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An Averroesian Quest: The Unfulfilled Wish for a Universal Dictionary of Literary Genres and Critical Terminology

Jorge Luis Borges dedicated one narrative of his famous anthology *El Aleph* (1949) to the medieval Arab scholar Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), who had lived and worked in Cordoba in the twelfth century and who is known to posterity as an intermediary of Aristotle under the name of “Averroes”.¹ Borges puts himself into the Middle Ages with their conflict between realism (which insisted on the substantial meaning of general concepts) and nominalism (which denied any meaning beyond the “empty” words). Borges also takes on the perspective of an Arab scholar for whom the pleasure of his own culture with the confirmation of the status quo was more important than the western thirst for innovation. In *La busca de Averroes*² Borges begins with a peculiar fusion of historical, almost encyclopedic information on Ibn Rushd, and a sensitive, even romanticising fiction showing the philosopher at his desk one midday in Cordoba. Averroes is working on a translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, but “two doubtful words had halted him at the very portals of the *Poetics*. Those words were ‘tragedy’ and ‘comedy’”.³ The dilemma can easily be explained: “He had come across them years earlier, in the third book of the *Rhetoric*; no one in all of Islam could hazard a guess as to their meaning.”⁴ At the same time, however, these terms are so frequently used in the *Poetics* that it is impossible to avoid them.⁵ Completely at a loss, Averroes struggles with his translation, while outside the window, ironically, a boy sitting on the shoulders of another, is playfully imitating a muezzin.⁶ In the evening, the scholar is invited to dinner with the vain, but well-travelled Abulkásim, who recounts wondrous

1 Cf. Khalil Hindawi. “An Early Arab Contribution to Comparative Literature: Averroes’ “Talkhîs Kitâb Aristu fi al-Shi’r” (A Summary of Aristotle’s “Poetics”).” *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 41 (1993), 6–8.

2 Jorge Luis Borges. *Collected Fictions*. Translated by Andrew Hurley. London: Penguin, 1999. Quotations: http://posthegemony.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/borges_collected-fictions.pdf.

3 Borges 1999, 534.

4 Borges 1999, 534.

5 Borges 1999, 534.

6 Borges 1999, 535.

Note: Updated, revised and translated version of Achim Hölter. “Mit Averroes auf der Suche. Der unerfüllte Wunsch nach einem universellen Gattungsllexikon.” *Komparatistik* 2012, 25–35.

things of a trip to China, among other things, how he was led to “a house of painted wood [...] with rows of cabinet-like contrivances, or balconies, one atop another”.⁷ People had been sitting everywhere, making music on a “raised terrace”,⁸ while masked men were praying, singing and talking to each other.⁹ Abulkásim’s listeners, however, misled by their own vocabulary which serves their personal experiences, do not understand him and regard his stories as foolish. The traveler insists that the masked men had presented a story, but the self-conscious Arabs think their dialectics superior: To tell a story, nobody would need so many people. And Averroes, being the contorted mirror of Borges himself, heads on to his favourite idea that – whether out of Islamic orthodoxy or semiotic speculation – everything had potentially already been said in the infinite combination of a limited system of signs, and everything that could possibly be said was included in the poetic system of signs from the beginnings of poetry. When he returns in the morning, he finally believes the two enigmatic terms to be clear to him; briefly he notes: “Aristu [...] gives the name ‘tragedy’ to panegyrics and the name ‘comedy’ to satires and anathemas. There are many admirable tragedies and comedies in the Qur’an and the mu’allaqat of the mosque.”¹⁰ What editions of Borges’ works generally do not explain, is that Mu’allaqas (or Arabic mu’allaqāt) is the term for the canonic texts of seven pre-Islamic, ancient Arab poets;¹¹ this is where the author, probably subtly teasing his readers, makes them feel like Averroes in front of the word “tragedy”. But Borges would not be Borges if he left it at this single ironic case study. He had wanted, he adds, to tell “the process of failure”¹² and chosen the example of a scholar, who, “bounded within the circle of Islam”,¹³ could not know the meaning of the two terms. He had understood, however, that it was no less absurd to imagine such a scholar on the basis of the few existing sources. So, Borges’ scepticism extends much further, and has no issue with Averroes or Islam in particular, however here it will be sufficient to have a closer look at the cultural difference (whether one takes the message of the story seriously or not).

