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Volume 15 Issue 7 (December 2013) Article 7**Kathleen Shields,****"Challenges and Possibilities for World Literature, Global Literature, and Translation"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss7/7>>

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Abstract: In her article "Challenges and Possibilities for World Literature, Global Literature, and Translation" Kathleen Shields argues that Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* was grounded in translation practice: in creating a canon representing the best of each nation, translation occupied centre stage. Nation-building in Europe in the nineteenth century was combined with the idea of transnational literature where translation was an important tool of transmission and exchange, as well as a way of decentering from a strong monolingual base. There are four challenges for comparative literature now. Firstly, the nation state is weakening. Secondly, despite the growing interest in world literature since the 1990s, Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* is in decline, replaced by the rise of English as a *lingua franca* and pivot language for translations. Thirdly, asymmetries in relations between languages, and the very small number of translation languages, are becoming more marked. Finally, digital reading means that literary products are simply "there," fluidly absorbed into ever-changing canons with no visible means of mediation. What then are the opportunities offered by the European tradition of translation studies? Could polysystem theory help to re-examine the filters and asymmetric relations that exist between producers and consumers of literary texts? Can translation studies map relations of prestige to arrive at not only an ethics but also a geopolitics of literature?

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Challenges and Possibilities for World Literature, Global Literature, and Translation

My starting point is the question of what links Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur* to world literature, with a particular focus on the matter of translation. It may well be that different modes of translation are a useful way of charting some of the shifts from the first concept to the second that have taken place both inside and outside literature. Translation, which was seen as a mediating force in multiple bilateral contacts between the literatures of Europe, has increasingly come to play a part in a pyramidal model. Hence literature in English, literature translated to English, literature written in order to be translated into English, literature written in English — where the subject is translation as a trope for mediation, but where the text itself is not translated — have become the dominant forms. In Europe, as elsewhere, there has been a perceptible shift from literary translations which facilitate contacts between literatures to a more and more unmediated supraliterature. Calling attention to translations is a way of thinking again about how literatures and cultures relate to each other, how outside forces have brought about changes in the relationships among literary systems, and what challenges are inherent in these changes. Some approaches in translation studies offer possible ways of mapping this territory.

In 1967, R.K. Dasgupta gave world literature a threefold definition that is useful for this discussion. First, world literature can be "the sum total of all the literatures of the world," a wide definition upon which the arguments of this article are based. Second, the term refers to "works in the different literatures of the world which have attained world recognition" (399). Dasgupta's second definition corresponds to prizewinning and in some cases bestselling literature, the literature that has jostled its way to the top of the literary system. And third, world literature can be viewed as "different literatures of the world conceived as one literature" and this is now the predominant meaning of the term (399). I posit that Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* was based on the practice of translation: in the creation of a canon that would represent the best of each nation in both its specificity and its universality, translation played a crucial role. Far from being a doctrine, Goethe's concept is a "structural sketch" that originated in a moment when Goethe became aware of his reputation abroad and began to read his own writings in translation (see Hoesel-Uhlig 31). The term also emerged during a time of profound change in German culture between 1780-1820 when there was much debate about translating as a way of mediating between the domestic and the foreign, a period since seen as paradigmatic for European literature (see, e.g., Berman). Johann Peter Eckermann reported that Goethe referred to "the epoch of World-literature" in January 1827 (165) — that is, not long after the the Napoleonic Wars which divided Europe "in an era when the Revolutionary Wars, Napoleon's campaigns and the Wars of Liberation had just ravaged Europe, the "epoch of world literature" is meant to heal rifts and to unite culturally what politically is thoroughly divided. The aim is mutual toleration" (Krobb 12).

The creation of nation states in Europe in the nineteenth century went hand in hand with the emergence of the idea of a transnational literature where translation was an important tool of transmission and exchange. It was believed that translation could foster dialogue and understanding between nations, that cultural mediation could compensate for the arrogance, intolerance and ethnocentrism of the nation state. For instance Thomas Carlyle in his 1827 essay on the state of German literature remarks that it has the best, as well as the most translations because "the Germans study foreign nations in a spirit which deserves to be oftener imitated. It is their honest endeavor to understand each, with its own particularities, in its own special manner of existing; not that they may praise it, or censure it, or attempt to alter it, but simply that they may see its manner of existing as the nation itself sees it, and so participate in whatever worth or beauty it has brought into being" (70). In this scheme of things translation comes to carry a heavy burden, as instanced by Antoine Berman's often-quoted idea of translation as a decentering force, as an escape route from ethnocentrism: "the essence of translation is to be an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentering. Translation is a 'putting in touch with,' or it is nothing" (Berman 4). This statement might seem unduly optimistic today and yet it is a breath of fresh air for the literatures of Europe where each one has evolved from a nationalistic base. Further, the belief that translation fosters dialogue

