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World Literature: a Rereading of Symbolic Geographies

Abstract: The present article is the result of a bird's-eye view attempt to retrace and discover the emergence and spread of World Literature both as a concept intricately related to a paradigm shift in humanists' take of the world as well as a theoretical framework bound to describe and prescribe an important literary reevaluation movement. In doing so, we noticed a series of patterns that prompted us to dissociate between different facets of World Literature. Thus, if we look at World Literature in terms of a projection, we are able to identify a geographical or rather cartographic standpoint (which may or may not be symbolic) that conceptualizes it as either a map, a network or an ellipse or a systemic approach that re-conceptualizes it with the help of metaphors such as the rhizome, the tree or the wave. When it comes to World Literature as a project, a more methodological approach arises that can be divided into a quantitative take meant to define World Literature as the sum of all literatures and a qualitative take meant to validate a canonical perspective. Based on the noticeable shapeshifting nature of the World Literature concept, an argument can be made in favor of its itinerant status as a theory, or rather in favor of elaborating an itinerant theory of World Literature that would not fall prey to the steadiness of certainty but would attune to the nature of the concept.

Keywords: World Literature, project, projection, network, geography.

I. Introduction

The paradigmatic shift that accompanied the emergence and further development of World Literature (WL) not only as a key theoretical concept in Humanities but also, later on, as a distinct area of research and academic study has prompted numerous attempts of defining it and, subsequently, of rendering it as a viable framework for philological endeavours. However, a bird's-eye view of its vast implications reveals that, when it comes to WL, one rather needs to exchange their looking glass with a kaleidoscope since the same notion has several meanings, depending on the analytical tools and the stakes of its theorists.

The analysis of WL as a *project* - by which we mean the sum of methodological, critical, prescriptive and prospective approaches, as well as theories that attempt to define a *modus operandi*, cultural and educational

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policies, polemics and dissensions regarding both the nature of the concept and its practical applicability - is anticipated, at an analogous level, by its approach as a *projection*. Our research is based on the fact that the concept of WL was originally constructed as a form of conceptual cartography, of imaginary geography, or as a series of cultural-identitarian projections through which men of letters such as Goethe intuited the need for a paradigmatic shift in worldview that would foster contact with otherness. Thus imagined, WL must be progressively understood as a form of contact between European cultures (intra-national/intra-European), as a dynamic of cultural exchange from a central culture to a peripheral one, and finally as an all-encompassing network of multicultural dialogue.

The replacement of cultural *monadism* and national insularity, first ideologically and then programmatically, by a cultural *nomadism* that seeks to facilitate contact with otherness is encompassed, first and foremost, by the various meanings of *world literature* as an itinerant perspective. The result of this transition is an imaginary geography designed to replace a geographical perspective, discredited by its tendency to be confined to a politicised dynamic, and to offer conceptual alternatives considered to be in line with the universalising premises of WL.

2. Mapping World Literature: Between Hegemonism and Itinerant Topography - Historical-Theoretical Dimensions

2.1. The Map-Model

In terms of a projection, WL is initially built off the aforementioned imaginative dynamics as a form of delimitative literary-cultural cartography and therefore as a super-projection of the geopolitical maps themselves. Classified by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as a "hegemonic hermeneutics" that ends up flattening the globe insofar as it proposes a predefined approach to the world, the "geographical" perspective encapsulates a series of analytical angles such as that proposed by Pascale Casanova, which subsumes WL into a centre-periphery dialectic. Such an economically and geopolitically determined approach thus superimposes the literary map on the map of the circulation routes of literary and symbolic capital, from established cultures - accumulations of cultural-literary influence - to peripheral, minor cultures, mere recipients of "cultural goods" produced in the epicentres. Although Casanova's approach, as well as similar ones by Moretti, Wallerstein and Itamar Even-Zohar, outline the theoretical premises of WL as developed in the 20th and 21st centuries, we cannot help but notice that they are, nevertheless, recent echoes of a worldview that emerged in the 16th century and which, according to Theo D'Haen, is representative precisely of the way in which the maps of that period, by

projecting continental power relations, translated the literary dynamics of that time.