In his short essay “Partial Magic in the Quixote” Borges presents several examples of exponentiation or logarithmation of different levels of reality within the text. What he does not name is the term given to this phenomenon by André

7 Borges 1999, 540.

8 Borges 1999, 541.

9 Borges 1999, 541.

10 Borges 1999, 547.

11 Cf. Ewald Wagner. *Grundzüge der klassischen arabischen Dichtung*. Bd. I. Darmstadt, 1987, 155–158.

12 Borges 1999, 547.

13 Borges 1999, 548.

Gide, then not yet fully accepted in worldwide terminology: “mise en abyme”.¹⁴ Instead, obviously aware of a terminological emptiness below his feet, Borges begins his text with a safeguarding clause: “It is plausible that these observations may have been set forth at some time and, perhaps, many times; a discussion of their novelty interests me less than one of their possible truth.”¹⁵

Now Borges uses his Averroes case and the term “tragedy” and “comedy” to ironically show the intercultural dilemma of genre theory. On the one hand these facts – which from an objective point of view are a fundamental problem of a scientific discipline – have unquestionably animated comparative literature for decades precisely because of the number of apparently unsolvable differences, and for many comparatists it seems to legitimate their discipline as compared to other one-language philologies. On the other hand, it is equally evident that the situation complicates any precise and translatable exchange on genres. Comparison would be a desirable first step, logically to be followed by adaptation. The important background questions would therefore be: Are the differences generally unsolvable, and is a meta-lingual communication desirable at all? Interestingly, the elementary answers are diametrically opposed to each other,¹⁶ as the terminology of natural sciences aims to make language more or less superfluous or to optimise it to a medium of cristalline clarity. In the humanities, however, taxonomies are subject to specific conditions, because cultural objects are in a constant state of development and the terminology of genre denies any standstill. Nevertheless, distinctions can be made even for literary discourse. On one end on a scale for transnational terminology one would find a strong terminological heterogeneity (i.e. genres originally defined by a national culture), and on the other end homogeneous, conflictless terminology which seems to be universally translatable. Between these two ends of the scale is a mixed zone of terms which are neither nationally idiosyncratic nor can be transferred without problems. This mixed zone, the one where discussion usually takes place, is of special interest for intraphilological studies of translation, not least because of the empty spaces and apparently easy vocabulary (“false friends”) which inhabit this sector.

Although studies of translation deal with questions of terminology as well, cultural studies remain a difficult terrain, also because of a potential deconstructive scept-

¹⁴ The term originally is from André Gide's diary. Cf. Lucien Dällenbach. *Le récit spéculaire. Essai sur la mise en abyme*. Paris 2002.

¹⁵ Jorge Luis Borges. *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*. New York: New Directions, 1964, 193.

¹⁶ Cf. Harald Fricke. *Die Sprache der Literaturwissenschaft. Textanalytische und philosophische Untersuchungen*. Munich, 1977, 262 against M. H. Abrams. “What's the Use of Theorizing about Arts?” In *Search of Literary Theory*. Ed. M. W. Bloomfield. Ithaca, 1972, 1–54.

ticism that would not allow for a descriptive and therefore also self-descriptive meta-language, which would understand the network of terms rather as rhetoric or allegory than as a reliable description of the literary status quo. A “recursus ad infinitum”, leading to safe ground, is inconceivable here, and a ‘terminus’ in the original sense of boundary stone is conceivable only as an act of naive (stipulative) setting of limits. But this problem is not new and is mostly, if not solved, at least excluded by differentiating a completely pragmatic use of language. At the core of the problem lies the general question, as to whether universal concepts are valid in the humanities. While terms in natural sciences are nominal definitions (research errors left aside), in the humanities, strictly speaking, there are as many genres as there are single specimens – and this is exactly what fascinated Borges in his tale *Funes el memorioso*. Our actual dictionaries (and, on an abstract level, the imaginary general dictionary of literary criticism) are building a hierarchy of ideal terminological unifications: from regional and national traditions, from traditional usage and, of course, from mighty founders of discourse or creators of genres, who simply cannot be ignored, as far as the historical aspect of a definition is concerned.¹⁷ Either way, historical and cultural terms are subject to multiple shifts. It is equally obvious that dictionaries are always representing only one specific moment. This inaccuracy, regretted by scientists, is “only” captured historiographically or instantaneously, which does not mean, however, that accuracy would a) not be desirable and b) if not achievable in total, at least partially improvable. So, what are the possibilities for optimising literary terminology of genre on an intercultural level?

