Rahul Peter DAS
Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg
e-mail: das@suedasien.uni-halle.de

RUMINATIONS ON LITERATURE IN A GLOBALISED CONTEXT

ABSTRACT   A critical appraisal of the term and concept of "world/global literature," examining *inter alia* the two opposing notions of particularity and commonality/universality associated with it, the issue of selection and who has the authority to select, and the problem of the language interface.

Keywords: world literature, global literature, translation, social constructs

Communication has taken many forms throughout history, and need not be constrained spatially or temporally, as exemplified, for instance, by paintings and monuments in the case of visual communication, or writing and oral recordings in the case of spoken communication. This has enabled humans to interact with and influence each other transcending the boundaries of space and time.

Written or, in the present age, recorded oral communication may take various forms, one of these being that which we today call literature.[1] One can, I think, confidently assume that there is a general, or at least near to general, agreement that simply writing something does not constitute literature – there has to be something more involved.[2] Unfortunately, what this exactly is, and what exactly is produced by these means to belong to the category of "literature," is unclear even to disciplines studying literature as a categorical phenomenon,[3] as a *Wissenschaft*.[4] Indeed, the efforts to define "literature" are legion, and one may, with a dose of polemics, assert that no two seem to be alike. This is substantiated by the findings of Rainer Rosenberg, who, after a painstaking analysis of the historical usage of the term *Literatur* ("literature") and its associations particularly, though not only, in Germany, concludes (Rosenberg 2003: 38f.)

> daß es *den* Literaturbegriff gar nicht gab, vielmehr auch in der Literaturwissenschaft zu der fraglichen Zeit stets diverse Literaturbegriffe im Spiel waren. [...] Wenn sich anhand der Veröffentlichungen feststellen läßt, daß ein bestimmtes Paradigma zu einer bestimmten Zeit

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[1]   Forms of literature whose sole repository is the individual as a corporeal being are not in the focus of interest here. Literature in a recorded oral form is, however, subsumed under "written" in the following.

[2]   As Jean-Paul Sartre aptly put it (Sartre 1972: 32): "On n'est pas écrivain pour avoir choisi de dire certaines choses mais pour avoir choisi de les dire d'une certain façon" ("One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain manner").

[3]   Interestingly, such study is to be found mostly in non-English discourse; in fact, there is no real English equivalent for the German *Literaturwissenschaft*, with its equivalents in other European languages (e.g., Dutch *literatuurwetenschaap*, Swedish *litteraturvetenskap*, Danish *litteraturvidenskab*, Polish *literaturoznawstwo*, Czech *literární věda*, Russian литературоведение etc.) (cf. also Hladnik 1995: 141f.) – it is not the same as *comparative literature* (*Komparatistik* in German). The particularly German phenomenological approach has found not only friends in parts of the world with other academic traditions; it has, for instance, been criticised by René Wellek as leading to "a discipline removed from contemporary literature and released from the task of discrimination and evaluation" (Wellek 1963: 35f.), i.e. for not indulging in "criticism" as in the Anglo-Saxon (English, particularly in the USA) and Romance (particularly French) sphere, in which linguistic environment *comparative literature* is most firmly embedded.

[4]   Even today, in German language discourse the ideal of a *Wissenschaft* remains largely that constituted at least since the eighteenth century: "If a field of study was to put itself (or keep itself) on the map – if it was to validate its claim to be a rigorous *Wissenschaft* with an autonomous jurisdiction – it had to constitute itself as a system. A system was a clearly bounded, self-contained whole; it had its distinctive methods and normative premises, from which it derived its own criteria for truth value and a certain internal coherence" (LaVopa 2001: 208f.). This is difficult to reproduce in discourse utilising another language, and it is thus quite understandable that the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) lists "Wissenschaft" as a loan word utilisable in English, explaining it as: "(The systematic pursuit of) knowledge; learning, scholarship; science."

den Fachdiskurs beherrscht, dann ist damit noch nicht erwiesen, daß die Mehrheit der Fachvertreter diesem Paradigma gefolgt ist.[5]

As Terry Eagleton remarked: "What matters may not be where you come from, but how people treat you. If they decide that you are literature then it seems that you are, irrespective of what you thought you were" (EAGLETON 1997: 7f.). His resigned conclusion: "There is no 'essence' of literature whatsoever" (EAGLETON 1997: 8).

Instead of attempting to elucidate the prevailing disaccord by quoting – ultimately far from exhaustively – from a plethora of works devoted to the subject, I would like to draw attention to just one appropriate description, by Fotis Jannidis, which sums the matter up nicely (JANNIDIS 2003: 305):

> Es gibt heute kaum noch etwas, über das Literaturwissenschaftler sich einig sind: Man weiß sich in einem allgemeinen Dissens über die Frage, was Literatur ist und welche Literatur von der Wissenschaft untersucht werden sollte.[6]

In view of this situation, a description of "literature" which does not attempt to be an authoritative definition, but strives to succinctly give voice to the mentioned dissent, while leaving ample scope for interpretation in various directions, seems the best one may hope for.[7] According to one such description (JANNIDIS/LAUER/WINKO 2009: 32)

> [...] es scheint uns [...] phänomenadäquat und plausibel zu sein, den Begriff ›Literatur‹ als Ensemble von Gattungen zu konzipieren, die über eine Struktur der Familienähnlichkeit miteinander verbunden sind.[8]

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[5] "that *the* concept of literature did not in the least exist, rather, in the *Literaturwissenschaft* at the time in question, too, diverse concepts of literature were always involved. [...] If it can be established on the basis of the publications that a certain paradigm dominates the specialist discourse at some certain time, then by that it is still not proved that the majority of the specialists has followed this paradigm."

