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Literary History outside the Gutenberg Comfort Zone

Abstract: As this article argues, lyricism and narrativity are often expressed in non-printed or non-written forms, which as such are often marginalized in the eyes of literary scholars, even comparatists. Comparatists are institutional heirs to a philological tradition that gravitated around the Gutenberg Comfort Zone of printed literatures in the European languages and genres. But a proper understanding of world literature should reconsider not only the notion of a Western-centred world. It should also reconsider the Western-centred (print-based and modernity-directed) notion of literature, and the production-anchored (rather than diffusion-oriented) sense of literary history.

Keywords: history of philology, manuscript culture, orality, reception history, remediation, world literature

1 Introduction

The topic of this congress invited us to reflect on one of the fundamental and defining concepts of comparatism as a discipline, that of transnationalism.[1] Hugo Dyserinck, in whose department I enrolled in 1973, defined comparative literature as the discipline which, uniquely among the philologies, studied literature as a multinational phenomenon from a supranational point of view (Dyserinck 1991 [1977]). Forty-five years later, that principle still holds, although nowadays we can phrase it with the help of newer and sharper terms like "cultural transfers," "entangled histories," and correctives against "methodological nationalism" and Eurocentrism.

All of this is implied in the notion of "comparative." But what about the notion of "literature"? In the following pages, I want to consider, historically and typologically, some implicit a priori assumptions of what constitutes literature. I shall argue that our habitual understanding of it is rooted in the print culture of post-Gutenberg Europe, part of a Gutenberg modernity, and therefore uncongenial to any type of literature that is not itself part of this post-Gutenberg modernity. In particular, I want to address modes of "non-Gutenberg" literature that we

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encounter not as printed matter but as performances, not as textual objects but as textual practices. My motto here comes from the great Cuban poet-intellectual José Martí, who wrote in a poem from his *Versos sencillos* (1891):

> Todo es hermoso y constante,
> Todo es música y razón,
> Y todo, como el diamante,
> Antes que luz es carbón. (Martí 1891, 13)

> [All is marvellous and constant,
> everything is music and reason,
> and everything, like a diamond,
> before it gets to shine is coal.] (my trans.)

Martí's poem itself aspired to move from the lumpish, inky condition of printed textuality to the sparkling condition of music. Indeed, the condition of music is what made it famous: readers may know Martí's poem without realizing that they know it, for its opening stanzas, beginning with the line "Yo soy un hombre sincero," were fitted into the traditional Cuban tune called "Guantanamera." That re-mediation is a measure of its canonicity and has made its global spread possible, and this conjunction of medium and diffusion is what I want to discuss here.

How do poems on the interstice between ink and song fit into literary history, global or otherwise? This question forces us to reconsider how we write literary history in the first place, and how our way of writing literary history emerged as a fixed praxis. Before addressing the question of the history of writing literary history, let me clarify the issue further with reference to another ballad from a different part of the world and an older, premodern tradition.

2 "Dónal Óg" and Irish literary culture

The Irish-Gaelic poem called "Dónal Óg" [Young Donald] comes from the European periphery, in a language and cultural tradition which, though part and parcel of the European complex, stands in a marginal position to it. The poem itself vacillates uneasily between the media of writing and orality: it originated as a demotic ballad text in Gaelic, became famous around 1900 as a printed poem in English translation, and since c. 1960 its fame as a printed poem has reinvigorated the popularity of the oral ballad. "Live" renditions of it, impossible alas to reproduce in a printed text, can be found online on YouTube. The first stanza translates into English as follows:

> O Donal Óg, if you go across the sea,
> Take me with you, do not forget –
> And you will have a handsel on feastdays and marketdays
> And the King of Greece's daughter to share your bed.

The ballad is focalized through the lyrical subject of a young, lovelorn woman. She is hankering after her lover, the "Young Donald" after whom the poem is named, promising him comfort during the day and joy during the night. In a succession of breathless four-line stanzas, her emotional turmoil is evoked: how she pines for him; her worries that he might have left her; her plight, facing her uncomprehending mother and relatives; her desire and her dejection.

> My heart is as black as the blackness of the sloe,
> or as the black coal that is on the smith's forge;
> or as the sole of a shoe left in white halls;
> it was you put that darkness over my life.

The poem is an emotional roller-coaster ride culminating in an almost cosmic, metaphysical stanza of despair:

> You have taken the east from me; you have taken the west from me;
> You have taken what is before me and what is behind me;
> You have taken the moon, you have taken the sun from me;
> And my fear is great that you have taken God from me.[2]

The poem's raw emotional power, barely contained by its highly controlled diction and formal rhyme schemes, has made it a classic. Like many literary classics, the text allows succeeding generations of readers to encounter and recognize their own concerns, reflected and poetically heightened. Recently, the text has reached out to feminists and new-age readers; in the twentieth century, Celtic scholars were moved to find echoes of the woman's complaint, or *pastourelle*, part of the medieval-aristocratic register of *amour courtois*, surviving in the Irish popular tradition, and to see that tradition's vibrancy and literary power under English oppression.

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2 The quoted stanzas run as follows in the original: "A Dhónaill óig, má théir thar farraige, / Tabhair mé fhéin leat 's ná déan do dhearmad. / Beidh agat férín lá aonaigh 's margaidh, / 'gus iníon rí Gréige mar chéile leapan agat." – "Tá mo chroí-se chomh dubh le hairne / Nó mar ghual dubh a dhóifí i gceárta / Nó le bonn bróige ar hallaí bana / Agus tá lionn dubh mór os cionn mo gháire." – "Ó bhain tú thoir agus bhain tú thiar díom, / Bhain tú an ghealach gheal is an ghrian díom, / Bhain tú an croí seo bhí i lár mo chléibhe díom / Is nach rí-mhór é m'fhaitíos gur bhain tú Dia díom." Text quoted following Ó Tuama and Kinsella (1981, 310–312); translation following Gregory (1903, 66). On the poem and its literary-historical position, see Ó Duibhginn (1960).

For Victorians like Lady Gregory (whose translation I have quoted here), the appeal lay in its emotional intensity. Her associate, William Butler Yeats, *fin-de-siècle* aesthete that he was, fell for the scintillating imagery (among Young Donald's vain promises, bitterly recalled, are fish-skin gloves, bird-skin shoes, golden ships with silver masts, and sugar mills on every stream of Ireland). What impressed early twentieth-century readers most of all was the final stanza, which was often quoted as a synecdoche for the poem as a whole, with its recognition that intense love could not be contained within the moral restrictions of traditional Christianity. The poem has the power of embracing different meanings for different readers. But what, to recall the famous exam question, did the author intend with it?