Encyclopedic writing in the field of comparative literature or international literary criticism has been more closely classified and analysed by Rüdiger Zymner,¹⁸ who drew attention to problems and desiderata of international literary terminology.¹⁹ Encyclopedias codify the order of sciences. Here too, lies a hidden problem,

17 Cf. e.g. Heimito von Doderer’s “Kürzestgeschichten”, translated to French as “histoires ultra-brèves”: *Histoires brèves et ultra-brèves. Traduit de l’allemand (Autriche) et présenté par Raymond Voyat*. Paris, 1998.

18 Rüdiger Zymner. “Die Fachlexikographie der Literaturwissenschaft: eine Übersicht.” *Fachsprachen. Languages for special purposes. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Fachsprachenforschung und Terminologiewissenschaft*. 2nd half vol. Eds. Lothar Hoffmann, Hartwig Kalverkämper and Herbert Ernst Wiegand. Berlin/New York. 1999, 2036–2045. – Achim Hölder. “Eine erste bibliographische Handliste von Reallexika zur Literaturwissenschaft seit 1900.” *Komparatistik 2005/2006*, 131–140. – Achim Hölder “Lexika”. *Handbuch Komparatistik. Theorien, Arbeitsfelder, Wissenspraxis*. Ed. Rüdiger Zymner and Achim Hölder. Stuttgart/Weimar 2013, 355–361.

19 Achim Hölder. “Sprachen und Komparatistik”. *Handbuch Komparatistik. Theorien, Arbeitsfelder, Wissenspraxis*. Ed. Rüdiger Zymner and Achim Hölder. Stuttgart/Weimar, 2013, 213–217; esp. 215–217.

because an encyclopedia of genres is imaginable not only in alphabetical order,²⁰ and the more international the public of the encyclopedia, the less the alphabet will be the first choice. That is due to the mere fact that the alphabet(s) tear the entries apart depending on the language: In relation to the German M for “Märchen”, the Russian S for “skazka” trails far behind, to the German F for “Fabel” (fable) corresponds a Russian B for “basnia”, opening up a completely different cycle. In order to organise the content in a non-alphabetical order, one needs an encyclopedic concept of the scientific field (according to Klaus Weimar).²¹ The scientific alternative is to picture the *res* and their interrelation. This means that sometimes the consequence of logical empirism is to relate genres graphically, with the form itself being always strictly symbolic. One has to organise the field – something which was tested in the theory of genres with a famous circular graphic²² and to add – theoretically in an incorruptible manner – an infinite number of terms from an infinite number of languages to this ideal diagramme, plus: to add an infinite number of footnotes in order to account for the minimal graphical differences within the circle or the chosen graphical form.²³ But what if one distrusted a non-verbal, although still symbolic, graphical episteme with its circles, scales, intersections and arrows?²⁴ What if the abstract models of a scientific order (like Dewey’s decimal classification and many more) proved to be not historical or differentiated enough for literary criticism? What if we want the language of poetics to remain a linguistic artifice, as it has been to date? Dictionaries with five or more languages, some of them visual, are becoming popular, translation apps have become part of everyday life, as have formerly web applications for word processing, Google translator and its counterparts being in more frequent use than many would like to admit. All these media have to simplify radically, mostly by offering one term for exactly one other term and by giving at the most some alternative offers, from which the user has to choose for him/herself. Let us take an example from natural science: In Bernhard Grzimek’s

20 Zur Episteme des Alphabets: Andreas B. Kilcher. *Mathesis und poesis. Die Enzyklopädik der Literatur 1600 bis 2000*. Munich 2003.

21 Klaus Weimar. *Enzyklopädie der Literaturwissenschaft*. Munich, 1980.

22 Cf. Julius Petersen’s circle of genres from 1925 e.g. in: Klaus Müller-Dyes. *Literarische Gattungen. Lyrik, Epik, Dramatik*. Freiburg/Basel/Wien, 1978, 57.

23 The strong priority of the “verbum” was also customary: Sulzer’s *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* started from the ideal conception that homonyms from different arts could be explained in one article, e.g. the word “figure” in visual arts, rhetorics, music, and dance: “Figur” (Zeichnende Künste, Redende Künste, Musik, Tanzkunst): Johann Georg Sulzer. *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*. 2. Tl. Neue verm. zweyte Aufl. Leipzig, 1792, 229–235.

24 Cf. in general Achim Hölter. “Art. ‘Bilder und Diagramme’”. *Handbuch Komparatistik. Theorien, Arbeitsfelder, Wissenspraxis*. Ed. Rüdiger Zymner and Achim Hölter. Stuttgart/Weimar, 2013, 345–348.