In his article *Mapping World Literature* (D'Haen 2012, 413-422), Theo D'Haen links Immanuel Wallerstein's World Systems theory (an economic analysis of world history and social change following the establishment of the capitalist economy) to the 16th century mapmaking, in which Western Europe was central, Europe and parts of the Americas were semi-peripheral, and the rest of the world was peripheral. Of particular interest are more recent cartographic changes, also based on the premise of a parallelism between the modes of projection of WL. Thus we see the replacement of Europe, which was dominant until the mid-20th century (which prompts Pascale Casanova to theorise the existence of a Greenwich Meridian of WL located in Paris), by the United States, and the fact that, in parallel with Spivak's proposals for a "hermeneutics" of WL oriented not from the south upwards but from the north downwards, the world maps of the last half-century assign a central position to Australia, Indonesia, India, framed in part by the Americas and in part by Africa, while Europe ends up occupying an insignificant position. Also in Theo D'Haen's article we find the observation that modern maps of China and Japan reveal how each world can see itself as its own centre.

We see, therefore, illustrated once again, the transition from a Eurocentric vision to one that attributes centrality and therefore influence to spaces that until recently were catalogued as points of interest in terms of anthropological curiosities. Recent developments, which seem to reflect a rethinking of the world on the basis of a different distribution of areas of interest and influence (a vision which seems, in any case, to show an openness to the world and thus to bring non-European cultures and literatures out of their shadow), raise the following problem: is this rethinking of areas of influence (whether political, economic, cultural or literary) not just another way of replacing some hegemonic cultures with others, while preserving the centre/semi-periphery/periphery dynamic? We could thus argue that underneath the apparent depoliticisation of world maps, understood here as the matrix of WL, lies the interest of the map-maker, the compass foot dictating the reorganisation. In this sense, Sanja Bahun notes how the discipline or concept of WL follows the trends of economic and political history, functioning in certain contexts as ideological justification or legitimation for different positions of power such as, for example, the supremacy of German culture in a period of interconnectedness of European countries, or the hegemony of the United States in the context of the Latin American boom: "[...] world literature regularly gains prominence when a need for consolidation of a global system is pronounced [...] and its conceptualizations as a rule originate

precisely in what Casanova calls "great national literary spaces." (Bahun 2012, 373-382)

The common denominator of the so-called cartographic approaches that can be attributed to theorists such as Casanova (WL seen (also) as a history of axiological confrontations between peripheral and central cultures), Wallerstein (an analysis of the circulation of capital and the distribution of economic power between the centre/semi-periphery/periphery with reverberations at the cultural level), Moretti (identification of a pattern of cultural-literary influences from the centre to the periphery) or Itamar Even Zohar (theory of polysystems and cultural interferences) is not only the way in which WL is projected as an imaginary geography, but also in postulating a profound inequality underlying the functioning of the literary space. Let us therefore dwell on this inequality that projects WL as an eminently polemical, even political construct - if we were to accept the postulate of an overlapping of the literary map over that of geopolitical influences - and note, in the light of the theories set out above as well as of retrospective perspectives (by relating current theories of globalisation to the state of affairs of imperialist or nationalist eras) the plurivalent nature of the inequality that determines the circulation of literary texts and cultural products. The reasoning behind the above-mentioned approaches is therefore based on the direction of circulation of the literary text: from *central cultures* with established symbolic capital (France, Germany, England in the 19th and 20th centuries) to *minor, peripheral cultures* (Eastern European countries, for example), from *languages of international circulation* (English in the case of the United States, where, as we shall see later, the number of texts translated from other languages is insignificant compared to the circulation of English texts or translations from English) to *languages of minor circulation* (such as, for example, Romanian), from *politically dominant states* to *satellite countries* (the most telling example being that of the dictatorships of the 20th century, with reference to the circulation of texts from the USSR to the satellite countries), from *empires* (Great Britain) to *colonised spaces* (India), from *dominant economic structures* (and therefore much more able to economically support cultural development and the apparatus of literary production, distribution, promotion and export) to what Wallerstein calls *semi-peripheries or peripheries*. In line with the postulate of inequality as a determining and delimiting factor of literary geographies is also the correlation that Marx and Engels establish between economic development and the evolution of WL, a correlation that is also reflected in the perspectives reiterated above. For instance Moretti analyses WL from this angle as a study of the struggle for symbolic hegemony throughout the world. Also, Itamar Even-Zohar, emphasises the one-sidedness of the process of literary circulation by noting that a target literature (therefore minor, peripheral) imports forms and patterns from a source literature,

