a *horizontality*, which leads to an articulation of *similarities* with relation to a third party (Europe, occidental modernity discourses), without the entire constellation of the bipolar vertical structure of “difference” necessarily taking effect. (Klengel/Ortiz Wallner 2016: 9)

Con esta primera precisión teórico-metodológica se desplaza el énfasis del fenómeno cultural del testimonio como entidad identitaria en nuestro presente hacia la relevancia de las redes de transmisión y circulación de saberes que enfatizan el *cómo* determinados productos culturales se reinventan y resemantizan en su paso por y existencia en distintos contextos culturales. Tomando como punto de partida la escena de lectura en *World Literature Today* a que me he referido antes, desarrollaré en lo que sigue el caso de circulación del fenómeno testimonial y su materialidad concreta como género narrativo desde el continente americano (específicamente desde Centroamérica) hacia el subcontinente indio, postulando que su trayectoria multirrelacional manifiesta la coexistencia de los tiempos heterogéneos de las literaturas del mundo a la vez que decanta una historia, dinámica y hasta hoy ignorada por la literatura mundial, de las redes feministas de izquierda durante la Guerra fría.

La comprensión de literatura mundial acuñada por David Damrosch (2003), esto es, como un conjunto de obras literarias que circula más allá de su contexto cultural propio, sea en su versión traducida o en su lengua original, y que en dicho proceso llega a formar parte activa e incide en un sistema literario distinto del propio (4), la leo aquí en contrapunto con la propuesta de Ottmar Ette de complejizar dicha noción en favor del término “literaturas del mundo” (2017: 37), resultantes estas de las convergencias de una serie de

lógicas no acumulativas de una totalidad, sino acentuadoras de las carencias.³ El componente espacial de las dinámicas globales de circulación se complementa, en la noción de Ette, con una historia e historización de los movimientos y desplazamientos en los circuitos de intercambios y traslaciones. En este sentido, la verticalidad centro-periferia como lógica dominante que sigue caracterizando a las nociones clásicas de literatura mundial, es relativizada y problematizada al contraponer la pluralidad de lógicas que le son inherentes a las “literaturas del mundo”, literaturas que nos recuerdan y señalan precisamente las carencias del mundo en el que existen.

El sentido operativo de una categoría como la de “literaturas del mundo” radica entonces en colocar y leer, a contrapelo, en forma de red no jerárquica ni normativa, sino en razón de su movilidad, mutabilidad, variación y fuga, los disensos, diferencias y multiplicidades de las producciones literarias insertas en circuitos de circulación concretos. Esto implica, para el caso del lugar de enunciación que denominamos “América Latina”, pensar la historia de la circulación de saberes como una trayectoria de idas y de vueltas. El caso del testimonio, tal y como lo propongo comprender y releer aquí en su circulación Sur-Sur (específicamente de Centroamérica hacia la India), es la historia de una trayectoria productiva de transferencias literarias e intelectuales entre culturas testimoniales, estudios subalternos y feminismos del Sur.

Testimonio, literaturas del mundo y la perspectiva desde el Sur II

Con el auge de los debates acerca de la literatura mundial y las literaturas del mundo se fue recuperando, a inicios del siglo XXI, un espacio de enunciación para las teorías y los estudios literarios comparados. Paralelamente se abría el espacio del debate a partir de las voces provenientes de lugares de enunciación *otros*, ejemplarmente reunidos bajo categorías como la del Sur global, Sur/

3 “El concepto de las literaturas del mundo, por el contrario, no presupone ninguna abundancia tal. Su forma de pensar multilógica siempre tiene presente que numerosas otras lógicas todavía no están incluidas en él e incluso que estas lógicas desconocidas, no exploradas, les faltan, por naturaleza, al discurso propio y a la concepción propia de las literaturas del mundo. Así, el discurso de las literaturas del mundo no cae en la trampa de la abundancia, sino que parte de una carencia, de una escases, de una privación que no se puede encubrir con ningún tipo de acumulación cuantitativa, ya que las literaturas del mundo no se dejan encasillar ni delimitar espacialmente y muestran siempre brechas y lagunas” (Ette 2017: 66; traducción mía).

South o relaciones Sur-Sur (véase Mann/Phaf-Rheinberger 2014; Klengel/Ortiz Wallner 2016; Mahler 2017). Estas categorías comparten una problematización sistemática de la perspectiva eurocéntrica que había marcado los estudios y nociones de la globalización vigentes (acuñados, por ejemplo, en el término “Tercer mundo”), desplazando su atención crítica a las *histoires croisées* más amplias y complejas, entre Asia, África y América Latina. Es en este corte en el que cobra aún más sentido la comprensión del género testimonial como un “lenguaje global”⁴ transversal capaz de situarse y operar bajo las coordenadas de más de un sistema literario y en diversos continentes, no necesariamente de forma simultánea sino más bien en múltiples y heterogéneos tiempos. Así, su trayectoria Sur/South como *travelling concept* incluiría una serie de intervenciones en planos diferenciados como el de una cultura global vinculada a los reclamos de justicia y políticas de la memoria, hasta su circulación exitosa como texto icónico de la literatura latinoamericana en el mercado global del libro — como consta, por ejemplo, para el caso de la traducción al inglés del texto de Menchú anunciado en el sitio de la no menos icónica Verso Books como un “global bestseller”.⁵

Kavita Panjabi, especialista en literatura comparada y reconocida académica feminista, trazó ya a inicios de la década de 1990, desde la India, el trayecto Sur/South del testimonio: “One of the first cases (perhaps the first case) of Latin American influence on Indian Literature in the context of women’s writing is that of *Sandino’s Daughters* [...] on *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telengana People’s Struggle*”⁶ (1992: 58s.) y más adelante continúa:

4 Para un panorama reciente sobre el testimonio como fenómeno cultural en un contexto ampliado mundial ver la introducción “Perspektiven auf ein kulturelles Phänomen: Zeugenschaft in der Romania” (Nickel/Ortiz Wallner 2014: 7–15).

5 Véase el anuncio en la página de Verso: <https://www.versobooks.com/books/445-irigoberta-menchu>.

6 “*We Were Making History: Women and the Telengana Uprising*, a collection of testimonies of women who participated in the Telengana People’s Struggle of the forties in the state of Hyderabad, recorded and edited by the Stree Shakti Sangathana, was the first widely read collection of women’s testimonial literature in India and was published in 1989. [...] The editors of the *testimonios* acknowledge this influence thus: ‘When we first chose to do this study, one of our own aims was to recover our own history (we saw the women in the Telengana Struggle as founders of a history of women’s action in Andhra, indeed in India itself). So we thought we would be tracing a lineage. But after we had done nearly forty interviews, we decided that it would be best to publish them as life stories. We now thought of it as a book that was theirs, as much as it was ours. We were also encouraged because we had read and enjoyed [...] *Sandino’s Daughters* (280)’” (Panjabi 1992: 58s.).

This instance reflects the direct influence of Central American women's testimonies on Indian feminist historiography, as a precedent and persuasive force, encouraging the creation of space for a new and important genre. [...] Given the strong parallels in the political and historical experiences of women in these cases, there was ready ground here for the reception of this influence; the Telengana women's narratives, like the Central American *testimonios* [...] are situated in the historical context of crises in nationalism in contemporary postcolonial societies, and the increasing articulation of the role of women in these struggles. (Panjabi 1992: 59)

Aquel primer momento de contacto y recepción, Panjabi, así como el colectivo feminista de izquierda Stree Shakti Sanghatana que editó *We Were Making History*, lo ubican claramente en el trabajo doble (académico y de activismo político) de reivindicación de la historia de las mujeres como un acto público y privado de intervención política. Así, el colectivo de editoras que recopiló los testimonios y dio forma a *We Were Making History* (1989) escribía en su introducción programática: “Women's history, then, is an intervention: its intent is more political than archival. . . As we search out and record the histories in this book, we set out to reclaim a past and celebrate a lineage of resistance and growth, for to be deprived of a past is to inherit an impoverished present and a future sealed off from change” (Sanghatana 1989: 19).

La temprana lectura y recepción del clásico de Margaret Randall *Sandino's Daughters* (1981), así como de los testimonios de Domitila y Rigoberta Menchú (véase Panjabi 1992 y 2009a) abrieron una serie de debates en los circuitos de la cultura letrada de las izquierdas en la India. El testimonio no fue visto como un sustituto de la historiografía, sino como un género autónomo capaz de ocupar un lugar que haría que las voces silenciadas se escuchasen de forma diferenciada y no naturalizada dado que, simultáneamente, se trataba de un género “nuevo”, uno que apenas empezaba a ser nombrado en India en 1989, año tan significativo para la historia global. Es precisamente esta intersección entre una emergente forma de literatura insurgente en India y la circulación de la misma en círculos letrados de diferentes continentes, es decir entre Centro-/Latinoamérica y la India, que emerge una trayectoria Sur/South hasta hoy desatendida e ignorada por la teoría y crítica latinoamericanas.

Se amplía así el horizonte de comprensión del fenómeno testimonial dado que en su trayectoria del Sur al Sur visibiliza una serie de aspectos que le adjudican un papel relevante en las literaturas del mundo y en las historias literarias en que surge, ya no comprendidas estas como manifestaciones de una comunidad imaginada restringida y restrictiva, sino como historias literarias conectadas entre sí. Por un lado, las reflexiones de que es objeto desde India muestran la historia de sus vinculaciones con géneros “anteriores” como la novela y las narraciones autobiográficas, de origen occidental y no occidental: “*testimonio* did

not develop from a vacuum, it belongs to and is a development from traditions of political literary texts that prevailed in both the Indian and the Latin American contexts” (Panjabi 1992: 60). Recurriendo a la tradición no occidental de las narraciones autobiográficas en India y tomando como caso paradigmático la autobiografía de Gandhi publicada en 1948 en su traducción al inglés, esto es, al inicio de la India independiente, Panjabi (1992; 2009) reconstruye a partir de ese primer momento postcolonial una serie de entrelazamientos de las dimensiones retórica, metafórica y política presentes posteriormente en el género del testimonio una vez que ha entrado (a finales de la década de 1980) vía los testimonios centroamericanos en el sistema literario indio.

Una de las claves de lectura radica precisamente en poner el énfasis en el cómo son analizadas las genealogías de producción y recepción de textos cuando estos se mueven fuera de “su” lugar, esto es, fuera de su aparente lugar natural de origen. Así, Panjabi va perfilando en sus estudios pioneros (1992; 2009a) las rutas de circulación y recepción y las transformaciones estético-políticas del género del testimonio en India proponiendo una periodización literaria a partir de la publicación de *We Were Making History* hasta “Living to tell their tale: *Testimonio* as subaltern voice in India and Latin America”, un seminario organizado en el 2007 en Nueva Delhi en el Center for Spanish and Latin American Studies de la universidad Jamia Milia Islamia, constatando en dicho recorrido una ampliación que incluiría ya no únicamente las luchas de las mujeres militantes de izquierda por contar con su propia historia, sino también como género idóneo para narrar las historia de vida de los dalits.⁷ Un caso ejemplar de las interconexiones entre feminismos, historias de vida de los dalits⁸ y testimonio se halla en la compilación de Sharmila Rege *Writing Caste/Writing Gender*:

7 La hoy llamada literatura dalit (“Dalit Literature”) es un género ya consagrado en India y en otros contextos. En un artículo publicado en el 2015 en *The Times of India* titulado “Dalit literature goes global” Martand Kaushik resume el estado de cuestión así: “‘The circulation of Dalit literature [...] is important to deconstruct an idea of India that is pervasive, and one that many diasporic Indians seek to cultivate: India as non-violent, Hinduism as mythological, anti-orthodoxy and benevolent, and both as peace-loving,’ says Toral Gajarawala, an associate professor at NYU. ‘The knowledge of India that circulates in the West is caste-free. Dalit studies offer a corrective to this ‘idea of India’ in an important way’” (Kaushik 2015).

8 Acerca del papel de la literatura dalit como un género emergente, Panjabi observa: “Dalit autobiographies, which have been compared to African-American slave narratives, are now also being read in the critical framework of the Latin American *testimonio* in terms of their narrative strategies and content, and their institutional location and function *vis-a-vis* critical academic discourse. [...] Even though the writings by Dalit women appeared bizarre and illogical to many readers and critics in the non-Dalit literary circles, today these *testimonios* have become crucial to think and theorize about the literary and social spheres” (2009b: 12).

Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios (2006), libro con el cual el testimonio —asumido ya sin traducción al inglés como lo demuestra el título— terminaría por constatar la disrupción del discurso tradicional de la historia literaria india como manifestación de una historia literaria mucho más compleja y global, marcada por la trayectoria Sur/South de un género narrativo de los márgenes americanos hacia los márgenes de la sociedad hiperestratificada de la India:

Another dimension to this debate also included the view that the original name, *testimonio*, be preserved, for if we could ultimately retain the Anglo-American term “novel” in India, does the reluctance to take on the Latin American *testimonio* not reflect a bias against acknowledging the literary interaction with Latin American influence? [...] The point is thus not about the western or Latin American or Indian source of nomenclature but about the consensus on the nature of the conventions of the genre in a specific culture, and the horizons of expectation a particular generic naming may set up. For a genre frames the reader's interpretation of a text; and the specific conventions of the genre, draw readers into identifying the significant features of the genre, as distinct from others, operative in the text. (Panjabi 2009b: 9s.)

Ahora bien, no se trata en esta historia literaria de las relaciones Sur-Sur de borrar las complejidades y paradojas de cada sistema literario o de ignorar los contextos histórico-culturales específicos en que el género testimonial surge e interactúa.⁹ Lo que me interesa destacar en toda esta reflexión es la potencialidad de una lectura a contrapelo que la perspectiva teórico-metodológica situada del concepto Sur/South devuelve a los estudios literarios. Al cuestionar el archivo y el canon dominantes, aún de un género literario menor como lo es el testimonio, y al rastrear su historia alternativa de circulación fuera de la territorialidad americana, nos ubicaremos en un espacio de enunciación más complejo y, a la vez, menos normativo capaz de releer las redes de solidaridad literaria de los feminismos del Sur hacia finales de la Guerra fría. Solidaridades literarias que, desde la historia de la circulación del testimonio en clave Sur/South, develan renovadas relaciones entre estética y política. El testimonio, en esta particular constelación de relaciones y transferencias culturales puede y debe ser, una vez más, releído en toda su complejidad como parte de las literaturas del mundo.

⁹ Rege apunta acertadamente a una de las particularidades del testimonio en India cuando afirma: “In order to bring ‘new insights and theories into elite brahmanical institutions of academia’ as well as to integrate Dalits into mainstream society, it is imperative that the *testimonios* of Dalits should be regarded as a medium of ‘resistance and organized anti-caste struggle’” (2006: 15).

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4: Dislocating temporal, geographical and environmental mediations

Alejandra Laera

Más allá del mundo: imaginación transtemporal para un cierto modo de habitar los confines

El mundo y lo mundial: modos de leer, funcionamientos, motivaciones

¿Por qué hablar del tiempo si estamos hablando del mundo? Pero antes: ¿de qué hablamos cuando hablamos de mundo en sede literario cultural?

Itinerarios, caminos, trayectos, errancias, flujos. La narrativa latinoamericana de finales del siglo XX y comienzos del XXI ha encontrado en esas figuras espaciales uno de sus motivos fundamentales, si no el principal. En sintonía con las artes (sobre todo en formato de instalaciones o intervenciones, pero también en pinturas), la narrativa tendió a focalizar aquellas historias en las que predominan los viajes, los traslados, las migraciones. Como rasgo particular, a diferencia de otros momentos en los que emergieron con rapidez los relatos de viaje, en este caso los desplazamientos son multidireccionales, arman líneas curvas y rectas, son reacios a una lógica que no sea la del puro movimiento, abarcan y amplían ilimitadamente el mundo. Como rasgo similar al de esos otros momentos previos, muchos de ellos tienen elementos documentales o los simulan, ya sea porque son crónicas o se organizan con la forma del diario, ya sea porque son del orden de lo autoficcional o porque lo emulan. Ni las diferencias ni las similitudes son menores. Por un lado, si bien siempre hay un elemento de localización fuerte en las narrativas sobre desplazamientos, también hay en el conjunto más reciente un cierto rasgo deslocalizador, en la medida en que el impulso o la necesidad de traslado excede las circunstancias locales o es ampliamente compartido; de allí la multidireccionalidad, de allí lo abarcativo. Por otro lado, la ampliación del mundo en el conjunto de esas historias, al igual que el impulso generalizado a escala mundial, remiten una vez más al modo en que los discursos de la cultura, tanto ficcionales como documentales, se vinculan con las circunstancias políticas y económicas, y también con las tecnológicas, que a la vez propician, por medio de sus propios discursos y prácticas, cierto tipo de intereses narrativos por sobre otros. Y así como el discurso de la modernización, por ejemplo, puso en el centro a la ciudad, o el de la colonización a los viajes transatlánticos y a las tierras ignotas, el discurso de la globalización puso en el centro, podríamos decir, una idea

diferente de mundo: amplio, accesible real o virtualmente, expansivo, cognoscible, incluso hospitalario. No era un mundo que había que descubrir o que había que explorar, tampoco un mundo al que había que admirar o del que había que salir, sino un mundo al que se podía llegar, un mundo disponible.

En esa misma dirección fue que desde los estudios literarios se retomó la noción de “literatura mundial” propuesta por Goethe en 1827 y que, siguiendo alguna de sus derivas (teóricas, sociológicas, pedagógicas), diferentes críticos contribuyeron a su reemergencia y expansión. Más allá del recorrido, de los aportes, aun de los reparos, lo que me interesa es subrayar la alineación entre este tipo de producción crítica, que incluso daría lugar a lo que se conoce como *World Literature Studies* y tiene plafón institucional, y la producción de cierto tipo de narrativa, no solo por su inclinación temática, sino también por su difusión, sus intercambios y sus posibilidades de circulación. Con vistas al argumento que busco elaborar acá, quiero distinguir, por consiguiente, entre los tres sentidos involucrados en la noción de literatura mundial, en tanto se trata de una literatura del mundo y sobre el mundo. Por un lado, *la literatura mundial como modo de leer*, perspectiva ligada a los estudios literarios y, que, en la instancia actual, podríamos datar desde el fin del siglo XX, básicamente a partir de los polémicos aportes de Pascale Casanova y Franco Moretti y, en el campo latinoamericano, de la incisiva compilación de Ignacio Sánchez Prado.¹ Por otro lado, se trata de lo que llamo *funcionamiento literario mundial*, en el que también resuena el diagnóstico de Goethe en su archicitada frase de 1827 acerca de la insuficiencia de lo nacional para pensar la literatura y a lo que un par de décadas después se refieren Marx y Engels, comentarios ambos que despuntan la relación entre lecturas, lenguas y mercado a través de una circulación (de nombres, títulos, contenidos, géneros, formas, estilos, etcétera) inevitablemente transnacional, cuyo horizonte es mundial y cuyos alcances son inesperados; si bien este funcionamiento mundial involucra textos y autores, no se detiene en el trazo fino de las textualidades, sino que su terreno privilegiado es el de las prácticas culturales, con mayor o menor carga política y económica. Finalmente,

¹ Es muy conocido el conjunto de textos inaugurales de la reemergencia de la literatura mundial a comienzos del siglo XXI, principalmente los de Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000) y “More conjectures on World Literature” (2003), y Pascale Casanova, *La República Mundial de las Letras* (1999). Además, fue un importante aporte la inflexión pedagógica de la cuestión de David Damrosch en su *What is World Literature?* (2003) y la apertura propuesta en el volumen compilado por Christopher Prendergast, *Debating World Literature* (2004). Una discusión pionera e incisiva sobre la situación de América Latina en los estudios de literatura mundial fue organizada por Ignacio Sánchez Prado en *América Latina en la literatura mundial* (2006).

en la línea en la que inicié este ensayo, puede entenderse *la literatura mundial como motivación*, es decir como impulso y a la vez como motivo (en esa acepción básica que le dio Tomashevsky en 1925), recorriendo diversos niveles, entre otros el temático, el lingüístico y el argumental. Solo en ciertas circunstancias y bajo ciertas condiciones esos tres sentidos se imbrican haciendo la noción de literatura mundial tan productiva para revisar los protocolos de la crítica literaria como para repensar los términos de lo mundial.²

Ahora bien: ¿qué ocurre cuando la relación o la sintonía entre esos sentidos de la literatura mundial se debilita, cuando la validez general de la noción de mundo entra en crisis y es cuestionada? ¿Qué repercusiones tiene tal situación en cada uno de esos sentidos? ¿Qué queda de lo mundial y cuáles son las derivas de la literatura mundial tras el desajuste de los planteos teóricos, críticos y metodológicos respecto de los discursos y las prácticas del plano político y económico? Es a raíz de estos interrogantes donde la distinción entre los tres sentidos que esboqué me resulta operativamente necesaria para pensar sus decantaciones en el momento actual y sus desafíos a futuro.

A esta altura, es inherente a la literatura una posibilidad de proyección mundial que se confronta con un paradigma nacional o local mayormente restrictivo y que la consolidación desigual del mercado de libros ha acelerado vertiginosamente (en algunos casos subsanando las desigualdades y en otros profundizándolas); en tanto funcionamiento, si atendemos a las prácticas de corte tecnológico, la literatura mundial excede sin dudas el umbral de lo post-global. Como puede notarse, el funcionamiento “mundial” de la literatura se superpone con una vertiente del modo de leer “mundial”, en la medida en que es la crítica la que detecta, rastrea y describe recorridos, flujos, circulaciones literarias. Y esa suerte de marco teórico crítico mundializador, muchas veces con un sesgo excesivamente sociológico, ya está incorporado a los estudios críticos, más allá de los World Literature Studies y de su institucionalización. Eso no obsta a que se siga sosteniendo el derecho y la aspiración a formar parte

² Doy solo un ejemplo que me parece fundamental pensar desde toda su dimensión mundial y que siempre ha sido abordado sesgadamente: el momento romántico de mediados del siglo XIX en el Río de la Plata, que triangula Europa occidental, en particular Francia, con Estados Unidos y con América latina: entre la década de 1830 y la de 1850 puede observarse un funcionamiento (la circulación en tanto mecanismo de consagración y de mercado: traducciones, publicaciones folletinescas, etc.) y una motivación (los viajes y la exploración territorial) que hacen converger en la imagen del “desierto” configurada por Esteban Echeverría y por Domingo F. Sarmiento a Chateaubriand (*Atala*) y a Fenimore Cooper (*The Prairie*, *The Last of the Mohicans*).

de ese mundo en el que la literatura circula con mayor visibilidad, tal como se observa en los debates del latinoamericanismo, que conllevan la otra vertiente del modo de leer en clave mundial. Solo que el corolario de ese gesto contemporáneo es haber asumido la idea de un mundo al que habría que ampliar y del cual hay que denunciar la jerarquización propia de la relación entre centros y periferias o una ironía intrínseca a lo global o cualquier tipo de exclusión; pero hacerlo implica aceptar, aun cuando se la combata, la lógica de un mundo único (como si fuera un retorno materialista del universalismo de mediados del siglo XX). Sostener en cambio la coexistencia de varios mundos, que muchas veces entran en contacto y se intersecan o coinciden o colisionan, intensificar la configuración de esos mundos desde una posición particular, me parece que sigue siendo un desafío mayor que el gesto aspiracional de la inclusión en una literatura mundial. Llegamos así al tercer sentido: si la globalización, tal como hemos dicho, sintonizó los postulados de la literatura mundial con los discursos y las prácticas políticas y propició entonces lo mundial como modo de leer, fue sobre todo porque, además de acelerar el funcionamiento mundial de la literatura, potenció lo mundial literario como motivación. La confianza en los tránsitos, los flujos, las movilizaciones, la apertura implicada en lo global, junto con la desconfianza y la sensación de insuficiencia ante los paradigmas nacionales, fue fundamental en este proceso, tal como lo expliqué al comienzo. Asimismo, lo fue el giro documental que tuvo lugar en las últimas décadas y que puede pensarse vis-à-vis los discursos sobre literatura mundial; en ese giro documental, los motivos del viaje en todas sus manifestaciones han sido una tendencia poderosa para una narrativa con un componente ficcional muy diluido.

En la actualidad, con la reemergencia generalizada de discursos y prácticas políticas y económicas antiglobales, esa confianza en la movilidad, esa entrega a un mundo relativamente hospitalario está en crisis, de allí el debilitamiento de la motivación implicada en una literatura mundial. Y de allí, también, la detección de nuevos motivos en la narrativa y la búsqueda de nuevas herramientas críticas.

En este punto en el que confirmamos que la literatura mundial como funcionamiento es parte de los fenómenos literarios, que como modo de leer ha decantado y se ha independizado de los *World Literature Studies* y de su institucionalización, y que como motivación se ha debilitado, es donde querría enfatizar que si algo distingue a la crítica actual es la necesidad de acercarse a los objetos sin un marco previo rígido para, en cambio, hacerlo con una batería conceptual variada que permita disponer de los diversos elementos que sean requeridos por cada objeto en su abordaje. Apuesto, por lo tanto, a una crítica instrumental que, con este punto de partida, construya sus teorizaciones

y organice sus propias lecturas. Por eso mismo, vamos a hablar del tiempo cuando estamos hablando de mundo.

Más allá del mundo: transtemporalidad, aceleración y desaceleración

Al menos como tendencia visible en la narrativa del Cono Sur, podríamos afirmar que la imaginación literaria que acompaña la crisis de la noción de “el mundo” y “lo mundial” no es de orden espacial. A la profusa narrativa de viajes, tanto ficcional como documental, en la que predominaban tránsitos y flujos espaciales, no se la confronta con reclusiones o confinamientos. Tampoco hay proyecciones planetarias o intergalácticas, o sea la creación de otros mundos que compensen la crisis de este. Y sobre todo, y a diferencia de lo que ha ocurrido en los discursos políticos y económicos, no parece haber, por contraste con una imaginación global, un retorno narrativo a la imaginación nacional. En cambio, sugiero, *la crisis de la imaginación espacial global, que fue la que predominó en la narrativa de las últimas décadas, está acechada por el tiempo*. Solo que ya no se trata de aquel tiempo que marcó las tramas narrativas del siglo XIX, cuando reinaba la novela y con ella el tiempo cronológico; ya no estamos ante el relato del progreso, ni ante una de sus variantes novelescas preferidas: el ascenso y la decadencia. Tampoco ante el tiempo cuyas alteraciones modernistas de principios del siglo XX o las experimentaciones de los 60 conllevaban la necesidad de su reconstrucción lineal. Las grandes novelas del realismo y del modernismo hicieron del tiempo, de hecho, el sostén de sus tramas.