underlies many discussions of the subject. A few have questioned it. Douglas Robinson, for example, has drawn attention to a metanarrative of postcolonial translation studies whereby cultures are seen to progress through certain stages: the precolonial state, the colonial state, the postcolonial state, and a future decolonized state (89-90). It is often assumed that decolonization leads to more translation, although this is not necessarily the case. For instance, like a one-way bridge that is destroyed when it has been crossed over, translation is important for the creation of world literature, but fades into the background once this ambition is achieved. Mona Baker has questioned the metaphor of bridge building in translation in her study of how translation can prevent dialogue, block contacts, and support ethnocentrism on a global scale in the so-called war on terror. Already in the early-twentieth century, supranational attempts to redeem political divisions between nation states through translations of literature were inevitably connected to politics. The attainment of "world recognition," as in Dasgupta's second sense, was not without controversy. The Nobel Prize in Literature helped to promote the idea of an ideal library of all the countries of the world, a kind of United Nations of literature and Werner Friedrich called the Nobel a sort of "NATO of literature," but a literary version that only contains in fact a quarter of the NATO nations (Friedrich qtd. in Damrosch 1).

The selection of the Nobel laureates is fairly political: one only has to think of the example of Rabindranath Tagore, the first non-European to receive the Prize in 1913. Giving the Prize to a Bengali meant not giving it to a European as a way of avoiding having to decide between countries on the verge of war. One candidate for the prize alongside Tagore was Anatole France who was seen as too Dreyfusard and anti-clerical (see Le Blanc 266). There are at least two Tagores, one writing in Bengali and the other translating himself into English. While W.B. Yeats was instrumental in promoting Tagore as a universal figure who was above and beyond translation, representing the Unity of Being and allowing East and West to communicate with each other, the president of the Nobel committee Harald Hjärne saw a different Tagore (see Le Blanc 266-69). In his speech at the award ceremony Hjärne said that Alfred Nobel wished to reward works "of an idealistic tendency" and that Tagore's translations into English can benefit from belonging to literature in English "which has been a never-failing concomitant of the expansion of British civilization ever since the days of Queen Elizabeth" (Hjärne qtd. in Le Blanc 267). The case of Tagore illustrates the ambivalence of supranational literature toward translation: on the one hand, universalism — corresponding to ideologies, expectations, and literary needs at a given moment in history — can forget about the nitty-gritty of translating in order to concentrate on the unity of humankind. On the other hand, translations can make manifest the civilizing effect of a world language and its culture.

The careers of Nobel laureates are also interesting in that translating the local becomes forgotten once the writer has made it onto the world stage. For example, Léopold Sédar Senghor, who was nominated for the prize in 1962, translated some African texts into French while becoming simultaneously a champion of the French language only to cease translating in the years following his nomination. Obviously, it helps the career of a world writer to write in or be translated to a world language. A world writer tends to tell us far less about his/her culture than a less known or minor writer from the same culture to take the contrast between Senghor and Sembene Ousmane. A world writer is awarded literary prizes by countries outside his/her own and this was certainly true in the case of Senghor: bibliographies, library catalogues, and databases list the many translations of Senghor rather than the small number of translations done by him (see Shields, "Léopold Sédar"). On the one hand, we can view world literature in Dasgupta's first sense of "all the literatures of the world" or at least as clusters of literatures on a more or less equal footing distinct from each other by requiring translation from different languages. From the perspective of translation, Dasgupta's second two notions, literatures which have attained world class status and literatures of the world considered as one use translation in the same fashion. Translation is a way of paying lip service to the particular while erasing its particularity.