without the latter being aware of the transfer or of the indigenous products of the target-culture. Similarly, Pascale Casanova believes that the efforts of small cultures to transpose their literary products onto the "stage" of WL and gain recognition as such are subject to fluctuations in literary capital (and the axiological realities of the "cultural goods market") which in fact mirror the current political imbalances.

2.2. The Network Model

Theorists such as Spivak, Damrosch, Cooppan and Terian, who question the hierarchical premises of WL seen as a centre-periphery dynamic, dwell on this inequality mentioned in the previous section, proposing the replacement of this kind of vertical hermeneutics (focused on the one-dimensional, linear transfer from areas of influence to areas of reception) with a network-type projection. An interesting example is Spivak's critique of Moretti's theory of the concept of "distant reading" as a method of analysing broad movements of circulation of literary forms with their epicentre in Europe (the European novel, European languages, European capitalism). Spivak argues that at the basis of this theory lies a form of "cartographic arrogance" (Spivak 2003, 73) whereby the sender from a central culture analyses data drawn from the periphery while forgetting, through this form of accounting for the literary, to read. Similarly, Cooppan argues that what should matter is not the cartographer but the map itself, proposing, therefore, not the perspective of a singular world, but of a set of ever-changing spaces "that coalesce into globalities of many kinds, each striated by the transverse networks of language, region, area, and moment that simultaneously shape a single text and link it to others" (Cooppan 2012, 194-203). In agreement with Spivak, Vilashini Cooppan proposes in his article entitled *World Literature Between History and Theory* the concept of "itinerant topography" (Cooppan 2012, 194-203) through which an intersectional perspective of WL can be formulated "as a crossroads of flows and lateral connections, of connectivities and disjunctures, of coming close and zooming out; in short, as a disciplinary topography in motion" (Cooppan 2012, 194-203).

A similar objection, this time pretexted by Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, belongs to Andrei Terian who, in his article entitled *National Literatures, World Literatures and Universality in Romanian Cultural Criticism 1867-1947* (Terian 2013), sees in this type of approach to WL the reflection of an old error of comparative literature. The author thus believes that the analysis of the ways in which individual works relate to each other is reminiscent of the theory of "influences" and, consequently, of its homologues, such as Moretti's "wave" or Zohar's "interferences", which postulate the aprioric passivity of the target cultures incapable of resisting

the transfer from the source cultures. However, Terian is of the opinion that the asymmetrical nature of the cultures between which interferences take place does not imply the unilateral nature of the transfer process, except in those situations where literary evolution is politically managed. What Terian proposes can be put in relation to the objections of Efraín Kristal, who argues for a world literature in which the West does not have a monopoly on the forms that matter:

”[...] the West does not have a monopoly over the creation of forms that count; in which themes and forms can move in several directions from the centre to the periphery, from the periphery to the centre, from one periphery to another, while some original forms of consequence may not move much at all.” (Kristal 2002).

This raises the question of making analytical perspectives more flexible, so as to be able to follow what manages to reach from the periphery to the centre, as influence in its own right, while at the same time taking into account the fact that, as Moretti notes, the number of cultural products that travel the reverse path, from the periphery to the centre, is incomparably smaller:

”Yes, forms can move in several directions. But do they? [...] What I know about European novels, for instance, suggests that hardly any forms 'of consequence' don't move at all; that movement from one periphery to another (without passing through the centre) is almost unheard of; that movement from the periphery to the centre is less rare, but still quite unusual, while that from the centre to the periphery is by far the most frequent.” (Moretti 2014, 159-180).