En cambio, en la contemporaneidad, quiero llamar la atención sobre una concepción temporal diferente: tiempos que conviven, se superponen y se confunden, tiempos que se discontinúan, se aceleran, se descomponen y se repiten. *Una contemporaneidad cuya imaginación es transtemporal y que, por lo tanto, da lugar a la heterocronía y la altertemporalidad*. Esa, propongo, es la imaginación postglobal: la que propone sus elaboraciones o resoluciones narrativas por medio del tiempo. Más todavía, y estrictamente en esto me quiero detener: una imaginación que encuentra en el tiempo la salida para los problemas planteados en y por el espacio, en y por el mundo. *La imaginación literaria de un mundo transtemporal*.

Me estoy refiriendo a un conjunto de novelas latinoamericanas del Cono Sur en las que la noción de tiempo es casi un principio constructivo. Novelas todas que trabajan con la *aceleración*. Una aceleración impulsada por la guerra total, por la invasión política o por la invasión ambiental, por el desastre

ecológico, por el hambre o el caos social. Novelas de aceleración positiva, como *Quema* (2015) de Ariadna Castellarnau (escritora española radicada hace casi una década en la Argentina, que ganó con este libro el Premio Casa de las Américas), *Los restos* (2014) de Betina Keizman (argentina radicada durante aproximadamente el mismo lapso en Chile, donde ejerce la docencia universitaria), *Cataratas* (2015) de Hernán Vanoli (argentino que vive en la Argentina, sociólogo) o *Mal de época* (2017) de María Sonia Cristoff (argentina y docente universitaria de escritura creativa). Pero también novelas de aceleración negativa, como *Leñador* (2013) de Mike Wilson (chileno-norteamericano que vivió en la Argentina) o *Distancia de rescate* (2014) de Samantha Schweblin (argentina que habita hace unos años en Berlín). En todos los casos, algo ha ocurrido, no se sabe con certeza qué, y el mundo ha cambiado para siempre. En todos los casos, también, hay traslados y desplazamientos. Pero la posibilidad de habitar esos nuevos pedazos de mundo (provisorios, incómodos, insatisfactorios, amenazantes) implica una cierta desmundialización, en la medida en que acotan el mundo en lugar de ampliarlo, en la medida en que parecen protegerse de él antes que buscar en él refugio, en la medida en que lo desrealizan y ya no se lo reconoce. Desmundialización: o bien retorno a la pura naturaleza o bien cambio total de orden o bien completo extrañamiento. De allí que muchas veces, también, se produzca un borramiento gradual de las referencias espaciales.

Si el caso de la aceleración positiva es más evidente por la aceleración del ritmo narrativo o por la proliferación de temporalidades, como en los textos que mencioné, el caso de la desaceleración negativa es igualmente potente en su inflexión temporal de lo que resta del mundo.³ Mientras en *Leñador* de Mike Wilson el efecto de la detención del tiempo es su descomposición en partículas mínimas, ya que la narración se ve demorada permanentemente por la descripción y la explicación, en *Distancia de rescate* de Samanta Schweblin se apuesta a una repetición cada vez más minuciosa de las acciones como conjura contra el devenir de la historia narrada, como si la repetición con variaciones pudiera alterar el curso de la historia y crear una temporalidad alternativa. Cada una a su manera, ambas novelas plantean tramas espaciales cuyos

3 Si ponemos en sintonía lo que llamo novelas de aceleración positiva con las teorías político económicas aceleracionistas, encontramos en ellas la misma tensión que provocan estas: si el aceleracionismo supone que las capacidades productivas y tecnológicas deben ser liberadas más allá de las limitaciones impuestas por el capitalismo para dejarlo atrás y llegar a la expansión hacia un postcapitalismo globalizado (Williams/Srnicek 2017: 47), la hipótesis de las tramas y su textualidad nos permiten pensar en los efectos liberadores del aceleracionismo o, para decirlo con las palabras de uno de sus críticos más fuertes, de la “catástrofe” que implica “la intensificación del ritmo de producción y de explotación” (Berardi 2017: 69).

conflictos se elaboran a partir de la desaceleración temporal, ya sea por la vía de la descomposición o de la altertemporalidad: ambas desaceleran el paso del tiempo, lo ralentan, lo demoran, retrasan su avance. En lo que resta de este ensayo, voy a enfocarme en una de las novelas de esto que llamo *novelas de aceleración negativa*. Me refiero a *Leñador* de Mike Wilson y la descomposición del tiempo cronológico que practica a lo largo del relato.

Descomposición del tiempo en *Leñador* de Mike Wilson

Los bosques del Yukón: fríos, secos, casi árticos, solitarios, arduos, extraños, alejados de todo lo conocido, extremos, un confín. Es allí donde está el protagonista de esta novela haciéndose leñador, tras llegar, presumiblemente y por algunas alusiones dispersas a lo largo del relato, desde el sur del territorio americano, desde el otro extremo; y es desde allí que narra en primera persona esa experiencia. Así empieza:

Combatí en una guerra, hace décadas en un archipiélago, y combatí en el cuadrilátero, hace años en las noches de la ciudad. Fracasé en las islas y en el ring. Me fui del país, buscando alejarme de todo, de la oscuridad, del pasado, de la claustrofobia, necesitaba respirar. Veía cosas que me hacían mal, escuchaba voces, me estaba perdiendo, extraviando en mi cabeza. Hui hasta llegar a los bosques de Yukón. (Wilson 2016: 11)

El protagonista no narra el desplazamiento a través del territorio americano, no cuenta cómo lo hizo ni por qué; tampoco explica los motivos que lo llevaron a elegir como destino el Yukón. En ese trayecto puramente masculino (la guerra, el boxeo) en el que el cuerpo se confronta con lo otro (el enemigo, el contrincante), se trata, en el Yukón, de dejarlo todo atrás para volver a empezar. La percepción del nuevo territorio como una suerte de último reducto del mundo implica, precisamente, la búsqueda no solo de una nueva vida sino también de un nuevo modo de vivir, un espacio donde desprenderse de lo que está antes para aprender todo desde el comienzo.

En su libro *Tiempo. La dimensión temporal y el arte de vivir* (2015), Rüdiger Safranski escribe que detrás de un verdadero comienzo existe la posibilidad de una gran transformación y se pregunta por la manera en la que nos podemos deshacer de la propia historia, de lo que nos ata hacia atrás (Safranski 2017: 46). En *Leñador* la posibilidad de esa gran transformación es la huida al Yukón, donde en lugar de encontrar un opositor al que vencer, como en su vida previa, aprende a convivir con la pura naturaleza, para lo cual es necesario “descifrar el

territorio” (Safranski 2017: 47). Es en ese desciframiento en el que parecería haber una apuesta a la espacialidad, donde, a través de la noción de comienzo que se configura en la novela, se horada el tiempo cronológico de la vida en el bosque. Podría decirse, de la temporalidad construida en la novela, lo mismo que dice el narrador sobre su encuentro con un alce: “Nos quedamos así, deben de haber pasado no más de unos cuatro o cinco segundos, pero el instante se extendió, duró una vida” (Wilson 2016: 69). Porque *Leñador*, en su desciframiento del territorio, nos entrega una suerte de manual enciclopédico: herramientas, animales, árboles, materias primas, actividades, utensilios, estrellas, enfermedades, costumbres, productos, remedios, accidentes geográficos, mitos, y mucho más. En el manual se despliega el contenido de la frase que cierra la breve apertura narrativa de la novela, tras mencionar la huida al Yukón: “Aprendí cosas” (Wilson 2016: 11). Para narrar el aprendizaje, sin embargo, ante todo se describen esas cosas que se aprenden. Y en esa descripción hecha con minucia y atenta al detalle, el tiempo de las acciones se descompone abriéndose a una temporalidad que no es ya la de la vida del protagonista sino la de las cosas. Si el instante de la mirada entre el narrador y el alce parece durar una vida, ¿cuánto dura el instante de una cosa?

La descripción en *Leñador* se entrega a esa temporalidad sin cronología, en la que todo se da a la vez; una temporalidad que se transforma en sucesión solo a través de su puesta en escritura. Este, el primero de la novela, es un ejemplo contundente:

Hacha. El hacha es la herramienta por excelencia del leñador. Está compuesta de dos piezas; la hoja y el cabo. La hoja es la pieza de acero templado con forma de cuña que se emplea para cortar. El cabo (o mango) es el largo de madera con el que se sujeta y empuña el hacha. La pieza de acero se compone de la cabeza, el filo y la hoja. El filo es [...] (Wilson 2016: 11)

La descripción del hacha, además de la extensa sección en la que detalla sus características, incluye tres largas secciones más: “*Tradiciones*”, “*Mantenimiento*” y “*Utilización*”. Toda la novela, de hecho, asume esa secuencia descriptiva, suspendida por breves fragmentos narrativos que carecen de continuidad y en los que apenas se vislumbra la rutina de la vida en el bosque.⁴

⁴ En general, las herramientas siguen la secuencia de su caracterización y las entradas acerca de para qué sirve, cómo se mantiene y cómo se usa. Otro ejemplo diferente de secuencia enciclopédica tiene las siguientes entradas: Lesiones. Cortes. Congelamiento. Roturas. Para qué sirve, cómo se mantiene, cómo se usa. Asimismo, en muchas ocasiones hay reenvíos a entradas anteriores para completar la información.

Así, la narración ya no funciona como marco o telón de fondo de la secuencia narrativa, ya no es la presentación del ambiente que permite entender a los personajes ni de los personajes que permiten entender las acciones. En cambio, a modo de manual enciclopédico, como dije, la descripción ocupa toda la novela, se hace relato, aun cuando no cuente nada y sea casi autosuficiente. Por un lado, *Leñador* puede leerse, a diferencia de lo que ocurre en la novela realista moderna, como una novela en la que la descripción no contribuye a hacer avanzar la trama sino que es una información plena que surge de la observación. Pero, por otro lado, *Leñador* puede leerse también como una suerte de registro cotidiano en el que cada módico relato sobre la vida en el bosque encierra una observación que habilita una extensa y detallada descripción que cobra autonomía. En ese punto, *Leñador* hace todo lo contrario de lo que hace una novela con el tiempo: en lugar de hacerlo avanzar (hacia adelante o hacia atrás), lo suspende; en lugar de acelerarlo dándole velocidad hasta llegar al desenlace, lo desacelera hasta que ya no importa. Si en las novelas que extreman la acción, como las de aventuras, que pueden transcurrir en espacios similares al Yukón, el tiempo avanza vertiginosamente y se acelera, en *Leñador* se desacelera y diluye toda cronología convencional.⁵ De allí que hable de novelas de aceleración negativa y, en ese punto, de *Leñador* como una novela que, por la vía de la descripción explicativa, descompone el tiempo en cada detalle. Frente al tiempo de las acciones, la temporalidad de las cosas.

Esta aceleración negativa o desaceleración, que en *Leñador* asume lo que llamo *descomposición del tiempo cronológico*, provoca efectos que exceden la dimensión novelesca. Porque la vida en el espacio de la naturaleza, con su propia temporalidad, va en contra del tiempo capitalista del reloj, de la exactitud y la productividad cronológicas (Safranski 2017: 109); quiero decir: el tiempo de la observación y la descripción, que horada el tiempo de la acción en ese mismo espacio, es también la descomposición que la temporalidad de la vida en la naturaleza más recóndita hace del tiempo capitalista. Que esa descomposición se realice como resultado del aprendizaje del modo de vida, pero también del trabajo en el espacio de la naturaleza, que sea resultado, en definitiva, del aprendizaje del “leñador”, no es contradictorio sino que, por el contrario, duplica su efecto. No se trata en principio de salirse por completo del mundo para encontrar una temporalidad alternativa, sino de ir a sus confines naturales para horadar de a poco, ¡para talar!, la cronología.

⁵ De hecho, hay varias novelas de Jack London que transcurren en el territorio del Yukón, entre ellas, uno de sus relatos más conocidos, *Colmillo blanco* (*White Fang*, 1906).

Junto con la descomposición del tiempo cronológico a través de la descripción, *Leñador* incluye por lo menos dos representaciones de un modo diferente de contar el tiempo, un modo *natural* de contar el tiempo. Una consiste en un almanaque agrícola que el protagonista y narrador lee en el campamento, como otros lo han hecho antes que él, y que registra cifras de producción, pestes, sequías, migraciones de aves, cosechas, menos a los propios leñadores (“nuestra utilidad pasa sin registro” [Wilson 2016: 85]). La otra es una de las entradas de lo que llamé manual enciclopédico y es la extensa explicación de la dendrocronología:

Dendrocronología. La dendrocronología es la ciencia que permite a los leñadores descifrar la edad (en años) de los árboles, contando el número de anillos de crecimiento visibles en los cortes transversales. [...] Leen los siglos, leen el pasado, el clima, el fuego, la sequía, los diluvios, el hielo, la ceniza y la peste. Lo leen todo hasta llegar al último aro, ahí se ven inscritos, hacha en mano, ahí leen la muerte. (Wilson 2016: 27s.)

En los dos casos, el paso del tiempo se vincula (y se cuenta y se lee) a través de la naturaleza. Solo que el almanaque lo hace incorporando el espacio del trabajo a la naturaleza, mientras el árbol lo hace conectando la vida con el territorio. De allí que el almanaque se pueda abandonar, como de hecho lo hace el leñador cuando deja el campamento para internarse aún más allá del Yukón, mientras el tiempo inscripto en los troncos es inherente a la naturaleza y cuenta la vida, como la del propio narrador, quien busca el círculo que se armó cuando llegó al lugar:

Ese anillo era el límite. Lo que yacía de ahí hacia el centro registraba otra vida, la que intento abandonar, es madera oscura, colonizada por memorias inciertas y una identidad frágil. Trazo una línea con el dedo hacia la orilla, hacia la corteza, hacia el presente. Comprendo que no hay regreso. Eso me calma, la idea de abandonar los anillos oscuros. (Wilson 2016: 101)

Dejar atrás la vida es internarse cada vez más en el territorio desconocido una vez que se lo ha aprendido todo en el espacio del trabajo. Viaje completo al revés del capitalismo, viaje hacia la materia prima, viaje al territorio de la pura vida. Al final, ya solo, completamente aislado, el leñador siente la necesidad de cortar un árbol. Cada parte de su cuerpo, cada movimiento, cada secuencia mínima de la acción son registrados en el último y largo fragmento narrativo que cierra la novela. La descripción es devuelta a la acción: acción ralentada, casi en cámara lenta, en la que el documentalismo se imbrica con la imaginación ficcional y retorna como registro exacto de la tala de un pino a la vez que como registro de una experiencia.

A partir de estas observaciones sobre la relación entre mundo y temporalidad, no solo se puede avanzar en problemas como la relación entre experiencia y tiempo, entre vida y naturaleza, entre cuerpo y territorio, sino también explorar otras relaciones, como la que se da entre cultura y economía, entre cuerpo y trabajo o entre materia prima, producción artesanal y producción capitalista. Con su funcionamiento relativamente mundial (desde la trayectoria de su autor a su propia circulación) y a través de la puesta en práctica de un modo de leer que construye su marco teórico atendiendo a las textualidades, *Leñador* permite ver, casi como en un prisma, la inflexión temporal que puede asumir la motivación narrativa dimensionada política y económicamente ante la crisis de la noción de mundo entendida como espacio habitable.

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Guillermina De Ferrari

Reading without habits: a Caribbean contribution to World Literature

A curious “cosmopolitan moment” took place during the European maritime expansion that brought us the colonization of the Americas and the Middle Passage. Paul Gilroy notes in *The Black Atlantic* that ships brought not only slaves to the Caribbean, but also subversive books. The circulation of books outside their context of origin – which is, in a nutshell, World Literature’s object of study – played an essential role in shaping knowledge and politics in the New World, contributing to the region’s distinctive cultural hybridity, as well as forming the basis of its social resistance.¹ In this essay, I discuss cosmopolitan reading in five Caribbean novels: Alejo Carpentier’s *Explosion in a Cathedral* (1962), Leonardo Padura’s *La neblina del ayer* (2005) and *Herejes* (2013), Marlon James’ *The Book of Night Women* (2009), and Mayra Montero’s *In the Palm of Darkness* (1995). I focus on “bad” reading (interrupted reading, misreading, nonreading) as a way to interrogate how the operation of imagining the other results in opacity rather than insight. I ultimately explore what this means in terms of both Caribbean culture and the paradigm we call World Literature.

Reconciling two different yet complementary notions – Mariano Siskind’s “desire for the world”, and Ulrich Beck’s “global risk society” – I suggest that we read literature produced in cultures and languages other than our own in part because it articulates urges, desires, and concerns that we share, but that our own imagination and creative processes may have not yet captured. In *Cosmopolitan Desires*, Siskind coins the phrase “a desire for the world” to name the elusive aspiration of Latin American writers to attain both modernity and universality. Siskind defines the world as a “necessary fantasy” that mediates both ethically and aesthetically between the marginality of the Latin American writer and an imagined universal literary community. Siskind’s book also discusses key aesthetic moments in Latin American letters in which this “desire for the world” becomes more palpable, such as *modernismo* and magical realism. In turn, Ulrich Beck’s “world risk society” discusses “cosmopolitan moments” in which a shared anticipation of catastrophe, either real or perceived, steers human beings to “lend meaning to their lives through exchanges with

¹ For a detailed discussion on the theory of World Literature and Latin America, see De Ferrari (2012).

others and no longer in encounters with people like themselves” (Beck 2009: 15). By combining the complementary notions of desire of the world (Siskind) and global risk (Beck), I want to shift the emphasis from geography to history, for I believe that we are citizens of our times more than citizens of our nations. In my discussion, I hope to show that an important reason we read across languages and borders is to make sense of the uncertainties posed by impending change, to perceive and interpret shared risks, and to imagine opportunities of survival together with a community of strangers.

I analyze here five novels that correspond to three “cosmopolitan moments”: the end of the divine right of kings and the birth of the modern state in the French Revolution; the fall of the Soviet bloc and a variation on what Francis Fukuyama calls “the end of history”; and Bill McKibben’s “the end of nature” to refer to the stage of the Anthropocene in which we live today. With these moments in mind, I examine how books, ideas and even revolutions travel from their place of origin into the Caribbean and help shape knowledge in the postcolonial world. I suggest that misunderstanding and misappropriation, which are constitutive aspects of Caribbean modernity, are also inherent in World Literature. This is no accident: the DNA of the modern Caribbean is cosmopolitan. I will analyze Caribbean literature to explore the counterintuitive argument that imperfect reading is a productive aspect of the World Literature paradigm.

To state the obvious, World Literature, a human activity, cannot be extricated from other social relations. Therefore, reading *badly* is not necessarily programmatic, but rather a symptom and an extension of our complex human entanglements. Members of the human community are imbricated with one another as well as with place and history in a way that justifies an aesthetic, intellectual, and affective dialogue that is, I suggest, only fully possible when embracing its ahistorical imperfection. This is not to say that humans always manage to understand one another across linguistic and cultural barriers. World Literature engages ambiguously and fallibly with the opacity of the other, to use Édouard Glissant’s term (Glissant 1997: 190), often using the other as a scene of projection (see Aching 2012).

This essay engages with World Literature as a form of reading *otherwise*, by which I mean reading with the awareness that reading the *other* produces compromised knowledge. I focus on different instances of the transplanted book in an arbitrary array of Caribbean novels to suggest that reading well, or even reading at all, is not required for literature to travel – not even for it to travel “well”. Rather, I argue, what matters most is why a reader reaches out for specific books, suggesting perhaps that certain times call for certain stories. Ultimately, I suggest that the individual quest for (dislocated) meaning leads to

a consistent, almost predictable form of misreading. I borrow a term from eco-criticism to ultimately suggest that World Literature misreads the specific while it works, and often works best, at the level of the species.

Alejo Carpentier's unpacked boxes

Because some novels anticipate theory, I see Carpentier's 1962 novel *El siglo de las luces* as a ship in a bottle; that is, a scale model to understand the practices and processes that one may call Caribbean World Literature. The novel is about revolution and disenchantment. Whereas the idea of the French Revolution is strategically staged in the novel through the death of the tyrant father – an absolutist king figure –, the *historical* French Revolution is at first concealed in plain sight, as the news in a Cuban newspaper is smaller than a guitar store advertisement. Revolutionary passion and disenchantment steer Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces*, a bildungsroman that follows two Cuban characters from youth to maturity in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth-century. As the characters mature politically and philosophically, they travel from Havana to Port-au-Prince to Paris, then to Guadeloupe and Cayenne, back to Havana, and finally to Madrid. Set during the age of Enlightenment, or “el siglo de las luces”, as it is known in Spanish, the novel marvels at scientific progress, revolutionary ideas, and new philosophies. I will briefly focus on three interconnected instances of cultural travel: cultural artefacts (in the form of scientific instruments and books), the act of mis/reading, and translation.

El siglo de las luces begins with the death of the father, a wealthy merchant in eighteenth century Cuba.² His death brings liberation to Esteban, Sofia, and Carlos, the three adolescents in the house, who close their Havana home to acquaintances and strangers and embrace a life of creative chaos. They order fancy products from overseas, including a very sophisticated physics set and a harp, which they never completely unpack.³ The partially opened boxes are stacked in various piles that create new topographies (prairies, mountains) which the children climb and where they lounge as they read natural history books, Greek tragedy, and science fiction novels. The boxes contain scientific

² This reading of *El siglo de las luces* is partly based on my article “Las palabras y las cosas” (De Ferrari 2005).

³ The physics set includes “telescopios, balanzas hidrostáticas, trozos de ámbar, brújulas, imanes, tornillos de Arquímedes, modelos de cabrias, tubos comunicantes [etc.]” (Carpentier 2001 [1962]: 29).

and musical instruments that remain disassembled and unused, like a closed box containing the harp that produces occasional musical notes when a string breaks due to the tropical heat. The few that have been unpacked are ostensibly misused: the hydrostatic scale weighs the cats, and a telescope helps them spy on neighbors. These objects fail to serve the purpose they were built for – that is, until the arrival of Victor Hugues, a French merchant and franc mason baker who will later become the Robespierre of the colonies. Hugues joins the adolescents in their games and eventually brings order to the house by unpacking and assembling the objects.⁴ The novel offers an implicit theory of how objects and knowledge travel: the kids desire the instruments for what they do, but the objects cannot perform their original functions until the French man supplies context, technical knowledge, and discipline. At the same time, however, the children’s appropriation is partly creative. The children’s use of these instruments of knowledge remains outside the objects’ original economies.

Their creative neglect of the objects’ purposes is further illuminated by way of contrast with the guillotine. The guillotine travels from France to Guadeloupe along with the printing press and copies of the decree of abolition. The guillotine comes in a box but is promptly assembled by carpenters and placed on the deck of the ship, where it is covered to protect it from the salty air. Carpentier’s guillotine is both instrument and symbol – the novel even compares it to a theorem – and yet is destined to lose its conceptual purity in the tropics. When, following a few months of “proper” use, the guillotine is taken on the road in Guadeloupe, it is used not to chop off dissenting heads, but to cut sugar cane or a hand of bananas for the amusement of locals. So, when objects are used by Europeans, they are put to work properly (by this I don’t mean put to a “good” or a “bad” use, but to a correct one). However, when used by locals, the objects quickly slide out of their semantic field and become *generic* tools that can be used for a variety of purposes: the guillotine becomes a powerful cutting machine.

While in France, Esteban is charged with the translation of French documents such as *Les Droits de l’homme et du citoyen*, as well as speeches and propaganda into Spanish. As he ardently believes in the importance of that political moment, he is both a cultural agent and an activist. At first, he is sincerely devoted to the mission of bringing the Revolution to Spain, but as he sees the terror that ensues in France, his work is reduced to mere professional

⁴ I would like to note the contrast here between the foreign instruments that are technically unused and useless as they are, and the *ultramarios* shop they own and is housed on the other side of the wall, which sells useful things.

zeal. He just likes to find the right word with no regard to the translation's ultimate purpose. His mission has become an aesthetic, not an ideological, one. However, his translations travel across the ocean and move the excited minds of the young – like Carlos, now a bourgeois revolutionary, and Sofia who, eight years later, feeds Esteban his own translations in her efforts to convert him to the revolutionary cause. This is destined to fail. The problem is that Esteban, now at the receiving end of his own words, knows too much to take them at face value. So, while the novel illustrates Esteban's disenchantment with revolutionary process (a reading that has led Carpentier to swear that the 1962 novel was written before the Cuban Revolution, to avoid unwelcome analogies), it also suggests that reading may be more productive when encountered from a certain position of ignorance.

If reading is reading oneself, even one's old reading is technically a misreading. Young Esteban passionately read and profusely marked Rousseau's *The Social Contract* in his adolescence, leaving marginalia in 1790 that becomes evidence against him in 1800 when he is arrested in colonial Cuba for his revolutionary ideas. Esteban no longer believes in the Revolution at that time, but that doesn't prevent the Spanish authorities from sending him to a prison in Ceuta where he spends the next seven years. The epilogue places Esteban and his cousin Sofia in Madrid during the Napoleonic invasion of 1808, where they join the resistance and disappear without a trace. We find out that after Ceuta, Esteban had only been interested in romantic literature (a sign of a deep change in the times and in his spirit). The material trace of his reading appears in a book, Chateaubriand's *Le Genie du Christianisme*, in the wrong place. The presence of this book, *his* book with *his* marginalia, in Sofia's bedroom, suggest that Sofia and Esteban were lovers. It is interesting that whereas an enlightened text creates a false reality, an anti-enlightenment and proto-Romantic text offers a glimpse at the truth. The physical traces of reading can as easily provide a deceitful confession as a truthful one. Similarly, Sofia who has technically misread the French Revolution, stays true to the larger – one may say *generic* – concept of revolution; for it is Sofia who moves Esteban into action, *any* action, because doing *nothing* is not an option.

The difference between Esteban and Sofia's political reading lies in the inside knowledge that Esteban has (and that Sofia lacks). While Sofia reads the lines, Esteban reads between the lines. Or, to put it differently, Esteban understands the "metarules" of the French Revolution.

In *Virtue and Terror*, Slavoj Žižek explains the French Revolution's hidden rules, and the new habits that determine what kinds of behavior constitute appropriate responses:

Every legal order [...] has to rely on a complex reflexive network of informal rules which tells us how are we to relate to the explicit norms, how are we to apply them: to what extent are we to take them literally, how and when are we allowed, solicited even, to disregard them, etc. – and this is the domain of habit. To know a society is to know the *meta-rules of how to apply its explicit norms*: when to use them or not use them; when to violate them; when not to use a choice which is offered; when we are effectively obliged to do something, but have to pretend that we are doing it as a free choice. (Žižek 2007: xviii)

And pondering about those “choices that are offered to us on condition that we make the right choice”, Žižek offers a theory of greatness: “Measured against this background, revolutionary-egalitarian figures from Robespierre to John Brown are (potentially, at least) *figures without habits*: they refuse to take into account the habits that qualify the functioning of a universal rule” (Žižek 2007: xix; emphasis in the original).

