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A ROMANIAN VISION OF WORLD LITERATURE: BETWEEN TELESCOPING AND EXOTICISM

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Abstract: The present study sets out to discuss the world literature paradigm in a Romanian context, by undertaking an ample journey through the most important present-day theories, while also adding local definitions of the concept to them. Our discussion is centred on the phenomenon of cultural telescoping that shaped the clashing relationship between literary spaces (peripheral and central, dominated and dominant, Romanian and the other European Cultures) that interacted, while keeping in view the constant relationing to an exotic, unfamiliar, or foreign territory in defining world literature. Passing through the theories of David Damrosch, Galin Tihanov, Marko Juvan or Lixin Zhang, to which we have added Romanian perspectives such as Tudor Vianu’s or Adrian Marino’s, we shall analyse the contribution of Romanian criticism to the set of instruments that may constitute that certain poetics of World Literature.

Keywords: World Literature, cultural telescoping, Romanian literature, East-European space

Context

The central concern of the present essay is connected to a simple observation, entailing a double perspective. According to the first one, the premise of theories on global literature is an external reference to a remote space, whether one may call that space exotic, unknown, imaginary, frightening, or fascinating. This external element dominated and was at the origin of all discussions about the literatures of the world. To paraphrase Dumas, who identified in history the hook on which he was to hang

his novelistic output, for World Literature, we shall prove that this hook is the external, exotic, remote, or foreign element, the element of otherness. In fact, such images from other spaces “while rarely wholly unproblematic, may also be necessary for different relations with and responses to others, for imagining the world otherwise than strictly within the framework of familiar expectations” (Gosetti-Ferencei 7) and for the basis of the relationships between the literatures of the world. The second perspective is connected to the phenomenon of telescoping, which we claim also represents a component of understanding World Literature. The relationship between culture, literature and ideology in case of the East-European space is constructed, as noted also by Virgil Nemoianu, through “telescoping”:

Much later (towards the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century), in more exotic areas of the continent, such as Hungary or Romania, various readers have received the works of Pope and Swift as being somewhat romantic, individualistic, and as such progressive: they chose that which *they themselves* considered necessary (34).

The process can also function reversely, as we note that the so-called dominant cultures, those power centres which manifest hegemony towards peripheral or semi-peripheral spaces, “revive” – to make use of Marko Juvan’s terminology, their own literary heritage with literary hypostases from remote spaces of the globe. The main form through which access to such foreign visions is granted – even if this type of reporting to (semi) peripheral spaces itself is much older than the concept of *Weltliteratur* (to refer to French Enlightenment, for example) – is represented by real or imaginary journeys that become a pretext for the discovery of Asian or African spaces, in the narratives of the French writers of the mentioned period.

"Le roi est mort! Vive le roi!"

The present-day discussion of the concept of World Literature and of the analytical context contains in itself claims and negations of the field, however, the definitions being produced varied between a radical and a transformational component. Samuel Putnam noticed as early as 1936 the demise of the field of “comparative literature”, holding against it its lack of “a historical comprehension of the forces which are at work today, at this moment, shaping the literature of tomorrow” (135), while Franck

Chandler brings up, also in 1936, contradicting Putnam, the concept of World Literature, which he defines as follows: “influences, similarities or dissimilarities, processes of growth, and varying treatment of a theme, examined in any detail and with any breadth of knowledge at all, are bound to include literature written in more than one language” (136).

The manner in which we discuss world literature today¹ manages to cover the topic as it advances in the direction of diversity and, above all, it tackles the clashes between various areas that produce cultural telescoping. We shall analyse the means by which this phenomenon determines the reconstruction of the way in which we view literature on a global level, thus implying a vector connected to a space which is perceived as exotic, remote, or foreign, and which shapes this interaction, usually rougher in nature, between cultures, evident in the relationship that gives rise to World Literature.