[6] "There is, today, hardly anything on which scholars of *Literaturwissenschaft* agree: one knows oneself to be in general dissent regarding the issue of what literature is and which literature should be examined by (the) science." Note that, though *Wissenschaft* has here been translated as "science," this is, all the more so as Latin *scientia* has undergone a marked semantic shift in modern English, of course no satisfactory equivalent for the German term (as also pointed out, e.g., by VERMEER 2007: 88f.).

[7] DAMROSCH 2003: 14 has attempted such a description: "Any global perspective on literature must acknowledge the tremendous variability in what has counted as literature from one place to another and from one era to another; in this sense, literature can best be defined pragmatically as whatever texts a given community of readers *takes* as literature." This is, however, unsatisfactory, as it simply shifts the problem of defining literature from one plane to another, since to take something to be literature requires a conception of what constitutes literature to be already present. Cf. also the criticism of this description by PETTERSSON 2006: 28 note 56.

[8] "[...] it seems to us [...] to be adequate to the phenomenon and plausible to conceive the term 'literature' as an ensemble of genres that are connected with each other by means of a structure of family resemblances."

Matters are complicated by the fact that, as in the case of various other terms figuring prominently in public discourse, academic definitions of "literature" may not be in synch with, or not have any marked or discernible effect on, common everyday usage. And there are, in fact, various meanings which dictionaries list for this term, which might – as in the case of various other terms in common public discourse[9] – make it difficult to determine exactly what any particular individual means when using "literature." For it is clear that when we refer, for instance, to "literature in the twentieth century," we use "literature" in a sense different from its usage in, e.g., "scientific literature" or "management literature." But in the case of these latter too, the usage is different from that in, e.g., "English literature." Anyone with a knowledge of modern English comprehends this difference immediately, even though this person, unless a trained semanticist, would probably feel quite ill at ease if asked to explain the difference, not only pertaining to these usages, but also to others which have not been mentioned here.

Now among the various definitions which the OED gives, the one seeming to be most relevant to our context is that of "literature" without a qualifying word before it: "written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit." This, of course, leaves much room for interpretation. Nevertheless, it also accords, ultimately, with the description of Jannidis/Lauer/Winko 2009: 32, quoted above.

Dealing with "literature in a globalised context," which entails both public and academic discourse in which the various discussants do not necessarily, and probably overwhelmingly do not, first strive to reach an accord on the nature of what they are discussing, thus using an already intrinsically fuzzy term in various individual manners which might not be in accord with each other,[10] we will have to settle upon some sort of working definition which allows incorporation of as much of this variegated discourse as possible, while making allowance for its inherent fuzziness. In this context, "literature" as defined above by the OED, namely "written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit," with "written" also including recorded oral works, seems to be the best take-off point; my – admittedly unproven – presumption is that most readers of these lines will be comfortable with this usage.[11]

Having settled on what "literature" is, at least for the purposes of our considerations, let us now turn to the "globalised context." As is known, not only individual works, but also whole genres of literature have over the centuries passed from language to language and culture to culture,[12] transporting influences back and forth, shaping and re-shaping

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[9]   Whitney 2010: 23 cites "Western," and in this context draws attention to George Orwell's remarks on terms such as "democracy," "socialism," "freedom," "patriotic," "realistic," "justice" etc.

[10]   A good example in this context is Perkins 1992, a comprehensive study on "literary history" which does not first specify what "literature" is, even though this seems relevant to the nature of individual literary histories, or genres of literary history.

[11]   One could, at this point, also debate on what genres of works could be subsumed under "written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit," i.e., whether these should be fictional or semi-fictional works in prose or verse, or include other sorts of works too. But such a discussion here does not seem to serve any discernible purpose, and is hence dispensed with.

[12]   I am aware that today "culture" is a contested term; cf., e.g. Hann 2007: 133: "Nehmen wir tapfer

ideas and values. An ideal means for a partnership of exchange of human values in intercultural space,[13] one might say.

However, there is a difference between this sort of exchange and contemporary globalised exchange inasmuch as not only are the spatial dimensions involved much larger, but so also are the temporal dimensions involved. The enlargement has come about both through means of travel and – perhaps even more importantly – communication and storage (including storage retrieval) hitherto unavailable to mankind. "Globalisation" in the contemporary context thus refers to a new situation brought about not only, but to a major extent by heretofore unknown technologies, bringing with it not only opportunities, but also challenges hitherto unknown, at least in today's dimensions.[14] This accords opportunities to create literature which not only transcends certain individual cultural and/or linguistic areas, but is truly globe-spanning, with the potential – given the requisite infrastructure – of transporting its ideas to all humanity in a manner previously impossible.

Is that, however, the same as 'world' or 'global' literature,[15] which it has become common to refer to and debate about, despite doubts having been voiced as to the validity of these categories?[16] In this connection, Daniel M. Dooghan, recurring to previous studies, points out (DOOGHAN 2011: 281):

All literature is world literature,[17] or more appropriately, part of global literary production.[18]

That is, of course, true inasmuch as literature produced on this globe or in this world cannot but be 'world' or 'global' literature. However, when the terms 'global' and 'world' are matters of debate in the context of literature, they are obviously so precisely because they are not taken to refer to the sum total of literary production the world over, even though this may be available to all in its entirety – which it is of course not.

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einen Rotstift in die Hand und jedes Mal, wenn wir ›Kultur‹ sehen, streichen wir das Wort" ("Let us bravely take a red pencil in the hand, and each time when we see 'culture,' we'll strike out the word"). However, I am at a loss as regards an alternative, and so am retaining the term here nonetheless.

[13] Note that this essay originates in an oral presentation at a seminar on "Human Values in Intercultural Space" in Cracow in 2012.