2.3. The Ellipse Model

In tune with the perspective on WL as a threefold spatialization of hegemonic relations (centre/semi-periphery/periphery), but in the same cartographic paradigm of imaginary geographies, theorists such as David Damrosch, Emily Apter or Gayatri Spivak attempt to reconceptualize literature as a network, in order to bring minor literatures out of their marginal positions and to dynamically reconfigure them as living expressions of the history of ideas. The transition, also at the projective level, towards a dynamically reconceptualised WL as a network is based on recourse to geometric analogies that reimagine the hitherto tripartite whole in the form of ellipses. The ellipse thus becomes the basic unit of the world literary construct, an inherently collective figure that presupposes the existence of two centres, abandoning the monocentric, hegemon-oriented perspective in favour of an itinerant approach. Herein lies the main difference between the tripartite cartographic vision and that of the network construct. This is what David Damrosch proposes in the volume *What is*

World Literature? when he speaks of a (pluri)elliptical approach to literature, whereby elements such as literary-cultural connections in their synchronic and diachronic developments, representational forms and historical events that circulate along the network, can be better reified, periodically condensing into nodal points of historical density and affective depth (identifiable, depending on the situation, by literary genre, period, region, language, event) or the coexistence of literary phenomena in this whole set of ellipses or literary maps that are temporarily superimposable and in constant movement. Of course, the premise of WL as a fluid network of transfer implies a limited understanding - due to the broad nature of the perspective addressed - of the variations that determine the emergence of literary works in the source culture (and therefore of the variables on which it depends, including elements such as cultural context, the purpose attributed to the text, modes of interpretation and appropriation, etc.), projected, through the prism of the theory addressed above, at the far end of the ellipse:

"At the "farther" focus of the ellipse, however, there may be, and again almost certainly will be, considerable variation, as the work, author, or literature in question may serve very different purposes within the possibly very different cultural contexts in which it is received. It remains to be seen, then, whether, and if so at which level of abstraction, sufficient similarities can be detected to also map not only the actual presence of a certain work, author, or literature in a number of foreign cultures but also the interpretation put on them in these cultures, or any commonality of purpose they might serve [...] Gradually, then, and on different levels of abstraction, maps could be construed of a work's, an author's or a literature's "global reach" as well as "impact"." (D'Haen 2012, 413-422).

WL designed as a network and therefore subject to a dynamic, relational model thus becomes a fluid concept, imagined either as an agglomeration of intersecting lines linking two or more literary works of different origins, or as patterns of literary influence or patterns of circulation and intersection on a global scale that operate beyond the classical text-author hermeneutic system. In order to trace the superstructures of literary circulation, such as the circuits of publication, translation, adaptation, promotion, it is necessary to consider the relational dynamics between different systems and the way in which they come, over longer or shorter periods of time, to overlap, leading in some cases to the emergence of a more efficient system that will then spread over an increasingly wider area. Examples of this are the case of the European novel in the mid-19th century, or the literary theory systems in Europe and the United States, which subjected non-Western literatures to a strict grid of rules and expectations, reducing them to criteria of conformity and non-conformity: a hegemonic relational model which led to the creation

of comparative criteria such as the "backwardness" of a culture, "modernity", etc.

3. Systemic metaphors of world literature: the rhizome, the tree, the wave

Alongside the perspectives listed above, by virtue of which world literature is constructed as an imaginary geography, there are also other conceptual projections that are themselves constructed on the basis of metaphorisation processes. The latter differ from the geometric approach of cartographic perspectives (map, network, ellipse) and are more concerned with the functionality of the literary system than with its spatialisation: *the rhizome* (Deleuze, Guattari 1987), *the tree and the wave* (Moretti, 2014).

3.1. The Rhizome

Vilashini Cooppan uses the concept of *rhizome* in Deleuze and Guattari's sense as a research method and cultural model that allows for the representation of a system (in this case, that of WL) non-hierarchically as an organisational structure that chronologically traces causality from a "root" to its subsequent ramifications and thereby identifies the source and finality of an event. On the contrary, the rhizome is characterized by "ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 28), a concept through which the understanding of history and culture is not based on a process of narrativization, but is projected as a system of influences or attractions without a specific origin or genesis: "a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo" (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 45).