Galin Tihanov identifies the roots of the phrase in previous studies by Goethe, centred on history rather than on literature. According to him, August Ludwig von Schlözer is the one who made use for the first time of the term “Weltliteratur in German” in order to discuss a historical component essential to Icelandic literature in “Isländische Litteratur [sic] und Geschichte (1773)” (Tihanov 283). From a similar perspective, Tihanov brings up William James, who constructs, starting out from Sanskrit literature, the central thesis of his analytic endeavour: “reveals the origins of the discourse of World Literature outside the systematic study of literature by literary scholars” (Tihanov 284). We can thus observe that the beginnings of the system of World Literature can be identified in the field of influence of other sciences which thus offer the instruments for the analysis of the interaction between the different literatures of the world, especially, as we shall see, by bringing up exotic spaces, which become narrative scenarios of the works discussed within this context. This fascination of writers with non-Eurocentric spaces is easy to notice, Iceland, for example, being such a point of reference: Victor Hugo places the action in one of his early novels, *Icelandic Inn*, in the North-European space, C. S. Lewis’s script from the *Chronicles of Narnia*, in the same exotic territory. As far as the Romanian language is concerned, in the beginning of the 20th century Constantin Sandu-Aldea’s 1908 translation of the novel *A Fisherman from Iceland (Pêcheur d’Islande*

¹ A valid systematization was undertaken in the volume edited by Martin Mircea, Christian Moraru, Andrei Terian. *Romanian Literature as World Literature*. New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

by Pierre Loti) appears alongside the references identifiable in the poems of Ion Barbu, the clouds “of chaste Iceland” or the dramatic work *The Wild Swan of Iceland* by Dumitru Radu Popescu. These are just some examples that prove this interest in rather remote spaces, which are meant to produce this creative clash between cultures.

According to recent definitions, we can notice the dominance of the “exotic” element, which we may refer to as unfamiliar or foreign, in order to avoid reducing its field of influence. By observing the triad exposed by the analysis of the texts of Casanova, Moretti and Damrosch, Marko Juvan concludes that:

World literature is a system that, by establishing interaction between particular literary fields and through translation, creates channels for the cross-national circulation of literary works, the reception and cultural impact of which become anchored relatively permanently within a multitude of foreign literary fields outside their local environment (Prešernovska 3).

In fact, this is the core idea which we would like to develop: the definition of World Literature implies, first and foremost, this circulatory flux of literary works, but, most importantly, a double reference, systematized by the medium that produces a literary work: the local one and the target, the foreign one, which thus communicate with each other by means of a cultural product born out of the process of telescoping, of collision. In truth, the latter’s power of significance is the one that determines the centre’s direction of expansion. The importance of each of the spaces that interact with each other results, as noted by Zhang Lixin, from the relationships established between nations and national traditions:

World literature is by no means a simple by-product of economic globalization; it can and must be studied within its own « literature-world » on issues that are specific to certain cultural and historical circumstances, to some aesthetic or formal characteristics, while they can, and in many cases must, be put in the larger context of social and political interactions among nations and national traditions. The social and the cultural, the political and the literary, the local and the global-these are not mutually exclusive claims in the study of human experiences and human expressions, and world literature thus offers us not just the occasion to appreciate works from different traditions for their aesthetic appeal and broadly human interest, but also

the glimpse into the specific conditions in which those works are created and circulated, the opportunity to understand different cultural and historical circumstances that necessarily deepen our appreciation (2).

It is also important to highlight the fact that, if Goethe brought up the subject matter in 1820, 28 years later, Marx forged it from the point of view of economic and political development and of the exchange of goods on a global level, as part of a reductionist definition. “Cultural memory” and “interlinguistic circulation” are, for Marko Juvan, the essential aspects which characterize World Literature as “a historical category – as a concept and as a reality,” because according to him “World Literature is not nowadays’ global literature” (Perspectivizing 34). With reference to the European space, delimitations are determined by the power centres established by the researchers of the phenomenon. Whether we speak about West-European literature or about urban spaces such as Paris, it is the centre that irradiates knowledge towards the periphery. In spite of the fact that in recent decades arguments and counter-arguments have been put forward regarding the questioning of the validity of the canonical criterion in judging literary works (we are thinking of the proposals to question the canon by authors such as John Guillory, Henry Louis Gates Jr., or Ankhi Mukherjee), we follow Zhang’s tentative, quite matter-of-fact definition, according to which World Literature must not be considered neither a “conglomerate of books,” nor a collection of volumes thrown onto the market, bearing various labels, such as “Best Seller” or other types of marketing strategies, but rather a corpus “of canonical works” belonging to “the literary traditions of the world” (Zhang, Canon 123). The essential observation connecting the definitions offered by the theoreticians of World Literature is that certain vectoriality of discourse towards remote, less-known, exotic spaces. One might add that the way in which World Literature is defined owes a certain direction to the social context, that the critical reporting on the phenomena that central or (semi) peripheral literature describes are features related to the dual relationships between ideology and a certain literary trend, according to the epoch, because “a work that can be described as «conservative» in its immediate historical context seems to become «progressive» one or two generations later on” (Nemoianu 36).