*Encyclopedia of Animal Life*²⁵ each volume ends with a triple index: A systematic overview of the zoological species after Linné's *Systema naturae* (1758) and an alphabetical index, including German and Latin terms, accompany a third index, a dictionary of animals in the four languages German, English, French and Russian. Something like this is extremely rare in literary criticism. Some dictionaries give translations of lemmata into several main languages, but this only seems to be an attempt at retaining some flexibility, because in fact the equation of about five elements creates a much stronger inflexibility. This is the point where a certain feeling of discomfort arises on using Wolfgang Ruttkowski's dedicated *Nomenclator litterarius* from 1980,²⁶ because especially the "genre mineurs"²⁷ naturally find themselves in an awkward shadow, as well as national specialities like a Spanish "zarzuela", which can be met during a transfer on languages only by explanatory concepts, not translation.

Let us look at some items from Ruttkowski's *Nomenclator* and remember its construction: The about 350 pages of listed terms and nomenclature from A to Z without explanatory articles, treat not only genres like "short story", but also techniques like "simultaneity", stylistic terms like "vorticism" or qualities like "vivid". Ruttkowski uses German as his basis and assigns the equivalents in English, Dutch, French, Spanish, Italian and Russian (transliterated), cutting out identical words. The book offers a foreword in each of these languages. Terms from other important literary idioms are included, i.e. from the Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Indian (understood as a cultural space, not as a language), Japanese, Latin, Persian, Portuguese and Provençal. In case of a singular national term an explanatory translation is offered in brackets: "kaguar (jap.) D (old mimic ritual dances, early form of drama)".²⁸ Controversial equivalents like "D Kurzgeschichte ED short story (E short short story) N kort verhaal F conte, nouvelle S cuento I racconto R rasskaz"²⁹ are of special interest within such an ambitious project. There are more difficulties to consider: The German "Küchenlied",³⁰ equivalent to the Spanish "canción de cocina", has to be translated to other languages not verbatim, but analogously. It is not difficult to develop the Russian form "kuchon-naya pesnya", but the term is, though comprehensible, not in general use. Ruttkowski's book contains more than 3000 terms and translations. The appended index in

25 Bernhard Grzimek. *Grzimeks Tierleben. 13 Bde.* Zürich, 1968–1972.

26 Wolfgang Ruttkowski. *Nomenclator litterarius.* Bern/München, 1980. Cf. Wolfgang Ruttkowski. *Zur semantischen Beschaffenheit literarischer Sachbegriffe.* Munich, 2007.

27 Fritz Nies (Ed.). *Genres mineurs: Texte zur Theorie und Geschichte nichtkanonischer Literatur (vom 16. Jh. bis zur Gegenwart).* Munich, 1978.

28 Ruttkowski 1980, 190.

29 Ruttkowski 1980, 205.

30 Ruttkowski 1980, 202.

the book's main languages (with Russian in Cyrillic) is the final proof that this book is founded on practical experience and therefore aims at practicability, not principles.

One of the paradigms of German Romanticism and therefore of German philology is the difference between "Volksmärchen" and "Kunstmärchen", for which none of the parallel languages offers any satisfying solution, failing to communicate two components and the inherent poetics. Ruttkowski's entry reads as follows: "D Kunstmärchen E art/ literary fairy tale N cultuur-/kunstprookje F conte artistique/ littéraire S cuento literario I racconto di fata letterario³¹ R (rasskaz-) skazka".³² Very few of these terms have really been successful, but at least they are helpful in translating a book on "Kunstmärchen" (tales that have been created at a given moment by a known individual) from German to other languages. Even "Märchen" is a problem in some languages, while the addition of the artificial element (something like "craftsmanship" or "mastery", activating in German two positive prefixes "Kunst-" vs. "Volks-" and not, as has been suggested before, one additional quality and its negation) makes it even more difficult. Finally, the specification "Volks-" is known to be ambiguous itself, so that any translation with "popular/populaire" definitely means a constriction. The common dictionaries for foreign languages do not usually make this binary distinction. The Italian *Enciclopedia Garzanti*³³ lists "fiaba", but omits "Kunstmärchen". On the other hand, the often-discussed pair of terms "Ballade/Romanze" can be found in numerous dictionaries, despite the fact that both were basically identified as intentional symbols during a debate taking place around 1800, as to whether or not the one genre ("romance" etc.) was a placeholder of the other ("ballata" etc.) in a different cultural context. A particularly interesting case is the so-called "Rollengedicht", not because it has no clear equivalents in other languages ("E dramatic monologue, F monologue dramatique, R dramatischeskij monolog"),³⁴ but because with the linking of analogous terms, for which the lexicographer is responsible, the indisputably *lyric* construction (and examples from the canon of *lyric poetry*)³⁵ with its

31 And not: "fiaba letteraria."?

32 Ruttkowski 1980, 204.

33 *Enciclopedia Garzanti della letteratura*. 3a ed. aggiornata. Milano, 1979.