Esteban is a disenchanted reader on account of his *in situ* experience. When he reads the revolutionary essays, ideas and manifestos, he knows when to read between the lines, what not to take literally, and what to ignore. He has acquired the habits of the revolutionary order of things. These metarules are not immediately available to a decontextualized reader like Sofia. What Esteban’s knowledge of the metarules does for his reading of philosophical texts is similar to what Victor Hugues’ knowledge of how the mechanisms of the instruments in the boxes work, and of the adulterated books in the family business, enables him to do. Victor Hugues’ experience as a store owner allows him to see what was hidden between the lines, and save the children from being robbed by their legal guardian. However, as a statesman Hugues refuses to obey orders from France once the Revolution reverses course. It is his selective neglect of the metarules what makes him the Robespierre of the Caribbean.

The biggest unpacked box in Carpentier’s novel is the Haitian Revolution. The Haitian Revolution – “an extension of the European revolution”⁵ – is in no small part the result of a literal reading of *Les Droits de l’homme et du citoyen*,

5 Susan Buck-Morss (2009: 37). Buck-Morss’ essay also traces the story of a misreading. Buck-Morss wrote it as she wondered why Hegel would bring up the slave and the master in a conversation about civil society in Europe. Buck-Morss suggests that the origin of Hegel’s master and slave dialectic may have originated not out of his dialogue with other European philosophers but out of the fact that Haiti was front-page news on a daily basis. The essay even proves that, until Buck-Morss pointed this out, Europeans were productively misreading Hegel. What is at stake in the proper contextualization of Hegel in relation to Haiti, states Buck-Morss, is “the recognition of freedom as a human” or, rather, universal “aspiration” (2009: 75).

the key text that Esteban translates into Spanish in Carpentier's novel. Susan Buck-Morss suggests that

For almost a decade, before the violent elimination of whites signaled their deliberate retreat from universalist principles, the black Jacobins of Saint-Domingue surpassed the metropole in actively realizing the Enlightenment goal of human liberty, seeming to give proof that the French Revolution was not simply a European phenomenon but world-historical in its implications. (Buck-Morss 2009: 39)

One could say that it was ignorance of the metarules – not understanding that the proposed equality was meant to be limited to white French men –, that facilitates a literal, perhaps incomplete, yet liberating reading of the French Revolution. This is essential to an understanding of the (disavowed) Caribbean modernity that largely stems from the inherent contradictions between the so-called universal project of the enlightenment and the particulars of a race that had to negotiate their humanity in every sphere of life, contradictions that were not immediately recognized in the Saint Domingue of eighteenth century.⁶

The unopened boxes function as a microcosm of Caribbean modernity, in which texts, concepts and Revolutions are often unpacked only partially and with unexpected semantic malleability. By reflecting on the way instruments and concepts travel and behave in the Caribbean at the onset of European modernity, Carpentier's novel proposes a theory of a cosmopolitan periphery. The novel's extensive travel and engagement with European political philosophy reveals a deeply Caribbean "desire for the world". Such cosmopolitanism is best illustrated by Carpentier's two aesthetic projects: marvelous realism – Carpentier's name for what he understands is the Caribbean's inherent surrealism – and the Neo-Baroque. The Neo-Baroque, defined by Severo Sarduy as a combination of excess, proliferation, and semantic displacements, is itself a misappropriation of a European aesthetics taken out of context. This is partly how Carpentier's novel helps advance an analogy between Caribbean culture and World Literature since, I suggest, a certain degree of misunderstanding makes World Literature not only possible but also desirable.

⁶ See Sibylle Fischer's *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*.

Marlon James's impolite book

Books *are* read in Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women*, and the reader is a slave girl named Lilith. She is a secret reader: nobody knows she can read, and she must hide while reading. She is what Henry Louis Gates Jr. calls "an *impolite* learner": her reading is not part of a deliberate effort to shape her character, but rather helps make evident the inhumane fiction that inequality was part of a "'natural' order of things" (Gates 1988: 52). Stealing time from sleep, she hides to devour Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*. The risk and the importance of reading for Lilith is hard to put into words. If found, she might be physically punished by people who would not only disapprove of the entitlement behind the practice, but will also assume she is unable to understand the complexities of "civilized" – that is, British – novels and characters. However, punishment is what has put her in front of Fielding's book in the first place.

Lilith finds Fielding's novel when cleaning the library at Coulibre, the plantation where she has been sent for "training" after she accidentally splashed a guest's chaperone with scalding soup during a dinner party.⁷ The ghost of the Haitian Revolution looms over Jamaica, and the master's fear requires harsh discipline. Exile at Coulibre is the last one in a series of cruel punishments following the soup incident: Lilith was first hit in the face and body, then gang raped, then whipped, and finally taken to the new plantation to learn proper slave manners – or, in other words, to learn to show obedience in the face of any degree of injustice. In her new temporary home, Lilith befriends Dulcimena, who works in the kitchen slave and is the master's reluctant concubine, who has proven to have a sunny spirit even while enduring unspeakable tragedies. It is soon after the mistress of the house tortures and kills Dulcimena out of jealousy that Lilith finds *Joseph Andrews* in the library.

Her act of reading is illuminated by Henry Louis Gates' essay "James Gronnoiosaw and the Trope of the Talking Book", which suggests that participation in literary culture became the only way "to demonstrate individual membership in the human community" in the plantation context (Gates 1988: 52). Reading Fielding's novel gives Lilith a glimpse of what humanity not bound by the plantation's inhumane rules would be like. She sees the protagonist as a charming man: "There be only one man, one soul, that can make her laugh and he be neither black nor real" (James 2009: 206). It is of course paradoxical that only a fictional human being makes the slave girl feel human. Reading has

⁷ I should clarify that Lilith *recognizes* the book. She was already acquainted with before Coulibre.

allowed her to create an imaginary society of equals. Such is the humanizing quality of literature: in the interaction between herself and a fictional human being, she sees herself as truly human. It is a devotion akin to love, “She need him every night. After working through a page, she would wipe away tears from laughing quiet-like and feel her face. The soft skin would surprise her” (James 2009: 207). Lilith becomes aware of her skin not in terms of color (with its assigned social and legal implications), but as the site of potential tenderness, of feeling loved. The book “talks” to her, draws her in, makes her feel like a person. In forgetting her life through reading, she is more her own self than ever.

However, the reality of the plantation interrupts. The more she is whipped, or sees others being whipped, the less comfort she finds in the book. Dignity and equality dissipate, giving way to a feeling of personal betrayal: “Joseph Andrews lying to her, making her wish for a place and time that never going’ come”. She holds the protagonist Joseph Andrews personally accountable: *he* is lying to *her*. Fully claiming her racialized self, she becomes aware of being not just a reader, but a deceived reader. She bitterly concludes “Nothing in this book a nigger can use”⁸ (James 2009: 220). Lilith has become a disenchanting reader not just of Fielding’s novel, but of the indifference of the great European novel to the scandal of slavery. Fielding’s has become an impolite book that fails to include her.

The novel is a creative medium that facilitates the imagining of lives other than our own. As such it requires, in principle, that the reader forgets herself. However, Lilith, who reads to forget her reality and attend to her soul, has become aware of the awareness of her own erasure. Acting as a distorted mirror, literature had shown her infinite possibilities. She had believed herself to be in full possession of her human attributes. By contrast, reality has taught her the dehumanizing dimension of her oppression. Lilith has understood the existence of the hidden rules of social interaction and assumptions – the “metarules” – in the novel. As in the case of Esteban, it is reading *well* that makes her stop.

Leonardo Padura’s closed books

Leonardo Padura is by far the most widely read living Cuban author. His novels, which have been translated to more than a dozen languages, often talk

⁸ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. bases his essay on resistance in antislavery literature on the resistance of the indigenous population via Guaman Poma’s “paños que hablan”.

about books. Those books are sought, bought and sold, and often worshipped, but they are rarely read or even opened. Padura's recurrent protagonist Mario Conde, a policeman and frustrated writer in the first four novels of the series *Las cuatro estaciones*, leaves the force and becomes a second-hand bookseller and a private detective in a place with, technically, no private sector.

In *La neblina del ayer*, Conde finds a gem of a library in the once-elegant El Vedado neighborhood. In it, he finds bibliographic treasures that have remained untouched for forty years, including nineteenth-century Cuban editions of European classics, like a first Cuban edition of Voltaire's *Candide*. He also finds "inconceivable delicacies of creole bibliography that he was seeing and touching for the first time"⁹ (Padura 2005: 67–68). He finds a natural history book by Ramón de la Sagra that includes 158 hand-colored engravings among many other books that look and feel very expensive. The price of each of these books is around ten thousand American dollars: if only one were to be sold, that sum would allow the library's owners and Conde to support themselves for years. However, as he goes through the shelves, Conde puts the most valuable Cuban books – "Aquellas *delicatessen*" (Padura 2005: 76) – in the unsellable pile: only foreigners can pay that amount of money, but Padura is adamant that national treasures should remain on the island. In his search for sellable yet valuable books, he finds a cookbook and in it a forty-year old newspaper clipping about the suspicious suicide of a bolero singer whose mysterious death will structure the detective part of the story. Convinced at heart that these treasures will end up being sold to undeserving foreigners, and because Conde's friends are his true treasures, Conde ends up stealing some of the unsellable books to give to his friends and even saves the first edition of José María Heredia's poem *Niagara*, published in Toluca in 1832, for his girlfriend. Heredia's book alone is worth about twelve thousand dollars but, in Conde's rationalization, taking these books to his friends is justice, not robbery (Padura 2005: 353).

In Padura's *Neblina*, this fantastic inventory of books makes up an idealized library at the very tip of Conde's fingers. Conde wallows in the luxury of naming and enumerating them. Curiously, the books are listed in terms of value (no value, collectible value, too much value, sentimental value, national value), but are not read. They are not "unpacked". More often than not, they are quickly recirculated and turned into food. Indeed, as soon as Conde gives the owners some money to ensure their exclusivity, they run to the black market to buy any form of protein. In turn, Conde's profit from his book-selling business is given to

⁹ Originally: "inconcebibles exquisiteces de la bibliografía criolla que veía y tocaba por primera vez".

Josefina, a mother figure, who then procures all the ingredients to produce the most delicious traditional Cuban dishes. Finding all the ingredients is practically inconceivable, and Josefina makes “verdaderas exquisiteces de la cocina criolla” (Padura 2005: 67–68). Padura has stated that Josefina’s cooking responds mostly to a fantasy because at the height of the Special Period, literature was the only way to make food happen.¹⁰ However, in contrast with the bibliographic delicacies that are named but not opened, Josefina’s dishes are described in the minutest detail. Readers are not offered sensorial access to the food, but they do find in Josefina’s retelling of the recipe a meticulous reconstruction of the dishes that amounts to a material presence. More than in the books, Padura wallows in the food. Fantastic cuisine, not a treasured library, ends up being a more efficient reservoir of nationalistic nostalgia.

In the novel *Herejes*, Padura tracks in part the disappearances of a European painting during WWII and of a teenage girl in the 2000s. The painting, a Rembrandt that was given by the painter to his Jewish apprentice, is in the hands of the apprentice’s descendant on board the transatlantic liner *St. Louis*. The *St. Louis* sailed from Hamburg to Havana in 1939, carrying 937 passengers, most of whom were Jews fleeing Nazi Germany. The passengers held entry permits to Cuba that were not honored; they were not allowed to disembark, and after several days were sent back to Germany. In the novel, the owners of the Rembrandt on the ship give the painting to a Cuban immigration officer in exchange for an entry visa for their daughter, but they are robbed of the painting and of their last hope. The Rembrandt, stolen by a corrupt immigration official in 1939, is exported illegally in the 2000s by another corrupt official. While in Cuba, the illegally imported painting remains hidden (another “unpacked” box¹¹) and trapped in corrupt, clandestine commercial transactions. It also stands for the inhumane act of not saving a Jewish girl named Judith from her death.

In the 2000s, before her disappearance, a 17-year old girl named Judy is profoundly disenchanting with the society she lives in. She is an Emo, part of the urban tribes in today’s Havana, who imitate manga characters in clothing and hairstyle. They embrace a tragic ethos, making suicide a possible cause for her disappearance. Conde eventually finds Judy’s murderer. While looking for clues, Conde finds three objects in the girl’s room that obsess him: J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and a DVD version of the 1982 film “Bladerunner”. Conde

¹⁰ Stated during the book presentation of *Adiós, Hemingway* at Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba in July 2001.

¹¹ Perhaps it is hidden in plain sight, on a wall covered with reproductions.

remembers the film very well and it even inspires him to solve the mystery in a dream, although his epiphany is eventually proven scientifically. He also remembers Salinger's coming-of-age novel, and his fond memories of having read it in his youth help Conde connect to Judy's own turbulent adolescence. The mention of Salinger helps create bibliographic empathy: Conde and most of us were Judy at some point in our lives. At the same time, however, Nietzsche's book persistently bothers Conde. It is true that Judy speaks through her readings, but what upsets Conde is Nietzsche himself, his godlessness, his lack of faith in the value of virtues and in human kind.

Conde's contact with Nietzsche's book starts with a handwritten note that falls out of its pages. It was written by Judy herself and, although it is not clear whether it is a direct quote of *Zarathustra*, it nonetheless reveals Judy's Nietzschean (godless) thoughts. When Conde explicitly tries to read the book, he finds it unpalatable, indigestible: "Mientras a duras penas deglutía a Nietzsche" (Padura 2013: 423), as he was trying to swallow Nietzsche's book with much difficulty, his mind turned to a list of people who could explain Emo philosophy and Judy's "mental confusion" to him. In other words, he looks for people who will help him *not* read Nietzsche. To this end, Conde goes to a former classmate, then to a teacher, then to a sociologist who is doing research on urban tribes. The latter helps him understand Judy's dark behavior in terms of the desire to liberate her mind from inherited ideas and from a system that is oppressive (Padura 2013: 373). The scholar has read David Le Breton extensively, and summarizes his ideas for Conde – that is, the scholar pre-digests the book for Conde. Le Breton, like Nietzsche, remains unread.

In contrast, Judy's literature teacher has kept one of her term papers, in which the girl quotes and comments on a passage in Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces*. It is a section in which Esteban complains of being trapped in Guadeloupe because of the war between France and England. Feeling as much a guest as a prisoner, Esteban elaborates on the bureaucratic difficulties of crossing borders:

passports, papers, stamped, signed and countersigned papers [...] permit, safe-conduct, passport, and any word that would indicate the authorization to a human being to allow him to travel from place to place [...] For fear of the Revolution as well as fear of the counter Revolution, the government and the police had put a limit to the ancestral freedom of man to move around the planet without having to subject his ancestral nomadism and sovereign will to move to a piece of a paper.¹² (Padura 2013: 401–402)

12 Originally: "universal proliferación de papeles, cubiertos de cuños, sellos, firmas y contrafirmas, cuyos nombres agotaban los sinónimos de permiso, salvoconducto, pasaporte

With this reference to borders and bureaucracy, Esteban describes the birth of the modern state. The quote seems to affect Judy in part because of her lack of freedom in a country where Cubans were required to obtain an exit visa in order to travel, testing citizens' loyalty to the regime. Judy is therefore complaining about one of the principles of the Socialist social contract in place in Cuba since 1959. More indirectly, in the novel this passage seems to allude to the story of the little Jewish girl named Judith who was denied an entry visa that would have saved her, although Judy the Emo has no apparent connection with her. The quote from Carpentier in Judy's paper ends with the idea that travel should not be forbidden because "la fidelidad por obligación es un fracaso" (Padura 2013: 401–402).

Minimal reading via a third party offers a theory of World Literature. Judy, the reader in this novel, is in fact dead. However, she leaves the material trace of having read books, but she has shed the particulars and embraced their spirit instead. Books help construct Judy's character and her defining disenchantment.¹³ It is no doubt ironic that the section devoted to the Emo girl Judy and the mystery of her death is called "The book of Judith". The biblical effect of the title is so ambiguous as to give the appearance of being named after the wrong girl. In her reading of the novel, Vicky Unruh suggests that *Herejes* is the first of Padura's novels dedicated to the future as opposed to his nostalgic musings. I would speculate that it is a future where books are little more than sterile physical props.¹⁴

There is a well-known precedent: in Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres*, one of the protagonists, Silvestre, and his brother famously sell books from their father's library to fund their frequent trips to the movies. Similarly, Conde's displacement from reading to eating is not a surprising twist in post-Soviet Cuba, where eating, especially eating well, is a complex and difficult operation. However, considering Mario Conde's stated obsession with books, the displacement from reading to food can be seen as a form of getting away with not unpacking the boxes. This suggests a critical paradigm of World Literature as "knowing" without "reading". Padura uncomfortably appeals to Nietzsche in a (late) Socialist appropriation of "the end of history". Francis Fukuyama wrote *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) to reflect on the post-Soviet

y cuantos vocablos pudiesen significar una autorización para moverse de un país a otro. . . tuviese que someter su soberana voluntad de traslado a un papel".

¹³ Padura is borrowing Carpentier to address a historical process that either resembles the Cuban Revolution (similarity and repetition) or one in which he himself is somehow still inserted (continuity).

¹⁴ Part of this reading appears in De Ferrari/Unruh (2015).

world, a world that provides the context for Conde's writing – but from the perspective of the West, where liberal democracy was the only model left.¹⁵ Fukuyama's "the end of history" reflects on the growing importance of "the body, its needs, and fears" when, after the Cold War is over, "men are unable to affirm that any particular way of life is superior to another" (Fukuyama 1992: 305). Fukuyama would see this attention to food as a symptom of a decline in values related to the decline of moral debate and critical citizenship. But there is a fair amount of irony in the context of Cuba's late socialism, which consists of a capitalism simultaneously repressed and ubiquitous to sustain a repressive political stasis.¹⁶ I suggest that Padura's novels, which are read in many languages and have received many international awards, are popular in part because they present another route to the very same point where Fukuyama ends up, in which simple pleasures are the go-to response to political disaffection.¹⁷

Mayra Montero's darkness

Cuban-Puerto Rican Mayra Montero's novel *Tú, la oscuridad* (1995) has been labeled the first explicitly environmental novel in the Caribbean.¹⁸ Its cosmopolitan moment is what Bill McKibben has called "The End of Nature": "that moment when for the first time human beings had become so large that they altered everything around us. That we had ended nature as an independent force, that our appetites and habits and desires could now be read in every cubic meter of air, in every increment on the thermometer"¹⁹ (McKibben 2003: xiii).

The novel follows the extinction of a subspecies of frog in Haiti in the 1990s. Critics understand that the protection of animals often appears in competition with human welfare in a situation of persistent poverty and political violence. Indeed, there is a structural continuity between ill treatment of animals for the well-being of humans, and of other humans that are marked as

¹⁵ For a discussion of how Fukuyama himself was misread, see Fukuyama (2010).

¹⁶ Ariana Hernández-Reguant coined the term "late Socialism" to describe the period in Revolutionary Cuba after the fall of the Berlin Wall when the government adopts capitalist measures to ensure the survival of the socialist Revolution.

¹⁷ For a reading of Nietzsche's ideas in relation to the Cuban Revolution, see *Community and Culture in Post-Soviet Cuba* (De Ferrari 2014). In this book, I read novels by Padura, Jesús Díaz and Abel Prieto as incapable of breaking apart from the revolutionary ethos, in opposition to "perverse" and "evil" texts whose Nietzschean suspicion of (revolutionary, manly) virtues allows them to break away from the complicit social contract.

¹⁸ See Paravisini-Gebert (2014: 350). See also Heise (2016: 167).

¹⁹ In the prologue to the revised version.

animalistic (Heise 2016: 167). This is why the novel stages the act of “reading” ethnographically as well as ecocritically. It is in this double approach that the novel somewhat approximates what it looks like to read not only global “appetites and habits and desires”, but also local impotence and fear “in every cubic meter of air” – to paraphrase McKibben (2003).

The protagonist, an American herpetologist named Victor Grigg, travels to Haiti in the 1990s with the mission of finding a near-extinct frog, the *Eleutherodactylus sanguineus*, commonly known as a *grenouille du sang* because of its color. The disappearance of the *grenouille du sang* takes place among similar disappearances of similar frogs around the world. These disappearances are accounted for in the form of short scientific interchapters, while the main chapters are narrated alternately by either Grigg and Thierry Adrien, his local guide, as they tell each other their life stories. Each monologue acts as a first-person narration – an oral “book” that is interpreted and appropriated – read – by the other. This dynamic is more explicitly played out in the chapter “Alma de *macoute*” [‘Like a *Macoute*’] that presents Grigg’s thoughts while he listens to Adrien’s stories. Adrien talks about the infidelities of a promiscuous woman called Ganesha, the lover of Grigg’s herpetologist predecessor *Papa Crapaud*, which prompts Grigg to reflect on his own marital problems. The novel’s dual structure showcasing the life stories of the American scientist and the Haitian guide advances the importance of narrative in claiming human status. At the same time, the power imbalance between the two protagonists recreates an ethnographic exchange to the point that Grigg, who notices that Adrien sometimes includes information about the frog when he talks about his life, starts recording him (Montero 1995: 35). Adrien, the native informant, functions as the open book that Grigg reads and rereads in his double efforts to explain Haiti and his own life to himself.

The novel explores the value of different lives at the end, when the overcrowded ferry taking the two men out of the dangers of Jérémie to Port-au-Prince sinks, killing two thousand Haitians, along with Grigg, Adrien, and the last specimen of the *grenouille du sang*. The fact that the death of thousands of people – poor, anonymous Haitians – seem to matter less than the disappearance of the frog in the novel shows the dehumanizing capacity of poverty, which, as Judith Butler suggests, makes some lives more grievable than others. The end, however, does not resolve the ambiguous place that Grigg and Adrien occupy in a compromised hierarchy. Neither valuable frog nor devalued – generic – “Haitian”, the two men have eluded the label “specimen” to attain protagonist status.

Nevertheless, the blurry line separating human and nonhuman animals in this context is further complicated by the fact that humans are cast as members

of recognizable “types”. At the beginning of the story, we seem to have one of each, Thierry, Grigg, the elusive frog, which, once found, is scientifically described as the male specimen of a near extinct subspecies. Similarly, before helping Grigg, Thierry had served as guide for Jasper Wilbur, another herpetologist whom he called *Papa Crapaud*. Foreign scientists belong to the enlightened side of the colonial enterprise. The scientist category acquires new members as Grigg intersects two botanists from the New York Botanical Garden who are looking for a rare female specimen of a near extinct subspecies of a cactus in the same area. The botanists have a guide called Paul. Thierry Adrien, who has been a guide for several decades, shares both name and wife with his (late) father, suggesting repetition. He is one in a string of brothers – several “Adriens”. Women also appear as specimens within subcategories. Local women, foreign women, unfaithful women, and crazy women all seem to follow recognizable patterns through repetition and some degree of substitutability. Women and native guides, but also scientists and father figures, make humans and their stories appear interchangeable and capable of endless reproduction.

In the context of a story built on the obsession with species and specimens, men and women cease to be individuals and become types with recognizable behavior within predictable ecosystems. Therefore, phrases such as to be like a macoute, to behave like a macoute, to be a man in a string of men who love and abandon women or are deceived by them strips the characters of their individuality. A more complex parallelism involves their fears and desires. On the one hand, Adrien’s fear of the *grenouille*, (he believes the frog is a bad omen) is the negative side of Grigg’s desire to find it; on the other, Adrien has a growing desire to see the ostriches in Grigg’s father’s farm and bring one to Haiti, where it would be the first of its kind, while Grigg is actually afraid of his inheritance. Thanks to vaudou ideas, repetition may occur even in death since, according to Adrien, “a man walks the same roads again and again without knowing, believing that they are new”.²⁰ Adding, more ominously, “The dead also walk the same roads again and again” (Montero 1995: 238–239).

The novel recreates an atmosphere in which science is incapable of grasping the real story of animal extinction and, implicitly, of human violence. The scientific interchapters are brief, descriptive, and attest to the limitations of the scientific method with phrases like “inexplicable deaths” (Montero 1995: 71); “the mystery was never resolved” (1995: 71); “unknown causes” (1995: 21);

²⁰ Originally, “Un hombre repite todos sus caminos, los repite sin darse cuenta y se hace la ilusión de que son nuevos” and, “Los muertos también repiten sus caminos”.

“fruitless search” (1995: 161). By contrast, Dr. Emile Boukaka, a Haitian surgeon who combines scientific methods with vaudou beliefs, suggests that the cause of the disappearance of the frogs is not “acid rain, herbicides, deforestation” as scientists claim (1995: 132), but rather it is due to Agwé Taroyo, “the god of the waters”, who has summoned the frogs to stay deep in the water (1995: 131). Ursula Heise sees the appeal to the supernatural as “one of the weakness of the novel”, since it helps “block any detailed social and political analysis” (Heise 2016: 171). And, what is more, “it also seems to exonerate humans from any responsibility in the ongoing extinctions” (Heise 2016: 172).

And yet, a useful theory transpires in an implicit analogy between scientific discourse and social analysis. Namely, the novel observes that “the younger frogs get disoriented and expose themselves to dangerous situations because they lack *malice*; the capacity for self-protection is a learned behavior for most amphibians”²¹ (Montero 1995: 225; my emphasis). This observation suggests that the political problems in Haiti are attributable to the lack of social options and a moral compass. An environment of violence is the consequence of a modernity that excludes young Haitians – as well as the frogs. Perhaps disorientation is the result of dependency on a “weak” social cosmology in which responsibility is often delegated to fate, as well as the generalized corruption that makes accountability impossible. Although it would be fair to say that even Grigg, the scientist, accepts the role of fate when a suffering Adrien complains that “a man never understands when the sadness that will accompany him for the rest of his life begins”. To which Grigg replies “Neither sadness nor happiness [...] A man never knows anything, Thierry. That is his tragedy” (Montero 1995: 133).