Romanian literature through translations into World Literature

In early twentieth century Europe the increasing interest in exotic spaces continues, shifting the perspective away from the centre, regarding not only literature, but also history. The most well-known theory about the importance of exotic spaces is the one offered by Spengler, who notes that the viewpoint must move towards “the Cultures of India, Babylon, China, Egypt, the Arabs, Mexico - separate worlds of dynamic being which in point of mass count for just as much in the general picture of history as the Classical, while frequently surpassing it in point of spiritual greatness and soaring power” (34). This switch of focus towards peripheral or exotic areas, in relation to Eurocentric literature, implies an opening up towards less-known literatures which, once having entered the literary circuit, may bring about major changes. For Spengler, as noted by Thomas O. Beebee “World literature is cosmopolitan literature, while the opposite of world literature, in Spengler’s view, is not national literature, but provincial literature that is bodenständig (telluric), what Alexander Beecroft would call ‘epichoric’ or possibly ‘panchoric’ literature” (Beebee 302).

As for the assimilation of the concept in the Romanian space, we notice that in first half of the twentieth century references to the global literary network and implicitly to the manner in which Weltliteratur had been previously discussed are imported and then folded into the local cultural milieu by means of translations.

Also, awareness of the interaction between cultures is reflected in the literature, with the clear expression of the way in which this collision occurs, in a telescoping sense. Thus, in *A Book on Romanticism*, a book chronicle published in *Viața Românească*, 1929, about Louis Reynaud's volume, *Le romantisme. Ses origines anglo-germaniques*, Octav Botez explains the meaning² he builds starting

²“Undoubtedly, foreign input, imperfectly assimilated, has often given rise to caricature or reprehensible exaggeration, but if ideas had not spread beyond the borders of nations and intellectual exchange between peoples could have been prevented, none of the great cultural movements, which, starting with Christianity, sometimes changed the face of the world, would of course not have been possible. (...) Goethe, who dreamed, perhaps the first, of a “Weltliteratur”, today still premature, said in his conversations with Eckermann: “Any literature ends up being bored with itself, if exotic curiosities do not come to revive it”/ „Fără îndoială, aportul străin, imperfect asimilat, a dat deseori naștere la caricaturi sau exagerări reprobabile, dar dacă ideile nu s-ar fi răspândit dincolo de granițele națiunilor și schimbul intelectual între popoare nu ar fi putut fi împiedicat, nici una dintre marile mișcări culturale, care, începând odată cu creștinismul, schimbat uneori fața lumii, desigur nu ar fi fost posibil.(...) Goethe, care visa, poate primul, la un „Weltliteratur”, astăzi încă prematur, spunea în discuțiile sale cu Eckermann: „Orice literatură ajunge să se plictisească de ea însăși, dacă curiozitățile exotice nu vin să o reînvie.” (111-112) (My Translation)

from Goethe's concept, but without giving a clear conclusion. However, we note the observation that the exotic element is part of the mechanism of global literature.