Through the twentieth century in European literature translation also continued in its mediating role, as Goethe viewed it and as a way of decentering in Berman's sense. We could cite by way of example the cosmopolitan literature of the early twentieth century and its modernist translator-writers: Beckett, Gascoyne, Jolas, Man Ray, Reavey, Todd, etc. (see Eluard). Jolas is a typical case: born in the U.S., the son of a German-speaking mother and a French-speaking father, brought up in Lorraine, he described himself as "a man from Babel" who had experienced "frontier anguish" (Jolas

qtd. in McMillan 9). When the nation state was strong in Europe, cosmopolitanism coupled with a culture of translation could counter the ethnocentrism of the large European literatures. At the end of the twentieth century, major events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Apartheid in South Africa reinforced the importance of the English language on the continents of Africa and Europe. The preponderant role of the United States in world geopolitics also reinforced the power of English as a supralanguage in Asia, especially in China. The advent of new media, the digitization of texts, and the spread of economic modernization to every part of the globe have altered cultures literary culture included: "an explosion of flows" where "individuals, companies and states run up against classical dilemmas, but these dilemmas are starker, having been transformed into a new order of magnitude" (Moreau Defarges 7). In this situation, comparative literature in Europe is currently confronted by four major challenges. First, the nation state has become weaker. Benedict Anderson, among others, cited the power of global enterprise, political upheavals, and wars, as well as an increase in (im)migration as contributing factors to this weakening of the nation state. Anderson also studied the remarkable resilience of the nation state in the imagination of peoples despite the changes brought about by late capitalism (43-45). In these circumstances what has become of the Herderian unity between people, nation and literature? Etienne Balibar describes the "nation form" as a twofold illusion of univocal destiny and invariant substance, a narrative with a continuity of subject: "project and destiny are the two symmetrical figures of the illusion of national identity" (86). Is this illusion still intact?

What is the current function of centers of literary production and reception such as Paris, Frankfurt, or London? What is happening in these key centers of literary production? (see Casanova 82-91). While literature is becoming more and more delocalized, it is probably the case that it is the "constellations," with "temporary sub centers" constantly shifting and changing between world literatures and minor literatures, which play an important part (Thomsen 4, 54). In the circulation of more or less prestigious texts, translation as well as non-translation plays an increasing, but invisible role in the power relations between languages and literatures. As Michael Cronin observes, "there is no single model of globalization which is adopted willy-nilly by different nation-states" and "each country or community translates elements of the global and informational economy into local circumstances" with the result that there are "nationally and regionally differentiated experiences of globalization across the planet" (Cronin 34).

The second challenge derives from the weakening of the nation state, for the idea of *Weltliteratur* as a meeting place or as a place of exchange between nations is also being superseded. World languages, such as Arabic, Hindi, French, German, Chinese, and Russian are all yielding to English in the hierarchy of translations. David Bellos, who has studied the UNESCO statistics for the translation of literary works between seven languages between 2000 and 2009, comes to the striking conclusion that "Nearly 80 per cent of all translations done in all directions between these seven languages [Swedish, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, French, German, English] over a decade — 103,000 out of 132,000 — are translations from English. Conversely, barely more than 8 per cent of all translations done in the same set are translations into English — whereas French and German between them are the receiving languages of 78 per cent of all translations" (210, 217). The rise of English as a supralanguage means that it increasingly serves as a basis for other translations. Bellos's hypothesis is that the more prestige a language has, the higher it is on the pyramid and the more it is used as a pivot language for translations in and out of other languages. In this scheme of things Chinese is a large regional and "peripheral" language in relation to English. For example, the Chinese government project to translate the Five Classics (a large corpus of Chinese texts) into eight world languages envisages that an English translation will serve as a base text for all of these translations (Bellos 233). Already in 1990 Stephen Owen asked the following questions in relation to contemporary poetry in China: "but is this Chinese literature, or literature that began in the Chinese language? For what imaginary audience has this poetry been written? ... It is a new poetry; its way is uncharted" (31). It is certainly not a national literature, but a literature that is composed in order to be translated, most frequently to be translated into English. Owen's conclusion is telling: "The international audience admires the poetry, imagining what it might be if the poetry had not been lost in translation. And the audience at home admires the poetry, knowing how much it is appreciated internationally, in translation. Welcome to the late twentieth century" (32). While it was predicted that no language in the twenty-first century would have the hegemonic position that English had in the twentieth, many

overlook this prediction and in the literary sphere English continues to hold sway (see Maurais and Morris 17).

The situation is not different if one leaves China for Ireland: it is simply a difference of scale. For someone who writes in the Irish language, the English translation overshadows the original before the original is even written, since the translation is always towards English and not in the opposite direction. It is for this reason that an Irish-language author refuses to be translated because the anticipation of being translated for the world's English-speaking public alters the act of writing, an act which for the writer must have its roots in a particular history and a way traveled by speakers of Irish: "The writing is a matter of love, the kind I have been describing, a sustaining through my veins and verbs of something infinitely precious, a stretching back along the road we have come, a stand here in the present among the outnumbered and beleaguered but determined survivors of Gaelic Ireland" (Jenkinson 33-34). Biddy Jenkinson's argument bears striking similarities with some of Owen's points about Chinese literature: "As in any cross-cultural exchange that goes in only one direction, the culture that receives influence will always find itself in the secondary position. It will always appear slightly 'behind the times'" (Owen 30). Appearing behind the times is the fate of national and regional literatures when they are viewed from the perspective of a rising world literature that aims to be translated into English.