There is no way of knowing this, since we do not know the author or even the period in which the poem came into being. For all its fame and power, Dónal Óg is surprisingly vague and amorphous when it comes to provenance. The paper trail is by now fairly cold. The oldest version recorded from oral performance dates from the 1870s (significantly, it was recorded among the Irish emigrant community in Chicago). The oldest transcriptions date from the 1820s (these are in the Hardiman Papers, Royal Irish Academy). By the mid-nineteenth century, "Dónal Óg" appears to already have been an established part of the ballad repertoire, including Scotland, which indicates a long history of diffusion. But how long?

This type of ballad form can hardly be traced back to before 1650, and the poem's despair at the condition of mortal sin and sexual guilt indicates the operative influence of the Counter-Reformation.[3] In light of this evidence, scholars halfheartedly gravitate to a tentative ballpark dating of "sometime after 1650." But fools rush in where angels fear to tread, and in the absence of a firm authoritative dating, the Internet has begun to live a life of its own. "Dónal Óg" is extremely popular on poetry websites, copied and pasted from one blog to the other, and in that echo-chamber of fact-free memes, it is now universally dated to the *eighth century* – meaning: a poem of awesome antiquity.[4]

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[3] This is how I read the final stanza (cf. Leerssen 1999). The fear that Young Donald has "taken away God" from the lyrical subject need not indicate an existentialist loss of faith but rather despair at living in a condition of mortal sin. The loss of East and West, of what is before and what is behind, echoes the Lorica prayer of St Patrick: "Christ be with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, [...] Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me."

[4] The "eighth-century" meme may be a "1066 and all that" spillover from the dating of some religious nature-poems in Gaelic that are indeed from the early Middle Ages. In anthologies these tend to be grouped alongside "Dónal Óg" and other anonymous, undatable material.

The question of dating is obviously as intractable as that of authorship and gender.[5] Intractable as those problems are, there is an even greater problem: the very textual substance is amorphous. The poem as it stands in this particular version is a rather haphazard collection of individual stanzas, some of which are also encountered as part of other poems, and some of which may have drifted into this particular poem from other sources. Variants and different versions exist, giving a different order of stanzas or including alternative stanzas. Accordingly, some versions foreground the young woman's desire, and other versions emphasize her despair. "Dónal Óg" is variable, shape-shifting, a fleeting shadow in different shapes, formats, and periods.[6]

We are on firmer ground when we trace not the origin but the reception history of "Dónal Óg" and how it acquired its canonical stature in twentieth-century literary culture. Its fame began with Augusta (Lady) Gregory (1852–1932), an important author of the Irish Literary Revival and a close associate of William Butler Yeats. She gave a printed translation ("Grief of a Young Girl's Heart") in her essay-*cum*-anthology *Poets and Dreamers* of 1902, and it was her English version that hit the reading public. *Poets and Dreamers* was reprinted repeatedly; "Dónal Óg" was included in other collections by Lady Gregory and others, and emulated through echoing citations and recyclings by the other leading personalities of the Irish Literary Revival, sometimes following Gregory, sometimes competing with her. As a result, it is now a staple of anthologies. Its hypercanonicity was confirmed when it was included in John Huston's 1987 film adaptation of James Joyce's *The Dead* – something which is true to the spirit and the time-setting (1904) of Joyce's story, though not part of the original – and in a way shoehorned into the narrative. Tellingly, it is recited rather than sung, as a philological specimen, and troubles the genteel company with its emotional intensity:

> THE HOSTESS. And now, let us have a recitation! Mr Grace, would you beguile us yet again?
> *(Mr Grace moves to the front of the drawing-room under applause from the guests.)*

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5 The fact that the lyrical subject is female and the genre is that of the "young woman's complaint" means that the ballad is now predominantly (though by no means exclusively) performed by female singers and directed at a female audience; but the fact that the author is unknown and probably non-individual means also that the author's gender is as moot as the date of his/her/their *floruit*.

6 Among "folk" performers, such problems of variants and variability are well known. YouTube gives samples of many different versions of "Dónal Óg." One website among many discussing different variants is http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=14957 (17 August 2020), based on the *Digital Tradition Folk Song Database*.

MR GRACE. Ladies and gentlemen, I had intended doing a comic recitation for you this evening, but I came across something recently that I would very much like to pass onto you. It is called "Broken Vows."
(Mr Grace recites six stanzas from "Dónal Óg"; camera alternates between his recitation and the increasingly awed, uncomfortable faces of the guests, ending with a close-up of Gretta Conroy's moved expression.)
(Silence, no applause.)
MR GRACE. It's a translation from the Irish, by Lady Gregory.
THE HOSTESS, *breaking the silence.* Very strange – but beautiful.
(Various guests now express their appreciation, mainly the females.)[7]

Here, as in Martí's "Yo soy un hombre sincero," the non-print re-mediation is both an indicator and consolidator of literary canonicity.

In the decades since Huston's film accolade, Irish literary history has made giant strides forward; two benchmark publications being the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Deane 1991) and the *Cambridge History of Irish Literature* (Kelleher and O'Leary 2006). Both of these aimed to be inclusive (running to three and two massive volumes, respectively), encompassing English, Latin, and Gaelic-language traditions, and covering many genres, including popular balladry, over many centuries.

What is truly astounding is that in both these standard surveys with their many thousands of pages, "Dónal Óg" does not receive a mention. Too literary to be discussed as folklore, too oral and too chimerical to be discussed as literature, the acknowledged crown jewel of Gaelic-Irish lyricism quite simply slipped through the editorial cracks, failing to hit the radar screen in any of the different sections or chapters which compartmentalize the complex literary landscape of Ireland over the last centuries. The poem was picked up, I should add, in the substantial two-volume extension of the *Field Day Anthology* specifically thematizing "Irish women's writing and traditions" (Bourke 2002). That extension was provoked belatedly, almost as an afterthought, by the gender blind-spot in the original three-volume enterprise. In this extension, the poem is covered, but grouped into a section called "The Song Tradition" (dedicated to ballad performances by women), and presented as the performance of a singer in 1970. The provenance of the text is unimportant here. The editors in their notes date the text to the accepted ballpark "after 1650" and describe it as a group effort, the end result of a long process of collective shaping and polishing. In this presentation, the editors are in fact follow-

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7 The fragment is online on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgl-28nYB2Q (7 August 2020).

ing the approach already taken by the first translator, Lady Gregory, who states she got the text from oral recitation, and comments:[8]

> There are some verses in it that attain to the intensity of great poetry, though I think less by the creation of one than by the selection of many minds; the peasants who have sung or recited their songs from one generation to another, having instinctively sifted away by degrees what was trivial, and kept only what was real, for it is in this way the foundations of literature are laid. (Gregory 1903, 54; 261)

Gregory already implies what my comments so far have documented: practically everything that could be sensibly said of "Dónal Óg" belongs not to its substance or historical origin, but to its track record, its ongoing reception history, from the earliest transcriptions of the 1820s to the recent Internet memes. "Dónal Óg" only exists as a function of its reception. There is no there there.