Also, in a 1937 article entitled “Eminescu în limba germană / Eminescu in German” published in *Curentul* (issue X, no. 3444), Ion Sân-Giorgiu analyses the German translations of Mihai Eminescu's poetry by de Konrad Richter, thus highlighting the Romanian “contribution” to that *Weltliteratur*:

(...) envisaged and prepared by Goethe (...). The journey of Eminescu through German literature was long, until Konrad Richter's interpretation. In 1889 the volume *Rumänische Dichtungen* features some of the first German translations of Eminescu by Carmen Sylva and Mite Kremnitz, - the volume appeared in two editions, which may indicate the fact that the Queen's translation work was quite useful at that time. They were followed by the translations of Em. Grigorovitz, V. Tecontzea and others, and during the post-war era by the ones of N. N. Botez, Zoltán Franjo and Victor Orendi-Homenau. All of these translations are attempts, forming the groundwork for an oeuvre we are still waiting for. None of these translators has translated Eminescu's complete works, but each of them contributed one verse, one stanza or various poems to the familiarization of Goethe's language with Eminescu's lyrical output. The fact that so many writers have struggled to translate Eminescu into German is no accident. Eminescu's spiritual formation was essentially German. His affinity with the Romantics and especially with German post-Romantic poets is now an undoubtable fact (Sân-Giorgiu 3)³.

The idea of the influence of German culture on Eminescu's work is maintained by noting “the [poet's] spiritual formation,” which was essentially German, as well as his proximity to “post-Romantic German” poets. Discussions within the Romanian space also revolve around the idea of the “national,” especially since some European countries had become unitary states in the beginning of the century (consider even

³ „(...) pe care o visa și-o pregătea Goethe (...). Lung a fost drumul lui Eminescu în literatura germană, până să apară interpretarea de astăzi a lui Konrad Richter. La 1889 apar în *Rumänische Dichtungen*, traduceri de Carmen Sylva și Mite Kremnitz, - volumul a apărut în două ediții, ceea ce înseamnă că opera de traducătoare a Reginei poete a fost la vremea ei foarte utilă — cele dintâi tălmăciri germane din Eminescu. Au urmat apoi traducerile lui Em. Grigorovitz, V. Tecontzea și alții, iar de la război încoace ale lui N. N. Botez, Zoltán Franjo și Victor Orendi-Homenau. Toate aceste tălmăciri sunt dibuiri, pietre de temelie, pentru o operă care se lăsa așteptată. Niciunul din traducători n-a tălmăcit opera întreagă a lui Eminescu, dar fiecare în parte a contribuit cu un vers, o strofă sau mai multe poezii la încetățenirea liricei eminesciene în limba lui Goethe. Faptul că s-au căznit atâția scriitori să-l traducă pe Eminescu în nemțește nu este o simplă întâmplare. Formația spirituală a lui Eminescu a fost de esență germană. Înrudirea lui cu romanticii și mai cu seamă cu poeții postromantici germani este azi pe deplin stabilită” (My Translation)

the example of Romania that had become a unitary state in 1918). Thus, Cezar Petrescu, in the article “Literature, Expression of Society” from *Neamul Românesc*, April 1924 (issue 19, no. 90), defines global literature as utopian, starting from Emerson’s theory regarding nationalities:

The American thinker’s definition stands in obvious contradiction to the one of Weltliteratur — global literature — prematurely envisaged by Goethe, who saw in a not so far away future the establishment of a general and universal republic of letters, where the tastes and sympathies of readers on the one hand, and the originality and efforts of authors on the other hand, should no longer be sentenced to that geographic and national limitation, by means of which idioms, customs and affinities connect through strong roots the literary work to the land and the environment it was born out of (Petrescu 1)⁴.

His arguments are based on the apparent contradiction between universal and national literature, an erroneous analysis of Goethe’s theory. Resting on the premise that ethnic specificity has no place in a discussion about global literature, Petrescu advances a superficial construct, in which the writer becomes a historian, depicting the time in which he lives:

No longer than two years ago, when a number of English translations of Romanian novelists’ stories were published, special attention was allotted to Creangă, Caragiale, Sadoveanu, so precisely to those authors who represented our national character, and offered, according to the perspective of English criticism, a novel and local perspective. But literature, just like all art as a matter of fact, not only expresses the echo of an ethnic substratum, the synthesis of a national spirit, but is also located in time, in a specific epoch — becoming the expression of one who noted in a more detailed and understanding manner than any historian, the process of transformation of social classes, the influence of ideas, the conflicts of interest, the