The third challenge, when we take the very restricted number of translation languages into account, is the fact that asymmetries in the relative prestige of languages or what I call the "balance of power" between languages are becoming more marked. The metaphor of GPS to take account of the multipolarity of cultures on the world scale is an attractive one. However, the number of poles is limited (see Murat <<http://www.fabula.org/revue/documents6751.php>>). In order to avoid an unquestioning acceptance of the dominance of English in our reception of translated texts it is important to keep in mind the distinction that Nicholas Ostler makes between "a culture of translation" (that is to say, a culture which translates directly to and from other languages) and "a lingua franca culture" (a common language culture that does not translate) (150; on the domination of English as today's *lingua franca* see also, e.g., Eoyang <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/16>>). In English the doctrine of "fluent" and "transparent" translation was already strong in the 1980s as Lawrence Venuti has shown in his study of publishing statistics and book reviews in the United States and Britain (1-17; on the lack of translation in the United Kingdom see Dickens <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1140>>). The situation in Europe was always a bit different, mainly because of the proximity of nation states and because of the many exchanges that existed between the big three languages: German, French, and English. Now that English has become a *lingua franca* in Europe, Venuti's description of the fluent transparent model of translation with its corollary of the invisible translator is valid for Europe as well. For example, Carol Brown Janeway's translation of Sándor Márai's *A gyertyák csonkig égnek* using a German intermediary translation as her base text reflects on her own work by saying that she wants her translation to be like "a pane of glass" and that she does not want to leave any "fingerprints" on it (see Shields, "Thoughts"; see also Sherwood). The English language reader receives the text without any awareness of its passage through different languages or of the specific asperities of Hungarian. This myth of transparency leads me to my fourth and last challenge: the evolution of the reader into *homo numericus* means that literary products are simply there, commodified and inscribed into new and changing canons in a transparent way and without visible mediation. Buying books on the internet, reading them on screen, and downloading samples and fragments of books are all activities which change the way texts are produced, translated, and received. The advent of the internet coincides with the transformation of comparative literature into world literature while the invisibility of translation and of linguistic and cultural specificity also fits this new model seamlessly.

Taking the above-discussed four challenges into account, what are the possibilities afforded by the study of translations? Because it serves to remind us of the relations between cultures, translation brings us back to not only to cultural specifics, but also to the matter of the transmission of texts and ideas. Taking into account the various strands and traditions within translation studies, it might be useful and timely to revisit Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystems theory or by now "theories." The polysystem theory and its various versions allow us to refocus on the light that translations throw upon the conceptual frameworks, the filters and the asymmetries that exist between the producers

and consumers of literary texts (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/ccstranslationstudies>>). Regarding conceptual frameworks and translation, José Lambert posited interesting points about the maps which exist in the minds of publishers, editors, authors, translators, and readers: "My claim is that most of us have an indistinct, even medieval image of the literary world, and that we need to use more than one map to gain a more realistic and detailed view of literature and literatures ... the maps show only standard languages characterized by a written tradition. This is what makes our language maps so interesting in terms of ideology. They are based on a familiar tradition according to which a language needs to be well institutionalized in order to be recognized as such" (134-35). If anything, the rise of world literature in English has led to our mental maps becoming even more simple and indistinct than they were when Lambert published his article in 1991.