As Liza Paravisini-Gebert suggests, it is the entire nation, not just the frog, that is in danger of extinction (2014: 351). Grigg, who is miserably ignorant at first, understands this after climbing a steep learning curve. He finds that he no longer can report back to Vaughan Patterson, the scientist who sent him to look for this frog. Grigg has not only learned to read Haiti not only in the generic terms known to any outsider, but also understands its metarules as a country in which everyone is at risk of peril: “How to explain to Patterson that Haiti, oh God, was dying out, and that pile of bones growing in front of our eyes [...] is the only thing that will remain”²² (Montero 1995: 226–227). At first,

²¹ Originally, “Se desorientan o se pierden las ranas más jóvenes; se exponen a condiciones peligrosas porque no tienen *malicia*. La capacidad de protegerse y de ocultarse es una conducta aprendida en casi todos los anfibios”.

²² Originally, “¿Cómo meterle en la cabeza [a Patterson] que Haití, gran dios, se estaba terminando, y que esa loma de huesos que iba creciendo frente a nuestros ojos [...] era todo lo que iba a quedar?”.

Grigg functions as Patterson's eyes in Haiti. However, when Grigg learns the "habits" of the land, he suffers the same as the "good" readers I have discussed above. Too much understanding clouds legibility.

The darkness in the novel's title is about the anticipation of a catastrophe. While the title of the novel *Tú, la oscuridad*, refers to an oracle-style incantation that announces impending death and helps embrace it without fear (Montero 1995: 239), the translation *In the Palm of Darkness* seeks to establish a submarine connection with Polish-English writer Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*. It is true that there are echoes between the two, but they are quite subtle and perhaps even irrelevant. The parallelism is probably an editorial strategy to invite foreign readers into the unknown by invoking the association with a familiar writer, making visible the hidden threads that weave travel, whiteness, and self-knowledge. However, the English title grants the novel membership in a group of cosmopolitan novels about the dark art of losing one self in nature, or because of it. It is no coincidence that genre and genus are etymologically related: similarity and substitutability, structural aspects of literary artifacts, are also the mark of the species.

Readers without habits

I have reflected here on how reading in Caribbean literature can help us understand World Literature *otherwise*. I have argued that reading the other usually functions to the extent that the reader accepts that creative knowledge sometimes requires forgoing the specificities of the other. This I have called reading at the level of species. I am aware that the phrase sounds dangerous. In fact, I could as easily have written an essay against "reading at the level of the species", defending historical details and geographic minutia from overreaching World Literature critics and Latin Americanists. After all, what is Latin American literature if not an artificial concept that nonetheless orients our teaching assignments, our conferences, and our library holdings. My point here is that what *Caribbean* – as opposed to Latin American – literature shows is that occupying our historical time together across cultures is ultimately worth the risk. It is true that the role of the discipline that we call World Literature is to remain humbly vigilant about what is gained and what is lost when reading across cultures. But it is also true that imperfect reading can be a more liberating form of thinking (with) the other. In my analysis of *El siglo de las luces*, I borrowed from Žižek the notion that revolutionaries are "figures without habits" (Žižek 2007). The true revolutionary ignores the metarules – the implicit understanding of how to play the social game – to make new discoveries.

I want to conclude this reflection by suggesting that the Caribbean contribution to World Literature is, precisely, to appreciate revolutionary readers; for, historically, Caribbean readers are *readers without habits*.

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Marta Puxan-Oliva

The challenges of wild spaces to world literary cosmopolitanism

The imagination of the world and the planet have experienced a renewed interest in several critical discourses in the past three decades. However, their possibilities, limitations, and intersections are still hard to apprehend. The present volume and its precedent, *Re-mapping World Literature: Writing, Book Markets and Epistemologies between Latin America and the Global South* (Müller/Locane/Loy 2018), contribute to revisiting the critical intersections between world literature and other discourses such as decolonial theory, cosmopolitanism, or extractivism. This essay joins these efforts by examining a confluence of global discourses of new cosmopolitanisms, ecocriticism and world literature, guided by Joan Benesiu's *Gegants de gel* ('Ice Giants') (2015) and Gabi Martínez's *Sudd* (2007). By observing the novelistic setting of a cosmopolitan group of characters in spaces that are imagined as wild, I claim that the challenging intersection of global discourses interrogates the cosmopolitan aspirations in world literature. The novels I discuss are interested in the global both in its ethico-political and its biosocial dimensions, which center the new cosmopolitanism and the ecocritical discourses respectively. The apparently perfect integration of the cosmopolitan and the ecocritical approaches to address the global, however, proves so deeply problematic that it can help us rethink the novel – one relevant focus of interest in world literature – as a space of critical problematization of global discourses rather than of conciliation.

New cosmopolitanisms and ecocriticism as global discourses

New cosmopolitanism and ecocriticism are discourses of the global. The varied critical forms into which cosmopolitanism has been recuperated at the turn of the twenty-first century share the inquiry into the political and ethical relationship of individuals and institutions on a global scale, and an ethical project based on the recognition of a shared humanity from the point of view of what Walter Mignolo calls a “planetary conviviality” (Mignolo 2000: 721). For Pheng Cheah, any theory of cosmopolitanism addresses in one way or another the possibilities of “mutual

feedback with a global political consciousness that voices the universal interests of humanity and tries to maximize human freedom” (Cheah 2006: 486). In their diverse formulations, ranging from Martha Nussbaum’s ethical universalist project to Mignolo’s decolonial one, cosmopolitan discourses share a global political or ethical perspective, which makes the active revival of cosmopolitanism, as David Harvey notes, “a way of approaching global political-economic, cultural, environmental, and legal questions” (Harvey 2009: 78).

In *Episodios cosmopolitas en la cultura argentina*, Gonzalo Aguilar distinguishes this critical recuperation of cosmopolitanism from an earlier modernist, mostly aesthetic and intellectual, cosmopolitan discourse at the turn of the twentieth century and its early decades, which participated in the construction of a “modern” national identity and responded to center-periphery relations, but was not primarily concerned with an international political and ethical project, a function left to the discourse of “internationalism” (Aguilar 2009: 28–30). This distinction is important because, while this modernist cosmopolitan discourse has been a central object of study in Latin American, Spanish, and European literary and intellectual studies (Aguilar 2009; Gramuglio 2013; Catelli 2017), the discourse that I address here is mostly an Anglophone theoretical approach whose revival was born with the late twentieth and early twenty-first century expansion of global concerns. Mignolo has called it “critical cosmopolitanism”, Harvey “new cosmopolitanism”, Bruce Robbins and Cheah “cosmopolitics”, and Robbins and Paul Lemos Horta, “cosmopolitanisms”.

Global concerns have also been at the center of ecocriticism. As the branch of environmental humanities that focuses on the presentation of the environment in literature, ecocriticism addresses the relationship between human beings and their non-human environment. Because it builds on the culture-nature debate, and is increasingly preoccupied with the global environmental crisis, ecocriticism has developed, especially in Scott Slovic and Joni Adamson’s third-wave ecocriticism, into a global discourse concerned, in Ursula K. Heise’s words, with a “sense of the planet” (Heise 2008).

Arguably, critical cosmopolitanism and ecocriticism have evolved in theoretically similar ways. Especially prolific since the 1990s, both initially tended to conceive their relationship to the globe in terms of aspired harmony. They subsequently progressed toward more skeptical positions at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This evolution toward more problematic forms, and the imbalance between earlier legacies of harmonious relations between human beings and the world and newly problematic ones is the point this essay targets.

Several critics, among whom especially Mignolo, Harvey, Mariano Siskind, as well as Robbins and Horta, trace the evolution of the concept of cosmopolitanism

from Kant's influential definition – considered the “traditional” or “normative” cosmopolitanism – to the present. As Robbins and Horta brief:

Traditional definitions may tend more to the positive or negative, but they usually agree on some degree of synthesis: cosmopolitanism as a commitment to the good of humans as a whole that overrides all smaller commitments and creates a habitual detachment from the values of the locality. [...] this singular, normative account has been gradually if only partially displaced since the late 1980s by a plural, descriptive understanding. (2017: 2–3)

The initial recuperation of cosmopolitanism emphasized a certain understanding based on common human values with a supranational view.

The pursuit of a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature was also at the core of the ecocritical preoccupations in the 1990s, in what Lawrence Buell calls “first-wave ecocriticism” (2005: 17). As Buell, Heise, and Thornber explain:

First-wave scholarship of the 1990s tended to equate environment with nature; to focus on literary renditions of the natural world in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction as means of evoking and promoting contact with it; to value nature preservation and human attachment to place at a local-communitarian or bioregional level; and to affirm an ecocentric or biocentric ethics, often intensified by some conception of an innate bond – whether biological, psychological, or spiritual – conjoining the individual human being and the natural world. (2011: 419)

Interested in the regional, and with a strong Rousseauian and pastoral legacy, first-wave ecocriticism sought to elucidate and recuperate a certain human, mostly premodern, imagined bond with nature – one that is revisited in some decolonial approaches to environment.

The advent of globalization as a financial and political exploitative endeavor, the growth of neoliberal practices and political ideologies, the impact of postcolonial perspectives, together with a deep environmental crisis spelled out by the material evidence of climate change and damage, and the detection of the Anthropocene have triggered a shift in the objectives and conceptualization of the cosmopolitan and ecocritical approaches at the beginning of the twenty-first century, enforcing much less enthusiastic views on ethico-political relations on a global scale and the biosocial relations of human beings with the environment. Along these lines, new cosmopolitanisms have examined the colonial, religious (Mignolo 2000; 2010) and neoliberal uses and traps of cosmopolitan ideologies (Robbins 2017). These approaches to the right-wing political uses of cosmopolitanism and their alleged intellectual elitism have prompted “cosmopolitan desires” – in Siskind's words – for other kinds of formulations

that embrace the diversity of human experience in its ethico-political relations to the world. These more positivist approaches claim to have included social scientists, cultural critics and historians in discussions on cosmopolitanism. They newly understand cosmopolitanism as “a characteristic and possession of substantial social collectivities, often nonelite collectivities that had cosmopolitanism thrust upon them by traumatic histories of dislocation and dispossession” (Robbins/Horta 2017: 3), such as colonization, migration, exile, or human trafficking. A wide range of forms has emerged, many included in Robbins and Horta’s recent *Cosmopolitanisms*, among others the cosmopolitanism “of the poor” (Santiago 2004), “decolonial cosmopolitanism” (Mignolo 2000), and “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Bhabha 1998). As Robbins and Horta highlight, while new cosmopolitanisms seem more apt to explain current global problems and situations, they still struggle with an ethico-political aspiration of improving relations and devising fairer ways of organizing global governance.

Similarly to new cosmopolitanism, as explained by Flys Junquera, Marrero Henríquez, and Julia Barella (2010), Rob Nixon (2015), and Heise, Buell, and Thornber (2011), among many others; by the mid-2000s ecocriticism had turned to considering human damage to the environment and shifted its interest from pristine nature, clearly distinguished from constructed environments to an environment that included the human and the non-human, leaving “nature” as a problematic product of the “environmental imagination” (Buell 1995). Ecocriticism has turned to inequality by intersecting with gender, postcolonial, new historicist and decolonial studies, and tended to examine urban environments, catastrophe and climate change, focusing on pollution, social risk, toxicity, and weighing the damage to the environment produced by human intervention and the massive exploitation of natural resources. In observing those problems in literature locally or regionally and evaluating their impact on a global scale, and strongly affected by the detection of the Anthropocene as a new geological era which registers the human damage to the planet at a biogeological level, second, and especially third-wave ecocriticism have more clearly become a global discourse, concerned with the relations between human beings and the planet at large (Heise 2013; Barbas-Rhoden 2014). In their need to balance traditional forms of environmental imagination and aspirations of the relations between “nature” and “culture”, with actual practices and effects in our present historical and geological moment, ecocriticism finds itself in a struggle similar to cosmopolitan discourses.

I propose that Gabi Martínez’s *Sudd* and Joan Benesiú’s *Gegants de gel* display an overlap of the relations which center ecocriticism and cosmopolitanism that reveals the critical maladjustment between ethico-political and environmental aspirations and the conflictive realities they address.

***Gegants de gel, Sudd*, and the trouble with environmental and cosmopolitan imagination**

As Jernej Habjan and Fabienne Imlinger (2016) have argued, the novel holds a privileged place in the configuration of global discourses. Siskind distinguishes two ways in which this happens: the first is the “globalization of the novel”, where the novel expands into the flag genre of globalization, as he fully shows with several cases, including magic realism as a globalizing literary formula. The second is the novelization of the global, “the production of images of a globalized world as they are constructed in certain novels” (Siskind 2014: 28), to which the ones examined here pertain, given their imagination of globality.

Sudd and *Gegants de gel* meet the multilingual, multigeographical, and multi-strand developments that characterize a kind of novel that critics like Alexander Beecroft and Héctor Hoyos suggest contributes to the globalization of the genre, its engagement with global concerns in a particular historical system or “ecology” (Beecroft 2015), and the problematization of global discourses themselves such as World Literature (Hoyos 2015; 2017; Siskind 2014). In a way, this loosely-defined global novel not only engages with global tourism, drug trafficking, and the oil extraction business, but it also deploys various discourses of the global, highlighting their limitations. In this sense, for example, Hoyos understands the “global novel” as “a novel that can have a world literary standing” (Hoyos 2015: 6), and one that, in the case of Beecroft and Hoyos’s critical work, might be identified in the formal ways in which a world-consciousness is produced.¹ Siskind, Beecroft and Hoyos consider World Literature as a critical perspective that participates in global discourses by imagining the “world”, or rather “worlds”, in narrative. That is, their approach addresses the contextualized, literary poetics that imagines a particular “world” rather than the sociology of the circulation of literature.² In imagining the world, literature is a space that both produces and contests global

¹ See Hoyos (2015) and Beecroft’s multi-strand “plot of globalization” (Beecroft 2016: 199).

² While both approaches to World Literature are sometimes perceived as exclusive, as the discussions in the seminar reflected, they also nurture each other, as reflected in Siskind (2014), Sánchez Prado (2018), or Cheah (2016), and in the questions addressed to Benesiu and Martínez’s aims in promoting a highly appealing novel to international markets. In the case of Benesiu, it seems to me that the writing of a global novel in a minority language, Catalan, pointed out by Sánchez Prado, finds its reasons not in the counter-writing to global markets but rather in a historical publishing strategy for the building of a Catalan literary tradition that promotes and funds translation to other languages instead of resorting to Spanish as a marketable literary language.

discourses. I propose to examine *Sudd* and *Gegants de gel* from this angle as well. In particular, the novels superpose the formal features of the “wild space” and the “cosmopolitan scene”. Patrick Deer’s concept of “cosmopolitan scene” refers to a multinational encounter, that appears in fiction through a “scene”, understood simultaneously “as a discrete fictional unit”, “the performative and affective sense of ‘making a scene,’ and the creative and collaborative ‘scenes’ of music or popular culture” (Deer). The novels’ presentation of a “cosmopolitan scene”, the imagination of the wilderness, and the uses of narration in that situation will show the inadequacy of ideal relations and highlight the struggles that new cosmopolitanisms and ecocriticism go through in their dealings with the worldly and planetary imagination.

Benesiu’s *Gegants de gel* might be easily considered a global novel for its presentation of multiple characters, stories, places and languages, and the emphasis on mobility and supranational relations. Written by a first-person narrator, this Catalan novel presents a group of characters of varied nationalities sitting around a table at the bar Katowice in Ushuaia to tell the stories that have brought them to seek refuge in the frontier space of Tierra del Fuego.

Escaping from his Spanish family and friends on New Year’s Eve and propelled by a painting exhibition, the young narrator decides to visit those “those ice giants, of a white tinged with blue, floating with their majestic, enormous weight on the icy waters of the world-encompassing seas”,³ which for him represented “a primal and ancestral image that I wanted to see”⁴ (Benesiu 2015: 289). In this escaping trip, he finds himself sitting at a table in the Katowice where “a few characters who seem to come from various places are talking. Their languages mix together. Spanish and English exchange their melodies in no disagreement. Their hands gesticulate the rest of the sentence”⁵ (Benesiu 2015: 39). The narration emphasizes the distinct national origins and the sharable human experiences composing the cosmopolitan scene and exchange:

There I had them, before me, Guillaume Housseras, the rich Frenchman awaiting the arrival of his girlfriend Anne-Marie; Peter Borum, the Englishman affected by the violent episode involving his son and who had come here to clarify the details of his brother’s death; the Mexican Nemesio Coro, representing the escaping spirits of planet Earth; the

³ In the original: “gegants de gel, d’un blanc que girava al blau, surant amb tota la majestat del seu pes enorme sobre les aigües gèlides dels mars dels contorns del món”. All translations of Benesiu and Martínez’s novels are my own.

⁴ Originally, “una imatge primigènia i ancestral que volia veure”.

⁵ Originally, “conversen amb veu audible uns quants personatges que semblen haver arribat de llocs distints. Les llengües es barregen. L’espanyol i l’anglès s’intercanvien la melodia sense entrar en conflicte. Les mans gesticulen la resta de la frase”.

Chilean Martn Medina, genuine commissioner of those abandoned by their family; the hostess Dominka Malczewksa, whose reasons for abandoning Poland probably many years ago to end up owning the Katowice in the distant city of Ushuaia were still a mystery to us.⁶ (Benesiú 2015: 181)

Narrated in sequence, the characters' individual stories mostly reveal an escape from localized violence. The Englishman Peter Borum travels to the Tierra del Fuego to unravel the mysterious death of his brother, a former soldier in the Malvinas' war who appeared dead near Lago Escondido and whose death the Argentinean authorities quickly declared as a suicide and did not investigate any further. Borum escapes from the torment of having his son jailed for murdering an individual who had abused him cybernetically. The Mexican Nemesio Coro escaped from a prosecution resulting from his brother's debts and involvement in drug trafficking. The Chilean Martín Medina was a victim of the Pinochet dictatorship, and the bar owner Dominka Malczewska had survived the Russian Katyn massacre during World War II. These localized violent stories underline their national associations (Chilean Pinochet dictatorship, and Mexican narcotrafficking, for example), while simultaneously displaying an involvement (cyber abuse and drug war, World War II) that transcends historical and current national borders. Furthermore, the violent stories signal conflicts that have paradigmatically raised cosmopolitan sympathy, not least because of their media popularity, even topicality, which the narrator also remarks on. Because of their simultaneous localization and familiarity on a global scale, and their violence, the stories are highly sharable.

The narrator suggests the catalyzing effect of the cosmopolitan scene, when stating that those people “have come to the Katowice to meet and tell each other the individual reasons that brought them to this vital frontier that Ushuaia is. Dominika's bar has acted as catalyst for convergent forces on a frozen night in one of the world's extremes”⁷ (Benesiú 2015: 42). Through this and other similar comments, the narrator willingly interprets the cosmopolitan

⁶ Originally, “Allà els tenia, davant meu, Guillaume Housseras, el francès ric que esperava l'arribada de la seua nòvia Anne-Marie; Peter Borum, l'anglès afectat per l'episodi violent protagonitzat pel seu fill i que havia arribat per esclarir la mort del seu germà; el mexicà Nemesio Coro, representant dels esperits en estat de fugida del planeta Terra; el xilè Martn Medina, genuí comissionat dels individus abandonats per la família; l'amfitriona Dominika Malczewska, de qui encara no sabíem els motius que l'havien duta a abandonar Polònia segurament feia molts anys i acabar regentant el Katowice a la llunyanu ciutat d'Ushuaia”.

⁷ Originally, “han vingut al Katowice per trobar-se i contar-se així els motius particulars que els han dut fins a aquesta frontera vital que és Ushuaia. El bar de Dominika ha actuat com a catalitzador d'unes forces convergents en la nit gelada d'un dels extrems del món”.

situation through the idea of human solidarity that prompts confession and mutual understanding of the violent stories that brought the characters to the scene, and resorts to the ethical imagination of a cosmopolitan harmony generated in company and sympathy for personal suffering in a wide multinational world.

A related situation occurs on board *La Nave*, the ship traveling through the vast Sudd swamp to reach a southern city carrying a multinational group of people on a mission to negotiate the rebuilding of the “City” after a Sudanese war. The passengers include a select group of local tribal leaders, a prominent and cruel Sudanese war soldier and his sick wife, a Canadian photographer, a French biologist, an English oil company businessman, five Chinese real-estate businessmen, a local minister, the captain and his daughter, and a Spanish and a Chinese translator, who learn each other’s stories and face the challenging situation of being attacked and becoming stranded in the middle of a 57,000 square-kilometer natural space. The group has been carefully selected to discuss and reach an agreement that would implement the peace treaty and design the plan for the aftermath of the war, on the basis of individual local roles, abilities, and power. The multinational expedition seeks to resolve a conflict through international cooperation and agreement, based on their confidence in cosmopolitan discourses of mediating political conflicts at a supranational level.

Moreover, *Sudd* also discloses the ethical possibilities of a cosmopolitan group in the newly organized “city” (Martínez 2007: 229) that the ship becomes, since the characters similarly confess their stories. For example, the Chinese translator Han Tsu confesses to the narrator that he is becoming deaf in one ear, while the ferocious warrior Wad tells him that he does not want to kill anyone else. As the narrator remarks, “even the great hermits sometimes need somebody to tell their truths and, after all, I was only a white foreigner who would one day vanish with a handful of African stories”⁸ (Martínez 2007: 251). Despite the wishful assumptions and expectations, these harmonious ethico-political situations would be deeply affected by the environment where they take place, which initially seems to facilitate the global human sense of communion just shown.

The imagination of the wilderness enormously helps the sense of human communion with the planet, and that human beings are part of an all-powerful nature. Both settings in the novel are partially read through the imagination of

⁸ Originally, “[i]ncluso los grandes ermitaños necesitan una vez interlocutores a los que explicar su verdad y yo, después de todo, no era más que un blanco extranjero que un día se esfumaría con un puñado de historias de África”.

the wilderness; an imagination that is, especially in *Gegants de gel*, strongly criticized. Benesiu's novel plays with Tierra del Fuego as "the last territory of territories [...] in the middle of the night on a rotating planet"⁹ (Benesiu 2015: 41). The narrator suggests that it is

one of the least common places on the planet. A place deliberately sought out to avoid the multitudes and to experience the frontier feeling. The territory where humanity borders on nature at one of its extremes is called Ushuaia and it is found at a 54^o South latitude. It's motto reads: "Ushuaia, the end of the world, the beginning of everything".¹⁰ (Benesiu 2015: 22)

At the end of the novel, the sense of an isolated frozen territory where incidents occur and are left unknown reinforces the imagination of the wilderness.

Wilderness plays a stronger role in *Sudd*, where the passengers of *La Nave* face the overwhelming isolation, vastness and unpredictable dynamics of the open natural space of the Sudd swamp. The ship becomes trapped in the middle of moving bushy islands and floating vegetation that constantly reconfigure the landscape and hinder navigation, shaping a chaotic, ageless natural space:

From the watchtower I saw the chaos. An uncertain world. [...]

They say that the Sudd was formed in some inmemorial millenium from the lack of shores. The river burst its banks and spread out over the plain and the result of that flooding was the universe of lakes and sinuous channels determined by the floating islands which, by naturally varying their position, turned the swamp into a mobile labyrinth.

The Sudd is as large as many medium-sized European countries, with the difference that it constitutes a limitless kingdom of shifting confines. Geographers cannot determine its frontiers and when they do, they soon have to modify them.¹¹ (Martínez 2007: 56)

9 Originally, "últim territori dels territoris [...] al bell mig de la nit d'un planeta que gira".

10 Originally, "un dels llocs menys comuns del planeta. Un lloc buscat a consciència per evitar les multituds i per poder provar la sensació de frontera. El territori on la humanitat limita amb la naturalesa per un dels extrems es diu Ushuaia i els troba a 54^o de latitud sud. La seua llegenda diu: 'Ushuaia, fin del mundo, principio de todo'".

11 Originally, "Desde la atalaya vi el caos. Un mundo incierto. [...]"

Dicen que el Sudd se formó en algún milenio inmemorial a causa de la falta de orillas. El caudal madre del río se expandió por la llanura y el resultado de la inundación era aquel universo de lagos y canales sinuosos determinados por las islas flotantes que, al variar naturalmente su posición, convertían el pantano en un laberinto móvil.

El Sudd es tan grande como numerosos países europeos de tamaño medio, con la distinción de construir un reino sin límites, de confines corredizos. Los geógrafos no pueden especificar fronteras y cuando lo hacen deben modificarlas al poco".

In agreement with the imagination of the wilderness, this is “a world from another era. Preevolutionary”¹² (Martínez 2007: 105), where time is suspended in such a way that human beings are driven to ask themselves: “To what age had that place returned us to?”, “What did the future mean there?”¹³ (Martínez 2007: 200, 201). The vastness of the place is felt as “abrumadora” (‘overwhelming’) (Martínez 2007: 130), given its unexpected power over the ship and its passengers, and it finally surrounds and imprisons the ship in an enclosed vegetal, watery spot from which it cannot move. Under those circumstances, “all of a sudden, the animosity of outside commandos and even the burning threats in *La Nave* seemed to pale in comparison to the unfathomable vastness of our well-defined opponent”¹⁴ (Martínez 2007: 297). This quest for survival sets the familiar opposition between human beings as a group-species against the opponent “nature”, to be found in the fantasy of natural wilderness.

The situation of a cosmopolitan scene in these wild spaces, however, is less ideal than it may seem at first sight. It turns out to be an especially conflictive conjunction. In many ways the landscapes of Tierra del Fuego and Sudd are presented as Deleuzian “smooth spaces”, those fluid spaces whose physical features make them resistant to possession, spaces opposed to settlement because they have no paths, metric divisions or channels, but are only marked by traces that are erased and move in their trajectory (Deleuze/Guattari 1980: 472). The intrinsic ambiguity of smooth spaces suggests that these imagined wild spaces are also inherently problematic. The novels portray them as hosting stories of uncertain development and conflictive discourse. The narrative situations in the wilderness not only produce tales of cosmopolitan harmony but also engender conflictive relations through narrative unreliability and invented stories.

Indeed, the cosmopolitan table in *Gegants de gel* that seems to invite a special communion turns out to be an optimum setting for conflict. On hearing the other characters’ stories, the narrator feels his own is not as dramatically interesting, so he considers the possibility of “inventing something, of taking the liberty of employing a poetic lie so to keep myself alive in that table of night-time confessions”¹⁵ (Benesiú 2015: 125). In a similar line to the one expressed in *Sudd*,

12 Originally, “un mundo de otra era. Preevolutivo”.

13 Originally, “¿A qué edad nos había devuelto aquel lugar?”, “¿Qué significaba allí el futuro?”

14 Originally, “la inquina de comandos exteriores e incluso las amenazas que bullían en *La Nave* resultaban de repente casi burdas ante la inaprensible envergadura de nuestro ya bien definido rival”.