[14] It serves no purpose here to go into current theories regarding the various phases of globalisation (three, four or five, or more or less), or whether globalisation is a quite old or a recent phenomenon. What is relevant here is that the ongoing processes since the last few decades have led and are leading to developments hitherto not possible because the prerequisites were missing.

[15] Both terms are used here and in the following so as to preclude having to choose sides in debates on the proper terminology (cf. on this issue, e.g., MASOOMI 2010: 76f.).

[16] On criticism levelled against the concept of "world literature" see, for instance, KIRSTE 2000: 3–6.

[17] This phrase (also with "is now" for "is") is found in various English language literature fora, at times attributed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

[18] Right after this, Dooghan writes: "Sorting out what is good among those works is a task for aesthetics, not a disciplinary world literature." As we shall see below, there are views on 'world' or 'global' literature which would probably have difficulties with this opinion. Since we are not taking sides here, there is no need to comment further on this statement.

As Dooghan points out elsewhere (DOOGHAN 2011: 6), whatever the entity which is the subject of debate here may actually be,

> the world of world literature marks a boundary. Inherent to the term is not the expression of totality but its denial. Only certain texts constitute world literature.

Further (DOOGHAN 2011: 8):

> The globe may be easily defined, but a global literature lacks the clarity of its geographic site. This term faces the same obstacles as does world literature.

Unfortunately, all that does not, ultimately, help us much in arriving at any conclusion regarding the contents of 'world' or 'global' literature. It is, however, obvious that this is nothing primordial, self-creating or self-evident, but has to be something chosen to accord with certain parameters – in other words (as Terry Eagleton remarked on the "'literary canon,' the unquestioned 'great tradition' of the 'national literature'"; EAGLETON 1997: 10), that it

> has to be recognized as a *construct*, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time. There is no such thing as a literary work or tradition which is valuable *in itself*, regardless of what anyone might have said or come to say about it.

But if there are parameters involved, then these too certainly cannot be self-evident either, but have to be determined – and as such, they cannot but be dictated or influenced by the conditioning of certain environments. The whole thus boils down to influenced choices.

Since the debate on the nature of 'world' or 'global' literature has mostly occupied itself with the issue of particularity[19] – i.e. with the diverse literary products generated by various different groups, defined ethnically, linguistically, culturally or otherwise, and with how to juxtapose these within an overarching framework –, it centres, for the most part, upon which groups are to be represented, and through what means or products. In this, the major impulse today comes from debates predominantly in English, and informed heavily by developments in North America, especially the USA,[20] triggered to a major extent by issues of adequate representation of

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[19]   Against this background it is understandable that ROBERTS/NELSON 2011: 61 refer to 'world' literature as being "recognized as the best means of allowing the comparative study of societies and cultures in a globalized world."

[20]   This is unsurprising given the dominance of North Americans using English in relevant fora and discussions, which has effectively largely blended out other approaches. As César Domínguez provocatively asks in his presentation of the Slovak Dionýz Ďurišin's systemic theory of world literature (seemingly unknown to the relevant North American discourse) while referring to remarks made by Franco Moretti, who has come up with his own systemic theory: "to whom does "we" refer in terms of a collective of researchers who supposedly lack a theory of world literature?" (DOMÍNGUEZ 2012(a): 100; see also particularly p. 105).

various groups mostly, though not only, domestic, and theoretically underpinned by very specific ideological and explanatory models, including many taken to have been evolved as such in France and French.[21] This modern development – irrespective of the actual historical background of the concepts involved – probably explains why, even when the focus shifts from predominantly domestic considerations[22] to more really global ones, the issue of particularity and adequate representation group-wise remains predominant.

Interestingly, though, one of the major tangible outcomes of the view of 'world' or 'global' literature from the perspective of particularity has been not in the English language sphere, the debate in which has furnished it with most of its present parameters, but in that of German, as Peter Goßens details (Gossens 2011: 12):

> Weltliteratur, das zeigen die meisten Auseinandersetzungen mit dem Begriff wie dem Konzept, ist fast gleichbedeutend mit dem kulturellen Erbe eines weltliterarischen Kanons, dessen Ausmaß sich individuell entwickelt. Seine umfangreichste Form hat dieser Kanon wohl in den 21.000 Einträgen von *Kindlers Literatur-Lexikon* gefunden, wobei die Auseinandersetzung mit diesem Kanon angesichts seiner extensiven Ausdifferenzierung zunehmend auch eine Art Spezialwissen wurde.[23]

I was part of the project mentioned, as the editor responsible for literature in indigenous South Asian languages. However, my personal engagement was not seen by me as any statement of views on 'world' or 'global' literature,[24] but motivated primarily by the desire to ensure comprehensive representation of South Asian literatures in this mammoth enterprise. I remain thankful that this opportunity was accorded me.

Let us, however, return to the fundamental contemporary debate and especially the issue of particularity. As Dooghan 2011 presents a good, and critical, overview of this debate, there is no need to take up the matter anew in a more detailed form here.[25] In

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[21] I am using this neutral formulation as a means of steering clear of the controversy involving the actual basis, given the contention that (Lotringer/Cohen 2001: 1) "'French theory' is an American invention, going back to at least the eighteenth century, and no doubt belongs to the continuity of American reception to all sorts of European imports, an ongoing process."

[22] In this case a term widely used is "multicultural literature." The motives behind it have been succinctly stated by Cai 1998: 322: "Multicultural literature embodies a dream of equity for the oppressed groups"; it "should eventually lead to changing their [i.e. the readers'] perspective on the Other," and thus "cultivate pluralism."

[23] "World literature – most debates on the term, as on the concept, show this – is nearly synonymous with the cultural heritage of a world literary canon whose dimension develops individually. This canon has probably found its most extensive form in the 21.000 entries of *Kindlers Literatur-Lexikon*, in which context the engagement with this canon progressively also became, in view of its extensive differentiation, a sort of specialised knowledge."