In terms of reception and filters and translation, Theo Hermans described some of the manipulations at different levels and stages of the translation process which make these texts acceptable for the target culture. His concentration on micro and macro levels of the translation process is not unlike Franco Moretti's call for a "distant reading" of texts where description of general patterns combines with close study of a single trope or one specific feature of literature. As Moretti notes, "literary history will quickly become 'second hand': a patchwork of other people's research, without a single direct textual reading," unless we take account of text features ("Conjectures" 151). Study of texts shows the way that the self-advertising behavior of the 1920s and 1930s European translator-writers has given way to self-effacement and fluent, transparent norms compatible with the notion of a world literature and a literary market where translation tasks can be farmed out and delocalized. However, in her 2013 *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* Emily Apter's sounds a warning that Europeans would be wise to heed against this bland world literature: "World Literature is the blue-chip moniker; benefitting from its pedigreed association with Goethean *Weltliteratur*" (41). Apter feels "uneasy in the face of the entrepreneurial bulimic drive to anthologize and curricularize the world's cultural resources" (3) and deplors "World Literature's ready promotion of identifying over differing and its curiously impassive treatment of 'world' and anemic planetary politics" (335). It is hard not to agree with these observations, but Apter's understanding of literature, translation and politics is restricted to within a U.S. institutional framework (dare I say *habitus*?). "Politics" in the title of Apter's book is really a reference to US-American university politics vaguely desiring "literary studies to be anti-capitalist critique" (15). Literature is a mainly metatextual affair, a discourse upon critical discourses in several (mostly European) languages. The strongest parts of the argument are where actual translations are studied, for instance in the chapters "Paranoid Globalism" and "Checkpoints and Sovereign Borders" while the "untranslatable" is at its best when it is a lexicographical unpicking of distinctions between "oneworldedness," "transnationalism," and "planetarity" (Apter 71). Yet it is unfortunate that translation tends too often to be understood metaphorically "as a kind of philosophy, or as a way of doing theory and its history" (Apter 247), in other words as a type of hermeneutics minus a corpus of primary texts. The criticism of Moretti's *Maps, Graphs and Trees* is really the heartfelt cry of a humanities scholar who sees language departments closing while big data and digital humanities receive most funding (see, e.g., Habjan <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/13>>). Moretti's "quantitative formalism" (Apter 55) takes place in "the well-endowed seat of the digital humanities" from where "gracious concessions are offered to the old humanities" (Apter 56; on this see also Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári). But perhaps Apter sees the "ineffable" in too many places and overestimates the proportion of the ineffable to the "effable" in translations (19) and this is to ignore the fact that when translation studies emerged in the mid-1970s from an encounter between literary studies, linguistics, and comparative literature, it focused on the pragmatic and the non-rational and certainly did not justify describing translations on the basis of rationalism alone. It took the view that translations happen and are worth describing because they do show a great deal that is political, cultural, and historical.

Of particular interest to the question of comparative literature and translation now is the work of Even-Zohar and other polysystem scholars where it is concerned with unequal relations and asymmetries between literatures. Studying and describing translations can show how "strong" and "weak" literatures jockey for position in the hierarchy of prestige and centrality ("The Position" 122). Even-Zohar's concept of interference could be expanded to a world scale or to what he terms a

"macro-polysystem," the macro-polysystem in this case being "a group of relatable national literatures, such as the literatures of Europe" ("The Position" 122). We could enlarge this macro-polysystem to include groups of relatable literatures as they engage with the new supraliterature that is world literature. Interference is "a relationship between literatures, whereby a ... source literature may become a source of direct or indirect loans for ... a target literature ... There is no symmetry in literary interference. A target literature is, more often than not, interfered with by a source literature which completely ignores it" ("Laws" 54, 62; see also Even-Zohar, "Factors," *Polysystem*). For example, world literature in English (a source literature) weighs upon the target literature that is Chinese literature that then writes to be translated into English. The pyramid of translation through English means that the interference is one way: literature in English ignores Chinese or Irish literature while the converse is not the case. When literatures are coeval the interferences are mutual and translation, when it is secondary, is often a conservative force because it conserves the dominant position of literature in English (Even-Zohar, "The Position" 122).

Criticism is sometimes leveled at early Russian formalism — the forebear of polysystem theory — that the autonomy and literariness of the literary work make accounts too static. However, diachrony and history are built into the formalist approach: the center and periphery or top and bottom are not static or stable. They may stabilize for a time, by means, for example, of a conservative translation paradigm, but not forever (see Gentzler 78-89). In fact, the historical dimension of polysystem theory and the concept of mutual (or one-way) interference links in with the European tradition of comparative literature, which is not purely thematic, but which studies the history of the production and reception of literary works, the history of patronage and contacts, as well as the weight of traditions and canons in different systems. All of these serve to counterbalance the illusion of unmediated literature fostered by digital culture, as outlined in challenge four.