15 Originally, “inventar alguna cosa, de prendre’m la llicència de fer servir una mentida poètica per a mantenir-me viu en aquella taula de confessions nocturnes”.

anonymity in no-man's land actually attracts a special kind of confessional, untested narration, as the narrator suggests: "the magnetism irradiated by another human being who listens to you and who you would never cross paths with again enables confidences to be shared"¹⁶ (Benesiu 2015: 126). While waiting for his turn at storytelling, the narrator realizes that Martín Medina is telling the story of Daniel Rojas that he also wanted to tell pretending it was his own, so he turns to French cinema and his own experience for inspiration to improvise an engaging story. The following day, as the narrator and Peter Borum are walking in search of some traces lost in the snow twenty years ago in an attempt to understand the mysterious unresolved death of the latter's brother, they find Nemesio Coro's fresh corpse, just after his murder. All signs point to Martín Medina as the murderer, but he has fled the country and the crime is never fully asserted as resolved in the novel. The narrator reflects on Medina's stolen story in the cosmopolitan scene:

Now it turned out that perhaps everything Medina had said was false, and that the time he spent sitting among us at the table only served him to observe his victim carefully, with the patience of trained and determined murderers [...] Nemesio had trusted us with his story of a Mexican fugitive with a confidence that seemed excessive to all of us.¹⁷ (Benesiu 2015: 228)

While the text keeps the narration close to the narrator, and therefore makes his presence at the crime scene and his early accusations at the Argentinean police detention center convincingly false, the parallelisms between fictional invention and criminal lies in a cosmopolitan narrative framework where there are no tools for judgment because there are no references through which fabrication might be detected, suggest that the narrator's allegedly innocent use of poetic license has been playing with the same dangerous possibilities of Medina's narrative. In that sense, in highlighting the uses of narration for actual crime, the novel also reflects back on its narrator and the potential conflicts produced by unreliable narration both with regards to the story being told and to the global readers who might also be easily deceived.

¹⁶ Originally, "el magnetisme que irradia un altre ésser humà que t'escolta i amb qui mai no et tornaràs a creuar en la teua vida permet el subministrament de les confidències".

¹⁷ Originally, "Ara resultava que potser tot el que Medina havia dit era fals i que el temps que va passar assegut a la taula entre nosaltres sols li va servir per a observar detingudament la seua víctima, amb la paciència dels assassins ensinistrats i sorruts [...] Nemesio ens havia confiat la seva història de mexicà fugitiu amb una confiança que a tothom ens va semblar excessiva".

In *Gegants de gel* the questioning of the natural wilderness contributes to highlighting this misleading imagination of space – a kind of “geografía espiritual” (‘spiritual geography’) (Ferrer 2004: 54) – and warns of the risk of not apprehending its socioeconomic and political dimensions. In a similar narrative resource to the use of stories that come from other characters and films, the narrator’s imagination of the wilderness is significantly taken from mediating representations, through photographs (from various sources, included in the novel: a map, characters, landscape close-ups), movies (especially Lisandro Alonso’s *Liverpool*), paintings (photographs of Frederic Edwin Church’s iceberg paintings), and literature (notably W.G. Sebald, Roberto Bolaño, Stanisław Lem) that contribute to the dislocation between the environmental imagination of the wilderness and the actual tourism, industrialization, and penal institutions that are part of the historical reality of Ushuaia and Tierra del Fuego.¹⁸ In the literary tradition of the English travelers in Argentina that Adolfo Prieto documents, creators of the imagination of Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia as part of a massive European (and now global) search for “autenticitats arreu del món” (‘authenticities around the world’) cannot disguise, as the narrator admits, that travelers are “presoners de la nostra pròpia comèdia” (‘prisoners of our own performance’) (Benesiu 2015: 145), complicit in touristic propaganda, and instrumental users of it. In this sense, ruptured environmental desires are self-consciously surrounded by socioeconomic structures and practices that contradict their fabricated images and therefore disrupt the separation between nature and culture that would postulate the wilderness as the last refuge from human damage, intervention, and political violence. This postulation not only does not prevent conflict but, as the examples provided show, even stimulates it.¹⁹

In *Sudd* the peculiar dynamics of the swamp determine the conflicts that arise in the narrative. The Spanish translator instigates a misunderstanding that produces the novel’s central conflict. In this truly cosmopolitan scene, the starving passengers have just learnt about the food restrictions that the crew has decided for the poorest groups in view of the uncertain duration of the vegetal siege in which *La Nave* is trapped. At this moment, the narrator tells

18 As Nora Catelli recalled and *Gegants de gel* explicitly refers to, Ushuaia was one of the great penitentiary centers in Argentina, contradicting a wild Tierra del Fuego.

19 This point prompted an interesting discussion in the seminar centered on the imagery of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego in Argentinean literature, for which Jorge Locane suggested Christian Ferrer’s essays (2004) on the imagination of Patagonia, and Locane and Catelli recommended Prieto’s monograph (1996). Alejandra Uslenghi, Alejandra Laera, Alexandra Ortiz Wallner, and Héctor Hoyos helpfully interrogated the pictures’ effects in that imagination.

a Chinese outcast to act furiously against this food limitation, and deceiving him through mistranslation, makes him announce that minister Osman is the leader of this rebellion against Gao's and Norton's food rationing policy and that the desperate passengers in the "Inferior Level" should support it, tear open the sorghum sacks, and eat their fill. Taking advantage of the fact that he and Hang Tsu are the only ones who know Arabic, English, Spanish, and Chinese, the narrator produces the conflict by mistranslating, thereby inventing the words that he pretends to be literally translating. This creates a dangerous division among the crew, and empowers the translator with the "imperium" that the section bears as a title. The narrator states with satisfaction:

That was how the people started to eat their defenses while venerating the man who had cast them into hell.
 Thanks to me.
 I modified the feelings of the mob, pointing to the leader I was most interested in raising up.
 Using only my words.
 I felt big, I certainly did.
 I had *La Nave* in my hands.
 In my tongue.²⁰ (Martínez 2007: 225)

It is through language and taking advantage of the interstitial space between languages and cultures that the narrator can feel the "omnipotente gobernador del caos. Gobernador del Sudd" ('omnipotent governor of chaos. Governor of the Sudd') (Martínez 2007: 265). While blackmail is one of the outcomes of this conflict, the final objective of his new power remains unclear. However, what is ironically clear is that the vastness and openness of the territory offers him the possibility of gaining this imperium, "in the void. That is what is most curious. I was sovereign in the middle of the most terrifying void ever known, where not even the land is firm"²¹ (Martínez 2007: 267).

20 Originally, "Así fue como la gente comenzó a comerse las defensas venerando al hombre que les había abocado al infierno.

Gracias a mí.

Modifiqué el sentir de la turba, señalándole al líder que en ese momento más me importaba aunar.

Sólo a base de palabras.

Me sentí grande, ya lo creo.

Tenía a *La Nave* en mis manos.

En mi lengua".

21 Originally, "En la nada. Eso es lo más curioso. Fui soberano en mitad de la más estremece-dora nada conocida, donde ni siquiera la tierra es firme".

In this episode, the narrator reveals himself as the deceitful translator that the other characters have been suggesting when mistrusting his translations. Osman tells him: “Nobody trusts you here. You don’t speak our language well, you make mistakes with words, you have a strange accent and, as you know, people distrust those who do not speak like them”²² (Martínez 2007: 325). The mentioned episode acts as a turning point in the novel in revealing that the mistrust the narrator protests against by initially suggesting that his translations tend to make the exchanges smoother and avoid insulting language or cultural misunderstanding might be justified because he literally lies, generates conflict, and uses discourse as a weapon for gaining personal power and subjecting others to their inability to discuss anything without mediation. This shows the first-person homodiegetic narrator as an unreliable narrator that automatically suspends the story he has told in uncertainty. By not translating to Spanish many of the Chinese sentences, and manipulating discourse, *Sudd* suggests a gap that hosts a potential unreliability and the enormous possibilities of misreading the novel, similar to the effects that the narrative voice in *Gegants de gel* produces.

The liminal, smooth space where these characters meet strongly invites the division between nature and culture, which places the individual in front of the wilderness’ unreachability and unfathomability, where human relations blur in the homogeneity of the species-group that inhabits the planet. While these novels emphatically display the imagined wilderness in their characters’ perception of their surroundings as outside social and political constraints, Tierra del Fuego and the Sudd swamp ultimately reveal themselves not as the expected spaces of harmony but as spaces that enable and legitimize invented tales, misunderstood personalities, and manipulation of narratives that lead to fierce confrontation and unresolved crimes. In other words, it is precisely in those spaces in which the political and national ties can be released in a communion of storytelling or in the common struggle against nature, where violent conflict has, paradoxically, a wider ground in which to appear.

²² Originally, “aquí nadie se fía de usted. No habla bien nuestra lengua, se equivoca en palabras, tiene un acento raro y, en fin, ya se sabe que la gente desconfía de los que no hablan como ellos”.

The imagination of the wilderness, the cosmopolitan scene, and their challenges to world literature: A critical dislocation

Gegants de gel and *Sudd* suggest that the transnational global understanding that cosmopolitanism aspired to is a desire that, when set in a place imagined as outside the social and the political (a natural, wild, common space), reveals itself as problematic and potentially more conflictive than expected. The overlap of cosmopolitan scenes in wild spaces in fact questions whether cosmopolitanism can be thought of outside political affiliations, since the locations of Tierra del Fuego and Sudd conceived as wild and outside social and political regulations, in fact lead us to reread political relations problematically (for example, by inventing stories and rearranging alliances) between characters with an ultimately unavoidable national ascription or geopolitical determination (Polish, Chinese, European, Sudanese), triggering ethical and political relations that are even more perverse because they have larger room for action. The “wilderness” is conceived under those circumstances as a political and ethical “empty” space, a smooth space whose fluidity and difficult traceability makes it permissive, and where political and ethical relations cannot only not be fixed, but, like the loosely oriented power of *Sudd*’s narrator, are also volatile and at times arbitrary.

Similarly, the cosmopolitan scenes in an open, wild space disorient the human unitary, species-driven response that ecocriticism adopts in its relation to the environment. The human ideal that makes the species recognize itself as such when contemplating (as in *Gegants de gel*) or confronting (as in *Sudd*) the natural, wild spaces of Tierra del Fuego and Sudd, is destabilized by the fact that its relationship with nature necessarily implies the ethical and political relations between individuals. As the novels suggest, the imagination of the wilderness cannot be disentangled from the political and ethical function of space. That is, *Gegants de gel* and *Sudd* illustrate the limitations of thinking only of how the human species as a uniform group relates to the wild, depoliticized spaces, forcing the readers to consider the ways in which political relations distort the apparently neat nature-culture dynamics.

From this point of view, in their interaction, the global perspectives of cosmopolitanism and ecocriticism dislocate each other. Situated in what might appear as ideal global conditions – a multinational group with a transnational aim in a wild, unconditioned space – the novels reveal the weaknesses that harmonious, dialectical discourses entail, showing a lack of fluidity in those situations, which, contrary to the initial harmonious expectations the narrative situations generate, quickly reconfigure in the most perverse ways, creating fertile ground for

misunderstanding, manipulation, lies, and crime. Precisely, the use of personal narratives in a context with an extended margin for action, leads us to reflect on how the interaction of various global discourses affects the relations with which each of them is concerned (individuals in their ethical and political relations in cosmopolitan discourses; the human species and environment in ecocriticism), thereby illuminating their most contradictory and least amiable effects. In reflecting the problematic harmonious ideal of traditional cosmopolitanism and the trouble with wilderness (Cronon 2015; Mellor 2014), the novels embody the move towards critical cosmopolitanism and to second and third-wave ecocriticism. But they go even further. In anchoring the conflict at the intersection between the cosmopolitan and the environmental imagination, the novels index the limitations of global discourses focusing on the biological or the ethico-political relations with the planet and the world exclusively, and illuminate the challenges of thinking about them together.

Paradoxically, global novels like *Gegants de gel* or *Sudd* invite criticism to reconsider those allegedly untouched spaces as fitting for the ecocritical and cosmopolitan perspectives. These novels participate in the current revisions of the cosmopolitan and ecocritical discourses mentioned above. Being global in their focus and their approach, the novels disclose the paradoxes and contradictions of those critical discourses and their difficult intersections. This suggests that world literature approaches might be more productive in exploring the uses of global discourses in literature than in pursuing any global cosmopolitan ideal. This approach would help us better understand the imagination of the world and the planet in its varied forms that today guide the literary and critical narratives and discourses, and the practices that we perceive as global.

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5: Precarious worlds: thinking through the crisis of cosmopolitanism

Alejandra Uslenghi

The contemporary cosmopolitan condition: borders and world literature

Who is today the worldly subject of a cosmopolitan experience? Is there a role for world literature as a field of inquiry into the role of literature in globality to provide an account of this experience? In response to the invitation to participate in the discussion of the current critical agenda of cosmopolitanism – as a framework that could sustain and reaffirm the potential of narrative imaginaries of transnational subjectivities, whose sensibility is informed by multiple and overlapping commitments and loyalties, to transcend cultural differences and produce a concept of common humanity – I originally presented a reflection on the power of certain images and their contemporary on-line ubiquitous modes of circulation and reproduction to provide us with a world picture, and thus with a momentarily discerning worldview. I will take here that presentation as a point of departure to expand on two ideas, the premise that in any particular case, cosmopolitanism's value needs to be named, demonstrated and argued for and that contemporary literature and visual culture can be the vehicle for a cosmopolitan perspective that organizes the world in a more self-implicated and ethically fair way. This last point takes me into an analysis of American writer and photographer Teju Cole's "A piece of the wall", a literary and visual essay originally published on-line on his Twitter platform with his photographs in 2014.¹

My presentation at the symposium focused on analyzing the case of the photograph of Alan Kurdi, the three-year old Syrian boy of Kurdish origins who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 while fleeing with family and trying to reach the coast of Greece from Turkey. His lifeless curled-up body resting on the shore was photographed by the Turkish photographer Nilüfer Demir and the image went viral and generated worldwide reaction. International responses emerged almost immediately. This image became a symbol of the worldwide child refugee crisis, of Syrian refugees' plight; it called on Europe's tepid response, the background story uncovered weeks after brought debates on

¹ "A piece of the wall" was later published as the closing essay in *Known and Strange Things* (Cole 2016: 363–376) and one of the photographs taken by him on site in Sasabe (2011), at the US-Mexico border was reproduced in it, and later published and accompanied by a new text in his *Blind Spot* (2017). The essay can be read in its original format at <https://twitter.com/teju_cole/timelines/444262126954110977?lang=en>.

international law and procedures to grant or deny asylum; and the image was a center of attention in that year's Canadian elections. My point was not to illustrate the contemporary "cosmopolitan" condition, now abjectly visible as the traumatic, forced, expulsive experience of detachment from national belonging and identity into the bared in-between, marginal, socially undesirable yet economically useful, opened to unlimited exploitation and violence. That would have contributed to a current overuse and devaluation of this concept, sometimes too easily applied as a characteristic and possession of people that have seen "cosmopolitanism" thrust upon them by traumatic histories of war, dislocation and dispossession.² I will come back to this point, but instead my analysis tried to illuminate the conditions of possibility that allowed for both that brief instance of world community consciousness and empathic moment, when violence and death, the conditions of bare life inscribed upon a child's body reminded us that there is a world, a space of shared co-habitation, being undone. Briefly, those conditions of possibility had to do with the technological infrastructure of reproduction and distribution of images at and unprecedented speed that connected almost instantaneously a local event, its visual record with a worldwide audience through multiple platforms, activating multiple frameworks that produced interpretations and readings of that image capable of evoking photojournalism's history of testimonial truthful accounts, aesthetic dimensions of suffering – centuries of pictures of wounded, suffering and dead bodies could be condensed in that small lifeless lying body – and a universalist human rights discourse that rightly identifies children as the most vulnerable and defenseless population in today's perpetual war context.³ These images of distance suffering impose an ethical demand on viewers, compelling us to negotiate our own proximity and these, even if brief, acts of recognition of suffering break, interrupt the grand narratives of the normative subject.⁴ The consciousness of media globalized events, I argued, shows that cosmopolitanism and its

² As Pnina Werbner states, "At the present cosmopolitan moment in anthropology there is a temptation to label almost anyone – African labour migrants, urbanites, Pentecostals, traders, diasporics – 'cosmopolitans'" (2018: 17). Bruce Robbins writes, "If some people these days tend to feel a certain sinking of the heart when the word cosmopolitanism is pronounced, or at least a diminishment of intellectual expectation and excitement, I think it is only partly because the word is now being overused" (Robbins/Horta 2017: 41).

³ As Bruce Robbins states, "today's cosmopolitanism is asking for a great deal more than it can expect to get: namely, an end to war making. For Kant and for a majority of its champions since, peace has been cosmopolitanism's primary aim and measure" (Robbins/Horta 2017: 41).

⁴ Judith Butler's reflections on ethical demand and recognition of suffering in her "Torture and the Ethics of Photography" (2008) are essential to my argument, she analyzes the case of the photographic material of Abu Ghraib.

knowing-how-to-be in the world, like global mobility, is marked by multiple inequalities, and that its definition is an object of dispute (Whose cosmopolitanism? Which cosmopolitanism?). My obvious emphasis on a visual culture phenomenon brought the discussion with literary scholars to bear on the question of narrative, fiction, and contemporary literature's capacity for such impact – and the old cosmopolitan idea that the cultivation of the humanities is the affective and educational foundation for an empathic cosmopolitan ethical subjectivity, emancipated from any assigned identity, beyond one's mother tongue and open to the recognition of the "other-subject". My purpose here is not to fall back into ethics, but to expand on this inquiry that searches for a literary experience and a literary form, which does include or experiments with the visual correlation, that could respond to this demand and from what kind of perspective is it possible to narrate or enunciate such experience. Is there a possibility that the perception of a mediatized event, which "unites" us on a global scale, even just briefly, and this "consciousness" corresponds to any real shared experience?

Cosmopolitanism at the border

Cosmopolitanism as a critical agenda in the humanities has been distinct from all identity-based beliefs in human indigeneity, ancient and contemporary, and particular forms of nationalisms countered by its association with ethical universals. Globalization as a transformative economic and social scenario with its figurative tropes of "global village", interconnected society and its virtual aspects, and the configuration of a global class of international experts, technocrats, business leaders and advisers, image creators who move rapidly, fluidly, freely relying on technological advances and embodying the grand narrative of a "world without borders" demanded an actualization of its critical potential. Thus, since the 1990s cosmopolitanism has also been the arena where the meaning and the comparative advantages of multiculturalism, and on conflicts of universalisms and the negotiations of the value of alterity has taken place (Hollinger 2001). The shift from an "old" cosmopolitanism, understood as a normative abstraction, in the singular – the commitment with the welfare of humanity as a whole – but enunciated from the point of view of the humanist capable of standing above cultural particularities and with the power of the privileged who speaks for all humanity, has given way to a "new" cosmopolitanism. This new cosmopolitanism, an empirical, plural and descriptive rather than normative cosmopolitanism, draws "from below" – a contrast perhaps more readily embodied by the perspectives of Martha Nussbaum (1997) and Anthony Appiah (2006) – delving into the dislocated experiences of a set of the

new, less privileged cast of cosmopolitan characters and their singular cosmopolitan viewpoints. This shift emerged from a larger critique of cosmopolitanism discourse as elitist western liberalism, identified with high-minded humanitarian disinterestedness, and always complicit with imperial conquest. In the words of David Harvey, it could turn into “an ethical mask for hegemonic neoliberal practices of class domination and financial militaristic imperialism” (2009: 84) or in Timothy Brennan’s “[...] the essence of cosmopolitanism in a single formula, it would be this. It is a discourse of the universal that is inherently local – a locality that is always surreptitiously imperial” (1997: 81).

This fundamental transformation was accompanied by research into new archives and at a different scale, and a plethora of new adjectives came to qualify this approached from below: rooted cosmopolitanism, vernacular, subaltern, banal, and more recently Afropolitanism.⁵ From a cosmopolitanism perceived as a badge of elitism, embodied by scientific travelers, western anthropologists, agents of the empire, elite intellectuals and translators, to a pluralized cosmopolitanism that explored the perspectives of native informants, sidekicks, guides, migrant laborers whose race, class, gender often left them on the margins of the “autonomous travelers”. Thus, cultural exchanges that subvert metropolitan-peripheral dynamics emerged and came to redefine the cosmopolitan condition in terms of particular historical experiences. In this context, cultural cosmopolitanism and the politics of cosmopolitanism acquired a positive valence and progressive implications. This new cosmopolitan discourse has sought to describe the cosmopolitan condition in a sense of a lived experience, an experience of sharing the world with cultural as well as political implications, rather than an ideal, a political category or analytic concept. In this sense, it complicates the assumption – a rather idealistic one that has been co-opted by neoliberal discourse – that cosmopolitan people are those “able to feel at home anywhere”, constantly roaming the world, never uncomfortable. The cosmopolitan experience I am interested in analyzing is unsettling in its confrontation of difference, requiring introspection and negotiation. As Thomas Bender has reflected, “[o]ne’s engagement with difference, whether marked by pain or any other condition of difference, provides an *experience* that prompts both reaching out and a self-reflexive awareness” (Robbins/Horta 2017: 121). This is precisely the way in which the discourse of cosmopolitanism is defined

5 In the Latin American field, Mariano Siskind (2014); Héctor Hoyos (2016); Ignacio Sánchez Prado (2018) have produced studies taking up these interrogations and contributed Latin American voices to the scholarship on cosmopolitanism and world literature. The critical anthologies edited by Gesine Müller (2015) and Juan de Castro (2017) have further contributed to expand the scope of the debate.

as lived relation to difference, or as Judith Butler has named it, the idea of cohabitation, of having a common world, which for Hannah Arendt constitutes the basic condition for politics (Butler 2012: 134–151).

There is perhaps today no more contested site to test this decentered kind of experience than that of the border and border crossing. As many critics have pointed out, the imaginaries of globalization have not made borders disappear, regardless of certain habits of cosmopolitan consumption; much to the contrary they have proliferated.⁶ Globalization has multiplied borders as the means of mobility have spread across the planet and it has fragmented and disassociated some borders from others, where economic activity, trade and consumption, no longer shares the same boundaries as communications or political actions. Thus, making ubiquitous our experience of crossing them, a shared experience where cosmopolitan life is configured and where the concreteness, rudeness and brutality of the contemporary world is experienced. A global culture as a culture of borders, a wider and more pragmatic kind of cosmopolitan experience that we are learning to live and traverse. Each border situation – “thresholds, dead and transitional times, places of encounter, crossing and conflict, relationships that require unprecedented translations and exchanges” as Michel Agier has analyzed them (2016: 156) – is where the contemporary cosmopolitan condition is being formed as it ritualizes the relationship to the other. Agier further argues on the new centrality of the border to contemporary cosmopolitan experience:

In a global and hybrid world, where experiences of the unfamiliar and of uncertainty is practically everyday, this condition is born *on* the border, that is, in everything that makes for the border. This includes uncertain places, uncertain times, uncertain identities that are ambiguous, incomplete or optional, indeterminate or in-between situations, uncertain relationships. These are border landscapes, in which encounters and experiences bring into relation a here and an elsewhere, a same and an other, a ‘local’ fact and a ‘global’ context (simply meaning someone or something that comes from ‘outside’). (Agier 2016: 8)

It is by what happens at those border sites that we learn the ways of the world; the border, always closer than we believe and far from the exotic detour into distant countries that we may imagine as radically other, is where the other-subject is found. In order to recognize his or her existence, it is necessary “to extract oneself from identity-based beliefs and utopias that separate an

⁶ Wendy Brown (2014) reflects insightfully on a “desire for walls”, the sentiments, emotions, fantasies attached to the figure of the alien, of protection, of insulation, and of purity that engender social fears upon which political discourse act.

absolute and intrinsic ‘within’ symbolically and materially walled in, from an ‘outside’ that is nameless and voiceless, generating more fear in that is reduced to silence and dismissed” (Agier 2016: 9). In this act of recognition, as Julia Kristeva has analyzed, each person is also invited to discover their relative foreignness in the gaze of others, others with whom we share the same borderlands: “To discover our disturbing otherness, for that indeed is what bursts in to confront that ‘demon,’ that threat, that apprehension, generated by the projective apparition of the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid, ‘us’” (Kristeva 1991: 192). From this experience each takes a certain distance from their own construed identity by engaging in a cultural work that provides an understanding of the place in which we live and others whom we live with. It is this cultural work and a certain understanding of the “global” what I would like to highlight in Teju Cole’s 2014 essay.⁷

“A Piece of the Wall”

On March 13, 2014 the American writer Teju Cole published his non-fiction essay on his first-hand experience at the US-Mexican border, “A Piece of the Wall”, entirely on his Twitter account. The essay comes from a residency in Arizona, where Cole researched, photographed and wrote about the border culture, the locals and migrants experience. It comprised approximately 250 tweets over the span of a few hours, which combined his direct posts with his either first person or third person narrative text with eight intercalated photographs – Twitter allowed then to post 140 characters of text but also single images – and he adapted dialogue to that format opening and controlling 12 different accounts, one per each character whose testimony he included. Each person was given their own avatar either with photos he had taken of them or symbols or logos connected to their work. It is telling that he characterized this use of the device and platform to enact a multiplicity of voices on the issue of immigration and border culture, “a bit of world-building” (Calvin 2014). The limit of words in the Twitter format required him to adapt some of his sentences, breaking some longer text and strengthening some fragmentary ones. The essay reached a wide audience; through links, forwarded messages, and other social network platforms it was further reproduced and it is still possible today to read it in its

⁷ The scholarship on US/Mexico border and its rich and complex literary tradition is vast, here I am pointing out the experience of multiple forms of strangeness that overlap in Cole’s writing on this site and highlighting a distanced mode of relationality.

original format as well as in print. Cole was interviewed via email by multiple sites, in blogs, and literary online platforms. Many readers were caught up in the experimental use of the social platform – something that Cole had done before inviting collaborative storytelling and photo submissions through his accounts – but as he himself stated, his motivation were less a writerly experiment at blurring the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction usually rendered in the language of neoliberalism as “innovation”, but a test of the resonance of his writing within the framework of that global platform, immersing it in the digital media, letting it run loose through the internet and seeing who could be reached. A narrative of the conditions at the border that sought to break through the virtual cultural borders. A test of the virtual public sphere, checking the expanse and boundaries of what we could call a “global audience” and the possibility of an “instantaneous” audience. Also, a test of the idea that a serious and rigorous piece of writing should not be restricted to the print format, which speaks of a different medium, one which has always been considered until now perhaps hegemonic, as well as a claiming a different temporality. As he stated in an interview, behind that appeal to a global audience there was also a call for empathy that his account of border experience wanted to convey: “I’m not getting my hopes up, but the point of writing about these things, and hoping they reach a big audience, has nothing to do with ‘innovation’ or with ‘writing.’ It’s about the hope that more and more people will have their conscience moved about the plight of other human beings. . . . I continue to believe the emperor has a soul” (Calvin 2014). The act of witnessing – he attends a hearing in a courtroom where chained migrant workers are charged with illegal entry – gives way to the contemplation of the rough, arid, labyrinthine forms of the desert landscape, “The land is a maze. You have to be guided through, right from the beginning you had to be guided. The first story in the world is about safe passage” (Cole 2016: 367). The conversations with the locals – the waitress, the taxi driver, the border patrol officer, the chief medical examiner, the city arts council official, the migrant’s advocates, in front of whom he is both stranger but a national, the bearer of passport documents that allow him crossing – weaved a complex narrative that provides us insight into the temporal, social, and spatial dimensions of the border experience. Its local inscription of individual and collective lives; its territorial transformations and the materialization of an inside and an outside; and the relational framework represented by the border itself, representing both a division and the placing in relationship constitutes in Cole’s essay a regard of the border not as fixed and ahistorical given but a study of the border as it is being made, contested and reinforced exposing the displacements that have preceded that very emplacement. As the taxi driver tells him: “We didn’t cross the border. The border

crossed us. We've always been here. This business of trying to keep people out: in the end it's futile" (Cole 2016: 373). The layers of stories that Cole collects locally as well as his photographs show us how those "already here" when others arrive, transform themselves into the "always here", claiming an identity of space that is always the result of one's production of one's space, instituting locality and belonging.