[24] On this aspect of the lexicon see Arnold 2009: viiif., also with regard to the culture-specificity of canons.

[25] I would, however, like to expand on the criticism levelled (Dooghan 2011: 6, also 228) against the definition of 'world' literature by David Damrosch (referred to by Dooghan 2011: 266 as "at the

this discussion the irreconcilability of claiming or aiming for globality and emphasising particular entities is especially accentuated (Dooghan 2011: 267):

> For all its flaws, the nation remains a viable analytical concept; nation-states still exist even if their identity is under assault from within. However, to posit the existence of a global conversation as world literature does, [...] while surreptitiously and reductively mediating that conversation through the nation promotes the worst essentialisms. Doubly so, because they are not recognized as such.

The above can be taken to pertain to other entities such as "ethnic group," "region" or the like too.

The matter is explicated further (Dooghan 2011: 268f.):

> As limiting and problematic as the designator "world" is, it does imply a certain transnational scope. Yet the invitation for students to link these worldly texts with geographical places is the explicit motivation for the inclusion of the maps. Rather than allowing the texts to stand on their own as "world" texts, or contextualizing them with their discursive influences and respondents, the anthologies always already subsume their constituent texts under a totalizing logic of geography.

But there is, it is pointed out, an alternative, namely (Dooghan 2011: 266):

> All texts, by virtue of their being texts, can communicate something intelligible to the reader. The task of the editors, then, is to recover that kernel of ostensibly universal identity from a given text's otherwise irreconcilable difference.

It is highly interesting that this idea – which might, perhaps, be seen as being in opposition to Dooghan's own statement reproduced above in note 18 – is not pursued further. In fact, though Dooghan 2011 unsparingly criticises the existing predominant deliberations and developments with regard to 'world' or 'global' literature, the parameters of this discourse, as formed by the idea of particularity, are not abandoned. Even the plea for "reorienting our focus in world literature from national representa-

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same time world literature's greatest critic while wholly complicit in its reactionary enterprise"). This definition, quite influential at present, states (Damrosch 2003: 4): "I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language [...]. In its most expansive sense, world literature could include any work that has ever reached beyond its home base, but Guillén's cautionary focus on actual readers makes good sense: a work only has an *effective* life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture." Note, though, that the subtext that runs through this definition, and Damrosch 2003 in general, sees that which is "beyond their culture of origin" as something defined by some major European language, particularly English, and especially in the USA. We still await a detailed discussion of 'world' literature according to the criteria above with reference to a receiving culture outside this sphere, for instance Tagalog, Oriya, Khmer, Hausa or the like, or even, to take European examples, Basque, Albanian or the like.

tion to intertextual connection" (Dooghan 2011: 281), so as (in effect continuing and modernising Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's concept of a *Weltliteratur*[26]) "to take the mechanisms of global exchange as its object" (Dooghan 2011: 282), is not part of an alternative discourse with different parameters. The discourse remains heavily influenced by North American, and particularly US, notions and debates on a "literary canon."[27] And with regard to this, Šarká Bubíková (Bubíková 2004: 28) has pointed out that "America" (i.e. the USA)

> still needs to overcome its tendency to canonize works because of their ethnic origin instead of canonizing ethnic works because of their literary value.

In the last part of this quotation we have the nucleus of an alternative debate with different parameters, a debate which seemingly never became a constituent part of the predominant discourse in Europe or North America (particularly in the English language), maybe because the preoccupation with nationalisms and the resultant notion of national literatures got in the way.

This is not to say that there were no attempts to begin such an alternative debate in the regions mentioned. One such debate centres on the notion of 'universal' literature, which according to A. Owen Aldridge (Aldridge 1986: 56), when not taken to refer to the sum total of all works in the world,

> comprises all works that contain elements cosmopolitan enough to appeal to the average person in any literate culture.[28]

A discussion along such lines does not seem to have got off the ground, however, even though it "provides epistemological soundness and has far-reaching ontological consequences" (Domínguez 2012(b): 245).

But such a debate is or was found elsewhere, though along lines different from the above. I would here like to highlight one prominent example from another part of the globe and in a non-European language. I am referring, of course, to the ideas of Rabindranath Tagore (Rabīndranāth Ṭhākur). These are based on his philosophical vision within which he attempted to encompass all aspects of human endeavour including religion, science and art. On the latter he wrote in English (Tagore 1931: 134f.):

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[26] It is impossible to do justice here to the huge mass of literature written on this seminal concept as explicated by Goethe (the term was first used, though in a different sense, by Christoph Martin Wieland; cf., e.g., Koch 2005: 53, Hinderer 2004: 382). For a recent overview see, e.g., Lamping 2010.

[27] This is not surprising. As Damrosch 2003: 27 aptly puts it: "For any given observer, even a genuinely global perspective remains a perspective from somewhere."

[28] Cf. also Aldridge 1986: 53: "From the perspective of content, universal literature may refer to any work that reflects attitudes, situations, or experiences that are felt or understood by human beings in all cultures." There are, however, also theories seeking to shift the onus of the issue of universality, namely by requiring us as readers to adapt, and to develop the proper consciousness for coping with a work by "deterritorialising our reading practices" (Dixon 2012: 82).