⁴ „Definiția cugetătorului american stă fără îndoială în contradicție cu cea Weltliteratur — literatură mondială — visată prematur de Goethe, când vedea într’un viitor apropiat statornicindu-se o republică generală și universală a literelor, unde gusturile și simpatiile lectorilor pe deoparte, și originalitatea și năzuințele autorilor pe de alta, să nu fie osândite la acea circumscriere geografică și națională, cu care idiomele, obiceiurile și afinitățile leagă cu rădăcini trainice opera de artă de pământul și de mediul unde au luat ființă” (My Translation)

psychology of individuals and of classes; a giant mirror reflecting an epoch as no raider of dusty archives shall ever be capable of reviving and explaining (1)⁵.

The author constructs his discourse based on the process of highlighting the national component as a unique indicator of value, offering examples such as: the novel of Nicolae Filimon, which gained appreciation because *Upstarts Old and New* are not “imaginary and conventional fictions,” but contain “real life experience”, the comedy and short prose of Caragiale, the novels of Duiliu Zamfirescu, which are “the expression of a society” and what makes them last is connected to “the time and environment” they were born out of. Therefore, there is no doubt that the national component is prevalent in the analyses carried out on the basis of these examples, all the more so since the Romanian state was a relatively young one. The reflection of society, of time and of the environment becomes a winning creative formula, according to Petrescu, by depicting real life. The relationship between fiction and history is broached at present in connection with the study of World Literature. For instance, the concept employed by Zhang in order to define this component of historical reception through literature by *Shi de* also implies a vision of truth and morality:

Concept of *shi de* or the historian's virtue, the historian's commitment to telling the truth as a moral choice and responsibility, is crucial for understanding such differences. History and fiction are indeed comparable, but the certitude of historiography lays a solid ground for moral and political action that cannot be neglected in irresponsibly erasing the difference between the two forms of narratives” (Zhang 3).

This association of fiction with truth is equally emphasised by Robert Tally Jr., who notes in an essay on Melville’s narrations that the truth is always connected with space, which makes it fundamental to any narration (Tally 191). The dialectic

⁵„Nu mai departe de acum doi ani, când s-au tipărit în traducție englezească un număr de povestiri din romaniștii români, luarea aminte a fost atrasă de Creangă, Caragiale, Sadoveanu, adică tocmai de scriitori cari reprezentau caracterul nostru național, și aduceau pentru ochiul criticului englez o personalitate nouă și locală. Dar literatura, ca și întreaga artă de alminteri, nu exprimă numai ecoul unui substrat etnic, sinteza unui suflet național, ci se localizează și în timp, în epocă — este expresia unuia care a notat amănunțit și mai înțelegător decât orice istoric al timpului, procesul de prefacere a claselor sociale, influența ideilor, conflictele de interese, psihologia indivizilor și claselor; o gigantă oglindă care a reflectat o epocă așa cum nu va izbuti să o învie și să o explice nici odată un culegător de documente din arhivele prăfuite.” (My Translation)