3 Textual variability, textual historicity

Texts like "Dónal Óg" are unclassifiable in the rubrics of traditional literary history, and quite unlike *Pride and Prejudice* or *Heart of Darkness.* They exist only as an ongoing, fluid praxis very much like that of the folktale as analysed by Roman Jakobson and Pyotr Bogatyrev: as a bandwidth of performative variability.[9] Haun Saussy followed this line of reasoning in his insightful *Ethnography of Rhythm: Orality and its Technologies*:

> The criteria for authorship, authenticity, and consistency, and what counts as a doublet, a gap or an interpolation, differ once we are circulating in the domain of oral style. The tags of earlier and later, original and copy, author and nonauthor, fade away in an economy of mutually substitutable parts and traditional lines of thought. Orality stands in a different dimension of time. (Saussy 2016, 200)

However, the collectivity and *Nacheinander* of performativity eludes capture in the individuated, static *Nebeneinander* of written accounts (as my tortuous references to YouTube have shown when drawing on performative illustrations); but the radically "unanchored" variability of texts like "Dónal Óg," and their resistance to historiographical rubrication, is not merely a function of their orality. Nor would I like

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8 Gregory called the text "Grief of a Girl's Heart" and gave it as a prose translation; later anthologies rearranged her text into the now current stanza form.

9 Jakobson and Bogatyrov's 1929 work places, it will be recalled, oral texts in a structuralist *langue–parole* relationship, between a tale's/ballad's ideal-typical motif structure (quasi as a *sjužet*) and its palette of actual, variable actualizations (as performative *fabulae*).

to make "orality" a general term for whatever has failed to be textually contained. Textual fluidity is also a defining feature of manuscript culture – of which "Dónal Óg," with its traditions of different transcriptions, is also part. Indeed, performance and textual transcription coexist in what we might consider a two-phase model of diffusion and condensation. In historical transmission, transcriptions underwrite performances and performances are captured as written, printed, or documented precipitates (ranging from commonplace notebooks to broadsheets to anthologies and, these days, to websites). Whatever textual variants exist result from the cycling back and forth between ink and sparkle, between what Mukařovský would have called objects and actualizations. As Walter J. Ong already pointed out: "Texts can represent all sorts of different adjustments to orality–literacy polarities. Manuscript culture in the West was always marginally oral, and even after print textuality only gradually achieved the place it has today" (Ong 2002 [1972], 154).

Indeed, even in print culture, textual variability is by no means a failure to maintain the ideal stability and identity of the text, but rather part and parcel of the ontological condition of how texts perpetuate their presence through time and disseminate themselves across space. For Paul Zumthor, medieval texts were always "unfinished business," in perpetual development; a condition he termed *mouvance.* More recently, Bernard Cerquiglini in his *Éloge de la variante* has vindicated this open-ended variability against the philologists' retroactive imposition of post-medieval standards of textual closure. Textual variants were not what we have come to consider them today: problematic digressions from textual integrity. On the contrary, variants are themselves the default, normal condition of literary life. Cerquiglini's analysis follows Ong and Zumthor in seeing the advent of print culture as a game-changer, creating a fixation on textual fixity. The printing process imposed the necessity of achieving a definitive closure on typesetting before proceeding to the page-printing stage, and hence a concern with a definitive text – cast in lead, as it were.[10]

This tallies with the fact that print culture generates the rise of what Michel Foucault calls the author-function: the author as the text's primary brand and organizing criterion.

> Texts with a "literary" status can only be read when furnished with an author-function. Each poetic or fictional text will be exposed to the question of where it comes from, who wrote it, at what date, under which circumstances, with what motivation. The text's meaning, status, and

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10 Zumthor 1972; Cerquiglini 1989; also Hult 1991; and cf. Ong 2002 [1972], 128.

value depend on the answers to those questions. [...] Literary anonymity is deeply irksome to us, and we can only accept it by way of enigma.[11] (Foucault 1994 [1969], 800; my trans.)

Whereas manuscript culture would organize its codices thematically, each codex being essentially an anthology of texts put together for whatever reasons were operative in a given scribal situation, print will gravitate towards textual identification by title and authors. Within a century after the invention of print, we get the first *Opera omnia* editions, rubricating collections of texts under the name of their common author. Print culture soon generates a paratextual coating that identifies texts by title, author, and also date of printing.[12] These then become the three primary rubrics which allow librarians and historians to classify and order texts, pegging them down by author and date, and thus imposing a chronology of production. Any text that lacks an author and date (like "Dónal Óg") becomes in essence unclassifiable for the type of literary history that develops after Gutenberg – it is like a lost data cluster without a filename on a corrupted hard disk, or a library book misplaced on the wrong shelf and without a proper call number.

This is the deeper reason why "Dónal Óg" was able to escape the editorial notice of two great literary-historical surveys. Almost unavoidably, the study of literature after Gutenberg gravitates to identifiable texts, meaning texts with known authors whose identities link their various works mutually and whose biographies place those texts in the light of what is known about their lives. The text's individual qualities will be outlined against the background of the author's working conditions. In historiographical practice, that usually takes the form of a master narrative highlighting the author's innovative creativity against the *re-*

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11 In the original: "Mais les discours 'littéraires' ne peuvent plus être reçus que dotés de la fonction auteur: à tout texte de poésie ou de fiction on demandera d'où il vient, qui l'a écrit, à quelle date, en quelles circonstances ou à partir de quel projet. Le sens qu'on lui accorde, le statut ou la valeur qu'on lui reconnaît dépendent de la manière dont on répond à ces questions. [...] L'anonymat littéraire ne nous est pas supportable; nous ne l'acceptons qu'à titre d'énigme." DeLooze stresses medieval practices of authorial self-naming, i.e. deliberate non-anonymity (DeLooze 1991).