What is suggested by the concept of rhizome is therefore a world literature as the sum of disparate achievements and the correlations that can be made between them (by categorical criteria, for example the topos of trauma in the literatures of states under dictatorship, African-American literature, Holocaust literature, etc.) and not as a chronological reiteration of developments in the literary field.

Further drawing on the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, Cooppan associates the concept of *rhizome* with that of short-term cultural memory, while seeing in causal thinking an applicability of long-term memory. The latter is, by analogy, related to the tree-like perspective on cultural-historical phenomena, which imposes on interpretation a teleological path along the axes of descent and inheritance. On the other hand, short-term cultural memory as a methodological grid of WL is presented by Cooppan as a salutary alternative to the idea of the centre contested even by Spivak, since it proposes an analysis of the literary field as a whole of its disparate

developments, designed to "act at a distance, come or return a long time after, but always under conditions of discontinuity, rupture, and multiplicity" (Cooppan 2012, 194-203).

3.2. The Tree and the Wave

In his analysis of the literary field as an object of quantitative and performative study of the idea of literary influence and evolution, Moretti uses two distinct images of the literary field, but which, according to the theorist, function precisely by revealing evolutionary patterns through which the concept of world literature can be projected. The two metaphors proposed by Moretti are thus intended to highlight two types of relationship of literary fields related to cultural spaces: *difference* and *influence*.

Moretti projects two ways of thinking about literary history, one centred on local differences but through which one can glimpse similarities between different literatures (illustrating, for example, how the idea of a national literature and recourse to an ethnoculture has served to legitimise the national and forge a cultural individuality in the case of several nation-states), the other considering the external influences of some literatures on others and how these crystallise.

The tree (a concept which, in Deleuze and Guattari's view, is opposed to the *rhizome*) describes, in Moretti's perspective, the transition from unity to diversity, for example from Indo-European to other languages or, as stated above, reveals a prerogative of nation-states in the struggle for identity, whereas *the wave* describes the reverse movement, that of uniformity of an initial diversity (two of Moretti's examples refer to the global spread of the English language and the position of Hollywood cinema in the film market). The apparent opposition of the two methods of analysis does not, however, negate the fact that they can be used concomitantly or even diachronically. Moretti, for example, develops an analysis of the modern novel as a result of the oscillation between the two mechanisms and assigns the *tree* as a metaphor of national literatures and the *wave* as a metaphor of WL.

Based on the theories outlined in this chapter, we cannot say that WL as a projection precedes or is the result of a project (and by this we mean the applied dimension of WL both as an object of study and as a platform for research in the literary field or a new theoretical paradigm). We can say, however, that it constitutes, at the imaginative level, an analogous plan either fed by or from which concrete methods of composing, defining and managing a distinct field of study are derived. The totality of the avatars through which this concept is constructed and the recourse to geographical, geometrical, biological or cognitive metaphors reveal, first and foremost, an overriding cultural imperative to manage Otherness and to visualise it (through contact or enclosure) in order to then, particularly in the recent

decades marked by a multiplication of disciplines of study, interdisciplinary methodologies in Humanities and an opening of political and cultural borders, to determine a social imperative of understanding, comprehension and proper relationship with the Otherness. The concept of WL and its various projections over the centuries, in its attempt to reify the ineffable (we shall see below that no theory of WL claims the privilege of completeness) translates, in fact, a hermeneutics of Otherness designed to mirror the concrete, geopolitical, social-cultural realities of the global cultural polsystem.