history – fiction has shaped literature ever since its beginnings, acquiring in the process, according to the degree of dominance, multiple facets. For the Romanian prose of the nineteenth century this dyad functioned from the very beginning by establishing a connection with the favourable part of history, especially due to the 1848 generation's (*pașoptist*) ideology. Things change, however not substantially, in the moment that *junimism*, followed by *sămănătorism* and *poporanism* interfere with the expected development, achieving at the beginning of the twentieth century the co-existence of modernism and traditionalism, two different paradigms subjected to the phenomenon of telescoping. If one takes into account the fact that the nineteenth century imposed, and to a certain extent controlled, the manner in which writers took up a sort of duty derived out of a sense of social responsibility, during the first half of the twentieth century the perspective is centred on a certain duality: on the one hand, a concern for the individual, his psychology, and on the other hand, an interest in the observation of crowds, engaged in uprisings or other collective movements. This relativization, which results from the reflection of the social phenomenon, individual or collective, constituted as an advantage for a certain type of ideology, leads to the creation of a new type of literary work. Literatures from peripheral spaces “choose” their own models which they then incorporate into their own cultural magma. Marko Juvan observes the fact that central literatures periodically save themselves from decline by means of “imports from the margins of the world” (55), offering the example of Norse ballads, Icelandic sagas, Ibsen's plays, Latin-American magical realism and African and Caribbean literatures. It is not at all accidental to come to think of the example of Martha Bibescu, awarded by the French Academy for the volume *Les huit paradis* (1908), which was based on a journey to Persia, an exotic realm for the culture of the Hexagon. Also in the beginning of the century, another Romanian author, Panaït Istrati, publishes his works in France, where the fascination with the Balkans played an important role in his adoption. The opening up of a culture towards other spaces, somewhat remote from Europe, is done uncoincidentally through the publication of volumes describing such territories. Goethe was reading the translation of a Chinese novel, according to the text of his letter to Eckermann, at the moment when he was theorizing the concept of *Weltliteratur*. Voltaire, another author referred to when one discusses the fascination with exotic spaces, writes about the journeys of *Candid* to America, the Orient, Lisbon, Paris, Surinam, England, Constantinople or Venice, in *Candid, or On*

Optimism (1759), published in various editions, becoming one of the most edited French books of the eighteenth century⁶, and many more examples. The cultural space between the work written by Voltaire and that of Goethe – seen as representatives of World literature, not of national literatures – was, according to Tudor Vianu, the period of development of global literature. Vianu, in an article published in 1959 (36), referring to Fritz Strich's work, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*, 1. ed., 1948, revised edition 1956, undertakes a journey through the reception of the concept of *Weltliteratur*, noting that the first step was the one by means of which researches such as Vossler, in 1928, held that the Middle Ages made literature accessible to various cultural spaces by using Latin. Bringing up Voltaire's personality, Vianu concludes that:

The notion of a universal literature takes shape in fact during the epoch starting with Voltaire and until Goethe, as a result of the expansion of literary knowledge, determined by social, aesthetic and moral needs which could no longer be satisfied by the sole works of classicism, that is to say of the literary formula incorporated by absolutism, during that epoch, the epoch of pre-Romanticism and early Romanticism, when the development of the Western bourgeoisie and its aspirations towards national originality, the tendency of also introducing into the literary concert of the world sounds pertaining to their own tradition or to the traditions of peoples which until that moment had remained in the shadows of the exclusivist prestige of classicist dogmatism, gradually produces the discovery of medieval literatures in vulgar languages, of northern literatures, of European folklore, of Middle-Eastern and Far-Eastern literatures. (36)⁷

⁶In *Literature: a World History* (Gen. Ed. David Damrosch and Gunilla Lindberg-Wada), John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2022 it is mentioned that: "In the same year that Voltaire published *Candide*, the English wit, lexicographer, poet, literary critic, conversationalist, and novelist Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), better known as Dr. Johnson, also made use of the oriental philosophical tale in *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*. In that both *Candide* and *Rasselas* are, as well as philosophical tales, also stories about the education and growth to maturity of young men, they also use some of the conventions of the novel of education slowly coming into its own at the time. Yet Voltaire and Johnson, who were both opposed to slavery, were more interested in holding up for inspection what they saw as the shortcomings of Europe, and, certainly in the case of Voltaire, ridicule and satire. For Voltaire, such reflections followed from his more general struggle to achieve greater clarity and reason in all things, p. 973.