12 It seems relevant to highlight the paratextual identifiers of title and date alongside the name and identity of the author. In the case of "Dónal Óg," we have seen how English adaptations foreclosed the poem's meaning by imposing emotionally dirigistic titles like "Grief of a Young Girl's Heart" or "Broken Vows." The Gaelic title, such as it is, derives from the opening words, which are only its opening words in a certain specific stanza arrangement; and, as rendered here, it follows a recent orthographical standard – any pre-1945 text would have spelled Donald's Gaelic name as "Domhnall" rather than "Dónal." Thus, the poem's lack of a pre-inscribed title is radical rather than incidental or anecdotal, and forms part and parcel of its textual fluidity and historical elusiveness.

poussoir of the conventions of the time. The individual identifiability of texts is part of a historicist logic of artistic progress.

4 The rise of writing literary history and the edges of the Gutenberg Comfort Zone

There is, in fact, a prototype of such a history dating from these very decades; it comes from the world of Renaissance art. Giorgio Vasari's proud proclamation of Renaissance values, the *Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors from Cimabue to our Own Times Described in the Tuscan Language* (1550), traces, with unabashed, triumphalist self-celebration, how from Cimabue to Michelangelo, pupils surpassed their masters, how techniques were transgenerationally lifted to ever higher planes of achievement, and how the Renaissance bootstrapped itself out of what became known, in the process, as the Middle Ages or Dark Ages.

This deep-seated paradigm also informed other fields of historiography, not least literary history. Even in the title of Dr Johnson's *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets, with Critical Observations on their Works* (1781), we see the presiding genius of Vasari. Other literary histories were similarly organized on bio-bibliographical lines, inventorizing the record under the new dispensation of print culture and ordering it by authorship and date; examples include the multi-volume, long-running, and still-ongoing *Histoire littéraire de la France* by the Maurist Benedictines (1733–), Jean-Noël Paquot's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire littéraire des dix-sept provinces des Pays-Bas* (1764), and Erduin Julius Koch's *Compendium der deutschen Literatur-Geschichte* (1790). Meanwhile, "Dónal Óg" was acquiring its unobtrusive currency in the ballad repertoire. By 1815, Gaelic-Irish literature was drawn into this bio-bibliographical regime of early literary history. Charles O'Conor and Edward O'Reilly performed their first inventories of ancient Irish writers at the very moment the first manuscript transcriptions of "Dónal Óg" were made: the former in his *Rerum hibernicarum scriptores veteres* (1814), the latter in his *Chronological Account of Nearly Four Hundred Irish Writers* (1820). The predication of these works on authors' identities and a chronological order of production dates is captured in the titles chosen for them.

A new way of studying literature, less predicated on bio-bibliographical author-lists, emerged between 1770 and 1830. We may broadly characterize it as a shift from an antiquarian mode to a philological one. The new philologies emerged, giving the various "modern languages" or "national literatures" an equal standing with the classics, and in turn necessitating a transnational counterpoise called com-

parative literature. The process began somewhere around 1770 (when Herder attacked Enlightenment universalism) and crystallized around 1825, when Goethe fought his rearguard actions for literary cosmopolitanism.

The historical dynamics of this period are extremely complex: a number of intellectual and institutional changes coincided in time and reinforced each other's impetus and impact. These include the reorganization of the libraries and archives of the European states; the rediscovery of medieval manuscripts in these reorganized libraries; the Indo-European linguistic paradigm organized around Sanskrit; the rise of historicism and national conservatism (in response to the rapid revolutionary changes of the period); the rebooting of the European university system after Humboldt; the academic professionalization of the pursuits of history-writing and literary study; and the second print revolution, which hugely raised the quantity of print production, lowered its cost, and magnified its social penetration (Leerssen 2004a).

This cluster of revolutionary changes all happened in these same decades, and it meant that a lot of new sources were coming to attention which failed to fit into the bio-bibliographical paradigm or what may be called the Gutenberg Comfort Zone (fig. 1). This material included oral sources, rediscovered ancient manuscripts predating the rise of print culture, and non-European texts.
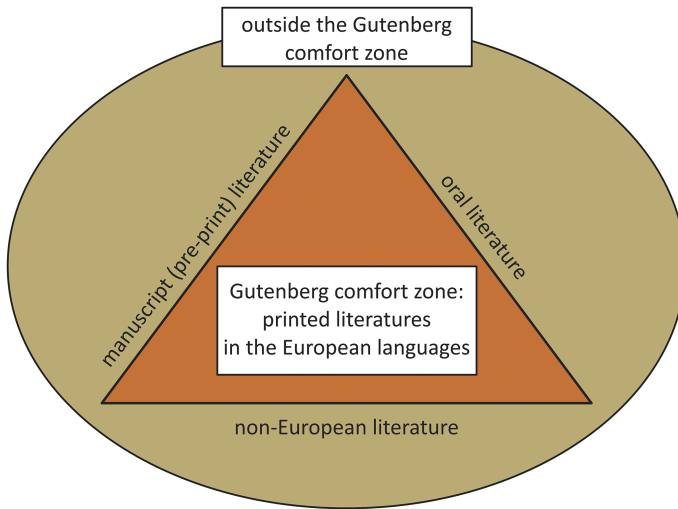

Fig. 1: The Gutenberg comfort zone and its limits.

Let me begin with the importance of oral sources: balladry, either taken down from performative recitation or else edited from earlier transcriptions. Scholarly interest in anonymous balladry began with Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765)

and Herder's *Volkslieder* (1778–1779), and led to Arnim and Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805–1808) and the folk and fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm (1812). From there the vogue affected all of Europe, and indeed, later in the century, beyond. The "Grimm ripples" reached Ireland with the work of Thomas Crofton Croker (*Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, 1825–1827), a decade after the literary histories of O'Conor and O'Curry. It was an adept of Croker, James Hardiman, who noted down one of the earliest transcriptions of "Dónal Óg."

This oral material was not always a sentimental type of rusticism. There was also a sense that older balladry might be heroic, tragic, or even epic in scope, as well as providing a type of literary archaeology. Macpherson's *Ossian* had in the 1760s transmuted orally collected balladry from the Scottish Highlands into archaeological fragments of an allegedly ancient Homeric-style epic. That claim, though soon debunked, had set people thinking. Other material of an epic or tragic nature was appearing, such as the Croatian *Hasanaginica*, which found its way into Herder's anthology in Goethe's translation; it was definitely in the tragic-sublime style. The Grimm-inspired Serbian fieldwork of Vuk Karadžić supported the idea that the registers of epic and orality were not altogether divorced, and that something like "oral epic" was conceivable. (Wolff 2012; Leerssen 2004b, 2012a).