4. World literature as a project: conceptual origins, theoretical and methodological meanings, semantic differences

4.1. Methodological questions

WL as a project distinguishes itself from its projective avatars by questioning a functionality not only in terms of spatial distribution, but also in terms of its applicability as a theoretical paradigm defined at the crossroads of literary, cultural, social studies, areas of study such as anthropology, translation studies, political science, cognitive science and the literary politics that determine the emergence, editing, promotion, translation and distribution of literary texts in the universal circuit. WL is therefore comparable to other cultural paradigms such as globalization, universal literature, the canon, national literatures, etc. But how do we quantify the "world" element in WL, from what analytical angle can we begin to make hypotheses, how do we turn a construct that essentially cannot be reduced to a single perspective methodologically, and how can we transform it into the theoretical framework of current literary studies as long as it remains an eminently fluid concept, resilient to any form of fixed interpretation? Current definitions of WL, far from assuming the premise of completeness, are themselves formulated on the basis of an interrogative apparatus that precedes an apparatus of solutions as variable as the object in question. Damrosch's questions on the study of WL are illustrative in this respect. What should be its object or stake? The discovery of a common denominator of world traditions? To reveal how the great powers project their values in politically and economically subordinate spaces? Integrating translations as literature or just analysing literature in the language in which it was written? How do we view WL? As the sum of world literatures, as a canonical subset of each culture's classics? As a set of works with a foreign audience? As literary products of hegemonic spaces, such as Greece or ancient Rome, or of the great powers of the West?

Theorists such as David Damrosch or Andrei Terian suggest three ways of conceptualising WL: either as the sum of literary works produced in the

world over time (cumulative approach), as a "world" canon that selectively integrates the most valuable literary works and thus, as the result of a selective approach, (but in what terms do we define value: aesthetic, linguistic, content, context?), or as a global literary system illustrated by the network approach. Examples of the cumulative approach can be found in the theories of Franco Moretti, who proposes a systematic analysis not of the canon, but of what he calls "the great unread" (Moretti 2014, 161) or "the forgotten 99 percent of non-canonical world literatures" (Moretti 2000, 208) advocating, therefore, an integrative analysis of the elements that literary studies have so far omitted, whereas David Damrosch or Mads Rosendahl Thomsen favour a selective approach, while resorting to a historical-literary perspective (which Pascale Casanova does to a certain extent by systematically analysing intraliterary links). For example, in the volume *What is World Literature?* Damrosch analyses how literary works acquire new meanings in translation. Another question that arises in this context concerns the demarcation of the units of world literature and the relationships that are established between them. Can we confine world literature to an analysis of individual works or national literatures or should we devise broader cultural frameworks of analysis to manage the specificity of the phenomenon? What would be the selection criteria with regard to the works belonging to other cultures that we read? How much does translation distort a clear perspective on the aesthetic and value potential of the original text?

Parallel to the problems of definition and method, other observations arise, this time concerning not the possibility of an all-encompassing analysis, but the possibility of a truly objective perspective in relations with Otherness, a *sine qua non* condition of WL: can we really avoid projecting the values of the native culture into the interpretation of, let us say, a foreign literary text? How do we position ourselves within the unequal cultural, political and economic landscape of which we are part and in which our cultural products circulate?

Many of the theories of WL converge towards the time when Goethe coins the term *Weltliteratur* in a conversation with his secretary, Johann Peter Eckermann. But Goethe, while putting into circulation a concept that seems to anticipate not only the formation of a new cultural consciousness but also the twilight of the national literatures that dominated the nineteenth century, does not assign it a fixed meaning, oscillating himself between an essentially Eurocentric vision and a broader, even global perspective. Throughout several texts, Goethe attributes varying meanings to the concept of *Weltliteratur*, without giving it a proper definition. On the one hand, he sees WL as a "market" of cultural goods, a system of trade and cultural exchange between intellectuals across Europe, while on the other hand, he refers to the circulation of literature in a global framework,

encouraging in a sense the translation and distribution of valuable texts from world literatures (in fact, Goethe formulates the concept of *Weltliteratur* after reading a Chinese novel) while remaining wary about the commercialisation of popular literature and the evolution of a mass culture. We can therefore distinguish between the two meanings of WL as Goethe imagines it and say that one refers to "the circulation of elite cultural goods among an international coterie of connoisseurs, the other embracing all literary works and all readers everywhere". (D'Haen, Damrosch, Kadir 2012, XVIII). It therefore oscillates between a quantitative and a qualitative criterion. Caius Dobrescu makes a similar distinction, seeing in the Goethean concept the fusion of two distinct meanings of "*Welt*": on the one hand, a WL that satisfies the criteria, or rather the aesthetic and value affinities, of a universal community, and on the other, a global network of contact between intellectuals in which the literary masterpieces of the nations would have the role of differentiating them.