⁷ „Noțiunea literaturii universale se formează de fapt în epoca dintre Voltaire și Goethe, ca un rezultat al extinderii cunoștințelor literare, determinată de nevoi sociale, estetice și morale care nu se mai puteau satisface în singurele opere ale clasicismului, adică ale formulei literare anexate de absolutism, în acea epocă, în epoca preromantismului și a romantismului incipient, dezvoltarea burgheziilor apusene și aspirația lor către originalitatea națională, tendința de a introduce în concertul literar al lumii și sunetele provenite din tradiția lor proprie sau din aceea a popoarelor rămase până atunci în umbra prestigiului exclusivist al dogmatismului clasic, produce pe rând descoperirea literaturilor

Following in the footsteps of Strich, Vianu identifies four means by which this exchange between the literatures of different peoples comes about: the literature of translations, then “critical studies of foreign literatures or the registration of echoes brought about by local creation abroad” (37), “traveling to other countries”, which yield literary results and the comparison of various writers or literary epochs, meant to highlight the originality of each term of this comparison. The importance of translations is constantly reaffirmed in order to understand the role that such an endeavour has in the circulation of literary works. Juvan compares World Literature, starting from Goethe’s primary idea, to the circulatory system, where large blood vessels are similar to the main canals of central literatures which impart ideas, but which once having reached the ramified network of capillaries bring about changes depending on how remote the space that they irrigate is. Also part of the “circulatory” system are critical studies, both those published inside the country on foreign literatures and those published abroad as a result of the reception of Romanian literary works. Within the same context we can find with Pascale Casanova, as far as the definition of literary space is concerned, some of the categories explained by the Romanian critic:

Conceived in terms of Cassirer's 'symbolic form: within which writers, readers, researchers, teachers, critics, publishers, translators and the rest read, write, think, debate, interpret; a structure which provides their - our intellectual categories, and recreates its hierarchies and constraints in every mind, thus reinforcing the material aspects of its existence. (200)

Vianu also includes travel literature in the category of literary exchanges meant to enrich the global network. Still under the influence of the concept of “comparative literature,” the critic mentions the comparative endeavour as a pretext to feature the each author’s originality.

The paradoxical nature of the concept is noticed by Damrosch, who speaks on the one hand about the pre-existence of World Literature, taking into account especially the multiplication of the channels of transmission and influence ever since ancient times either by means of commercial routes or by means of the spread of

medievale în limbile vulgare, a literaturilor nordice, a folclorului european, a literaturilor orientale și extrem-orientale”(My Translation)

religious ideas which determined, even before the birth of national states, a prolific cultural and literary exchange:

The world's literatures have long been in contact through multiple routes of transmission and influence. Trade routes such as the Silk Road and the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean formed networks of transmission, powerfully seconded by the spread of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. These world religions brought a great deal of literary material in their wake, often introducing literacy itself to formerly oral cultures. The waxing and waning of empires gave further impetus to cross-cultural literary relations, sometimes suppressing local literary traditions and at other times stimulating them in new and creative ways. The phenomenon of world literature is thus many centuries older than the national literatures that became the basis for most literary study during the past two centuries. Paradoxically, though, it was the rise of the modern nation-state that led to the elaboration of world literature as a concept and as a problem (Damrosch 3).

The ideas related to cross-cultural relations and global literature are also analysed by Adrian Marino, who acknowledges that various literatures of the world communicate with each other, an aspect that has been noted ever since antiquity. What is crucial is the individualization of creative formulas, which is of much greater importance than the identification of a unity, the observation of specific differences and of common aspects:

There are no isolated literatures, and neither are there Chinese Walls. One can notice a permanent process of osmosis between the literatures of the world, an inevitable interaction, translated by means of the flux of currents, programmes, ideas and literary procedures, by means of the totality of transmissible elements (types, themes, motifs, literary techniques, etc.). The reality of these facts is so obvious and imposing that, for many, the study of global literature is reduced exclusively to the inventory and the analysis of these common elements, which are in permanent migration (Marino 23)⁸.

⁸ „Nu există literaturi izolate, nici ziduri chinezești. Între literaturile lumii se constată un proces permanent de osmoză, o interacțiune inevitabilă, tradusă prin fluxul curenților, programelor, ideilor și procedeele literare, prin totalitatea elementelor transmisibile (tipuri, teme, motive, tehnici literare etc.). Realitatea acestor fapte este atât de evidentă și de impunătoare încât, pentru mulți, studiul literaturii mondiale se reduce numai la inventarul și analiza acestor elemente comune, în permanentă migrație” (My Translation).