At the same time, philologists were beginning to realize that even written epics could have an oral gestation period: Homer was now seen not as a Big-Bang primordial genius coming out of nowhere but as the summarizing agency codifying an older oral, rhapsodic tradition of formulaic balladry.

Thirdly, forgotten epics were being rediscovered all over Europe: the *Nibelungenlied*, *Beowulf*, the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Lay of Prince Igor's Campaign*: all these made their print debut in literary circulation in editions appearing between 1800 and 1836. Every nation was revealed to have its own primordial original epic. Where there were no manuscripts to be found in attics, they were either forged (as in the Czech case of the "Bohemian manuscripts" "discovered" by Vaclav Hanka in 1817–1818) or else assembled out of oral material (as in the Finnish *Kalevala*).

The bewildering number of publications name-checked here may give an idea of how very complex and turbulent the historical dynamics of this period were: a perfect storm of concurrent changes affecting all of Europe; the turbulent primal soup out of which our discipline, comparative literature, would emerge (Leerssen 2012b, 2015).[13]

What was relatively untroubled by all this welter of change and transition was the discovery of non-European literary traditions. This was a much more

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13 Remarkably, this process affected, more or less simultaneously, very dissimilar countries with very dissimilar socio-political regimes: some still feudal monarchies or empires with serf-

steady process, taking place under its own steam; it had begun well before the tipping point of 1770–1830, and continued across and after it. A highly useful survey by Ritchie Robertson lists, in the century before Goethe translated Hafiz and coined the idea of *Weltliteratur*, translations such as: *Arabian Nights* (Antoine Galland, 1704–1717); *Zafanarma* (Pétis de la Croix, 1722); the Koran (George Sale, 1734); *Haoqiu Zhuan* (*The Pleasing History*; Wilkinson and Percy, 1761); the *Zend-Avesta* (Anquetil-Duperron, 1771); the *Bhagavadgita* (Charles Wilkins, 1785); *Sakuntala* (William Jones, 1789); *Kalila and Dimna* (*The Fables of Bidpai*; Knatchbull, 1819); and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (Macan 1829) (Robertson 2015).

The discovery of a world literature beyond the European canon was a steady, century-long process, starting with what Paul Hazard already called a *crise de la conscience européenne*. Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* of 1819 and his proclamation of *Weltliteratur* are in a way the closure of a century of literary globalization. The titles mentioned here are each of them tips of an iceberg involving the reworking of texts in other European languages, adaptations, and spin-offs. Schubert was engaged in an opera called *Sakuntala,* and the famous Turandot story can be traced back from Schiller's and Carlo Gozzi's versions to a Persian tale collection translated, or perhaps concocted, by the orientalist Pétis de la Croix in 1710, *Les Mille et un jours* (*Hazar u Yek Ruz*). As the theme of Turandot already indicates, much of this material became a popular source of inspiration for nineteenth-century art, such as opera: alongside the national nativism of Wagner's *Ring*, we have the exoticism of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* and Puccini's *Turandot*. Again, re-mediation is a central modality of appropriation.

5 World literature between the new philologies and folklore

While "world literature" was unaffected by the arrival of the new philologies, the non-European material was classified along the taxonomic lines which were operative at the time: either as belonging to the world of oral repertoire (such as the

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dom, others already industrializing middle-class societies. To account for this simultaneity, a network analysis of the intellectuals involved appears to be the most promising approach. Men like Walter Scott and Jacob Grimm were central actors, and were in touch, either directly or through at most one intermediary, with most of the European scholars involved, from Iceland to Greece. The Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms has undertaken a network analysis on the basis of correspondence and letter-exchanges, visualizations of which may be consulted online at http://ernie.uva.nl (18 August 2020).

Arabian Nights), and hence close to folklore, or else belonging to the world of primeval epic (such as the *Shahnameh*), and as such part of a subsisting category of "ancient" literature.

The category of "ancient" literature had been all-dominant before 1790, as the bedrock of biblical and classical antiquity, overlaid by the modern period after an intervening entr'acte of the "Dark Middle Ages." The new philologies differentiated the modern period into nationally distinct vernacular traditions; these reached back into their medieval roots and originary epics (*Nibelungenlied, Beowulf*, etc.), to abut on "ancient" literature at an uneasily conceptualized event horizon (fig. 2).
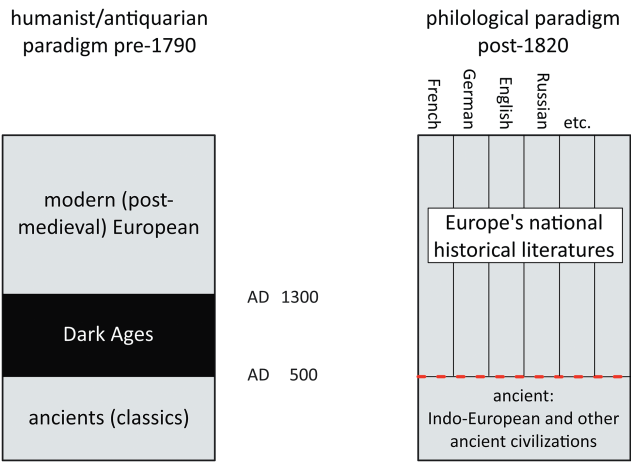

Fig. 2: Antiquarian and philological modes of situating modern European literature(s) globally and chronologically.

To be sure, this model was primarily applied to the modern literatures of Europe, with the non-European literatures largely relegated to a pre-existing, ahistorical container category together with the classics and Biblical Hebrew. The notion of "world literature" as a result combined two asymmetrical canons: a historical, vernacular-European hypercanon and an ahistorically ancient, globally non-Western one. The division now was no longer between ancient and modern literature, but rather between ancient and national literatures; in this model, historicity was predicated to the national traditions of Europe while the rest of the world was either prehistorical or ahistorical.

Thus, the new philologists continued to gravitate around the Gutenberg Comfort Zone, concentrating their focus and activities on *printed literatures in the European languages*. And that comfort zone is still where most of us are happily dwelling.

