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WORLD LITERATURE AND EUROPEAN LITERATURE

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What is European literature? Could it not be argued perhaps that the very category of "literature," indicating something distinct from rhetorical decoration and *belles lettres* – representing instead "a certain type of value, i.e. literary aesthetic value" or "a special function that could be performed by some kinds of imaginative writing" (Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 255–56; Poovey 2008: 2) – was "invented" nowhere else than in Europe (Reiss 1992: 70–96)? Or that "It is … in Europe that … the 'fabric of the universal' operates, that is to say the machinery for recognizing a literary work as 'autonomous'" and therefore as a specific human institution (Casanova 2009: 21)? Could it not be argued, in short, that "European literature" is a tautology in terms, and conclude with Goethe that "European, i.e., world literature" (in Birus 2003: 1)?

Certainly, what made sense for Goethe would smack of anachronistic Eurocentrism today – particularly at a time when European cultural markets are flooded with literatures from other continents, let alone other non-literary new media (Moretti 1993: 865). The uncomfortable tautology should not be dismissed, however, without recognizing the difficulties implied in any attempt to relativize the concept of European literature. Recognizing, for instance, the necessity of questioning its centrality – one asserted "in the tradition of earlier European colonizers … [who] claimed universal validity for what they saw as their cultural model" (Youssef 2001: 19) – would not resolve in theory an asymmetry that perdures in practice: European writers, as the Moroccan novelist Abdelfattah Kilito remarks, are judged on the basis of local standards; but who can read an Arab novelist, in the West or even in the East, without comparing her to a European (Kilito 2003: 153)? Could Jorge Luis Borges dismiss European precursors? Or Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto antropofago* do without some "European values" to "cannibalize" (Fernández Retamar 1975: 112)? One could imagine a Korean theory of the novel written against that of Ian Watt, but could one imagine one written without (Dong-il 2003: 177)? The slippage of "world" into "European" literature, in other words, is not a simple matter of accepting or refuting Eurocentric assumptions: it may be ingrained in the very category of literature, as it was constituted in history.

The sacrosanct attempt at "provincializing Europe" (Chakrabarty 2000) faces, moreover, another set of peculiar if inescapable aporias. First, there is the problem of setting the limits that define such a province: "The expression European literature means: the body of works produced within Europe or by citizens of a European nation" (Chevrel 1998: 19); such a definition has the advantage of comprehending migrant literatures written in non-European languages (if produced "within Europe"), and even literatures written in other continents by "citizens"; but then, which nations are European, and which ones are not? If Europe is only, in Paul Valéry's famous dictum, "a small heading of the Asiatic continent … a western appendix of Asia" (Valéry 1948: 24), where does Europe end and Asia begin? Is a Turkish citizen European? The European Union is still debating that point, and one wonders whether literary theory should await a resolution from Brussels.

Second: assuming that a lasting consensus on the limits of Europe could be reached, would European literature then amount to the sum total of all literatures produced within European nations and by its citizens? Franco Moretti would consent to that, but in order for that immense and disparate body of works to be even conceivable, can we even be sure that the notion of "literature" remains the same in all cultural areas of Europe (Chevrel 1998: 23)? Not even the most comprehensive history or anthology would be barely adequate, and new methods of "distant reading" would need to be deployed instead, in order to provide graphs, trees, statistics, atlases, and other bird's-eye views of such a European literature (Moretti 1993, 1997, 2003). For scholars with more traditionalist inclinations, the devil remains in the detail – namely, in the omission of the plural "-s" from "European literature": this is not just a sum, but a unit and a totality.

Ferdinand Brunetière was very specific about this: European literature is not an "arithmetical unity" (Brunetière 1973: 182). "Literarily," he considered "European only that which has enriched the European mind by some element which has remained until then 'national' or 'ethnic'" (Brunetière 1973: 175). Tautological reasoning apart – can we know what the "European mind" is before we even defined "European"? – Brunetière's definition, pronounced at the Congress of Comparative History in 1900 and presenting "European literature" as "only a branch of comparative literature" (Brunetière 1973: 157), inaugurated a new age in which Europe played a dominant role in the emergence of Comparative Literature as a disciplinary formation (Cohen 1989: 5). We will have a chance to come back to this, but not before noticing some further complication. Understood as neither a "homogeneous whole" nor a mere set of "similarities and differences" (van Humbeeck 2008: 105), Brunetière's European literature was not a refutation of national differences, but rather its ultimate, almost Hegelian synthesis. It was:

> organic unity, a unity of variety whose harmony results from the very differentiation of its member parts … the more [European literatures] are "national" the they will be "European"; if European literature is made up only of the diversity of the forms that the demands of the national geniuses have successively or simultaneously imposed on a common matter.
>
> (Brunetière 1973: 182)

Rehearsing already the European Union's theme of e pluribus unum, Brunetière was thus avoiding that a loose "mystical" (Youssef 2001: 6–7) category such as "European mind" would stretch beyond the scholar's control: if it was difficult (especially on the Revue des deux mondes!) to eliminate the role of "the great oriental literatures" (Brunetière 1973: 157) in the enrichment of such spirit, one could nonetheless discard Hebrew, Arab, Persian, or Hindi literatures as fundamentally extraneous to the European history of the rise of the nation-state. European literature, after all, contained in itself enough "difference" not to need the supplementary "Oriental" one: to begin, it encompassed the difference once highlighted by Madame de Staël between Southern and Northern literature, in which the South played the role of an internal Orient (Brunetière 1973: 174).

Beyond the tautology, what, one wonders, is European after all? The nation-state, suggested Brunetière. Yet only a decade after the publication of his essay, nation-states in Europe seemed inclined to pursue mutual destruction rather than any organic synthesis. Maybe Pascale Casanova's observation regarding commercial rivalries should be extended to include military warfare:

> One of the few trans-historical features that constitutes Europe, in effect, one of the only forms of both political and cultural unity – one that is paradoxical but genuine – that makes of Europe a coherent whole is none other than the conflicts and competitions that pitted Europe's national literary spaces against one another in relentless and ongoing rivalry. Starting from this hypothesis, we would then have to postulate that, contrary to commonly accepted political representations, the only possible literary history of Europe would be the story of the rivalries, struggles and power relations between these national literatures.
>
> (Casanova 2009: 13)

Or rather, what could be postulated is that the history of the notion of European literature would be the story of the protracted attempts to synthesize rivalries and struggles into imagined unities. It may be worth recalling, incidentally, that the very idea of Europe as a political, cultural, and moral entity had its origin in a conflict: the proper name, which mythology had assigned until then to the beautiful woman kidnapped by Zeus disguised as a white bull, was evoked by Isocrates at the height of the Persian Wars. The small city-states of Greece, he argued, were too small to confront Darius's powerful army; their only hope was to unite as a new political and military entity – as "Europe" (Chabod 1995: 23; Hay 1957: 1). It took many more wars – the siege of Constantinople (Lewis 1982: 18) and the Crusades (Davies 1996: 258) being the most notable – to solidify the concept of Europe.

Against this background of internal and external conflict, European literature was born:

> It is a well-known fact that the idea of a European literature became widely accepted in Western academic circles since World War II. For it constitutes

> a kind of a substitute, or an alternative to the all too conflicting Western national literatures ...
>
> (Youssef 2001: 1)

As a matter of fact, it was already in the quarrelsome climate first of the Wars of Religion, and later the wars of Spanish succession, that an idea of European literature was initially formed (Sinopoli 1999: 12). As Voltaire reminisced, it was in those years that "a Republic of Letters was established imperceptibly in Europe, despite wars and despite religious differences" (Voltaire 1957: 1027). Albeit limited to a small part of Western Europe, the ideal of the Republic – the possibility, that is, of scholarly and literary exchanges, in spite of international conflicts – was instrumental in the establishment of transnational and pan-European cultural aspirations. While publications such as the *Gazette littéraire de l'Europe* (1764) or Jean-Baptiste-René Robinet's *Considérations sur l'état présent de la littérature en Europe* (1762) stressed the link between Europe and literature, by the second half of the eighteenth century, spurred in part by the expulsions of the Jesuits from Portugal, France, and Spain, and their subsequent exile, more transnational approaches to European literatures began to appear that highlighted their common origin and mutual indebtedness: Juan Francisco Masdeu's *Historia crítica de España* (1783) introduced the term "European literature" *expressis verbis* (Marino 1998: 13); and Juan Andrés's *Dell'origine, progressi e stato attuale d'ogni letteratura* (1785) put forward the controversial theory of an Arab origin for European literature (Dainotto 2006, 2007: 87–133).

The Napoleonic Wars following the French Revolution, accompanied by wars of national liberation, prolonged the interest both in Europe as a transnational guarantor of peace (Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace" dates from 1795), and in "European literature" as its cultural equivalent. Requests for a new "European literary science" grew, most notably in journals such as *Europa*, founded by Friedrich Schlegel in 1803, and in the *Archives littéraires de l'Europe* of 1804 (Marino 1998: 14; Chevrel 1998: 20).