However, the issue that arises is that, beyond this circulatory flux, there is – to cite Dionýz Ďurišin and Marko Juvan – the heterogeneous and rapid development of so-called minor literatures, of which category Romania is also a part, and implicitly, the role of peripheries. The process is one with a double sense, but what is essential is the manner in which the renewal of central literatures is produced, by means of “their influential repertoires have been renovated by the appropriation of the cultural heritage of the third-world cultures (Apter 325), by attracting outstanding authors from «exotic» milieus, as well as by the assimilation of distant poetics” (Juvan *Perspectivizing* 11). The power centres which irradiate ideas, creative formulae, and structures are a starting point, yet the spaces they reach determine the originality of literary creations. The role played by such literary spaces in languages with limited circulation or in areas remote from the Eurocentric zone is relevant for the piecing together of an overall vision of World Literature, as it is understood today in the context of mobility and fluidity. Romanian literature⁹, as well as other literatures belonging to peripheral or semi-peripheral spaces, may become a resource for what Zhang claimed World Literature poetics should contain: “a set of fundamental questions concerning the nature, origin, qualities, values, techniques, and components of literature” (7).

The conclusion that arises from this study is connected, first and foremost, with the identification of discussions in the Romanian literary space from the end of

⁹ “Humanists, some of the Renaissance poets such as Ronsard (A sa muse), the ideologists of the 18th century, who found their correspondents in Confucius, Goethe, obviously, for whom the reading of a Chinese novel constituted a proof that “people think, live and feel almost exactly in the same manner like we do” cultivated precisely this feeling of universal equality and fraternity. Inside the “extended homelands” represented by universal literature there are no privileged languages, literatures, or cultures. Comparatism done right, which can always offer proof that while the Japanese Middle Ages produced works fine like the pillow-engravings of Miss Sei Shonagon, the European Middle Ages was caught up in barbarism, helps to tone down national or continental pride, re-establishes the equilibrium in favour of creations everywhere. Nations, and thus also literatures, as noted also by Toma Nour, Eminescu’s protagonist, “are nothing but prismatic nuances of humanity”, of equal value and quality”/ „Umaniştii, unii poeţi ai Renaşterii ca Ronsard (A sa muse), ideologii secolului al XVIII-lea, ce-şi găseau corespondenţi în Confucius, Goethe, bineînţeles, pentru care lectura unui roman chinez constituia un argument că «oamenii gândesc, se îndeletnicesc şi simt aproape la fel ca noi» au cultivat tocmai acest sentiment al egalităţii şi confraternităţii universale. În interiorul «patriei extinse» care este literatura universală nu există nici limbi, nici literaturi, nici culturi privilegiate. Comparatismul bine practicat, care poate demonstra oricând că, în timp ce Evul Mediu japonez producea opere de fineţea însemnărilor pe pernă ale doamnei Sei Shonagon, Evul Mediu european se afla în plină barbarie, moderează infatuarea naţională sau continentală, restabileşte echilibrul în favoarea creaţiilor de pretutindeni. Naţiunile, şi deci şi literaturile, cum spunea şi Toma Nour, eroul lui Eminescu, « nu sunt decât nuanţele prismatice ale omenirii», de valoare şi calitate sensibil egală”. (Marino 57) (My Translation).

the nineteenth century and the second half of the twentieth century, regarding what defines global literature: on the one hand, what I called the phenomenon of telescoping, through the interaction of Romanian culture with the central cultures, and on the other hand, making use of an element from an exotic space, as a way of revitalizing a literature. The importance of such an approach resides in the fundamental observation – which also defines the research field of World Literature – regarding the relationships between the literatures of the world, are built upon an exotic, unfamiliar space, which revives the exhausted narratives. In the Romanian literary space, by analysing the directions of criticism from the mentioned period, we find that the connection to global literature was made through the translations of Romanian authors into main languages, but also by means of debating the different modes of influence and circulation between a central culture and a peripheral one. Thus, we find that the role of Romanian literature, as part of the literature from South-Eastern Europe, becomes valuable by coming across as an exotic space, but, at the same time, by assimilating some ideas from the "mainstream" cultures of the time.

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