34 Ruttkowski 1980, 286.

35 Otto F. Best. *Handbuch literarischer Fachbegriffe. Definitionen und Beispiele*. Revised and complemented ed. Frankfurt am Main, 1994, 462. Brentano, "Der Spinnerin Lied", Uhland, "Des Knaben Berglied", Rilke, "Lied des Bettlers" etc. and as a cited paradigm Goethe, "Schäfers Klagelied."

non-generic base noun “Gedicht” is translated with something definitely different, so that the translation is no less than a transfer from “poetry” to “drama”.³⁶ Which leaves the mystery as to why for Spanish (and only there) the given solution is “monólogo lírico”.

The current development of the special meaning of “comedy” in the German language, meaning strictly a TV format versus “Komödie” as on stage, shows very well the instability of translational relations. Even more prominent is the everlasting problem posed by “Novelle”, which is in need of an internal distinction in Spanish that can hardly prevail against the powerful tradition of Cervantes’ *Novelas ejemplares* – not to mention English, where the more precise term “novella” or “novellette” will always have the connotation of an import. Let us have a further look at this ever-neuralgic term, for which Ruttkowski gives the equivalent “novella” for English, Italian and also Russian, “conte, nouvelle” for French, “cuento, novela” for Spanish and “povest” for Russian.³⁷ This shows also that the book can only in a limited sense serve as a dictionary for active use. How could a *translator* decide whether to use “cuento” or “novela” in Spanish? And a glance at the Spanish “novela” is not helpful either. The index lists the German “Novelle” as well as “Roman”, but the peculiar vague terminology of genres in hispanic philology cannot be overcome lexicographically by either side.

Other dictionaries do not focus on the problems of translation. In contrast to the pragmatic and short repertoires, dictionaries of universal aesthetic terms like the historical *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*³⁸ in seven volumes can afford to focus on the documentation of the history of terminology with its debates. Heinrich Lausberg’s *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*,³⁹ not a dictionary of terms in a strict sense, is limited to the three canonical languages of Western rhetorics: Greek, Latin and French, while Gert Ueding’s German *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*⁴⁰ only paraphrases in Greek and Latin. Typologically significant for real dictionaries are Wilpert’s German standard work,⁴¹ with its vast historical explanations in dense articles, which allow for a large number of terms due to their brevity and of course

36 Cf. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Noten und Abhandlungen zu besserem Verständnis des west-östlichen Divans*. J.W.v.G.: Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden. Vol. 2. München, 1988, 187: “Es gibt nur drei echte Naturformen der Poesie: [...] Epos, Lyrik und Drama.”

37 Ruttkowski 1980, 244.

38 Karlheinz Barck (Ed.). *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*. Studienausgabe. 7 vols. Stuttgart/Weimar, 2010.

39 Heinrich Lausberg. *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*. Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft. 2nd ed, 2 vols. München: Hueber, 1973.

40 Gert Ueding. *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*. Tübingen, 1992–2012.

41 Gero von Wilpert. *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*. 7th, improved and complemented ed. Stuttgart, 1989.

the 3rd edition of the *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*,⁴² with its precise hierarchical structure of articles, though in principle not dealing with linguistic interferences.

Let us consider briefly the situation on the international market of literary dictionaries. There is a general competition at least in the Western cultures, where works are published or edited at regular intervals, but also beyond. For instance, relevant works were: in Russian Igor A. Eliseev and L.G. Poljakova: *Slovar literaturovedčeskich terminov*. (Rostov-na-Donu: Fenikus) 2002; in Spanish Demetrio Estébanez Calderón: *Diccionario de términos literarios* (1996);⁴³ in Japanese Rintaro Fukuhara/ Masatoshi Yoshida: *Bangahn yugo jiten* [= *Dictionary of Literary Terms*] (1978);⁴⁴ in Dutch Hendrik van Gorp/Dirk Delabastia/Rita Ghesquiere: *Lexikon van literaire termen*. Groningen 1998,⁴⁵ from which a different version (with different editors) exist for the francophone countries.⁴⁶ In markets of middle size, there exists often exactly one dictionary as a reference for many years, i.e. in Poland: Maciej Krasskowski's *Leksykon terminów literackich*. Warszawa: Twój Styl 1994, or the Czech example, Josef Brukner's *Poetický slovník*. 2nd ed. Praha: Mladá Fronta 1997. In general, a quantitative hegemony of English, and then French and German encyclopedias has to be stated. Most of the other examples are, naturally, Spanish, Russian, Italian. If it is true that the so-called "great" languages are dominating the field of publishing in the humanities, and that the "smaller" languages are usually allowing only one profitable book per language due to the limited market, the conclusion is that the spreading of philological terms can be divided in several zones: a) the anglophone zone, b) the domain of the other "world languages",⁴⁷ c) the zones of traditional single-language cultures, d) the partly post-colonial areas of mainly English and French as second languages, e) single-language cultures, which have to work with *translated* encyclopedias because of a still developing educational system or because of linguistic isolation. It is interesting to see that these works are usually (not always!) translated from English, independent from the traditional political formation of blocks. The case of an encyclopedia that does not translate terms, but is as a whole a