Re-sensitizing the de-sensitized virtual global sphere becomes then possible with a narrative that portrays the border from the writer's own cosmopolitan experience – as he tells us, Teju Cole was born in the US to Nigerian parents, grew up in Lagos, and returned to the US for pursue his college education – he writes, "Citizenship is an act of imagination. I was born American, but I also had to learn to become American" (Cole 2016: 374), one deeply embedded into racial history, "my understanding of American experience has mostly been from the point of view of a recent African immigrant. I tried to understand the interconnected networks of trade and atrocities that formed the histories of the cities I've known and visited. . . In Tucson, witnessing the ongoing crisis in the borderlands, I have to revise my understanding of my country to include this, too" (Cole 2016: 374). In "A Piece of the Wall" the border is thus the site of interpellation of one's own sense of self and the cosmopolitan subjectivity Cole examines is the one that cultivates both commitment and distance, one's own possible distance of the self, always worked by identity assignments, and an awareness of the possibility of dialogical knowledge of the others. The border is the site of awareness of the porosity of the here and there, the traces of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa, which relativizes those primary roots and given affiliations.⁸ Like the Twitter accounts Cole activated to give voice to those he interviewed, the dialogical knowledge of others permeates the essay and portrays that sense of liminality which is not just personal but also reveals the social dimension of the border, people situated in a space of uncertainty about social existence and being recognized by others.

Among the images he also published we can see scenes from the border towns of Nogales and Sasabe south of Tucson in Arizona depicting the precarious infrastructure of "puestos fronterizos", border checkpoints, as well as migrant assistance NGOs, where the sense of transience contrasts with the

⁸ Cole's published fiction – in particular his novel *Open City* (2011) – has been deemed either "an exemplary cosmopolitan performance", one in which the global Anglophone novel instantiates ethical connections across national identities, or critical of this program and his storytelling as not invested in forging international contact zones but in cautioning against a facile instrumentalism equating cross-cultural connection with social transformation. See Vermeulen (2013) and Saint (2018).

border-long extension and the background imposing presence of the desert landscape. Fences, barbed wire, natural and built dividers traverse the towns. These images, taken by Cole while traveling there, underline certain points of the narrative and as in many photographs by the author, oscillate between close attention to detail and a kind of panoramic detachment. Thus, the gaze also negotiates its own liminality, getting closer and distancing, a street style photography that defines Cole's approach to the media (see Lucas 2017). The portrait of Isabel García, the leader of the *Coalición de Derechos Humanos* and public defender in the Pima County – taken in her office amidst her daily work fighting inhumane treatment of migrants and gathering information to help with identification of dead bodies found in the desert or for families in search of loved ones who have never returned – shows her in a stoic, serene but stern profile, her face turned to the side. While she looks away from the camera, the narrative focuses on the arduous process of identification of unknown bodies, the collection of body marks, details, physical peculiarities, all that can be used to scan the remains, the remnants of those lives now scattered through the desert. In the words of Kat Rodríguez, another leader, the coexistence with this reality demands a certain emotionless impassiveness: “People have to be desensitized”, says Kat, “to allow the kind of horrible death that happened to someone like René. If you really confronted it, it would be unbearable” (Cole 2016: 371). The image we confront next as Cole forces us to bear the sight is a close up of the morgue unit of Pima County where “rows of body bags in metal shelving, stacked in regular array like a card catalogue, five levels high” (Cole 2016: 375). Once again the weaving of narrative and photography to re-sensitize the reader, catch the distracted attention of the Twitter audience, and confront them with the harshest of visual testimony.

The visual trace of this biopolitical control exercised at the border on the bodies of migrants to control the “flows” of populations is clearly rendered in the two photographs where Cole depicts the wall. The red corrugated wall near the US-Mexico border in the town of Sasabe stretches through scrubland in the background, cutting through the landscape towards the horizon line as it reaches a blue and cloudy sky. This red wall, which also draws a bloody red line, can be seen through a screen of wire fence bisecting the frame, an angular geometry that reproduces the border lines colliding and signaling the here and there and the spatial dimension of the border, the boundary that partitions the space and materializes an inside and outside. The photograph does not depict any human figures, but the space of contact and exchange between the two edges, the two sides is a graveyard of unknowns, “In the grass near the inspection post, on the Mexican side, someone has planted two white crosses.

The large one lists at a forty-five-degree angle. On the smaller, I can make out the word ‘mujeres’” (Cole 2016: 369). The border is also a cemetery, a site of mourning for voiceless, silenced bodies where the visual testimony, the mark of those crosses in the ground, becomes a path of remembrance in face of the impossibility of naming them and resisting the biopolitical model of alterity, the power of life and death exercised to its limits, by “letting die” the undesirable, the foreigner, the outsider.

The contemporary cosmopolitan experience of the border raises the signification of questions that come to define our critical agenda today: there is no common world without alterity, and the relationship to the others is imperative to the construction and functioning of a common world. Any genuine common world necessitates a personal and societal shift in the treatment of marginalized people, if it will not just be a graveyard. As Michel Agier writes on the critical potential of cosmopolitan thought,

The question then is to transform the global foreigner, invisible and phantom-like, whom identity politics leaves nameless and voiceless behind material or invisible walls, bureaucratic or ideological, into a person whose alterity becomes again relative and potentially closer. On this basis it will be possible to reconsider each border as a new test of alterity where an other-subject emerges, the cosmopolitan subject, come to disturb the existing identity-based order. (Agier 2016: 156)

The transformation rests on these kind of narratives and images, which do not renounce an ethical call but at the same time establish a point of encounter in the common platforms of the global virtual village, seeking to interrupt the incessant flows of daily communication, claiming the attention of that global audience to incite an emotional and aesthetic response. The title of the essay refers to the last image Teju Cole included in his posts, it depicts a piece of corroded, rusty metal bar with blueish tones, laying on top the writer’s wooden table, “On the table on which I write this is the piece of iron I took from the base of the wall at Nogales more than two years ago. The officers at Tucson Airport gave me trouble (it was in my hand luggage, and came up strange and solid on the X-rays). I told them it was a memento. They took it out of the bag and examined it, puzzled. Then they let me go, with my piece of the wall” (Cole 2016: 376). An image and an object of remembrance that brings the border experience home, closer, accessible and comprehensible. The border is not a distance elsewhere, it is actually here, in a contemporaneity and spatial continuity of the world that makes it possible to live alongside others. The wooden table and the iron bar, the material objects out of which a common world, the world in common, can be imagined.

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Mariano Siskind

Towards a cosmopolitanism of loss: an essay about the end of the world

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.

E.B., Brazilian Poet

One of the most felicitous effects of the recent world literary and cosmopolitan turns for the field of Latin American literary and cultural studies (or rather, the attention to minoritized, vernacular, strategic forms of cosmopolitanism in the region) is the opening of a discursive space set on destabilizing the Latin Americanist ideology of the Latin American critical tradition; that is, a rather refreshing critical discourse set against the particularistic, identitarian and provincial cultural politics of the scholarly field dedicated to the study of the over-signified cultural void that we are used to tagging with Latin American signifiers. Against the reproduction of overdetermined historicist interpretations of our objects of study, sustained by a militant desire to affirm the exceptionalist, differential nature of Latin American culture, this world literary/cosmopolitan turn has re-opened a comparative critical practice that has always been active in the field in spite of programmatic attempts to marginalize it since, say, the 1970s (and when I say *comparative*, I am thinking of the dislocation of sameness in relation to its constitutive instability and to the contingent

Note: This essay is an attempt to present some of the main argumentative lines of a book manuscript I am working on with a tentative title that includes formulations in English like “the end of the world” and ideas in Spanish like “crisis y dislocaciones de esto que ya no es mundo” that I’m not sure how to translate. I presented ideas about the end of the world in talks at the Freie Universität Berlin, the Universidad Nacional de Rosario, the Universidad de San Martín, the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of California at Riverside, Yale University, Universität zu Köln, SUNY Buffalo and University of Leeds. I want to thank Catarina von Wedemeyer, Joachim Küpper, Judith Podlubne, Sandra Contreras, Gonzalo Aguilar, Mónica Szurmuk, Leila Gómez, Marta Hernández Salván, Jacques Lezra, Noël Vallis, Aníbal González Pérez, Gesine Müller, Justin Read and Daniel Hartley for their very generous invitations, and to the friends, colleagues and students present at these presentations for helping me work through some of these notions. I also want to thank Anna White-Nockleby and Lucas Cuatrecasas for their intelligent comments and suggestions, and the students in my doctoral seminar, “The non-cosmopolitan and the post-global: worlds of destitution in literature, film and theory”, particularly, Ignacio Azcueta, Matylda Figlerowicz, José de León González, Lucas Mertehikian, Rodrigo del Río Joglar, Isaac Magaña Cantón and Mauro Lazarovich.

nature of its order and formation). A comparative critical practice, that is, capable of estranging those objects that would now be seen as incommensurable with the idea of Latin America, of a dislocating non-Latin Americanist critical discourse enunciated from the cracks of Latin America's split cultural body; a critical practice in which particularistic and identitarian predicates – whether national, regional, ethnic or political – are dissolved as a result of a new awareness of the irreducible singularity and contingency of the signifying structures that frame our approaches to these *less-than-Latin American* objects of study. But even if this is certainly a productive first step towards the decentering of the discipline's particularistic self-commodification, it depends on a supposedly stable notion of "world" that the experience of crisis that defines and overwhelms the present in 2017 seem to be undoing.

This essay is an attempt to rethink, revise, fold, twist, dislocate, and reconceptualize the notion of cosmopolitanism during a historical juncture defined by the total collapse of the imaginary function assigned to the world by the experience of the world that was central to the discourse of cosmopolitanism – the world understood as the symbolic structure that used to sustain humanistic imaginaries of universal emancipation, equality and justice. Well, the world today can no longer fulfill the role of a feasible signifying horizon for cultural and aesthetic forms of cosmopolitan agency. So, what is the ethico-political potential today of a cosmopolitanism without world? Is an expansive, euphoric concept of cosmopolitanism understood as the desire to expand one's own subjectivity until making it coincide with the totality of the known and unknown universe still useful to address the overwhelming experience of loss that defines the very contemporary sense of crisis that I am calling here the experience of the end of the world?

In *Cosmopolitan Desires* I proposed a notion of cosmopolitanism as *deseo de mundo* that I feel needs to be revisited in light of the crisis of the idea of the world we are living through. There, in my book, I described *deseo de mundo* or *desire for the world* as the aesthetico-political differential structure of marginal cosmopolitanisms in regard to universalist discourses articulated in hegemonic contexts of enunciation. But an idea of cosmopolitanism that focuses in on those relational imaginaries that produced, posited and affirmed worlds (imaginaries defined by their drive to world the world, a notion that Djelal Kadir and Pheng Cheah draw from Heidegger's *Being and Time*), and which either are things of the past or have taken a backseat to more urgent and traumatic modes of displacement and global loss, seems less than compelling in the present historical context. Today we need an understanding of cosmopolitanism that reckons with the experience of the *unworlding* of the world, the displacement of the very stable notion of world as globe produced by hegemonic

discourses of cosmopolitanism and financial and consumerist globalization. The conceptualization of this experience of *unworlding* has the potential to reveal the phantasmatic nature of the world as the affective structure that can no longer ground a desire for universal belonging characteristic of modern forms of cosmopolitanism since Kant's classic texts, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" (1784) and "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" (1795) (Kant 1991). This *unworlding* points to the historical breakdown of the conventional conception of Kantian cosmopolitanism, understood as the rational obligation to concern oneself with the good of others regardless of our distance from them, an obligation that depends on the presupposition of an abstract, transparent and unobstructed universal surface across which this moral duty is felt and eventually realized.

But in spite of the need of a concept that underscores the experience of the *unworlding* of the world as the evidence of the insurmountable, geometrical/Euclidean gap between global embodiments of haves and have-nots that continues to haunt cosmopolitan imaginaries, there is a feature of Kantian cosmopolitanism that I am not ready to let go of: the ethical and political will to suspend the gap between the marginal and the metropolitan (and vice-versa); to transform actual and symbolic distance and hierarchical asymmetry into affective proximity; and to do everything possible to preserve the horizon of unconditional cosmopolitan hospitality even when (or particularly when) the productive nature of its impossibility seems to be utterly neutralized. In other words, I am not ready to let go of the cosmopolitan dream in spite of all evidence pointing to its concrete, historical failures and manifest impossibility. Perhaps I should qualify this confession: I can live with my own inability to forsake cosmopolitanism as a horizon for cultural and political agency as long as we recognize its empirical shortcomings, and we are diligently willing to come up with a necessarily revised and dislocated version of Kant's ethico-political concept, as well as of the notion of "world" that can be drawn from it. Universalist, world-affirming, ethico-political notions of cosmopolitanism are still useful when trying to describe and analyze modernist cosmopolitan formations and practices emerging precisely from their own contingent attempts to posit a world in which they could inscribe their modernist cosmopolitan aesthetic projects and subjectivities. In this context, "world" should be understood, not only as the geospheric cultural-political territory whose function was to negate the national determination of local forms of agency, but perhaps most importantly, "world" named the modern and modernist symbolic structure that supported humanist discourses of universal emancipation through global connections, translations, interactions, displacements and exchanges; "world" as the symbolic realm where demands of justice, emancipation and universal inclusion (whether political, cultural and/or aesthetic) were meant to be actualized.

There is no better example of the production of the world in modernity/modernism, of the conceptualization of modernity as a process of *worlding* and world-making than the famous closing lines of Marx and Engels' *Manifesto of the Communist Party*: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working Men of All Countries, Unite!" (Marx/Engels 1979 [1848]: 500). Marx and Engels's call for the proletarian collective subjectivity to conquer the world, to be the world, to make it their own, in other words, to universalize their cultural and socio-economic particularity until it becomes identical with the totality of the world, expresses an incredible confidence in the potential of these collective subjects (first the bourgeoisie, *now* in 1847, the proletariat) to accomplish this task. But even more meaningful in the context of the argument I want to present in this essay is the fact that they invest the world (the world as it exists, along with the world the proletariat will create once it unites, conquers, and succeeds in creating a global social totality without internal differentiations and antagonisms) with sacred humanistic, emancipatory meaning; they transform the world into the only surface where emancipation can take place. Gaining the world, conquering it is the condition of possibility of Marx and Engels' cosmopolitan/internationalist actualization of universal justice.

Obviously, it is quite difficult to replicate Marx's confidence today, when workers, or rather precarious, vulnerable working men and women (who can no longer aspire to the subjectivity Marx called *worker*), are not in the process of gaining and conquering the world. Instead, they seem to be losing it – to be losing the structural grounds that gave meaning to work, leisure, family and a sense of futurity –, and seem to be doomed to modes of errancy on large and small scales, even when they appear to be standing still in one place. Marx and Engels' world no longer exists. The world, as the signifier that names the desire for an impossible but operative universal reconciliation, no longer exists. And the notion of cosmopolitanism we are in a position to articulate today, the *less-than-cosmopolitan* notion of cosmopolitanism that contemporary culture can afford today, does *not* produce worlds, is *not* driven by world-making, world-affirming desires, and in fact should be activated to work in the opposite direction: signifying the generalized sense of loss that defines the present historical juncture, specifically, the experience of losing the world that Marx and Engels identified as the battlefield of the emancipation to come.

An anachronistic notion of cosmopolitanism designed for a time when modern actors operated under the presumption that they had "a world to win" is not useful today. It does not interrogate displacements and traumatic losses we cannot fully understand, or begin to mourn and overcome; the painful sensation of the loss of the world we are experiencing today – the overwhelming impression,

over the last few years, that we are living through the end of the world: the displacement of 67.75 million refugees, migrants, stateless and forcibly displaced persons (the largest number registered in history [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Statistical Yearbook 2016]) as a result of environmental catastrophes, food shortages, political instability and economic hardship caused by a climate change crisis which seems to have reached a point of irreversibility, and by small and large-scale perpetual wars and terror; children forcibly separated from their immigrant families and kept in wire cages within detention areas policed by the security forces of the same liberal-democratic societies that lay claim to the global right to determine the meaning and scope of human rights and humanitarianism; the horrifying intensification of the military, economic and symbolic violence the Israeli state exerts over Palestinian people; the organization of state and privately funded death squadrons and militias to illegally repress social movements and assassinate their leaders across Latin America, Africa, China, Russia, Eastern Europe and Turkey; the structural unwillingness of conservative *and* leftist (leftist-in-name-only) governments to reduce poverty and socio-economic inequalities, and to conceive policy addressing it in the context of larger patterns of global inequality; the demented and theatrical degradation or deliberate demolition of republican democratic institutionalism across the Western hemisphere; the crisis or death of Europe as a project of political and cultural reorientation of the American global hegemony; the radicalization of financial capital's global sovereignty with the consequent need of new, increasingly creative modes of domination, and exploitation to attempt to secure the appropriation of surplus value, which nevertheless cannot be institutionally stabilized. Daily interactions and news from afar confront us with the faces of millions in pain, who are not living, but barely surviving this end of the world, swept over by a very real sense that "things fall apart and the center cannot hold"¹ (Yeats 1922). And even those of us whose lives are quite comfortable (comfortable *and* alienated: comfortably numb) are affected by a sense of dispossession, destitution, and disbelonging. This experience is very different from that of refugees and migrants but nevertheless, we feel lost in the world and are marked by this structural sense of loss (the loss of the conditions of enunciation that used to make possible the articulation of the dream, or the illusion, of universal emancipation), by no longer having a world, or a parcel of the world to call home, *no se puede hacer pie*, the experience of being in mid-air right after the rug has been pulled out from under

¹ I am fully aware of the liberal-leftist or democratic-socialist melancholic nostalgia at stake in the sense of loss and crisis that this list transpires. I am not entirely uncomfortable with this moment of *méconnaissance*.

our feet like Wile E. Coyote in the Warner Brothers' cartoons, when he is chasing the roadrunner and continues to run beyond the cliff, there is a moment, right before he realizes he is in mid-air, when he continues to run, when he is still going through the running motions, right before he looks down and realizes that nothing will prevent his fall. I believe this describes our present situation quite cogently: there no longer is a world under our feet.²

2 The end of the world does not only evince the obsolescence of the concepts of cosmopolitanism and globalization as differently oriented modes of progressive liberal utopias, but the same happens with world literature at least in relation to the common structure of its latest reinvention over the past 15 or 20 years in texts authored by very influential figures like Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti, David Damrosch, and Gayatri Spivak (among others); a scholarly practice that depended on an affirmative notion of the world as grounds for cosmopolitan cultural exchanges and translations that set the foundation for a universal (intellectual) community to come based on justice and equality, or for the capitalistic extraction of surplus literary and economic value and for the commodification of style, ideas and subject positions. This particular understanding of world literature is untenable in the face of the end of the world: it has exhausted its ability to account for relevant contemporary engagements with the present state of the (non)world. We will continue to see a proliferation of new case studies abounding in sociologies of markets and circulation, which may have merit in their contribution of new examples of the epiphenomenon, but will nevertheless confirm through their methodological repetitiveness the end of world literature as we have known it since the turn of the 21st century. But I want to be very clear: I am not advocating the abandonment of the notion and scholarly practice of world literature; on the contrary, I believe it still holds an enormous potential if we reinvent it. Since Goethe, world literature has always been a project bent on making literature speak to the political crises of the times, so the end of the world makes it impossible to continue to talk about world literature the way we did when the world still existed in the affirmative terms I just explained. Just as with cosmopolitanism and globalization, I think it is imperative to reconceptualize the meaning and scope of world literature in relation to the experience of the loss of the world. In a very recent and very lucid essay titled, "Corpse Narratives and the Teleology of World Literary History", Héctor Hoyos already points in this direction. He diagnoses a crisis of political (or extra-disciplinary) purpose in the discourse of world literature when constituted around the notion of circulation, which yields more circulation, and "then the self-fulfilling prophecy is complete. In other words, autotelic axiology and virtuoso exhibitions of connoisseurship replace discussions about finality" (Hoyos 2017: 66). Instead he proposes a world literature oriented by a search for justice. Writing on "The Part About the Crimes" in Bolaño's *2666*, and reflecting on the commotion, "moral outrage, guilt by omission, morbid fascination, disgust, and anesthesia" the reader experiment when reading about the *femicidios* in Santa Teresa, he proposes that "the section's embeddedness within the novel provides an illustration of what it might mean to bank the future of World Literature on a search for justice, always the more pressing concern than global literary historiography" (Hoyos 2017: 72). And he makes a call for a world literature that looks beyond a merely disciplinary and institutional horizon ("whether the expansion of the novel form across the continents or the transcultural resonances of epic", (Hoyos 2017: 73): when "six women are assassinated in Mexico every day, which is already a staggering statistic,

With the idea of the end of the world I am not proposing an abstract, trans-historical conceptualization of a vaguely universal contemporary experience of loss. And, of course, I am cognizant of the fact that there have been *other* ends of the world, that the constitutive instability of modernity has often been codified as a recursive end of the world; that in previous historical conjunctures, the relation of different social subjectivities to the structural trauma that provoked their dislocation has also been understood as *an* end of the world; and that for those who suffer, it always feels like the end of the world. The meaning of the experience of the end of the world I am trying to think through is not exhausted by “the gravity and irreversibility of the present environmental crisis” and “the vertiginous sensation of incompatibility – perhaps even impossibility – between the human and the world”, and more generally, by the recognition of “the face of the intrusion into our histories of a kind of transcendence that we will never again be able not to take into account: the cataclysmic horizon defined by anthropogenic global warming” (Viveiros de Castro/Danowski 2017: 1, 3, 109). I would like to propose that the historical (rather than biospheric) specificity of the experience of the end of the world today can be understood looking into the structural universality of its traumatic determination or, to put it differently, as the symbolic closure of the horizon of universal justice and emancipation that had defined the modern/modernist relationship between cosmopolitan politics and culture. Throughout modernity (because the notion I am working on has nothing to do with medieval Christian Millennialists or Biblical apocalypticism), the end of the world was a very real but strictly localized experience of the End Times that resulted from particular conditions of exploitation which were represented *as* universal. In other words, the signifying order structured around previous experiences of the end of the world was believed to be universal because of the forcefulness of the historical experience that dislocated it (the provincialized geographies of world wars might illustrate this point³ but there always was an “outside” of those ends of the world, a global or symbolic *place* beyond trauma, where redemption and

but the phenomenon is much larger worldwide: according to the UN, Mexico ranks sixteenth in femicides. . . Why shouldn't literary scholars, then, engage with something as significant, prevalent, rhizomatic, and urgent? One *blasé* answer would be: because we are not activists, journalists, criminologists, or forensic detectives. Neither is Bolaño, but he assimilates all four discourses to a significant extent, both in the research behind the novel and in the writing itself. Without ceasing to be a work of literary art, however narrowly we wish to construe one, 2666 stretches the limits of the form so as to rub against those other domains. The forensic hermeneutics in the passage above is a case in point: in a *mise en abyme*, coroners ‘read’ cadaveric fauna for clues, while readers do the same” (Hoyos 2017: 73–74).

3 See my essay “War” (Siskind 2016).

emancipation continued to be part of the horizon of expectations, regardless of the likelihood of their actualization. The representation of such an “outside” depended on the belief that politics and culture were to be understood as sites and practices capable of restituting and repairing the world in ruins that cosmopolitans still posited as the necessary grounds for the realization of universal justice, redemption – the end of suffering. And this meant that the experience of the end of the world always had to be symbolized against the horizon of its own negation.⁴ Today there is nothing outside the end of the world. The dialectical negation that used to be there for us to make sense of an alternative, a future, a just and emancipated world, does not seem to be available anymore. Not one person or collective is capable of representing itself beyond the imaginary or real impending threat constitutive of the experience of the end of the world.⁵ And even Capital articulates its own structuring function in direct

4 This is obviously the case with dialectical (or rather, post-dialectical) notions of the End of History, like Francis Fukuyama’s neoliberal/Straussian translation of Hegel’s philosophy of history in 1989 when, after the electoral triumph of Solidarnost in Poland and right before the Fall of the Berlin Wall, he declared the end of the dialectical conflict between Communism and Capitalism, with Western liberal democracy as the most perfect form of governmentality, and Capitalism as an economic system identical with Hegel’s universality of Reason. It goes without saying that the contemporary traumatic end of the world I am proposing to think through supposes, among other ends, the destabilization of Fukuyama’s post-historical neoliberal order (albeit, not in any revolutionary, emancipatory sense).