Unlike the purely internationalist Europe without borders imagined by the previous generation, unified linguistically through the hegemony of French, post-revolutionary Europe soon acquired the by-now familiar shape of "unity in diversity," and rested instead on the centrality of translation (de Staël). Differences could be those between Southern and Northern literatures – the first ancient and somewhat "Oriental," the second modern and romantic (Domínguez 2006: 425–28) – theorized by Madame de Staël in *De la littérature dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1799), and popularized in a great number of works, including Friedrich Bouterwek's *Geschichte der spanischen Poesie und Beredsamkeit* (1804), Simonde de Sismondi's *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe* (1819) and Edgar Quinet's *La littérature et les institutions comparées de l'Europe méridionale* (1843). Or such differences could be national ones, insisted upon, for instance, in Giuseppe Mazzini's "D'una letteratura europea" (1829), which drew programmatic inspiration from Goethe's concept of world literature:

> Goethe formulated the concept of Weltliteratur in the 1820s, during the heyday of European nationalism, and it was natural for him then to speak of

> world literature as based in the interactions of established national literatures.
>
> (Damrosch 2003: 57)

What gave "European" unity to national, linguistic, and geo-cultural differences was either the common secular aspiration to national self-determination, or the shared religious faith in Christianity. Overlooking the history of Islam and Judaism in Europe can not have been easy. Yet:

> At the dawn of the nineteenth century, within the space of a very few years, four major texts appeared that idealized the Middle Ages as a heavenly period of unity in Christendom, in close connection with an imagined "statehood" and a repositioning of the States's cultural heritage: Chateaubriand's *La genie du christianisme* (1800); August Wilhelm Schlegels's *Geschichte der romantischen Literatur* (1802); Tieck's *Vorrede zu den Minneliedern aus dem Schwäbischen Zeitalter* (1803); and Novalis's *Die Christenheit oder Europe*.
>
> (Meltzer 2009: 44)

All this translated quickly into specific literary studies: Henri Hallam's *Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the 15th, 16th and 17th Centuries* (1839) is typical of an epochal tendency to privilege the rise of Christianity as the moment of the birth of "the literature of Europe" (rigorously in the singular). Sucha literature would at one and the same time preserve Greco-Roman classical culture (most notably with Latin remaining the official language of the Church until at least the sixteenth century), and distinguish itself from it by being modern.

It has been argued that such a desire to declare a European cultural unity in the midst of wars and religious schisms was what slowly led to the institution of comparative literature (Bemong et al. 2008: 9):

> The new discipline, developed in the universities of Western Europe by the end of the Nineteenth Century, was understood ... particularly in France and Germany as a comparative history of European literatures, and often named as precursors [the studies of European cultural unity by] ... de Staël and the Schlegel brothers ...
>
> (Sinopoli 1999: 38)

In this sense, the centrality of Europe is no simple Eurocentric bias, but a more problematic inscription in the very history and genesis of comparativism itself: comparative literature was – certainly among other things – the attempt to answer crises and conflicts that concerned (with disregard for colonial wars) Europe specifically.

This holds true also in the case of the resurgence of comparative literature in the United States in the immediate post-World War II period:

> The impulse animating postwar American comparative literature was still recognizably the European dream of cosmopolitanism that had migrated

> across the Atlantic in order to come to fruition in that more welcoming climate. In this respect, it is useful to remember that many of the early sponsors of American comparatism were displaced Europeans – we can think of such giants as Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer, Rene Wellek, and … Werner Friederich …
>
> (Bemong et al. 2008: 9)

Almost as if he had foreseen all this, Paul Valéry had written on the eve of World War II:

> Whenever my thoughts become too gloomy and whenever I despair of Europe, I can restore some degree of hope only by thinking of the New World. Into the two Americas, Europe has sent its messages, the communicable creations of its mind, all the most positive things it has discovered, and, in short, all that was least liable to deterioration through transportation and remoteness from prevailing conditions. It was truly a form of "natural selection" that took place and which extracted from the European mind its products of universal value, while all its more conventional and too historical elements remained in the Old World.
>
> (Valéry 1948: 84)

With an echo of Brunetière, but with more faith in exile than in the nation-state, Valéry then saw the "universal" values of European literature migrating into the New World.