42 *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*. 3 vols. Berlin, 1997–2003.

43 Demetrio Estébanez Calderón. *Diccionario de términos literarios*. Madrid, 1996.

44 Rintaro Fukuhara and Yoshida Masatoshi. *Bangahn yugo jiten* [= *Dictionary of Literary Terms*]. Tokyo, 1978.

45 Hendrik van Gorp/Dirk Delabastia/ Rita Ghesquiere (Ed.). *Lexikon van literaire termen*. Groningen, 1998.

46 Hendrik van Gorp/Dirk Delabastia/ Lieven D'Hulst u.a. (Ed.): *Dictionnaire des Termes Littéraires*. Paris, 2001.

47 Cf. in Chinese: Wei Quian. *最佳心理描寫詞典* (=Zui jia xin li miao xie ci dian). Beijing, 1988.

translation or adaption would be worth a special analysis. Herbert Greiner-Mai's *Kleines Wörterbuch der Weltliteratur* has been published in Spain as *Diccionario AKAL de literatura general y comparada (desde des origines hasta 1980)*,⁴⁸ and the Bulgarian *Retschnik na Svremennite Literaturni Termini* was translated from English by Tatyana Stoitcheva.⁴⁹ Related types are bilingual works like Mohammad Enani's Egyptian *Modern Literary Terms. A Study and a Dictionary: English-Arabic*⁵⁰ where we learn, by the way, that there does exist a word for "comedy" in today's Arabic: "mahzala", pl. "Ma'hazil", and of course also one for tragedy. A recognisable result from these bilingual confrontations is an awareness for the primary term and where it belongs: The affordable, therefore much-used *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, founded by J.A. Cuddon, prefers to integrate terms under their original, even if there exists an English equivalent. The German "Schlüsselroman" i.e. can be found under "livre à clef"⁵¹ with a reference to the variation "key novel"; and "didactic play" is put under L ("Lehrstück") with reference to its main representative Brecht.⁵²

The current literary terminology as active and creative is limited to relatively few languages.⁵³ How many exactly, is not easy to say, because one has to distinguish between the still quite numerous idioms in which philology is taught, the smaller number of languages in which literary criticism is published, and the even smaller number of those in which sustainable scientific lexicography is done. This is even more striking from a comparative point of view, as in practically all categories living literature is produced. This means that there exists a glaring disparity between the intrinsic creativity of a language and the reflection on form which is mostly controlled by respective foreign languages.

This dilemma is illustrated well by quite a small book – Gary Carey and Mary Ellen Snodgrass: *A multicultural dictionary of literary terms*.⁵⁴ The book, entirely written in English, advertises its multiculturalism. But a closer look reveals that the highly selective range of terms was only chosen under the aspect of what is "essential to a thorough, comprehensive study of world literature"⁵⁵ Therefore the "devices,

48 Trad., rev. y ampliación de la ed. española: Roberto Mansberger. *Amorós*. Madrid, 2006.

49 *Retschnik na Svremennite Literaturni Termini*. Translated by Tatjana Stoitschewa. Sofia, 1993.

50 Mohammad Enani. *Modern Literary Terms. A Study and a Dictionary: English-Arabic*. 3rd ed. Kairo, 2003.

51 J. A. Cuddon. *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*. Revised by C. E. Preston. London, 1998, 475.

52 Cuddon 1998, 452.

53 Hölter 2013, 216.

54 Gary Carey and Mary Ellen Snodgrass. *A multicultural dictionary of literary terms* Jefferson, NC. et al., 1999.

55 Carey/Snodgrass, 1.

modes” etc. are, in a very broad sense, only representatives of “the full span of classic world literature”. In reality this means merely that a few terms from Spanish, German or Japanese have been included to the general index. The key to this approach might be “world literature” as conceived in works by David Damrosch, Theo D’haen, Emily Apter, and many others, meaning literature(s) from all over the globe, but written in or at least translated into English and thus tuned in an Anglo-Saxon key.