6 Gutenberg anxieties I: The tangled roots of ancient epics (*Reynard*)

But the new model had a problematic edge between its two asymmetrical halves: how literatures turned from ancient into historical. Two specialisms in particular had to confront problematic material around the edges of the Gutenberg Comfort Zone: the scholars dealing with ancient epic, and the medievalists dealing with the transition from epic to romance. They ran into problems, and in both cases developed a highly interesting way of dealing with those problems.

Ancient epics had a high national prestige, but they were often contested between different successor nations. No single author had written this stuff, so how could any one country claim that it, and no other country, was the true heir to a given ancient epic? Which modern country "owned" *Beowulf* or the Edda? The question was misguided but unavoidable in the nationalist climate of the time, and sparked many a literary-appropriation conflict.

The most telling example of such national-historical antagonism is the feud over who could rightfully claim *Reynard the Fox* (Leerssen 2015). In various new editions and retellings, Reynard was a runaway success in these Romantic decades, and seemed to belong to a variety of literatures. Manuscripts were discovered and edited in many European languages: first in French, then in Latin, German, Flemish, and Low German. After a latency period between 1500 and 1750, all these different variants found their way into printed literary circulation by means of manuscript rediscoveries, editions, and adaptations (fig. 3).

The multilingual sightings of the wily fox led to various conflicting appropriations. Against the French claims that their *Roman de Renart* was the oldest transmitted text, Jacob Grimm argued that the names of the protagonists, Reynard, Isengrimus, Hersinde, and so on, were patently Germanic rather than Romance forms, indicating a Frankish-Germanic origin. The fact that the Reynard material has come down in a very tangled textual descent kept the quarrel going for the entire nineteenth century.

And so, the new national philologies collided with their own event horizon: precisely the materials which were the most highly valorized were also the most elusive and unclassifiable. Indeed, the reason why such ancient materials were so highly valorized was precisely their anonymity, undatability, and even their textually shape-shifting substance. This was a sign at the same time of a text's great antiquity and of its unmediated proximity to the collective *Volksgeist* of the national community. We also notice this when Jacob Grimm attempted to dispute the French claim to seniority in the *Reynard the Fox* claims court. The true origins, he argued, must lie deeper than the known names of the medieval authors

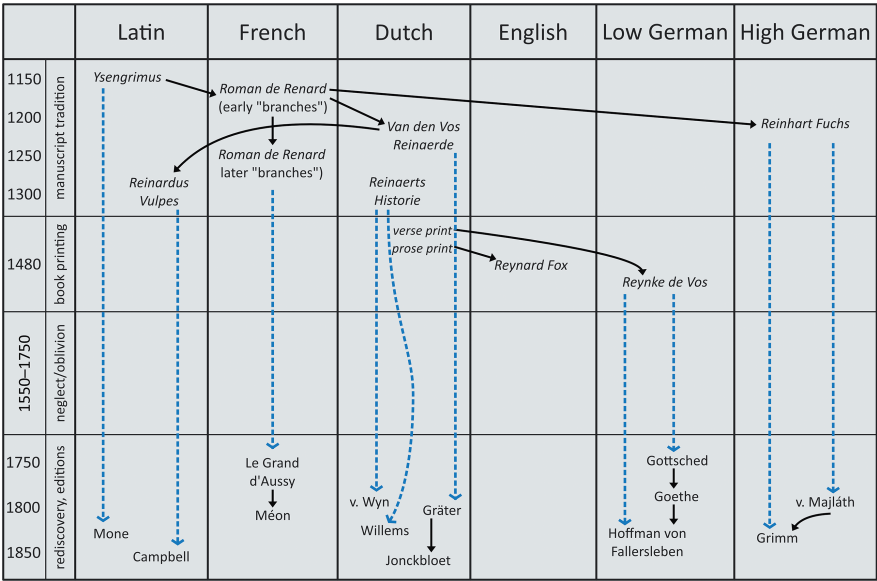|		Latin	French	Dutch	English	Low German	High German
1150	manuscript tradition	Ysengrimus	Roman de Renard (early "branches")				
1200				Van den Vos Reinaerde			Reinhart Fuchs
1250			Roman de Renard later "branches")				
1300		Reinardus Vulpes		Reinaerts Historie			
1480	book printing			verse print prose print	Reynard Fox	Reynke de Vos	
1550–1750	neglect/oblivion						
1750	rediscovery, editions		Le Grand d'Aussy			Gottsched	
1800			Méon	v. Wyn Gräter		Goethe	v. Majláth
1850		Mone Campbell		Willems Jonckbloet		Hoffman von Fallersleben	Grimm

Fig. 3: Medieval variants of the Reynard material and their later print editions.

like Pierre de St.-Cloud or Marie de France (fig. 5). Grimm preferred to explain the wide variety of versions from a collective, oral reservoir of semi-mythical, early-tribal animal tales.

This is where Grimm's unusual multiple talents come to the fore: more than any other scholar of his generation, he was equally at home in the study of written and oral literature. We have noted how the philologists of the period, since Percy and Herder, had been confronted with the importance of balladry, popular poetry, and folk tales; but no one was more innovative than Grimm in placing that material on the philological agenda. He was, after all, the man of folk and fairy tales, German legends, German mythology. In these folkloristic and ethnographical pursuits, Grimm showed a wide-ranging desire to collect tales in all their variability, without any need to reduce them to a master text. It was the entire diversity of variants that intrigued him, with each version as interesting as any other. While Grimm was nothing if not a German chauvinist when it came to written literature, he was in fact much more open-minded when it came to oral material.

In fact, Grimm was more than ready to see oral transmission as something that transcended ethnic borders and that embraced a world greater than just the Germanic race or Europe. In his study of *Reynard the Fox*, he inventorized a narrative *matière* beyond the French–German quarrels in which he was such a stalwart combatant.
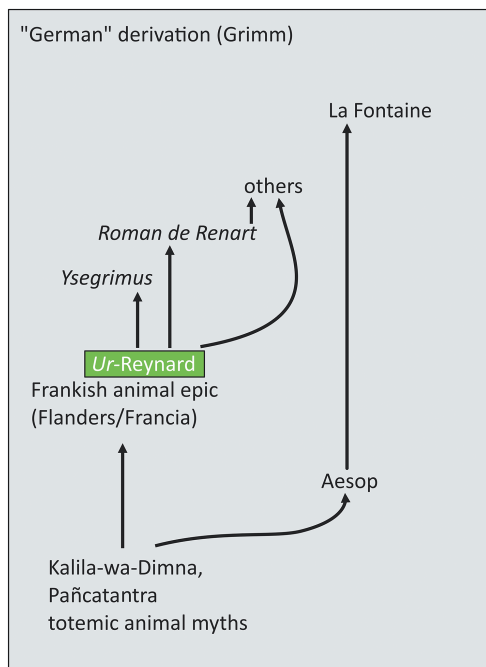
Fig. 4: Reynard *matière* according to Jacob Grimm.