Truth is the infinite pursued by metaphysics; fact is the infinite pursued by science, while reality is the definition of the infinite which relates truth to the person. Reality is human; it is what we are conscious of, by which we are affected, that which we express. When we are intensely aware of it, we are aware of ourselves and it gives us delight. We live in it, we always widen its limits. Our arts and literature represent this creative activity which is fundamental in man. But the mysterious fact about it is that though the individuals are separately seeking their expression, their success is never individualistic in character. Men must find and feel and represent in all their creative works Man the Eternal, the creator. Their civilization is a continual discovery of the transcendental humanity. [...] For Reality is the truth of Man, who belongs to all times, and any individualistic madness of men against Man cannot thrive for long.[29]

This vision has also informed Tagore's literary theory, in which he eschewed the idea of simple reproduction of the observable, as in the Bengali "Sāhityer bicārak" ("The Judge of Literature"),[30] first published[31] in 1903, where he says (Ṭhākur 1974: 351f.):[32]

sāhitya yāhā āmādigake jānāite cāẏ tāhā sampūrṇarūpe jānāẏ; arthāt· sthāẏīke rakṣā kariẏā, abāntar'ke bād diẏā, choṭoke choṭo kariẏā, baṛoke baṛo kariẏā, phā̃k'ke bharāṭ kariẏā, āl'gāke jamāṭ kariẏā dṛḍ̃ karāẏ, prakṛtir apakṣapāt prācuryer madhye man yāhā karite cāẏ sāhitya tāhāi karite thāke. man prakṛtir ār'śi nahe, sāhityao prakṛtir ār'śi nahe. man prākṛtik jinis'ke mānasik kariẏā laẏ; sāhitya sei mānasik jinis'ke sāhityik kariẏā tule. duẏer kāryapraṇālī prāẏ ek'i rakam. kebal duẏer madhye kaẏek'ṭā biśeṣ kāraṇe taphāt ghaṭiẏāche. man yāhā gaṛiẏā tole tāhā nijer ābaśyaker janya, sāhitya yāhā gaṛiẏā tole tāhā sakaler ānander janya. [...] man sādhāraṇata prakṛtir madhya haïte saṃgraha kare, sāhitya maner madhya haïte sañcaẏ kare. maner jinis'ke bāhire phalāiẏā tulite gele biśeṣ'bhābe sṛjan śakti ābaśyak haẏ. eirūpe prakṛti haïte mane o man haïte sāhitye yāhā pratiphalita haïẏā uṭhe tāhā anukaraṇ haïte bahudūr'bartī.[33]

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[29]   Cf. in this context Ghose 2011: 55: "Both Rabindranath and Einstein claimed to be realists who believed in an omniscient universal 'intelligence' as the fundamental reality, a conception of reality that subsumes within it classical mind-independent realism in which 'mind' is a complex evolute of matter and hence matter-dependent. The difference between these claims lies in the different ways in which the universal reality and its relationship with the individual are viewed – Einstein clearly viewing the universal intelligent reality to be essentially different from the individual (this was his religiosity), and Rabindranath believing in a oneness of the two in spite of the apparent difference. He regarded the universal One to be 'within as well as beyond' the individual."

[30]   Ṭhākur 1974: 348–354.

[31]   With the title "Sāhityasamālocanā" ("Criticism of Literature"), which was subsequently changed.

[32]   The translations of this and the following Bengali passages adhere as closely as possible to the original wording and thus accept a certain ruggedness of the English reproduction, so as to minimise the risk of falsification.

[33]   "That which literature wishes to let us know, it lets [us] know fully; that is, it erects by preserving the constant, omitting the irrelevant, making the petty petty, making the great great, filling the gap, tightening the loose. Literature continues doing exactly that which the mind wishes to do in the midst

It is on this foundation that Tagore erected his edifice of *biśbasāhitya*,[34] a term that can be translated both as "world literature" and as "global literature," but also as "universal literature" or "literature for all." This concept he elaborated upon in his essay of the same name,[35] first published in 1907, in the course of which he equated *biśbasāhitya* with the English "comparative literature,"[36] even though the two are very obviously, and were very obviously even then, not the same. He wrote (Ṭhākur 1974: 384f.):

sāhityake deś'kāl'pātre choṭo kariẏā dekhile ṭhik'mata dekhāi haẏ nā. ām'rā yadi eiṭe bujhi ye, sāhitye biśbamānab'i āpanāke prakāś kariteche tabe sāhityer madhye āmāder yāhā dekhibār tāhā dekhite pāiba. yekhāne sāhityaracanāẏ lekhak upalakṣamātra nā haïẏāche sekhāne tāhār lekhā naṣṭa haïẏā geche. yekhāne lekhak nijer bhābanāẏ samagra mānuṣer bhāb anubhab kariẏāche, nijer lekhāẏ samagra mānuṣer bedanā prakāś kariẏāche, seikhānei tāhār lekhā sāhitye jāẏ'gā pāiẏāche. tabei sāhityake eibhābe dekhite haïbe ye, biśbamānab rāj'mistri haïẏā ei mandir'ṭi gaṛiẏā tulitechen; lekhakerā nānā deś o nānā kāl haïte āsiẏā tāhār majurer kāj kariteche. samasta imārater plyān'ṭā kī tāhā āmāder kāro sām'ne nāi baṭe, kintu yeṭuku bhul haẏ seṭuku bār bār bhāṅ paṛe; pratyek majur'ke tāhār nijer sbābhābik kṣamatā khāṭāiẏā, nijer racanāṭukuke samagrer saṅge khāp khāoẏāiẏā, sei adṛśya plyāner saṅge milāiẏā yāite haẏ, ihātei tāhār kṣamatā prakāś pāẏ ebaṃ eijanyaï tāhāke sādhāraṇ majurer mato keha sāmānya betan deẏ nā, tāhāke ostāder mato sammān kariẏā thāke.[37]

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of nature's impartial abundance. The mind is not the mirror of nature, literature too is not the mirror of nature. The mind makes natural things to intellective ones; literature transforms those intellective things to literary ones. The method of operation of both is nearly the same. Only, differences have arisen between both due to some certain reasons. What the mind forms, that is for its own needs; what literature forms, that is for the joy of all. [...] The mind usually gathers from amongst nature; literature collects from amongst the mind. If one sets out to bring things of the mind to fruition outside, creative power is particularly needed. What is, in this way, mirrored from nature in the mind and from the mind in literature, that is far removed from emulation."