An interesting step, however, is indicated by the manual *Terminologie der Literaturwissenschaft* (ed. by Rudolf Beck et al. 1998), which was developed specifically for English literature studies. The terms are introduced as an English-German couple, with a minimal definition and explanatory article, i.e. “Prose Poem – Prosagedicht. Gedicht in Prosaform”⁵⁶ or “Dumb Show” – without a German equivalent – “Pantomimische Einlage im Drama der Shakespeare-Zeit”.⁵⁷ While the bilateral construction is of relatively low risk, avoiding forced translations or, the other way around: setting a national term which can optionally be embedded unchanged into the environment of a foreign language, helps to keep the process in balance. To develop this method further would mean to transmit only those terms which could easily be replicated in all languages. The conditions are of a linguistic and historical nature: Firstly, the morphology of the target language has to provide a rule for transmission, which is mostly given for words of Greek and Latin origin. The second condition – and here we are back to Borges – is that historical and cultural barriers do not make the mere transmission of the term senseless. Another aspect of the development from a bilateral to a multilateral concept would be to respect the growing number of terms as fixed in their respective context of a single language and to spread them as foreign vocabulary. Of course, this is a thought which fits in extremely well with the ideas of multiculturalism and it is not difficult to predict that the result would be a quantitative explosion of literary terms, analogous to the development in international language policy. It is highly probable that a competition would arise between the national cultures to each enforce as many incommensurable terms and genres as possible. The indefinite storage space of the internet would invalidate any economic argument, by which book publishing is usually controlled, so everything would simply be put alongside each other. This applies particularly to concepts and terms from Western literary and cultural theory, when it comes to integrating them in indigenous languages.

In Wikipedia, some terms have in the meantime been documented and are discussed in many languages, e.g. “novella” and its equivalents in 84 languages,

⁵⁶ Rudolf Beck/Hildegard Kuester/ Martin Kuester. *Terminologie der Literaturwissenschaft. Ein Handbuch für das Anglistikstudium*. Ismaning, 1998, 159.

⁵⁷ Beck, et al. 1998, 231.

„novel“ in 144 languages, “the sublime” in 35 languages, “free indirect speech” in 15 languages, and, in 19 languages, the “unreliable narrator”, whilst it seems noteworthy that the German “equivalent” and some others are not equivalent, as the entry is “Unzuverlässiges Erzählen”, marking the aesthetic procedure (narration) instead of the voice of a fictional character (narrator). No doubt a fruitful confusion. Then again, the articles are not written and translated from one origin, but are – at least between the “larger” languages – produced separately individually. Quality, precision, dimensions and references vary accordingly, as well as the selection of given literary examples, often focusing on the respective national literature. German articles are mostly based on German literary encyclopedias, French articles on French etc. So different terminological horizons are just a mouse-click apart without communicating. All in all, Wikipedia often, especially in articles of higher quality, reproduces and duplicates the single-language knowledge and mostly the knowledge of printed lexicography, thus leaving the question open, as to whether the collaborative open-access project is able to reach the scientific level of systematically edited print (or digital) volumes.

A project in terminology which would bring together the worldwide spectrum of encyclopedias physically – in a specialised national or, perhaps better, department library – as well as virtually is a real desideratum. Not so much in hope of normative definitions or in the prospect of a universal archive for translations, but because no single language or hegemonical perspective should block the view of the facts. What could result from an intensified dialogue between dictionaries? Possibly respect to the diversity of world cultures, as introduced to poetology by Earl Miner.⁵⁸ Possibly an alleged multiplication of genres. Possibly *also* further difficulties in communication. From a comparatist point of view the creation of relations, the incitement to a (lexical) comparison already has a value in itself. And: Projects in terminology are usually symptoms of a deficit, namely a problem with interdisciplinary communication, perhaps also of an optimism which releases synthetic forces or results from such effects, aiming for an increase of knowledge by comparative methods and a “critical discussion and dynamic development of scientific terminology”.⁵⁹ In fact, a rising interest in aesthetic universal concepts is noticeable, not so much out of the confidence to standardise what has been heterogeneous over thousands of years, but rather due to the impression that traditional and new media are using related methods, whose proximity has sometimes been tested only metaphorically, but not proven structurally. *Narrating, Describing*, but also *The*

58 Earl Miner. *Comparative Poetics. An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature*. Princeton, NJ, 1990.

59 Hölder 2013, 217.

Comic, *The Return of Pathos* are such current universal concepts. Collation would be the first step before weighing correspondences and distinctions in a second step.