5 This points precisely to a very important difference that I would like to highlight between my notion of *the end of the world*, and the way Slavoj Žižek characterizes the present as “the End Times” in his book *Living in the End Times* (the present of 2010, but it seems legitimate to extend his argument to 2017). For him, the sign of the times is the terminal crisis of capitalism; he writes that today “apocalypse is at the gates” (Žižek 2010: 315), explains that the nature of these apocalyptic days is directly marked by the fact that “the global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point” (Žižek 2010: x), and proceeds to detail its effects: ecological crisis, biogenetic revolution, struggles over raw materials, food and water, and the growth of social divisions and exclusions. Of course, for him no crisis should go to waste, and he sees the End Times we’re living through as an opportunity (Lenin’s dictum, *the worse, the better*), and ends the book championing the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the answer to the absence of an “emancipatory politics” today. The dictatorship of the proletariat is his solution to the need for constant “pressure exerted on by the people’s mobilization and self-organization”, a non-populist constant mobilization of the *plebs* without “the unity involved in the populist notion of the the People” (Žižek 2010: 393). And that is why he proposes we should read *Living in the End Times* as “a book of struggle. . . against those in power in general, against their authority, against the global order and the ideological mystification that sustains it” (Žižek 2010: xv). I strongly disagree with Žižek’s Leninist optimism (*the worse, the better* – which he reiterated in 2016 when he declared that a defeat of Hillary Clinton during the 2016 US presidential elections would be desirable since it would accelerate the demise of the neoliberal world order) and his hopeful affirmation of a post-liberal, post-capitalist and

relation to it, simultaneously as causing and being endangered by the end of the world.⁶

As opposed to the late 1990s, when Hardt and Negri were inspired by the anti-globalization movement to posit the multitude as a new unmediated, immanent, nomadic, subjectivity whose antagonistic force would eventually dislocate the social order of Empire/Globalization in a true revolutionary event, today there are no collective subjects invested with such redemptive potential. Emancipation and universal justice are not in the cards for those whose singularity is defined by the impossibility of dwelling in precarious territorial formations that no longer amount to what we used to call “world”; a landscape of ruins where being and dwelling – what Heidegger terms *real, essential dwelling* in his essay “Building Dwelling Thinking” – have become impossible. What looks like the terminal crisis of the symbolic order that used to shape the

politically mobilized world after the Apocalypse we are experiencing today. It is undeniable that *the end of the world* is tangled up in the crisis of global capitalism, deepened by the inability of capital to reinvent itself this time around, but the experience of the end of the world that I am trying to conceptualize here lies outside of the possibility of reintroducing any form of social antagonism that may restart the engine of a dialectical philosophy of history with its promises of a transcendence, a redemption, a reconciliation, an emancipation or a revolution to come. This is what I find inconceivable today for those subjects constituted through the experience of the end of the world, and for those of us thinking about it, writing about it.

6 In an essay published by *New Left Review* in 2014, “How Will Capitalism End?”, the German Marxist economic and sociologist Wolfgang Streeck analyzes the economic transformations after the financial crisis of 2008 that indicate that what we are living through is not just another crisis of capitalism’s “cyclical movements or random shocks, after which capitalist economies can move into a new equilibrium, at least temporarily”, crises which are “in fact required for its longer-term health”. On the contrary, he points out that “what we are seeing today, however, appears in retrospect to be a continuous process of gradual decay, protracted but apparently all the more inexorable”. He points out that: “Steady growth, sound money and a modicum of social equity, spreading some of the benefits of capitalism to those without capital, were long considered prerequisites for a capitalist political economy to command the legitimacy it needs. What must be most alarming from this perspective is that the three critical trends I have mentioned may be mutually reinforcing. There is mounting evidence that increasing inequality may be one of the causes of declining growth, as inequality both impedes improvements in productivity and weakens demand. Low growth, in turn, reinforces inequality by intensifying distributional conflict, making concessions to the poor more costly for the rich. . . Furthermore, rising debt, while failing to halt the decline of economic growth, compounds inequality through the structural changes associated with financialization – which in turn aimed to compensate wage earners and consumers for the growing income inequality caused by stagnant wages and cutbacks in public services”. As a result, he concludes that “assuming that ever lower growth, ever higher inequality and ever rising debt are not indefinitely sustainable, and may together issue in a crisis that is systemic in nature – one whose character we have difficulty imagining” (Streeck 2014: 37–38).

possibility of belonging and of home (as well as of the libidinal kind of displacements we have understood for over two modern centuries under different cosmopolitan rubrics), sheds light on the privileged, dislocated (non)subjectivity at the center of the end of the world. It is a subjective form that cannot be easily identified even when glimpsing its contours against the backlight of the differential surplus that results from the interplay of signifiers trying and failing to name the forcibly displaced, the migrant, the homeless, the hopelessly errant and the refugee. Because the vanishing precariousness of this (non)subjective figure results from a devastating violence that, at the same time, shapes and undoes its particularity, it cannot be apprehended or read by any kind of redemptive eschatology, whether cosmopolitan or *global-from-below* (and even less so, national-popular or subalternist). It is a (non)subject whose displacement no longer points to any kind of cosmopolitan *jouissance* but to the traumatic impossibility of dwelling as the overdetermined contemporary condition of the end of the world; dwelling is impossible for everyone everywhere, no matter the bodily or world-historical scale of the experience of dislocation. And this is true of the lived experience of generalized loss, even when not everyone is equally affected by this structural undoing of the world and its symbolic horizons; because we are not all refugees, homeless, forcefully displaced, errant or migrant individuals. No, of course not.⁷ But the end of the world, the widespread experience of being in the process of losing the world, renders visible the refugee, the migrant, the displaced in us, in those of us who are ostensibly not refugees or forcefully displaced persons. I am thinking of *the refugee in us* like Julia Kristeva's *foreigner in us*, which is her way of conceptualizing the presence of the stranger, the migrant as a figure of our own split subjectivity, as "the hidden face of our own identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. . . The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners not amenable to bonds and communities"⁸ (Kristeva 1991: 1).

7 Of course we are not all refugees, among other things because close to 80% of refugees are women and children. And the latest data published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2017 state that people of concern (this includes, not only refugees, but also asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, returned refugees and IDPs, stateless persons and others of concern) are female or male under the age of 18 out of a total of 67,689,992, which represents 33% (*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Statistical Yearbook 2016*). I want to thank Jacqueline Bhabha for helping me locate these figures.

8 With the idea of the foreigner in us, Kristeva brilliantly translates the dislocating opacity of the Freudian unconscious into geopolitical, societal terms in order to intervene in recent (and not so recent) polemics about immigration in France – and not exclusively in France,

At this point, it is indispensable that I state as clearly as I can that, in this essay, I am not dealing with the actual, historical experiences of refugees, migrants, forcefully displaced or homeless people. I have nothing to say about these very real historical subjects, about their very real losses and their very real wounded bodies; they remain unthinkable to me, to someone like me, someone whose experience of loss and of a world in ruins has absolutely nothing in common with the dispossession that constitutes the traumatic specificity of their subjectivities. It is rather an essay about the traces of those experiences that we call art and literature. And perhaps more importantly, it is about some of the idiosyncratic ways in which those of us who care about art and literature attend to these forms as symbolic sites in order to try and fail to understand the end of the world (and to extract the surplus of discursive enjoyment that is characteristic of our trade); it is about our reaction to an experience of the end of the world that is and is not *our* end of the world; and it is about what we (as professors, students, intellectuals, writers, artists) can and can no longer do about the end of the world through art as mediation, now that the historical horizon that signified the possibility of emancipation has vanished, and ethico-political commitments are barely more than the narcissistic symptomatology of our Facebook existences. In other words, it is a text that poses an honest and open-ended question about whether all we can do is mourn the loss of the world and nothing more, and approaching art as the site where we can engage in the labor of mourning – albeit a melancholic mode of mourning (I will develop this proposal further in the postscript to this essay).

The ghostly subjects of the end of the world (the *legion of wandering orphans* as Bolaño calls them in “El ojo Silva”, the short story that I will analyze here) are at the center of many of the most interesting contemporary narratives whose aesthetic contribution consists of a programmatic drive to dislocate the possibility of their own Latin American, national, or generally identitarian reterritorializations. They narrate the trajectories of characters (or pseudo-characters, undone characters, merely scribbled and blurred characters, sub-defined characters, and so on) who venture out into a decomposing world that can barely support their hyperlocal or global displacements. They explore the tension between the experience of losing the world and a *less-than-cosmopolitan* stubbornness not to let go of the world, or whatever is left of its symbolic potential to signify global displacements inscribed against the background of a universalist emancipation to come. They are

obviously: her discourse targets fascist-chauvinistic arguments from reactionaries across the globe, from Brexit and the US/Mexican, Ethiopian/Kenyan, Venezuelan/Colombian and Syrian/Turkish borders to xenophobic policies and everyday attitudes across Europe, Palestine, Pakistan, South Sudan, Uganda and beyond.

narratives disrupted by the loss of cosmopolitanism, by a cosmopolitanism of loss that tries to name the melancholic limit of mourning, of letting go of the signifying horizon that no longer is. I am thinking of narratives by Roberto Bolaño, João Gilberto Noll, César Aira, Chico Buarque, Guadalupe Nettel, Mario Bellatin, Lina Meruane, Sergio Chejfec, Eduardo Halfon, Mike Wilson, Yuri Herrera, Edgardo Cozarinsky, and perhaps only a few others that I may not know of (certainly not many, at least when it comes to literary works of aesthetic significance). Regardless of their plots, of whether they narrate a wide variety of forced and traumatic displacements (although they often do), the formal features of these narratives haunt the worldliness of the world. They shake up the structures that once sustained the fiction of the world as a totality of modern/modernist meaning, and the politically effective fantasy of universal inclusion implied in the obsolete notion of world-citizenship. These narratives hesitantly trace the cultural shape of a non-world marked by the decomposition of particular languages and identities that used to be stable, or at least more stable – or perhaps they were never stable; but even if they were always rickety, they were certainly cultural-politically effective, which is no longer the case. In this sense – and in order to reconfigure these narratives as sites that work through the different ways in which the end of the world is experienced, resisted and survived – it is important, not so much to *de-Latin Americanize* them (if it were still possible to characterize them at all as Latin American narratives) but to *de-inscribe* them from a naturalized, zombie-like Latin American cultural-historical hermeneutical frame, because there is nothing particularly, *exceptionally* Latin American about the end of the world even if the way in which it is processed is certainly marked by the specificity of local historical formations, imaginaries and aesthetic traditions.⁹

Roberto Bolaño in particular is, in my view, the topographical writer of the traumatic wound that unworlds the world. My argument is structured around a reading of his short story “El ojo Silva” (“Mauricio [‘The Eye’] Silva”) but I could have written this essay on Bolaño’s most remarkable novel, *Los detectives salvajes*, or *Estrella distante*, or on specific sections of 2666.¹⁰ Like these novels,

⁹ When I write that there is nothing *exceptionally* Latin American about the end of the world, I am referring to the exceptionalism that is constitutive of every identitarian, particularistic discourse – in this case the discourse of Latin Americanism. The end of the world is legible from a Latin Americanist perspective because it would be immediately reduced to a *moment* (in the Hegelian sense) of the region’s or a particular nation’s cultural history, it would serve to reinforce an identitarian landscape, rather than repurposing the symbolic ruins of a Latin Americanism that today only serve conservative and regressive functions.

¹⁰ In his essay “Politics and Ethics in Latin America: On Roberto Bolaño”, Juan E. De Castro reads Bolaño’s novel *Amuleto* very much along the lines of what I am proposing in this essay, as a Latin American articulation of Rancière’s understanding of literature as a site of resistance

“El ojo Silva” deals with dislocated, broken down, displaced, errant subjects marked by different iterations of the end of the world, and generally fulfills what Bolaño declared to be the ethical function of poetic discourse: “saber meter la cabeza en lo oscuro, saber saltar al vacío, saber que la literatura básicamente es un oficio peligroso. Correr por el borde del precipicio” (Bolaño 2002: 211).¹¹

“El ojo Silva” begins with two friends reacquainting themselves with each other in Berlin, late at night, in a park. Both of them are Chilean expatriates and have been roaming the surface of the planet, lost and restless, moving from Latin America to Europe, travelling across Africa and South Asia for the previous twenty-five years. One of them is the narrator, whose identity is not revealed to us but we can safely assume it is, as is usually the case, a character/first person narrator named Bolaño, or Belano, or simply B. He is passing through Berlin to launch the German translation of his most recent novel.¹² The other is Mauricio Silva who goes by the nickname “El Ojo” because of his work as a photojournalist.¹³ The narrator sees El Ojo sitting on a bench; they had not seen each other in over two decades, but when El Ojo read about the narrator’s presence in the city, he looked him up and decided to wait for him in front of his hotel. It takes a few seconds for the narrator to recognize him, but immediately afterwards they go on to spend the night in bars drinking whisky and beer, catching up, immersed in a

and mourning of the promise of emancipation that is lost to modern alienation, lies and state crimes. For De Castro, the global success of Bolaño is due, not to his novels’ “supreme artistic achievement”, but to the fact that they mourn and estrange through specifically Latin American aesthetic operations “the infinite crime that always turns emancipation into lies” and the “topics and moods characteristic of much contemporary [Western] literature resides” (De Castro 2017: 75).

11 Along these same lines, Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott characterizes Bolaño’s fictional universe as “one deep nightmare crossed by war and violence”, marked by “the exhaustion of the modern articulation between literature and the public space of reading that granted to it a particular social function (illustration, education, moral exemplification, etc.)”. As a result of this loss of literature’s function and capacity to “illuminate, represent and/or de-familiarize everyday life” and of its inability to constitute itself as a space for “the salvation of humankind”, all that is left is what Villalobos-Ruminott calls the “co-belonging” or “coexistence between literature and horror” (Villalobos-Ruminott 2009: 193–195).

12 The writing and publication dates of “El ojo Silva” coincide with Bolaño’s world tour of sorts to promote the launching of *Los detectives salvajes*. Even though the German translation appeared in 2002, Bolaño had been invited to universities and cultural centers around Europe since 1998 to talk about the novel that had won the Anagrama Prize that same year.

13 Héctor Hoyos reads in the combination of Silva’s nickname and character a raunchy double entendre: “the title itself is a saucy joke, alluding to the ‘whistling eye’, or a farting anus. True to form, the subject of the story is darkly scatological” (2016: 252).

conversation that soon turns evocative and melancholic. On their way back to the hotel, they sit down on the same bench where they had met hours earlier, and El Ojo begins to tell him “la historia que el destino o el azar lo obligaba a contarme” (Bolaño 2001: 16).

This short story presents an exceptional feature in relation to the entire corpus of Bolaño’s narratives. In his most powerful novels and short stories, his literature is constructed around an ethico-political-poetic trauma historically situated in Latin America, Spain and Western Europe; that is, regardless of where the plots are staged, their traumatic core is inscribed in a predictable transatlantic geographical formation. But in “El ojo Silva”, Bolaño displaces the action to India: “No sé a qué ciudad llegó El Ojo, tal vez Bombay, Calcutta, tal vez Benarés o Madrás, recuerdo que se lo pregunté y que él ignoró mi pregunta” (Bolaño 2001: 17). There, in this unnamed city in India, Silva is going to rescue two boys (one of them not yet seven years old, the other ten) from a clandestine and labyrinthine brothel where the youngest one is about to be castrated in a religious ritual in preparation for a festival where a young eunuch is offered to the gods and his body incarnates the spirit of a deity whose name Silva wants to forget: “una fiesta bárbara, prohibida por las leyes de la república india, pero que se sigue celebrando” (Bolaño 2001: 19). The eldest boy had been castrated years before and is now a sex slave offered up for the pleasure of tourists.

Silva is the subject of a double dislocation, as a Leftist activist who was forced out of Chile by Pinochet’s coup d’état on September 11, 1973, and as a homosexual marginalized and bullied by his homophobic fellow Chilean Leftist émigrés in Mexico, his first destination after escaping Chile. He left Mexico for Paris, Milan, Berlin and freelance jobs that took him around the world, never again at home anywhere. And that’s how he arrives in India to do a conventional, predictable photo reportage that he describes to the narrator as a glossy magazine piece in between Marguerite Duras’ *India Song* and Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha*.

Structurally, “El ojo Silva” is a framed narrative with the episode of the rescue of the castrated children at its center. The text frames this moment of failed Kantian cosmopolitan justice (I will come back to this) with a narrative of the meeting of Silva and the narrator, but this frame is in turn itself framed by a larger, generational context of the original, apparently fully Latin American, traumatic wound that is reduplicated in the irreparably wounded world of Bolaño’s textual creations. This larger frame is made explicit in all its overdetermining power from the very beginning, in the opening paragraph of the short story:

Lo que son las cosas, Mauricio Silva, llamado el Ojo, siempre intentó escapar de la violencia aun a riesgo de ser considerado un cobarde, pero de la violencia, de la verdadera violencia, no se puede escapar, al menos no nosotros, los nacidos en Latinoamérica en la década del cincuenta, los que rondábamos los veinte años cuando murió Salvador Allende. (Bolaño 2001: 11)

And then:

En enero de 1974, cuatro meses después del golpe de Estado, el Ojo Silva se marchó de Chile. Primero estuvo en Buenos Aires, luego los malos vientos que soplaban en la vecina república lo llevaron a México en donde vivió un par de años y en donde lo conocí. (2001: 11)

Later he recounts the night before El Ojo's flight from Mexico:

Recuerdo que terminamos despotricando contra la izquierda chilena y que en algún momento yo brindé por los luchadores chilenos errantes, una fracción numerosa de los luchadores latinoamericanos errantes, entelequia compuesta de huérfanos que, como su nombre indica, erraban por el ancho mundo ofreciendo sus servicios al mejor postor, que casi siempre, por lo demás, era el peor. Pero después de reírnos el Ojo dijo que la violencia no era cosa suya. Tuya sí, me dijo con una tristeza que entonces no entendí, pero no mía. Detesto la violencia. (2001: 13–14)

There is much to unpack here, but I want to concentrate on a problem that is central to my analysis of the short story: the need to dislocate the reading of what appears to be a Latin American reterritorialization of the question of structural violence in the opening pages. That is, I would like to read “El Ojo Silva” against the tendency to posit “la violencia, la verdadera [de la que] no se puede escapar” (Bolaño 2001: 11), here and in Bolaño’s fictional project at large, as a particularly Latin American epiphenomenon, as a Latin American destiny (just as in Borges’ “Poema conjetural” where the violent resolution of social antagonism is a “destino sudamericano”), which because of its historically situated nature, supposedly follows Silva and the narrator wherever they go. I believe this is not the way in which metaphysical and historical forms of violence are articulated in Bolaño’s writing, where inescapable violence is a structural condition of the non-world they fail to inhabit; it is symptomatic of what I am calling the end of the world and what Bolaño often calls “el mal”, whether it is found in Chile, in Mexico City, in the fictionalization of Juárez that is Santa Teresa, in Luanda, Kigali, Monrovia and the Liberian jungle where Belano may have died (in *Los detectives salvajes*) or in dark, abject corners of an unnamed Indian city, “Bombay maybe, or Calcutta, perhaps Benares or Madras” (Bolaño 2006: 112), or in any other place – because the particular instantiations of violence matter less, significantly less, than its structural, constitutive universal

function.¹⁴ According to this interpretation, Pinochet's coup d'état in 1973 (as well as the assassination of president Salvador Allende and its long-lasting murderous and impoverishing effects) is merely one of the Latin American instantiations of the violence these characters cannot escape; an important local instance to be sure, because it overdetermines the way in which Silva and the narrator perceive world-ending violence wherever they look, but nevertheless a particular iteration of a general condition. And this may explain the displacement of the traumatic wound that in the rest of Bolaño's narrative is articulated locally in Latin America or Europe to an unspecified Indian city. Because "India" is not India, that is, Silva's trip is not really to the Indian subcontinent; India is merely the signifier of an experience that lies outside the confines of Latin America and Europe, a marker that signifies exteriority in regards to what is known or is thought to be known (because in Bolaño, it is not knowledge that mediates the characters' relation to the world, but intense poetic and erotic experience), It is the intentionally unspecified name of an elsewhere that requires a lack of geocultural specificity in order to fulfill its

14 In his excellent monograph on Bolaño, *La modernidad insufrible*, Oswaldo Zavala analyzes the representation of violence and evil in Bolaño as the result of a dialectics between abstract, metaphysical universality and concrete, historically-determined Latin American particularity: "Bolaño transita de una noción vaga y ahistórica del mal hacia la materialidad específica de una violencia con coordenadas políticas, culturales y económicas precisas que alcanzan su forma más depurada en 2666 [...] Aunque el sentido de la violencia en cada coyuntura funciona evidentemente dentro de un contexto global, Bolaño las explora al mismo tiempo a un nivel local inmediato [...] Contra una noción ontológica del mal desprovista de significado político e histórico, la obra de Bolaño revela la contundencia material de la violencia sistémica occidental en determinados espacios y tiempos latinoamericanos. Sólo así puede comprenderse la muy subrayada afirmación de un personaje en 'La parte de Fate' sobre los crímenes de Santa Teresa: 'Nadie presta atención a estos asesinatos, pero en ellos se esconde el secreto del mundo' (2666, 439). Como núcleo trascendental del sistema de violencia occidental moderno, ese secreto no será del todo develado, sino apenas periféricamente dilucidado" (Zavala 2015: 154–155). I believe my disagreement with Zavala's cogently articulated dialectical characterization of evil and violence that results in a Santa Teresa as a space of particularized universality lies in a question of emphasis. While he sees 2666 as the endpoint of a Latin Americanist teleology that ends with a concrete actualization of metaphysics, I do not believe Bolaño fits well in this Hegelian mold. In fact, I see Bolaño travelling in the opposite direction moved by a highly metaphysical drive: from a self-referential and autobiographical (Chilean, Mexican, Latin American) understanding of evil, to the postulation of the (global, universal, metaphysical) posing of an inescapable nature of violence – not from his first texts to 2666, but within each of them, and I think this is particularly true of 2666 and "El Ojo Silva": a credible juxtaposition of Santa Teresa and the unnamed Village in the Indian rural countryside produces and effect of mutual displacement, illuminates the way in which Bolaño dislocates them as landscapes of inescapable violence.

narrative purpose – to underscore the universality of violence as the unifying constitutive condition of the end of the world.¹⁵

There is something else: as the negation of the predictable transatlantic, Euro-Latin American geographical formation and the modern/modernist itineraries and experiences of displacement that corresponded to them, Bolaño's "India" produces a cartography of displacement structured not around the anachronistic figure of the exiled, but the orphan: "luchadores latinoamericanos errantes, entelequia compuesta de huérfanos", or in Chris Andrews' translation of the short story, "the wandering fighters of Chile., a legion of orphans, who, as the name suggests, wander the face of the earth" (Bolaño 2006: 108–109). Wandering orphans – fighters, yes, but most strikingly, orphans, wandering orphans. The fact that these dispersed and disunited world-wanderers without a world (a collective that includes Silva and the narrator himself as metonymic figures of the end of the world) are represented as orphans accounts for a particular form of loss and of being lost in the world: the orphan nature of their global dislocation.¹⁶ I insist: at stake here is not the notion of exile that is so frequently invoked when reading global

15 Three final comments on the displacement of the plot to an imaginary location outside of the usual Latin American and European landscapes of Bolaño's narrative: 1) Ignacio López-Vicuña writes that the choice of India as the background for the story of Silva's cosmopolitan/non-cosmopolitan transformation has to be read in relation to a crisis of representation, realism, and in general, of the ability of literary language to produce referential knowledge at the turn of the twentieth century (López-Vicuña 2012: 85). 2) Ignacio López-Calvo reads the Indian setting in continuity with postdictatorial, post-testimonial Chilean and Latin American conditions of enunciation: "The Eye's adventures in India are nothing but a desperate continuation of the same pursuit of justice for which his nonconformist generation had lost its youth. An omnipresent sense of melancholy and ontological failure seems to overwhelm The Eye, the narrator and, by extension, their implied author" (López-Calvo 2015: 40). I agree completely with López-Calvo's characterization of the melancholia and sense of failure that overwhelms the fictional universe of Bolaño's characters, however, I choose to read this melancholia not as marked by the traumatic experience of the dictatorship and subsequent exile (although, of course, their traces are omnipresent in Bolaño's literature), but as anticipating subjectivities and affects that were already being formed during the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s; that is, I read the short story not in relation to the traces of the past it undoubtedly contains, but to the emerging changes of a symbolic field of signification to come. And finally, 3) the fact that in this short story India is not actually India precludes, in my opinion, the possibility of reading "El ojo Silva" in relation to the concepts of Global South and South-South forms of solidarity.

16 The equation of the figure of orphanhood with their "being lost" in the world can be traced at different turns of Bolaño's literature. Perhaps the most conspicuous one is found in *Los detectives salvajes*: Juan García Madero, one of three main characters in the first and third parts of the novel, reveals in the first page of the first part ("Mexicanos perdidos en México") that he is an orphan (Bolaño 1998: 13). In the second part of the novel, Auxilio Lacouture (the central character of the novel *Amuleto*, which expands on this episode of *Los detectives salvajes*), declares herself to be

displacements in Bolaño's literature. Or rather Bolaño's narrative, perhaps more than any other literary project of the 1990s (that is, *more than* Alberto Fuguet's and Sergio Gómez's *McOndo* for instance) signifies the transition away from a post-dictatorial understanding of global displacements, from the figure of the exiled to that of the wandering orphan without a world, a transition inscribed in a necessary historical change in our hermeneutical relation to the world of Bolaño in 2018.¹⁷ The signifying field of exile depended on the enduring presence of different imaginaries of home, even when the illusion of a possible homecoming was indefinitely postponed (Said 2000: 179, 181, 184–185). But in Bolaño's end of the world, the idea of home has vanished from the symbolic horizon, and the absence of an *oikos* that used to organize the economy of global displacements in the age of travel and of exilic diasporas (Van Den Abbeele 1991: xviii) is crucial to understanding the hopeless restlessness with which Bolaño's characters move from one place to another. Settling down, making a new home for themselves, is either inconceivable or taboo, and when characters like El Ojo Silva believe themselves to be safe and at home, Bolaño's poetic structure punishes with devastating consequences.¹⁸ As opposed to exile, orphanhood is not a reversible condition, and the

the mother of Mexican poetry, in charge of all the orphaned poets that live in the margins of the city. Finally, there are many figurations of this in every single part of *2666*.

17 In essays, journalistic pieces, novels and short stories, Bolaño has written extensively on exile and literature both in general and autobiographical terms. He oscillates between two positions. On the one hand, he writes about abstract and markedly aesthetic understandings of exile: he refers to it as literature *tout court*, and as the truth of literature, because for him the writer's homeland is his library ("Literatura y exilio" and "Exilios"), often stressing the impossibility of a return or of homecoming ("Fragmentos de un regreso al país natal", "El pasillo sin salida aparente", and "Una proposición modesta"). On the other hand, when he writes about his own experience and his contacts with other émigrés, he adopts a caustic tone, and discards exile as a notion that might hold a hint of aesthetic potential: "yo no creo en el exilio, sobre todo no creo en el exilio cuando esta palabra va junto a la palabra literatura" from "Literatura y exilio" (Bolaño 2004b: 40); and "por el aire de Europa suena una cantinela y es la cantinela del dolor de los exiliados, una música hecha de quejas y lamentaciones y una nostalgia difícilmente inteligible. ¿Se puede tener nostalgia por la tierra en la que uno estuvo a punto de morir? ¿Se puede tener nostalgia de la pobreza, de la intolerancia, de la prepotencia, de la injusticia?" (Bolaño 2004b: 43). What is clear in all of this essays, articles and marginalia is that he does not consider the experience of exile an adequate hermeneutic frame for his narrative.