[34]   The pronunciation of this Bengali word is /ˈbiʃʃoʃahitto/. It is made up of the combination of two loanwords (*biśba* and *sāhitya*) from Sanskrit. Transposed into Sanskrit, Tagore's term would be *viśvasāhitya*.

[35]   Ṭhākur 1974: 372–387.

[36]   Ṭhākur 1974: 385.

[37]   "If one sees literature through making it petty with regard to region, time and object, [then] one does not see it properly at all. If we understand this, [namely] that it is Universal Man himself who manifests himself in literature, then we get to see that within literature which is for us to see. Where in creating literature the writer has not become merely the means, there his writing has become spoilt. Where the writer has felt the sentiment of all humans in his thoughts, has revealed the pain of all humans in his writing, only there has his writing received its place in literature. Then indeed must one see literature in this manner, [namely] that Universal Man as a mason is erecting this temple; the writers, having come from various regions and various times, are working as his labourers. What the plan of the mansion is, that is not, forsooth, [lying] before any of us, but whichever bit turns out wrong, that bit is broken down again and again; every labourer, putting to work his innate capability, harmonising his own bit of composition with the whole, has to come to conformity with that invisible plan. In this indeed is his capability revealed, and precisely because of this no one pays him lowly wages like an ordinary labourer, [but] generally reveres him like a master [of his craft]."

And further (Ṭhākur 1974: 387):

pṛthibī yeman āmār khet ebaṃ tomār khet ebaṃ tãhār khet nahe, pṛthibīke teman kariyā jānā atyanta grāmyabhābe jānā, tem'ni sāhitya āmār racanā, tomār racanā ebaṃ tãhār racanā nahe. ām'rā sādhāraṇata sāhityake em'ni kariyāi grāmyabhābei dekhiyā thāki. sei grāmya saṃkīrṇatā haite nijeke mukti diyā biśbasāhityer madhye biśbamānab'ke dekhibār lakṣya ām'rā sthir kariba, pratyek lekhaker racanār madhye ek'ṭi samagratāke grahaṇ kariba ebaṃ sei samagratār madhye samasta mānuṣer prakāś'ceṣṭār sambandha dekhiba...[38]

The above must be seen also in connection with Tagore's differentiation, formulated most incisively in 1941,[39] between *satya* and *bāstab*,[40] which one may attempt to reproduce in English adequately as "truth" and "reality,"[41] the latter being bound to the individual human situation, the former exceeding this.[42]

The metaphysical aspects of these notions may possibly not appeal to all, but that is not the point. The point is that we have, here, an alternative model of 'world' or 'global' literature which is not based on particularity, i.e. on encompassing diversities, but on the notion of commonality (or maybe: universality), of the search for what transcends the various diversities and seeks to "recover that kernel of ostensibly universal identity from a given text's otherwise irreconcilable difference" (Dooghan 2011: 266, already quoted above). It is clearly based on a concept of what literature should be about that is very different from the particularity-based (Masoomi 2010: 108)

conviction that literature concretizes a kind of reality or truth about a given environment, a daily existence, a socio-cultural context, about given people, ordinary lives and transactions [...].

Even though Tagore's ideas are well-known particularly in South Asia, and have been discussed,[43] this alternative view does not seem to have gained many followers.[44]

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[38] "As the earth is not my field and your field and his field, [as] knowing the earth thus is knowing it in an extremely unrefined manner, so literature is not my composition, your composition and his composition. We usually tend to see literature exactly thus, in an unrefined manner indeed. Granting ourselves freedom from that unrefined narrowness, we shall fix as [our] objective the seeing of Universal Man within *biśbasāhitya*, shall accept an entirety within the composition of each writer, and shall see within that entirety the connection of all humans' efforts for expression..." What has here been translated as "unrefined," i.e. *grāmya*, literally means "rural."

[39] See Rāẏ 1983: 354–356.

[40] The pronunciation of these words is /ˈʃotto/ and /ˈbastob/ respectively. Both are Sanskrit loanwords, the latter in the Sanskrit form being *vāstava*.

[41] And in German as "Wahrheit" and "Wirklichkeit" respectively; cf. Tagore 1997: 105f.

[42] Tagore has elsewhere sometimes used *bāstab* in two senses, once as *bāstab* as given above, once to denote *satya*; on this terminology cf. Rāẏ 1983: 36f., 55f. (Other relevant Bengali literature was not available for consultation.)

[43] The latest publication on the issue seems to be Tiwari 2012. See also Paranjape 2011.

[44] It needs to be kept in mind that the discussion here is about literature, and not about the history of literature, to which other criteria apply. Cf. on this latter issue, e.g., Petersson 2006: 25 against

And yet it is interesting that, only a few years before Tagore put down his ideas in writing, another prominent personality from another part of the globe had voiced ideas pointing in a similar direction. It was Alfred Nobel who, in his will of 1895, stipulated that of the yearly interest from the fund he had set up there should be disbursed a sum among those who "hafva gjort menskligheten den största nytta" ("shall have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind"), with

en del den som inom litteraturen har producerat det utmärktaste i idealisk rigtning.