Focusing on translations allows us also to reflect upon the distinction made by Serge Arnaud, Michel Guillou, and Albert Salon between *mondialisation* and globalization, the former consisting of the extension of new forms of communication to a world scale and the latter being the sometimes hidden exploitation and use of the globalization process in the service of a worldwide Anglo-American commercial empire (254). What are the relationships between the circulation and translation traffic of texts and their markets? When world literature is discussed, one often thinks of the analogy between world music and the way it can merge different traditions and manipulate ethnographic realities (see Mason <http://prezi.com/q_g5b1curydl/world-music/>). That is to say, one stays within the field of music or within the field of literature and makes comparisons from one to the other on the basis of similarities between remixing and renewal of forms. Instead, analogies from the international art market might be just as useful for literature. For instance, the international art exhibition *Frieze* has been criticized for the fact that an Anglo-American idea of universality predominates and dictates the forms of art which are going to sell (see Allen <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/oct/14/frieze-talks-globish-art-world>>). The international art fair *Art Basel* uses phrases adapted from the financial markets: "To be a good bet against near-zero interest rates and unpredictable currency fluctuations, art needs the potential of a global market. Thus 'local artist' has become a synonym for insignificant artist and 'national' damns with faint praise. 'International' is now a selling point in itself" ("Global Frameworks" 90). The co-directors of *Art Basel* in 2010 suggested that private collections internationalize in the process of becoming more serious: "Collectors often start by acquiring art from their own nation, then their own region, then finally internationally" ("Global Frameworks" 90).

The study of translation can be a way of mapping out asymmetries between literatures in order to arrive at not only an ethics of translation, but also a geopolitics of literature. The comparative literature scholar needs to be inside and outside the literary system simultaneously, or as Suman Gupta expresses it: "the relationship between globalization and literature is arguably most immediately to be discerned not in terms of what is available inside literature and within literary studies but in terms of the manner in which globalized markets and industries act upon and from outside literary studies. This requires a great deal more attention than it has received within literature and literary studies" (170). Because it is a cluster concept that combines transmission, representation, and transculturation — the last being "the transmission of cultural characteristics from one cultural group to another" (Tymoczko 27) — translation is an important pathway connecting inside to outside.

How does this map of world literature look? Prose fiction and, to a lesser extent, lyric poetry written in English or translated (and written to be translated) into English are the current dominant forms. Prize-winning best-selling novels in their English translations tend to exemplify a formal blandness, a flattening out, and homogeneity. The tropes of this narrative fiction resemble ethnocentric translation strategies (e.g., ethnographic explanations, lengthy descriptions, local color, and explanatory notes). Imagism predominates in poetry translated into English at the expense of the auditory qualities of language and I include with this poetry the literature of spirituality in translation. Literature composed in English itself starts to read like literature in translation. For example, Adhaf Soueif in *The Map of Love* has a protagonist who is a cultural intermediary learning Arabic and reflecting on its grammar while a glossary is provided at the back of the novel (519-28). In the novel Isabel reads out a list of vocabulary from a grammar notebook: "Umm: mother (also the top of the head). Ummah: nation, hence ammama: to nationalize ... So, how can they say Arabic is a patriarchal language?" (164-65).

Although Soueif incorporates linguistic specificity in her novel, the matter of language itself becomes a theme. Readers of international literature come in search of windows upon other cultural phenomena "looking for some exotic religious tradition or political struggle" (Owen 29). The interest in causes is not just a Western phenomenon and there are certain parallels between the literature of causes and the preoccupations of political blogs. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen notes the rise of "traumatic literature" of wars and conflicts and refers to the Rwanda project (103, 129-30). Some of the authors involved with this project — such as Véronique Tadjo and Abdourahman Waberi — have in hindsight expressed discomfort with aspects of the enterprise. Tadjo noted the linguistic and cultural remove in her novel *Imana* as she is writing in French about a country that is distant from Côte d'Ivoire, the country that she knows. There is a double linguistic remove when her French text sells far more copies in its English translation.

In conclusion, will the map always look this way? Undoubtedly not. One thinks of Erich Auerbach's pessimism after World War II in 1952 when he wrote that "the presupposition of *Weltliteratur* is a *felix culpa*: mankind's division into many cultures. Today, however, human life is becoming standardized" (126). This statement is not unlike the expressions of gloom about the uniformity brought about by world English, globalization, and new media: "The process of imposed uniformity, which originally derived from Europe, continues its work, and hence serves to undermine all individual traditions" (Auerbach 126). Another tradition derives from Europe as well, namely the awareness of how specific traditions engage with overarching ones and how bilateral translation encounters take place between literary subsystems. Comparative literature, drawing on the work of descriptive translation studies, already possesses the tools for analyzing translation strategies which join the forces both outside and inside the literary world and it is possible that it will discover new knowledge.

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