18 In "El Ojo Silva" de Roberto Bolaño, o la ética arraigada de un cosmopolita", María Luisa Fischer also discards the notion of exile as a framework in which to read global displacement in Bolaño because "implica el deseo de retorno a una patria o un lugar de origen, lo que está por completo ausente en el diseño y sentido de sus relatos" (Fischer 2013: 41). I agree with her doing away with the category of exile, but I fail to see characters defined by their belonging (which she calls "arraigo"), or desiring a return to their origins (they are way smarter and more cynical than that), home even if it is structurally lacking in the narrative.

dispossession of the symbolic inscription that a father/mother or a home may have given the orphan, turns him/her (together with other subjective figures marked by loss like the homeless, the refugee and the mourner) into effective catachrestic figures of the end of the world.¹⁹

These subjectivities – paradoxically defined by the experience of what was lost, what is ruined and impossible to repair or to reaffirm, and therefore, tragically unable to reinscribe themselves, to *hacer pie* – are fundamental for a conceptualization of a cosmopolitanism of loss incapable of positing itself against the backdrop of positive universal demands. As a result of the historical closure of the possibility of acting in correspondence with the presupposition of a universal ethical debt which is constitutive of the Kantian subject, Bolaño's characters are failed, abject, blind cosmopolitans, and their cosmopolitan orphanhood makes them subjects of a universal form of disbelonging which renders visible the generalized condition of the end of the world. Neither particular nor universal, their non-universality is actualized in the *impossibility of acting in the name of justice anywhere*. In “El Ojo Silva”, the failure of cosmopolitanism is fully visible when Silva rescues the youngest child who is about to be castrated:

pudo ver los instrumentos quirúrgicos con que el niño iba a ser castrado aquella madrugada o la siguiente, en cualquier caso el niño había llegado, pudo entender, aquel mismo día al templo o al burdel, una medida preventiva, una medida higiénica, y había comido bien, como si ya encarnara al dios, aunque lo que el Ojo vio fue un niño que lloraba medio dormido y medio despierto, y también vio la mirada medio divertida y medio aterrorizada del niño castrado que no se despegaba de su lado. (Bolaño 2001: 21–22)

The sight of the youngest child about to be sacrificed in a religious ritual shakes him up, the imminence of violence, the violence he himself cannot escape is about to befall the child; he recognizes something familiar in the scene; he is interpellated and is moved to act, driven not by a preconceived plan but by a willful, eminently moral, demand for justice: “en mi interior lo único que hacía era maquinar. No un plan, no una forma vaga de justicia, sino una voluntad

¹⁹ Carlos M. Amador's points in this direction in his book *Ethics and Literature in Chile, Argentina and Paraguay, 1970–2000. From the Singular to the Specific*, in which he opposes two mechanisms of national or communal subjectification and exclusion: structural, relational specificity (historical, local/global) and singularity or immanent, substantial expression/existence that excludes difference “by the imposition of a positively marked differentiation from *all*” (Amador 2016: 147–148). In the final chapter, titled “Roberto Bolaño's Specific Exiles”, he sees Bolaño's writing as the production of *the specific* through his understanding of “literature and reading as a global system of displacements” (2016: 148), and Bolaño's nomadic travellers as “a way out of the trap of the *singular* that is part of the exile's desire for home” (2016: 148–149).

[...] el Ojo intentó sin gran convicción el diálogo, el soborno, la amenaza. Lo único cierto es que hubo violencia y poco después dejó atrás las calles de aquel barrio como si estuviera soñando y transpirando a mares” (Bolaño 2001: 21–22). And they escape, all three of them: “El resto, más que una historia o un argumento, es un itinerario” (Bolaño 2001: 22). El Ojo Silva takes the kids as far as he can, first to his hotel where he packs a suitcase, they take a taxi to the nearest town where they get on a bus, and then another bus, and then a train, and yet another bus, and another a taxi. They hitchhike until they finally get to a small, poor village whose name and location Silva (again) does not know, “una aldea en alguna parte de la India” (Bolaño 2001: 23), where they rent a house, and decide to settle down, to rest, and to live as a family. It appears that Silva has broken the spell, that he has found a way out of the violence he cannot escape. He has rescued the children and given them a place in the world. And he saves them in the most Kantian of manners: in the name of universal, morally inflected justice, but also in the name of love – the kind of love that lies at the center of a particularly Christian, gendered notion of cosmopolitan piety. Indeed, there is a crucial supplement that I have yet to include in my analysis of his redemptive rescue mission. If El Ojo Silva shares with the children their orphanhood, in order to save them, he becomes their mother, or rather, *a* mother: “Y entonces el Ojo se convirtió en otra cosa, aunque la palabra que él empleó no fue ‘otra cosa’ sino ‘madre’. Dijo madre y suspiró. Por fin. Madre” (Bolaño 2001: 22).

As a cosmopolitan orphan, when he becomes identical with his self-assigned role of maternal savior, Silva acts in the name of universal justice and love, saving the children from ritualistic mutilation and sexual exploitation, redeeming and delivering them from their subaltern sexual commodification, and in the process, rescues himself from the historical and metaphysical violence that has condemned him to homelessness, traumatic wandering and displaced orphanhood. Aside from its Christian overtones, this role is most clearly a gendered enactment of a restorative notion of cosmopolitanism; the egregiously conventional figure of the mother defined by her home-like womb restitutes love and justice in the form of cosmopolitan reparation for Silva, the children and all the dislocated, homeless orphans scarred by the experience of the impossibility of dwelling. Had this been the ending of the short-story, Bolaño’s cosmopolitanism would be squarely Kantian, *fueron felices y comieron perdices*. Of course, this being a Bolaño narrative, this form of restorative, repairing cosmopolitan universality (as well as the idealization of the figure of the mother) is doomed from the beginning. The closing pages of the text will return Silva and the children to the bleak, violent world they cannot escape.

After Silva and the children settle in the unnamed village (that reduplicates the negation of known and particular geographies that I discussed earlier in

relation to the signifier “India”), they live a brief but intense pastoral bliss: El Ojo becomes a farmer, and he teaches English and math to his sons and other kids in the village; the three of them are happy, the kids play with friends all day and manage to bring food home for Silva to cook, “A veces los veía detener los juegos y caminar por el campo como si de pronto se hubieran vuelto sonámbulos. Los llamaba a gritos. A veces los niños fingían no oírlo y seguían caminando hasta perderse. Otras veces volvían la cabeza y le sonreían” (Bolaño 2001: 23).

But this apparently joyous, repaired and self-reconciled existence ends suddenly when the children die. The short-story does not explain how they die, or prepare the reader for their death. They just die – suddenly, in two lines, as if they were meant to die and the short-story summarily forces the fulfillment of their destiny: “Después llegó la enfermedad a la aldea y los niños murieron. Yo también quería morirme, dijo el Ojo, pero no tuve esa suerte” (Bolaño 2001: 24). I do not know a reader of this short story who was not shocked when he or she reached this anti-climactic sentence recounting the children’s swift, arbitrary death soon after being freed from sexual slavery and having their life extended. We do not know whether this is the way El Ojo Silva related this tragic turn of events to the narrator, or whether it was the narrator who decided to tell it in this succinct, shocking manner, devoid of any affect whatsoever, to the point at which one does not know whether he suffers from a psychopathic form of detachment. Or perhaps the formalist gesture of this alarming, straightforward, factual and exceptional sentence (*‘Then the disease came to the village and the boys died.’*) is a punctum of sorts that concentrates the reader’s ethico-aesthetic attention on the signifying limits of language under traumatic conditions of loss. In *The body in pain*, Elaine Scarry explains that for those in pain the world cease to exist: “The presence of pain is the absence of world. . . Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject” (Scarry 1985: 35). If the end of the world is the world-historical condition of enunciation of the entire short story (and, I would argue, of Bolaño’s literature at large), the unspeakable pain of the children’s unexpected death breaks down Silva’s world and displaces the linguistic possibility of, perhaps, accounting for its undoing, a dislocation that is reduplicated every time the story of their sudden passing is told by Silva and retold by the narrator. Because pain (physical or otherwise) is the experience of subjective dislocation that binds together Silva and the narrator in the end of the world; they share pain, overdetermined, structural pain that they experience all over again every time they are faced with particular, contingent painful circumstances; they share pain and the experience of losing the world, because those who lost the world are

together in loss, they are lost together.²⁰ And that is how the short story ends, with El Ojo Silva crying inconsolably:

Aquella noche, cuando volvió a su hotel, sin poder dejar de llorar por sus hijos muertos, por los niños castrados que él no había conocido, por su juventud perdida, por todos los jóvenes que ya no eran jóvenes y por los jóvenes que murieron jóvenes, por los que lucharon por Salvador Allende y por los que tuvieron miedo de luchar por Salvador Allende, llamó a su amigo francés, que ahora vivía con un antiguo levantador de pesas búlgaro, y le pidió que le enviara un billete de avión y algo de dinero para pagar el hotel. Y su amigo francés le dijo que sí, que por supuesto, que lo haría de inmediato, y también le dijo ¿qué es ese ruido?, ¿estás llorando?, y el Ojo dijo que sí, que no podía dejar de llorar, que no sabía qué le pasaba, que llevaba horas llorando. Y su amigo francés le dijo que se calmara. Y El Ojo se rió sin dejar de llorar y dijo que eso haría y colgó el teléfono. Y luego siguió llorando sin parar. (Bolaño 2001: 25)

Cosmopolitan agency reduced to tears, to a sorrowful weeping about what is lost and cannot be redeemed, restituted or repaired. Silva does not cry *only* about the tragic and sudden death of the children, or about his being lost *God-knows-where* in need of rescue (from his friend in Paris, by anybody); he cries and cannot stop crying because the death of the children rendered visible the end of the world as a structural condition, because he cannot be saved even if his friend sends him the ticket to fly back to Europe – no one can be saved because violence is inescapable.²¹ The non-

20 In this sense, I couldn't agree more with Juan E. De Castro when he points out that Bolaño's "novels imply that we have always been living in a post-catastrophic moonscape [...] His work is the perfect expression of our time when we have discovered that we are living after the catastrophe but cannot imagine a way out" (De Castro 2017: 76). Similarly, Edmundo Paz Soldán identifies an apocalyptic aesthetic or ethics of the representation of horror and violence in Bolaño, particularly in novels like *Estrella distante* and *Nocturno de Chile* and links it to a very specific geocultural postdictatorial South American determination of Bolaño's novels: "el imaginario apocalíptico el único que hace justicia a la América Latina de los años setenta" (Paz Soldán 2008: 13). However, in a second movement, Paz Soldán admits that the originality and interest of *2666* resides precisely in the fact that "La parte de los crímenes" "generaliza al siglo XX, al mundo, a la condición humana" (Paz Soldán 2008: 18) this localized, South American apocalyptic ethics of representation.

21 In his essay "Dimensiones de una escritura horripalada" (2015), Benjamin Loy has lucidly analyzed the abundance of crying and laughing in Bolaño's literature as a function of the crisis of language and its failure to signify, and as the characters' loss of control over their own bodies, that is, as the death of the subject's sovereignty. Also see Ignacio Echevarría, who has famously characterized Bolaño's writing as "una épica de la tristeza", a notion he sees at work with particular intensity in "El Ojo Silva" and the never-ending crying that closes the short story: "como si en ese llanto se escondiera el enigma de [la] belleza inexplicable y de [la] desesperación [de su escritura]" (Echevarría 2002: 194).

cosmopolitan concept in the title to this essay, precisely, tries to name this universalization of loss that is constitutive of the experience of the displacement of refugees, migrants, the homeless and the errant orphans for whom there no longer is a world underfoot and who can only afford to dwell in the time and place of their own dislocation.

Postscript

One of the purposes of this essay is to wrestle with some of the following questions: what is the place of literature and the arts within the discursive field that symbolizes the experience of the end of the world today? Is there something, anything at all, that literature and the arts, along with those of us who care about them, who dedicate a significant part of our lives to thinking through them, to teaching them, and who generally feel at home with them can do to disrupt the contemporary structural condition that I am calling the end of the world? Are our discursive practices and the symbolic surfaces we work with compatible with a transformative notion of political agency oriented by notions of universal justice and reparation, or by the will to alleviate the suffering of those who are harmed as the end of the world unfolds? What I am trying to ask (today, in November 2017, discouraged and immensely saddened by the state of suffering we see on a daily basis, nearby and far away) is whether there is something we can do about the end of the world other than offering the discursive spaces we inhabit (our pedagogical, critical and aesthetic practices) as sites of mourning.

To be perfectly clear, I am not asking about the legitimacy of engaging the end of the world politically, of inscribing ourselves within collective demands or mobilizations to dislocate it, or of representing in political terms the wide variety of imaginary and symbolic processes through which our subjectivation occurs. My questions are about the political specificity of our humanities-bound discursive practices, about the efficacy of literature and the arts, and about their dubious potential today to constitute themselves as effective sites of political resistance and contestation. I am asking about the incommensurable and frustrating gap that separates our aesthetic and critical tools from the task at hand. In the face of a proliferation of research and publication projects whose political horizon is defined by the narcissistic and self-affirming performance of an identitarian and moralistic political pretense, I am trying to address the disjuncture between aesthetics and politics that seems to be constitutive of the intellectual experience of the end of the world, and that our critical practices fail time and time again to mediate. That is, I am trying to interrogate a very real, overwhelming sense of political futility

that permeates the artistic and academic realms today. Of course, this does not mean we should not continue furthering the understanding of the social, cultural and aesthetic formations we study, and of the theoretical concepts that reveal overlooked dimensions in them, as well as set in motion new critical imaginaries that illuminate past, present and emerging modes of existence. And no one should underestimate the scholarly and pedagogical contributions of the humanities as a collective enterprise of interpretation, narration and conceptual creation, nor should anyone minimize their effects beyond the classroom or the page (whether paper or digital). But it would be good not to kid ourselves about their potential to be translated into political practices capable of disrupting the symbolic and material structures of the end of the world and the pervasive sense of loss it effects. I am not arguing in favor of depoliticizing our pedagogical and research agendas, not in the least; and nor am I denying the immanent political forces at work in our discursive fields, producing and undoing hegemonic consensuses. But the notion that we are effectively politicizing our *shtick* because of our materialist analytical frame – either because we visibilize marginalized cultural formations and subjectivities as well as the social relations that result in their exploitation, or because we engage in postcolonial or decolonial forms of epistemic disobedience (often organized around the recognition and reproduction of previously constituted cultural-political identities), or because of *any* other hermeneutic approach believed to be more or less immediately political – depends on an excessive and ostensibly voluntaristic self-representation of the role humanistic research and aesthetic sensibility have in public debates today. And so, we are faced with a wide variety of research and publishing agendas articulated around an implicit conviction that *there is* in fact something we can do to interrupt the end of the world; that *there are* ways to align our critical practices with a transformative conception of politics, that the kind of deliberate demarcation of a *committed* place of enunciation that was possible *then* is still possible *now*. Personally, today, in November 2017 (and who knows what is going to happen in 2020 or 2021 or 2037), I find it impossible to inhabit such a place of enunciation, even when it is argued with intelligent and sophisticated theoretical arguments displayed to try to sustain a belief in Messianic forms of justice meant to activate the political potential of the present understood as a “single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage”²² (Benjamin 2007: 257). I truly believe there is very little we can do with art and literature about the end of the world. And I know my argument is dreadfully

22 In “A la pinche modernidad”: Literary form and the End of History in Roberto Bolaño’s *Los detectives salvajes*” (2010), Emilio Sauri concludes his lucid reading of Bolaño’s novel pointing to a passage where one of the novel’s main characters summarizes the poetic enterprise of the *real visceralistas* group invoking the quote I just have brought up from Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on

pessimistic – I write this hesitantly, well aware of the internal contradiction I feel, and frightened by the possibility of finding tomorrow that the despair and hopelessness that my argument evinces has crystallized into a reactionary position of passive resignation. This generalized feeling of *gloom and doom* that saturates our relation to the present, this grief, and this woeful paralysis need to be recognized and worked through. We should *stay with it*, even when (or especially when) this experience of the end of the world cannot be easily politicized without resorting to old conceptions of the political that have already proven ineffective. To get back to the questions that open this postscript, I would like to suggest the possibility of considering literature and the arts (and the very specific kind of discursive attention we pay to them) as sites where we find ways to mourn the loss of the world, of the imaginary structure of an impossibly universal, emancipated community to come that we now know is lost forever; mourning without closure, that is, a melancholic kind of mourning which cannot withdraw the libido from the vanished object because losing the world (losing the very structure of political utopianism) is not the kind of loss that can be overcome.

In “Mourning and Melancholia” (1915–1917), Freud describes mourning as the process through which one accepts the loss of the loved object.²³ While his

the Philosophy of History”. In a conversation with García Madero, Lima explains that “los actuales real visceralistas caminaban hacia atrás... De espaldas, mirando un punto pero alejándonos de él, en línea recta hacia lo desconocido” (Bolaño 1998: 17). Sauri explains that like just Benjamin’s angel of history, Bolaño’s visceral realists bear witness to modernity as catastrophe, “but while the messianism of the ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ could still envision a future capable of redeeming the past, *Los detectives salvajes* everywhere points to nothing more than the foreclosure of any possibility as such. Whereas the modernisms of both Benjamin and generations of Latin American writers and critics had previously conceived the literary as an opening onto the future, Bolaño’s novel signals the end of this particular aesthetic ideology, if only to suggest that history must now be found beyond it” (Sauri 2010: 431). I see my argument advancing in the same direction as Sauri’s conclusion: that Bolaño’s novels thematize a catastrophe and an experience of loss (of the world, of the horizon of emancipation and redemption) that places literature *más allá* o *más acá* of the political, of the site we used to invest with different degrees of efficacy to disrupt and redirect the catastrophe and reimagine the future.

23 There is an important tradition of literary criticism and theory that has interpreted cultural and aesthetic formations that engage in the labor of mourning, or that enable it (for recent particularly remarkable examples, see the works of Judith Butler, Wendy Brown, Jodi Dean, Rebecca Comay, Alessia Ricciardi, Laura Wittman, and Enzo Traversa, among many others). In Latin American criticism, there are many great examples. Perhaps the most important ones are Alberto Moreiras’ *Tercer espacio: literatura y duelo en América Latina*, Idelber Avelar’s *The Untimely Present: Post-dictatorial Latin American Literature and the Task of Mourning*, and Julio Premat’s *La dicha de Saturno. Escritura y melancolía en la obra de Juan José Saer*. Moreiras’s concept of mourning is constitutive of literature and writing in general because “la escritura es una forma de pagar una deuda de vida o consumir un duelo, y que por lo tanto la

characterization of the mourner shows excessive confidence in his/her ability to successfully labor through the transition from grief to an effective displacement of libido onto a new loved object, he defines the melancholic in purely negative terms as the flip-side of the successful mourner, incapable of grieving, an unredeemable narcissist who cannot escape the identification of the lost object with the moral and libidinal deficiencies of his/her own ego – melancholia as “an aberrant form of mourning” (Butler 1997: 167).²⁴ Freud admits to being puzzled by the nature of the melancholic’s inhibition (“we cannot see what it is

escritura inscribe, antes que nada o después de todo, la problemática inacabable de una mimesis sin final, [...] [el] duelo por el objeto perdido ontologocéntrico mismo” (Moreiras 1999: 4, 12). Similarly, for Premat, literature is but the institutionalization of writing as an attempt to work through one’s own mortality: “se escribe contra la muerte y dentro de un proceso de duelo y de elaboración de la muerte; o mejor dicho, sobre, desde y a pesar de la muerte, en una lógica paradójica que corresponde con lo inaprensible de este caso, noción o frontera” (Premat 2002: 44). Avelar’s use of Freud’s concepts is deliberately historical; in the context of his argument mourning and melancholia conceptualize the ways in which Argentine, Brazilian and Chilean novelists have dealt during the 1980s with a traumatic nature of their immediate past, at the same time, denouncing the impossibility of successfully letting go of the past in order to join in the euphoria of neoliberal capital, and the inscription of a tension in the present between a restitutive form of remembrance and a Nietzschean active forgetfulness that opens a horizon of contingent and undefined futurity. My argument in this postscript is, obviously, greatly indebted to the argument of Avelar’s book.

24 Freud is certainly unfair towards the melancholic when he qualifies the nature of his/her loss as merely ideal, confused about the identity of a loss inscribed in the realm of the unconscious, as opposed to the real, absolute loss of the mourner who has managed to symbolize it (Freud 1957 [1917]: 245). In an essay on Bolaño’s *Estrella distante* and *La literatura nazi en América*, Gareth Williams sees (following Freud’s negative/binaristic definition of melancholia) Bolaño’s narrative trapped in a melancholic paralysis that forecloses the possibility of proposing a different kind of politics, an *other* politics, and instead is stuck with a Schmittean partition of the social field that reduces the political to the mirror image of the trenches of friend and enemy. After reading Williams’ essay several times, it is difficult to have a clear sense of the name and features of the kind of deconstructive, non-melancholic politics that Bolaño’s Schmittean notion of the political forestalls, except when he writes at the very end of the essay that “for there to be freedom he [Bolaño] would have had to engage actively in the narrative deconstruction of the inherited trenches and fortifications of the friend/enemy divide, rather than recurring to tis melancholic reassembly time and time again” (Williams 2009: 139). Even though I agree with Williams when he sees Bolaño’s characters immersed in melancholia, the mournful-melancholic subjectivity of Silva, the narrator and the “legion of wandering orphans” is of a different sort than that produced by a Schmittean politics of the friend/enemy divide. What is at stake in my reading of “El Ojo Silva” (and I believe that is the case as well of *Los detectives salvajes* and *2666*) is the impossibility of a political way out of the end of the world, nothing can save the characters from the experience of the end of the world (including politics of course, Schmitt or no Schmitt).

that is absorbing him so entirely”), and explains that as a result he/she suffers “an extraordinary diminution in his self regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (Freud 1957 [1917]: 245). So, in relation to my argument about the present moment being defined by an experience of having lost the world, and about the ways in which art and literature work through that experience, it is notable that the most interesting contemporary *less-than-cosmopolitan* art and literature – and Bolaño’s narratives in particular – inhabit the gap between and within mourning’s impoverished world, and melancholia’s *melée* in which loss of world and of self-esteem are muddled together. Beyond the need to consider the specificity of these concepts in clinical contexts, and the historical differences between 1917 and 2017, it is apparent that we must come up with new, less binary conceptualizations of mourning and melancholia.²⁵ We need a concept of mourning that helps us stay with our loss when there is no promise of resolution, or safe passage to a purportedly self-reconciled, post-traumatic place where our libidinal reinvestment is supposed to reinstitute the world. And we need a not-so-melancholic concept of melancholia that acknowledges the traumatic sadness that mourning paradoxically represses when rushing forward towards the goal-line of detachment from the lost object to redistribute libido and move on. Melancholia as the internal boundary renders impossible the closure mourning is after exposing mourning-as-such (or mournful closure) as a willful form of false consciousness. But if melancholia foregrounds the fact that loss is insurmountable (as well as a certain confusion and ambivalence about what exactly has been lost), mourning is the force that demands us to work through it, to avoid surrendering, because as Derrida writes in *Specters of Marx*, the work of mourning is “not one kind of work among others. It is work itself, work in general, the trait by means of which one ought perhaps to reconsider the very concept of production” (Derrida 1994: 97). So, yes, mourning *and also* melancholia – in spite of Freud’s hierarchical organization of his definition of each of the concepts. My point is that, fundamental as the concept and labor of mourning are, melancholia should not be put down and pathologized to the extent that it is by Freud. To understand our place of enunciation in the context of the end of the world, we need them

25 To be perfectly clear, Freud’s binaristic, brusque differentiation of melancholia as the pathologic underside of the painful but ultimately successful labor of mourning might be correct and productive in clinical contexts – after all, depression is real and has to be effectively diagnosed and treated. My proposal for a less binaristic account of mourning and melancholia is for our poststructuralist humanities inquiries, which are informed, to a large extent by the double dimension and tension of psychoanalytic writing, between clinical reflection and speculative thought, inaugurated by Freud himself.

both, and we need to leave behind the binary, anti-dialectical logic of Freud's foundational essay. Because an understanding of mourning less confident in its ability to get us over loss, together with a not-so-melancholic notion of melancholia may allow us to see how the decision to *stay with it*, to be utterly depressed with what goes on in the world today, to deliberately decelerate normatively disciplinary or *immediately* political responses to this generalized experience of crisis might in fact open the possibility (maybe, maybe not) of differently politicizing the mournful melancholic relation that binds us to the ruins of the world we lost and everything that is gone with it.

At the same time as we mobilize (in spite of our doubts about the efficacy of our public demonstrations) against the most flagrant contemporary forms of abuse, exploitation and dehumanization, and in support of heroic lawyers, physicians, social workers, grassroots organizers and others who rush to shores and borders to help out migrants arriving in poor health, separated from their children, being inhumanely detained or thrown into concentration camps, as humanists (*qua* humanists), we should *also* clear up space for melancholic engagements with the end of the world – we should think through the shadows that haunt the failure and impossibility of radical projects of universal justice and inclusion by making room in our humanistic discourses for *less-than-cosmopolitan*, melancholic stances. Because perhaps our particular responsibility as humanists is to insist to audiences within and outside the humanities that we ought to be depressed (and even paralyzed) about what goes on; that before attempting to get over it by politicizing and instrumentalizing our pain, our outrage and our tears, a mournful melancholic engagement with the end of the world might be the only way to fully absorb, to really take in, the gravity and scale of hurt that surrounds us, and hopefully affect the political subjectivation we engage in next. Hopefully, but who knows.

And this is where texts like Bolaño's "El Ojo Silva" come to our aid. Just like dreams, the literature and the arts we need displace the unbearable sense of loss and the inescapable violence that define our present, and provide us with a surface where we may try to articulate, in the idiosyncratic syntax of our critical desires, the urgency of confronting an end of the world that might just never end.

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World Literature (2017). El manuscrito de su libro, *Narrative Reliability, Racial Conflicts, and Ideology in the Modern Novel* está en revisión en De Gruyter.

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