The line just quoted is translated by the Nobel Foundation as "one part to the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work in an ideal direction."[45] There has been a controversy, though, on the exact meaning of "idealisk," the result of which, as far as the Nobel Foundation is concerned, can be summed up in the words of Bengt Samuelsson, chairman of the board of directors of the Nobel Foundation, who in his 1997 opening address at the Nobel Prize award ceremony stated (Samuelsson 1997):[46]

Sture Allén, permanent secretary of the Academy, recently analyzed the expression "idealisk" in Nobel's will from a philological standpoint. He also obtained the help of a forensic expert, because the word "idealisk" is the result of a change that Nobel made in his handwritten will. The conclusion, based on the linguistic usage of that era, is that Nobel's expression "i idealisk rigtning" means "in a direction toward an ideal" or "in an ideal-oriented direction." The delineation of this ideal is determined, in turn, by the basic criterion that applies to all the Nobel Prizes: its benefit to mankind. According to Allén, the English translation of "idealisk" should therefore be "ideal" and not "idealistic," the term used in the first official translation of the will.

There seems to be no evidence which could let us assume that Tagore knew of Nobel's ideas, or that the committee which awarded him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 knew of Tagore's ideas reproduced above. But that is immaterial. What is relevant here is the alternative view of 'world' or 'global' literature as something based on commonality (or universality) and not particularity.

What this entails has been set forth by Horace Engdahl of the Swedish Academy, which selects the awardees of the Nobel Prize for literature (Engdahl 2010: 42):

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writing "the world history of literature" to "satisfy the interest in knowing what existed in earlier cultures that coincides with literature in the sense used about present conditions," as that would "separate individual older works from the cultures to which they belong, and where they form natural parts of textual worlds very different from the modern western one, and thus be deeply unhistorical in important respects." Cf. also Perkins 1992: 127.

[45] The original Swedish text is from <www.nobelprize.org/alfred_nobel/will/testamente.html>, the official English translation from <www.nobelprize.org/alfred_nobel/will/will-full.html> (both accessed on December 30, 2012).

[46] Cited from the English translation of the address. I was unable to obtain the original Swedish version.

In his will, Nobel declared that it was his "express wish that in awarding the prizes no consideration whatsoever shall be given to the nationality of the candidates." The prize is intended as an award for individual achievements and is not given to writers as representatives of nations or languages nor of any social, ethnic or gender group. There is nothing in the will about striving for a "just" distribution of the prize, whatever that could be. What was vital for Nobel was that the prize-winning author should have contributed to humanity's improvement ("conferred the greatest benefit to mankind"), not that the prize should flatter any collective self-esteem.

According to Engdahl, "a great book, regardless of its language and background, belongs to the readers of all the world" (Engdahl 2010: 45), and the Nobel Prize for literature tries to ensure this (Engdahl 2010: 45)

> by looking at authors as individuals and not as representatives. This not only means being open to good candidates from every corner of the earth. It also means turning a deaf ear to the demands that the Academy should let itself be guided by good intentions rather than good judgment. It means playing down the whole issue of origin.

As in the case of ethnicity or nationalism in the selection of the Pope, some might question the claim that "the whole issue of origin" is in actual fact played down in the Nobel selection process. One may also doubt whether individual awardees indeed "have contributed to humanity's improvement." But that would not alter the principle behind the whole. As is quite evident, this view of 'world' or 'global' literature is the direct antithesis of what seems to be the dominant discourse, based on particularities and identities, in this sphere.[47] Thus, from the point of view of commonality (or universality), the fear expressed by Erich Auerbach that the ever further reduction of literary languages, maybe ultimately to only one, would at the same time be the ultimate realisation and the end of 'world' literature (Auerbach 1952: 39) – a view which obviously is based on the notion of particularity – makes no sense.

The issue of particularity as opposed to commonality/universality was taken up some years ago by an author of Bengali background famous for his literature in English, namely Amitav Ghosh. On the basis of observations made primarily, but not only, in Bengal (though without recourse to Tagore's ideas), Ghosh discussed the differences these two approaches create in the character of narratives, and how their paradoxical juxtaposition allows certain novels to transcend the boundaries of space and time (Ghosh 1998). Taking his cue from Ghosh, Michael Mack concludes: "*Literary representation depends on a shift away from that which is represented*" (Mack 2014: 40; italics

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[47]	Moreover, it is clear from this short overview that the issue here is not the understanding or misunderstanding of literature in individual languages, and the meaning this literature has for the specific populations involved. Criticising the Nobel Prize for literature for being awarded or not awarded in the light of such criteria (as, e.g., by Derks 1996) is thus beside the point. Similarly, it should also be clear from the above that genres as such, too, are no relevant criteria. Therefore, it serves no purpose to point out, for instance (as done by Suleiman 2005: 79), that writers of children's literature have not been considered.

in the original). This echoes Tagore's contention that true literature needs to eschew "making it petty with regard to region, time and object" (see note 37 above).

At a deeper level, the two opposing views pertinent to literature "of all the world" (to use Engdahl's words quoted above) also reflect the two opposing views informing much of global debate in various spheres today, namely that related to the primacy of the individual as opposed to that of the group. But this issue not being in the focus of our deliberations here, we shall not comment further upon it.

For, apart from whether the author functions as an individual as such or as the representative of a particular group, there is also another matter that crops up in this context. It is the well-known controversy based on the catchwords "elitist" and "democratic." For whether one chooses a work based on its perceived benefit to humanity as such, or as representative for some particular grouping, it always (i.e., irrespective of which of the alternative basic premises mentioned above one adheres to) means that someone is doing the choosing, more often than not in the name of a multitude of other persons, but not necessarily legitimised by the consent of these – indeed, in most cases such consent would be impossible to come by.