The animal fable, he recognized, derived not just from Aesop or from his putative Frankish-Germanic myths, but from a much deeper and broader mainspring, including Estonian bear fables, the Arabian *Kalila and Dimna* tales, and the Indian *Pañcatantra* (fig. 4). The fact that Grimm sees the Reynard fable as rooted in oral-collective practices allows him to transcend the mutually exclusive national appropriations and even to situate the shifting *sjužet* in a transnational and trans-European cultural ambience. By being rooted in an oral tradition, Reynard is part of world literature.

This trans-European view would continue to dominate the comparatist study of ancient epic. We can think of the comparative work of scholars like H. M. Posnett, the remarkable Cambridge couple Hector and Nora Chadwick, and the Russians Aleksandr Veselovskij (who identified Byzantium as an important transmission zone between the oriental and European literary spheres) and Viktor Žirmunskij. To be sure, their work was undertaken in an imperial-ethnographic worldview characterized by stadialism and still dealing with non-European epic as a form of literary archaeology rather than literary history. Furthermore, the Russian tradition of Veselovskij and Žirmunskij was etiolated under the Stalinist mistrust of studying
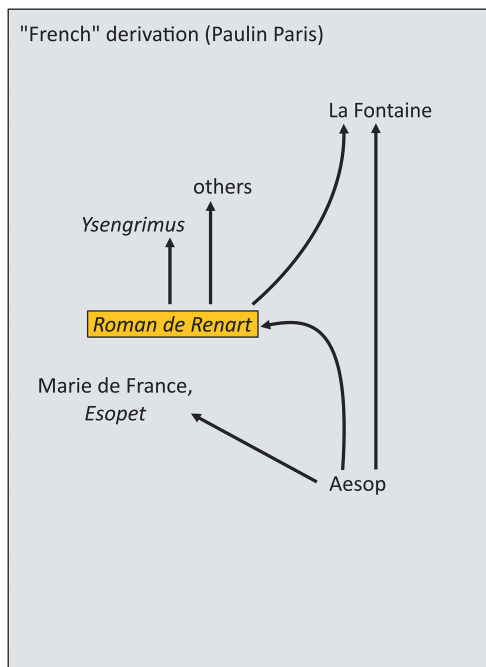
Fig. 5: Reynard matière according to Paulin Paris.

cultural transfers and influences historically (something decried as "formalism" and interpreted as a propensity to bourgeois cosmopolitanism). Žirmunskij, as we know, foreswore "comparativism" during the anti-formalist Ždanov purges of 1948, and abandoned historical questions in favour of typological and ethnographical models; and in the Cold War, such work did not mesh with the writing of literary history that went on in the West.

Even so, the point remains, and is still worth reflecting on, that the study of non-print literature appears to open up a wider, more trans-European and "global" field of vision than the study of print literatures in the modern European languages. Oral and non-print material, be it epic, myth, or folk tale, appears to enjoy a wider and more effortless mode of transnational dissemination than that afforded by print-culture modernity. We know this from the modern non-print media; but it appears to apply to the pre-Gutenberg ones as well. And in fact, some of the best nineteenth-century philologists, like Jacob Grimm and Gaston Paris, showed themselves sensitive to this paradox.

7 Gutenberg anxieties II: The global roots of love

The question of *amour courtois* (tender amorous emotion suddenly inspiring European literature after 1200, and still exercising a major influence on the literary imagination and literary register of the lyric) was an ongoing issue among medievalists ever since the days of Gaston Paris (1839–1903; pupil of Jacob Grimm's pupil Friedrich Diez, and son of Jacob Grimm's adversary Paulin Paris) (Hult 1996; Zink 1996).

The rise of love lyricism in European poetry is part of what Norbert Elias calls the civilizing process, which crucially involves taming the heroic macho aggression of older warrior heroes (Achilles or Siegfried) into something called courtesy. How did Beowulf turn into Sir Galahad? How did berserker warriors turn into chivalric gentlemen? How, in sum, did epic develop into romance? When did troubadours develop an idea called *fin' amor*, something that Dante would call the *dolce stil novo*?

It may well have been the echo of Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*, and his channelling of Hafiz, which alerted Gaston Paris and his medievalist tradition to the possibility of a cultural transfer from the Persian and Arabic traditions. Paris himself, the man who coined the concept of *amour courtois*, debunked older hypotheses by focusing on the experiences of the crusader William of Aquitaine, one of the earliest troubadour poets, and allowed for the possibility that the Crusader presence in the Middle East formed not just a geopolitical battlefield but also a cultural interface. This idea of a transfer from the world of Islam into Europe has remained in force, although more recent theories have moved their focus from the Crusader Kingdoms to al-Andalus and Moorish Spain. Here, early influences of amorous poetry are found in the Galician *cancioneiros* and their *cantar de amigo* poems, and in the figure of Alfonso el Sabio, another aristocratic courtly love troubadour. This is supported by the fact that Alfonso also sponsored a translation of Arabic *Kalila and Dimna* tales. (Menocal 1994; Nykl 1946).

There is something seductive in this. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, Irish critics have interpreted "Dónal Óg" as a late, popularized manifestation of *pastourelle* lyricism imported from the European *amour courtois* tradition (Ó Tuama 1978); apparently, that source tradition has antecedents reaching beyond the confines of Europe. Be that as it may, it again alerts us to the fact that once we leave the restrictive ambience of print-culture historicism, and the national-historical categories imposed on us by the Gutenberg regime, we become able by the same token also to transcend that wider methodological nationalism called Eurocentrism.[14]

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14 An inspiring recent example is Beecroft (2015).