Certainly, in Europe too there were those intent on salvaging a common European matrix from the debris of two world wars: Ortega y Gasset, for instance, insisted in a lecture given in post-war Berlin – delivered in Latin, as "De Europa meditatio quaedam" – that European literature, culture, and society "predate the existence of the European nation state," and that the idea of a cultural "unity of Europe is not a fantasy" (Fuentes 2004: 119; Lévêque 2001: 284). In Istanbul (whether it was Europe or not, he taught "European Philology" there [Angelov 2008: 65])Erich Auerbach conceived his "investigation into the literary representation of reality in European culture" (Auerbach 1974: 23) as if European literature was one whole. And from all-too-European Mitteleuropa, Ernst Curtius insisted:

> The first World War had made the crisis of European culture obvious … Europe is dismembered into geographical fragments … Europeanization of the historical picture has today become a political necessity, and not only for Germany … The "Europeanization of the historical picture" which is to be promoted today must also be applied to literature. If Europe is an entity which participates in two cultures the Antique-Mediterreanean and the Modem-Western, this is also true of its literature.
>
> (Curtius 1990: 4–9)

The two Europes of de Staël and Brunetière, North and South, Ancient and Modern, were not for him antithesis and separation, but essential unity. Curtius's

"Europe" was a wholesome Latin-Christian space to reconstruct; national cultures were only variations on a set of commonplaces – *puer senex*, woman-angel – that could be found in all times and spaces of a single European literature.

As soon as the German borders reopened in 1947, American-born Thomas Stearns Eliot, by then a European himself, hurried to visit no less a person than his friend Curtius in Bonn. What the two must have discussed is not known, but it is likely that at the core of friendly discussions was Curtius's idea of a fundamental unity of European culture, to be rebuilt after the war. Eliot devoted his talk "The Unity of European Culture," broadcast in Germany between July and October 1953 by the BBC's foreign service as part of de-Nazification programs, to the theme of "variety in unity" (Eliot 1977: 197). After reminiscing about the good times – of *The Criterion* between 1922 and 1936, when " there existed an international fraternity of men of letters, within Europe: a bond which did not replace, but was perfectly compatible with, national loyalties, religious loyalties, and differences of political philosophy" (Eliot 1977: 195); and after having briefly alluded to the sad ending of this new modernist Republic of Letters – Eliot soon came to the main point of his speech. This was Curtius's (and before that, Brunetière's) idea that "there is a common element in European culture, an interrelated history of thought and feeling and behaviour, an interchange of arts and of ideas" (Eliot 1977: 197). Yet while Eliot only echoed Curtius in maintaining that the element "which we share in common … is … the literature of Rome" (Eliot 1977: 190), he was more explicit than his friend in evoking the Romantic theme of Chateaubriand and Novalis:

> I am talking about the common tradition of Christianity which has made Europe what it is, and about the common cultural elements which this common Christianity has brought with it … I do not believe that the culture of Europe could survive the complete disappearance of the Christian Faith. And I am convinced of that, not merely because I am a Christian myself, but as a student of social biology. If Christianity goes, the whole of our culture goes. Then you must start painfully again, and you cannot put on a new culture ready made. You must wait for the grass to grow to feed the sheep to give the wool out of which your new coat will be made. You must pass through many centuries of barbarism. … The Western World has its unity in this heritage, in Christianity and in the ancient civilisations of Greece, Rome and Israel, from which, owing to two thousand years of Christianity, we trace our descent.
>
> (Eliot 1977: 200)

It was not in Europe, however, that the most authoritative pronouncement regarding the unity of European literature were made. Perhaps, Curtius had been right:

> Such a "science of European literature" has no place in the pigeonholes of our [European] universities and can have none. Academic organization of philological and literary studies corresponds to the intellectual picture in 1850. Seen from 1950, that picture is as obsolete as the railroads of 1850! We have modernized the railroads, but not our system of transmitting

> tradition. How that would have to be done cannot be discussed here. But one thing may be said: Without a modernized study of European literature there can be no cultivation of the European tradition.
>
> (Curtius 1990: 16)

Auerbach had moved to Penn State in 1947, joining his fellow German Leo Spitzer (Johns Hopkins) and Austrian René Wellek (University of Iowa) in the United States. In 1949, while Europe was taking its first eager step towards economic integration with its Council, it was from the United States that Wellek posed the question of "European literature" yet again, with the weight and authority of a book that will have formed more than one generation of literary scholars. Insisting on the necessity of abandoning "national" studies of literature, and of "identifying 'comparative literature' with the study of literature in its totality, with 'world-literature,' with 'general' or 'universal' literature" (Wellek and Warren 1956: 37), he wrote in *Theory of Literature*:

> Happily, in recent years there are many signs which augur a return to the ambition of general literary historiography. Ernst Robert Curtius' *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948), which traces commonplaces through the totality of Western tradition with stupendous erudition, and Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946), a history of realism from Homer to Joyce based on sensitive stylistic analyses of individual passages, are achievements of scholarship which ignore the established nationalisms and convincingly demonstrate the unity of Western civilization, the vitality of the heritage of classical antiquity and medieval Christianity. Literary history as a synthesis, literary history on a supernational scale, will have to be written again.... Literature is one, as art and humanity are one ...
>
> (Wellek and Warren 1956: 38–39)

The slippage of "comparative," "world," "general," and "universal" not even into "Europe," but into "Western Europe," should not, at this point, come as a surprise: the discourse on the unity of European literature, like that very European literature described by Curtius, is, after all, a series of commonplaces – medieval Christianity, the interchange of national traditions, the Greco-Roman heritage – that repeat through the totality of Western tradition in the attempt to invent a unity in the face of discord. To such commonplaces, we may now add another one. I am alluding to the commonplace of Eurocentrism, certainly applicable to Wellek's own attempt to collapse the United States, South America – let alone, *excusatio non petita*, "Oriental" literatures too – into the universal map of "Western European literatures":

> In total, much evidence for the close unity, especially of the Western European literatures, has been accumulated ... without minimizing the importance of Oriental influence, especially that of the Bible, one must recognize a close unity which includes all Europe, Russia, the United States, and the South American literatures.
>
> (Wellek and Warren 1956: 36–38)

I wrote that European literature is the attempt to "invent" a unity. I do not mean this in any negative way – especially if the alternative is the state of warfare which the idea of "European literature," from the Republic of Letters to Curtius and Wellek, meant to oppose. After all, other communities have been successfully "invented," and literature is said to have had a central role in it. Whereas national "invented communities" (Anderson 1983), however, were established through the institutionalization of state-sponsored departments, curricula, prizes, and schoolbooks, nothing comparable has ever happened in the case of the European Community. For the recent Union, literature has remained largely marginal if not ignored, with the exception, perhaps, of a peculiar publication of the Council of Europe in which European writers offer a more or less engrossing reflection on the theme of bridges in an attempt – allegorical at that – to bridge cultural differences (Council of Europe 1999)!

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44
WORLD LITERATURE AND LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Djelal Kadir

The American New World, the *Latin* American New World known as *Mundus Novus*, in particular, gives the terms "world" and "literature" an epistemic jolt, what we might call "a cosmic shove through the window." The disruptive nature of that experience, starting one early October morning in 1492, offers a new world perspective in recompense. "Perspective," as the twentieth-century art historian Erwin Panosfky etymologized it, literally means "seeing through": "We are meant to believe we are looking through a window into a space. The material surface upon which the individual figures or objects are drawn or painted or carved is thus negated, and instead reinterpreted as a mere 'picture plane'" (Panofsky 1927: 27). American history, Latin or otherwise, perennially forces us to look back through this unsettling image and its "picture plane." World literature, in fact, is another name for the vicissitudes of that "picture plane" in the New World, and we shall be taking yet another look through the window that seeks to frame it.

In the meantime, we might recall that the third characteristic of world literature in the ternary definition accorded it by David Damrosch, after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (q.v., the essay by Pizer in this volume), is, not surprisingly, window-bound: "World literature has often been seen in one or more of three ways: as an established body of *classics*, as an evolving canon of *masterpieces*, or as a multiple *windows on the world*" (Damrosch 2003: 15). Damrosch's choice for exemplifying this "*windows on the world*" definition is the Virgilian epic, the *Aeneid*, a foundational classic of empire that bulged in the saddlebags of more than one conquistador in what the European founders of a transatlantic empire conveniently called the "New World." Partly coincidental, Damrosch's illustrative choice is not insignificant for the fate of world literature in this New World. Damrosch refers to the *Aeneid* as "a window on the world of imperial Rome; though it is set before Rome's founding and treats legendary materials, in its underworld scenes and epic similes it opens out with unconcealed directness toward Virgil's contemporary world" (Damrosch 2003: 15–16). Indeed, lest we forget, Virgil was commissioned by Augustus Caesar to