Philology is quick, maybe too quick, with classifications. Let us think back once again to the point of Borges' projection onto a distant and past culture: To allow a literary genre to become so "foreign" that one cannot even imagine it – this cultural exercise could be a real gain for literary criticism. If one allowed oneself not to subsume a "scheme of acting with media" (S.J. Schmidt)⁶⁰ automatically under one of Goethe's "natural forms", not to classify it immediately and then put into a display case together with the other butterflies, but to perceive it with amazement, without the infinite trust in the providence of an own cultural God, this could be a prerequisite for taking the newly discovered or newly created species into view first. To find their "correct" name, there is ample time in the millennia to come.

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The following bibliography⁶¹ cannot claim to be exhaustive. It does, however, endeavour to document that, mainly in the course of the twentieth century, in about 50 active literary languages of the world, hundreds of dictionaries were printed to convey the terminology of general literary studies within diverse linguistic cultures, but also between these linguistic domains. These publications show an enormous range in terms of their ambition and volume: from narrow repertoires developed directly from the context of teaching at school or university to undertakings such as the 3rd edition of the famous German-language *Reallexikon*, which aims to introduce all central terms with a definition that is as universally acceptable as possible and then to work through the most important aspects of the lemma, namely the history of the term, the history of the concept, the history of the formal item and the history of research, together with a bibliography. It is obvious that there are several hundred different publications worldwide, some in many editions and widely used as standard works. The margins vis-à-vis other forms of literary lexicography, namely encyclopedias of authors and works, are not always sharp, especially when such mammoth works have been accompanied by a brief terminological appendix.

The notation is kept as short as possible for reasons of space. Abbreviations and city names have been standardised in English. "Authors" and "editors" have not been distinguished because of differences in indication practices. Transliteration

⁶⁰ Siegfried J. Schmidt. "Diskurs und Literatursystem. Konstruktivistische Alternativen zu diskurstheoretischen Alternativen." Fohrmann, Jürgen/ Müller, Harro *Diskurstheorien und Literaturwissenschaft*. Ed. Jürgen Fohrmann and Harro Müller. Frankfurt am Main. 1988, 134–158. Quote: 148. My translation.

⁶¹ Many thanks to Katharina Widholm and Caecilia Lermer for substantial help.

tions of the original titles are given for non-European writing systems, which, due to divergent catalogue entries, may not always obey exactly the same principle; translations have been omitted – *mutatis mutandis*, most titles mean “Terminology of Literary Studies” or something equivalent. Some national dictionaries are originally translations, for example from English or Russian. Occasionally, the first edition of a work could not be traced; the cumulative international catalogue system is not yet up to the task of remedying all cases. For the most important publications, the printing history has been indicated to some extent; however, it is impossible to list each individual bibliographical unit separately. This applies in particular to changes of conception after several decades in the case of long-lived works or the entry of younger editors into the succession.

As far as online encyclopedias or online versions of previously printed lexica are concerned, only a small selection can be mentioned; web links are also only given as an exception, because unfortunately they still become outdated quickly. However, the twenty-first century is definitely an online age, especially as far as reference works are concerned. We can therefore assume that the print versions of tried and tested, handy dictionaries on formal literary studies will continue to exist, insofar as they can be profitably marketed by important publishers in big print runs and small or medium volumes. In addition, or parallel to this, the works will be made available online and compete as publishing products with open access ventures and above all with Wikipedia. The first years of the twenty-first century have already shown that private or university projects, which develop a – and this is of course the most important advantage – living, open and in principle unlimited (this does definitely not have to be beneficial) list of definitions and examples of terms cannot in fact win the competition with Wikipedia. The fascinating privilege of Wikipedia is its potential multilingualism. Thus, there are, as shown, many dozens of articles on the most widespread genres of literature, which are ideally maintained and, above all, related to each other. Admittedly, this is also where one of the main problems with lexicographic entries in Wikipedia becomes apparent: that precise correspondences in a 1:1 ratio are not always possible or at least not achieved as long as the cumulative and collaborative principle applies, which cannot, so far, lead to uniform solutions through all internal discussions and editorial efforts.

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