We also recall here the meanings of Adrian Marino's "Republic of Letters", noting that initially, the Republic inevitably referred to the idea of the totality of "letters", understood here as the totality of the culture with which they are identified: "[...] "Republic of Letters" means the totality or ensemble of writings that are not necessarily literary, in the aesthetic, belletristic sense of the word. It includes, in traditional language, the totality of *res litteraria*." (Marino 1987, 289)

Re-using the traditional image of *Civitas Dei*, the Republic expresses the idea of community and universal spirit in the sense of a supreme intellectual reality. When the concept of community ceases to be thought of at a theoretical, abstract level, the "Republic of Letters" takes on the meaning of a community of men of letters, i.e. of writers, men of culture and scholars. Once internationalised and ideologised, the idea of universal literature takes on three basic meanings: the sum of literary writings, studies and knowledge circulating internationally, the spiritual consensus between cultural affinities inclined towards dialogue and collaboration, the expression of the universal nature of the human spirit. By going the other way round, from the universal to the national, the "Republic of Letters" comes to identify itself on the one hand with the symbolic nation of men of letters and on the other with the national literary republic, by recovering the "Republic of Letters" at the level of national culture and literature.

4.2 Methodological approaches

Returning to WL as a project, we can conclude, in line with Sanja Bahun's statements, that from a methodological perspective, WL cannot be circumscribed to a singular project, but analysed in all its forms, as metaphor or imaginary community, concept, discourse, practice,

pedagogical tool, theory or system of theories, while accepting that all these ways of conceiving it can alternate or coexist and that according to them WL acquires a certain status within global or regional systems of cultural exchange. Nevertheless, we can discern, within this plural system of theories and projects, two types of approaches from which the above perspectives derive: *quantitative* and *qualitative*.

The quantitative approach to WL is based on defining it as the sum of (all) literary works. From this point of view, the perspective seems to be well-defined, both in terms of the object of study conceived as a sum of data (variable, of course, but from which stable characteristics can be extracted), and in terms of the analytical framework and mode of operation, i.e. the analysis of a literary field that is as broad and varied as possible. Representative of the quantitative approach is Moretti's theory of "distant reading", presented as the only possible method of systematic analysis of what he calls "the great unread", by which we mean the totality of non-canonical literary works whose knowledge becomes possible not through reading, but through the identification of patterns of influence and functionality that lead Moretti to affirm the existence of so-called "laws" of transcultural interaction. Seen, then, as a global accumulation of literary texts, WL is defined in opposition to the concept of the canon, often rejecting the distinction between "high" forms of literature and popular literature, calling for a more flexible theoretical framework that allows for an analysis of "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language." (Damrosch 2003, 4)

On the other hand, the qualitative approach is based on the understanding of WL as the sum of all canonical texts, thus questioning the criteria (ethical, political, etc.) underlying the selection process and thus giving rise to a debate on the nature of the canon as a result of a narrow analytical perspective and a kind of hierarchical thinking (such as Spivak's "hegemonic hermeneutics"), a debate that brings to the fore a possible misrepresentation of global literatures and the hegemony of written literature.

Both of the approaches outlined above attract objections, as they seem to position themselves at two irreconcilable, and therefore invariably narrow, extremes that we find enunciated by René Wellek: "[...] understood in these terms, world literature is simultaneously exaggeratedly cumulative and inexcusably narrow (hyper-canonical)" (Wellek 1970, 3-36). The study of WL cannot be confined to one of these two perspectives, which prove insufficient precisely because they propose a (de)limiting (and sometimes impossible) analysis of the object of study as a finite construct. We cannot hope, as Spivak proposes, that all readers will make an effort and read as much as possible, in as many languages as possible, in order to thus overcome linguistic limitations or as a form of protest against the spread of

English, both in translation and in terms of anthologies dealing with WL. We cannot also overlook the fact that issues of linguistic hegemony are central to the discipline of WL (the historical dominance of Latin or French followed today by that of English), as well as issues of translation ethics, for example.