8 Conclusions

Those philologists and comparatists who have worked on earlier, pre-Gutenberg periods have always shown a relative openness to wider, trans-European patterns: medievalists, scholars of ancient epic, and, in recent decades increasingly so, classical scholars. None of them, however, has been able to match the breadth of vision of the folklorists studying oral literature. It seems to me that the only scholarly tradition which has addressed this crux flexibly and sensibly is that other descendant of the Grimm years: folklore, and the study of oral literature. No anxieties here over anonymity, variability, or the lack of a datable moment of genesis: all that scholars have to go by is morphology and at best a history of diffusion. Remarkably enough, in this much more fluid scheme, globalization is not a pious injunction but an obvious starting point. By the late nineteenth century, folklore commentary on the Grimms' fairy tales was already adducing analogues and parallels from all societies and storytelling traditions worldwide. And one of the most triumphant achievements in the study of global literature is, ironically, hardly ever on the radar of comparatists at all. It began as a morphological motif analysis of folk tales, not unlike the narrative morphology attempted in 1928 by Vladimir Propp on the basis of Afanas'ev's Russian fairy-tale collection. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, that foundational text of narratology, is of course a comparatist classic; less celebrated is the fact that in the same year, 1928, Stith Thompson published *The Types of the Folktale*. It was the English translation of a work written in German in 1910 by the Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne: *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen mit Hülfe von Fachgenossen*. *The Types of the Folktale* was republished in 1961 with a classified rubrication system of narrative motifs, and has since become a benchmark for folklore studies worldwide; since its latest revision by Hans-Jörg Uter it is now usually known as the Aarne–Thompson–Uter (or ATU) index. What must impress comparatists (those who do not ignore it, that is) is its truly worldwide taxonomy of narrative tropes and functions, dwarfing our own efforts to come up with a global typology of a genre like the novel. How fatuous is it, comparatists should ask themselves, to develop notions of world literature wholly from within the Gutenberg Comfort Zone, and in apparent heedlessness of anything like the ATU index? Our blind-spot in this regard seems to me to be the result of a regrettable methodological bifurcation between ink literature and non-ink literature, and an ingrained reliance on the textual fixities provided by the author-function and datability.

What conclusions offer themselves on this basis? To begin with: we may want to question our implicit assumption, derived from the world history of technology and economics, that Western modernity is coterminous with globalization. On the contrary, the case outlined here suggests, counter-intuitively and paradox-

ically, that in cultural and literary circulation, the pre- and postmodern media, from orality to cinema and the Internet, allow for a wider transcultural circulation of texts than did the Gutenberg print media (which on the contrary played into a trend of national compartmentalization and Eurocentrism). It is distortive to derive our notions of "world literature" from the Gutenberg Comfort Zone of Europe's nineteenth-century philologists, or to see "world literature" in Nobel-Prize terms – as the Champions League of all those authors worldwide who have achieved status in a Europe-rooted system of print literature.

It would be exciting to liberate our notion of literature and its historicity from two implicit restrictions. One is that the historicity of literature is by default the chronology of literary production. The opposite is true. Texts come to life only after they have left the hands of their authors. It is then only that their coal turns to diamond, their lumpishness to sparkle. Ann Rigney has called this the pro-creativity of texts, their capacity to procreate, to go forth and multiply, to spark off other creative moments in the course of their career. She accordingly focuses on what she calls the "afterlife" or "social life" of texts. In her *Afterlives of Walter Scott*, for instance, Rigney traces the ramifying, self-propelling career path of Scott's imaginative historicism, not just to historical novels elsewhere or into theatrical and operatic adaptations, but wider still: from Highland tourism to the fiery crosses of the Ku Klux Klan, from Bankim Chandra Chatterji to historical re-enactment societies. It would not do to subsume this under the traditional rubric of Scott's "influence" or a reception history, because the afterlife of Scott's novels is traced not just beyond its moment and country of origin, but also beyond its genre of origin, combining the mode of transnationalism with that of intermediality (Rigney 2012). At the same time, such a reception history works with datably documented events in historical time, not just with genres and motifs emerging timelessly, as per the Chadwicks or Žirmunskij, from their anthropological and societal subsoil.

Part of the social life of texts is, as we have seen in many instances, their power of re-mediation. This intermediality is in itself a challenge to the ingrained notion of letting literary studies gravitate to the genres that became dominant after the invention of print, with an emphasis on the novel, theatre, and poetry. These are not the only genres in which our culture can find expression in narrative, dramatic, or lyric form. Other genres range from travel- and history-writing to TV series, folk ballads, and comic strips; or, in a more ancient world, stained-glass windows, mosaics, and manuscript illuminations. The true marker of the procreativity of any given work is its power to negotiate the entire gamut of available genres and media.

What is exciting, in the case of "Guantanamera," "Dónal Óg," or the afterlives of Scott's novels, is not so much where they came from as where they went to. That cultural afterlife, surfing from one medium or genre to another, will be as effortlessly transnational as the narrative of the wily fox. It will easily cross borders and

with only a few intermediary steps establish cultural shortcuts between very different societies. And its precipitation into print is only a stepping-stone along the way.[15]

The cultural life of texts takes place in a truly global, swirling dynamics of communicative exchanges and adaptations.[16] It is this cultural life of texts that brings together the most disparate readerships in a web of inspiration and appreciation, into a polyamorous *Weltliteratur* that would have gladdened Goethe's heart. Of course, the rapid adjustment of cultural production and cultural dissemination to a globalizing post-Gutenberg dispensation has not gone unnoticed by comparatists (Saussy 2006), and indeed this ICLA conference was a sign of that. But comparatists may have to query their ingrained Gutenberg-based assumptions and working methods at a more fundamental level than merely by reviving the notion of *Weltliteratur* in post-colonial terms: as the appropriation of print literature and of Western-canonical genres (novel, theatre, poetry) by post-colonial actors. A true globalization of comparative literature will challenge the primacy of the printed literary media, of production history over reception history, of ink literature over non-ink literature, and will compound the complexity of a transnational approach with that of an intermedial one. Does that challenge amount to yet another "crisis" of comparative literature – such as they tend to be proclaimed with almost comical regularity? I do not think so; to me it looks much more like a really exciting and energizing prospect.

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15 It is instructive in this regard to consider the discussions around the granting of the Nobel Prize to Bob Dylan in 2016: this was the first time that this European accolade from within the very heart of the Gutenberg Comfort Zone was given to a literary practitioner whose work relies crucially on its performativity and non-print dissemination. Those who would see Dylan's lyrics as purely textual-verbal constructs will, quite rightly so, query their literary merit and the wisdom of awarding a Nobel Prize to a pop celebrity on that slim achievement. But the argument cuts both ways: an exclusive emphasis on verbal textuality truncates the importance and powerful appeal of Dylan's songs as, precisely, songs, primarily disseminated in non-print form.

16 For the emergence of "adaptation studies," see Chan (2012). As a solitary example from this very lively and productive worldwide field, I mention Rajagopalan (2009).

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