The problem, then, is the ability, or rather the willingness, of the theorists to devise a methodology that accepts the variations and incompleteness of the object of study, and which therefore functions as an approach that is itself variable and adaptable to the requirements and nature of the field of WL.

5. World Literature as itinerant theory or the itinerant theory of World Literature

Reading Edward Said's article *Traveling Theory* (Said 2014, 114-134) provides an interesting solution to the problem of theoretical and methodological adequacy. Said shows in his 1982 text how cultural and intellectual life benefits from the circulation of ideas, whether consciously appropriated, accepted as an unconscious influence, or creatively transposed into other settings, a circulation which, while involving a complex mechanism, seems to follow a recurring pattern. There is, therefore, an original point or initial set of circumstances for the birth of an idea or its transition towards discourse. As the idea travels from one point in time and space to another, it crosses a distance and comes into contact with the pressure of certain contexts. The idea is introduced or tolerated in the so-called target context by virtue of a set of conditions that Said calls conditions of acceptance or encounter resistance, and then it is integrated either totally or partially, changed to some extent by its new users, by its new position in the spatio-temporal context in which it finds itself.

Said exemplifies his assertions through an analysis of how Lukacs' theory in *History and Class Consciousness* evolves with regard to the emergence of class consciousness, an eminently critical consciousness born in a moment of crisis and revolt against the capitalist economic system. The author traces the path taken by Lukacs' theory, which emerges from a specific political-historical context and appears as a reaction to this context, and the way in which it is taken up, reinterpreted and refunctionalised, step by step, by his disciple Lucien Goldman (in the volume *Le Dieu caché*), in which "class consciousness" becomes "vision du monde", then by Raymond Williams, a student at Cambridge, who met Goldman there during two lectures given by the latter and who noticed, at a significant distance, also conditioned by a very different cultural context, the limitations of Lukacs' theory which he reached via Goldman. We will only take up from here Said's observations on the essential correlation between a theory and the context of its

emergence, i.e. how points of view, separated in time and space can discern (and not just alter) the limitations of certain worldviews:

”In measuring Lukacs and Goldmann against each other, then, we are also recognizing the extent to which theory is a response to a specific social and historical situation of which an intellectual occasion is a part. Thus what is insurrectionary consciousness in one instance becomes tragic vision in another, for reasons that are elucidated When the situations in Budapest and Paris are seriously compared. I do not wish to suggest that Budapest and Paris determined the kinds of theories produced by Lukacs and Goldmann. I do mean that "Budapest" and "Paris" are irreducibly first conditions, and they provide limits and apply pressures to which each writer, given his own gifts, predilections, and interests, responds [...] What is more interesting, however, is that because Cambridge is not revolutionary Budapest, because Williams is not the militant Lukacs, because Williams is a reflective critic - this is crucial - rather than a committed revolutionary, he can see the limits of a theory that begins as a liberating idea but can become a trap of its own.” (Said 2014, 122-124)

The example described above serves us in so far as it is applicable to the circulation and substantiation of theories about WL. Said's exposition, initially a perspective on WL as a ”traveling theory” or as a theory of travel can function, in the reverse sense, as a ”traveling theory”, i.e. an itinerant theory of WL, which leads us to the author's conclusion about the importance of Williams' theory, not necessarily as an improvement or correction of Lukacs' theory, but as an alternative theoretical approach, bent on itself: we must accept that there is no theory capable of covering all the situations in which it would be useful, and therefore we cannot postulate the existence of an intellectual system with unlimited power (as Lukacs described the capitalist economy). Therefore critical consciousness, in Said's view, is in fact an awareness of the resistance to theory, of reactions determined by concrete experiences or interpretations with which theory comes into conflict, an awareness that there is no exhaustive system regardless of the context of its emergence.

In conclusion, as in the case of Lukacs' theory evolution whereby Said demonstrates how theoretical modalization is necessary for the survival of the paradigmatic apparatus (a perspective through which we understand the role of critique in fluidifying theory and transforming it into a framework for eventual flexibilizations and recontextualizations), WL as a paradigm, program, methodology or theory must rather function as a critique of its own object in order to avoid the trap of theory

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