One is reminded of the controversy centring on the French anti-globalist José Bové and his prominent anti-McDonald's campaign, symbolised by the Roquefort cheese versus the Big Mac. Bové legitimised his stance by recurring to "good taste," which prompted critics to ask why his taste should be taken to be more legitimate than the taste of those who prefer Big Macs.[48] Transposed into our context, one could cite the example of the Harry Potter books, which have been seen as a shining example of 'world' or 'global' literature – particularly (though not only) with reference to their global spread –, but also as junk hyped out of all proportion by an industry out to make a quick buck.

It is true that "reference to good taste certainly does not figure conventionally in radical social critique."[49] Nevertheless, even if not expressly acknowledged, in most discussions on 'world' or 'global' literature qualitative criteria of some sort clearly play a role,[50] whether it be commonality or particularity that is regarded as predominantly relevant. And it is of course just such qualitative categories which serve to exclude certain forms or individual specimens of literature from being considered, even though they may be internationally highly popular.

This ultimately boils down to the issue of whose point of view is being asserted. Franz H. Bäuml has pointed out for mediaeval Europe (Bäuml 1980: 245):

> With the increase in vernacular literacy, moreover, the oligoliterate structure of medieval society, in which the ability to read and write and the possession of access to the written word were socially distinctive, was replaced by a proliferation of social distinctions based on the matter written or read.

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[48]   Cf. on this whole issue, e.g., Bodnár 2003.

[49]   Bodnár 2003: 139. Note that "good taste" is not used here as an analytical category, but rather as a referential one.

[50]   This was already pointed out above while discussing Dooghan 2011.

Jacques Pelletier opines in a more general vein (Pelletier 1986: 538):

Le discours sur la littérature n'est jamais innocent. Toujours il est effectué à partir d'un lieu bien précis et dans l'optique privilégiée par ce lieu.[51]

Consider, too, what Renate von Heydebrand and Simone Winko say (Heydebrand/Winko: 235):

We agree with the argument of Joachim Küpper [...], and also of Pierre Bourdieu [...], that the canonic stability of a small number of literary works cannot be explained primarily by their intrinsic properties; instead, one must look at their long-term usefulness for the historically evolving models by which social elites define their relationship to the world.

Jean-Paul Sartre is even more blunt by calling such hoeing to the line of a dominant group a characteristic not merely of discourse on literature, but of the writer himself, which must needs also pertain to what is written by the writer (Sartre 1972: 105): "Ainsi l'écrivain est-il un parasite de «l'élite» dirigeante" ("Thus the writer is a parasite of the governing 'elite.'").

But even if we look at the matter of choosing not from the point of view of social groupings, but from some other perspective, such as that of expert knowledge,[52] we cannot avoid the fact that we are here entering a sphere in which ultimately opinions are arrayed against opinions. This multifarious enterprise of defining what is or is not 'world' or 'global' literature has of late increasingly led to such literature being seen as consisting not of a canon, but as a process, or something similar.[53] Though "process" or the like ostensibly refers to an entity or entities with fluid borders and content, the terminology used is a bit unfortunate in that it might lead to the *action* leading to the creation of such an entity or entities being taken to be meant by the term 'world' or 'global' literature,[54] which would lead to this term ultimately referring to something devoid of literature itself.

In any case, it is doubtful whether it will ever be possible to decide on objective criteria to determine what is or is not appropriate to be considered. Let us leave it at that,

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[51] "The discourse on literature is never innocent. It is always undertaken from quite specific a position and within a perspective privileged by this position."

[52] Cf. on this aspect, e.g., Arnold 2009: x, where we also find a negative evaluation, as far as the evaluation and filtering of literature is concerned, of the principles which have given rise to the *Wikipedia*.

[53] Interesting in this context are the considerations of Bodmer 2009: 73f. on how this notion was utilised to underpin the vision, popular in Germany particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, of an intellectual elite of the best whose duty it was to manage world affairs.

[54] Cf. in this regard the remarks of David Damrosch, elaborating (Damrosch 2003: 3) on Fritz Strich's interpretation (first formalised in 1946, but going back to ideas expressed already in 1930; cf. Gossens 2003: 195f.) of Goethe's ideas (Damrosch 2003: 5): "My claim is that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike" (similarly Damrosch 2003: 281).

and simply hold on to the fact that, whichever of the two opposing views on 'world' or 'global' literature, based respectively on commonality and particularity, one may adhere to, choices of some sort have to be made to decide what can be deemed to be 'world' or 'global' literature, however this may be defined.

But there is no gainsaying the fact that any relevant discussion has great difficulties in freeing itself from the conditionings and backgrounds of the various discussants, and from its and their positioning in time and space. What then transpires has been aptly described in a study devoted not to literature, but to the interpretation of the development of world history, which description is, however, relevant here too (Bryant 2006: 404):

> A grand interpretive battle is joined. The claims of partisans notwithstanding, victories here – in marked contrast to the natural sciences – are rarely total, and the new positions agreed to are seldom supersessional of the old. Continued factionalism is commonplace, but accommodations do also occur [...].

At this point one could be tempted to latch onto social studies discourses which attempt to classify the various, and often contradictory, trends and processes within "globalisation" on the basis of whether the local influences the global, or the global the local. Some have indeed attempted to discuss literature in a globalised context within the framework of terms such as "glocalisation" and "grobalisation,"[55] "macro-localisation" and "micro-globalisation,"[56] or the like, i.e., with the help of terms created, discussed and critiqued primarily in contexts having little to do with literature. We also have theses on the standardisation of differences in the cultural sphere.[57] It may be debated whether such efforts to fit multifarious actual happenings into neat theoretical delimited boxes, and to label these, are really helpful, given that such efforts often tend to produce meta-discourses on the boxes and labels rather than on what these attempt to come to grips with. I leave this question to others to debate upon.[58]

My concern is different. There is a much more fundamental conceptual problem associated with such discourses, as with many such classificatory problems, namely that they tend – sometimes explicitly, but more often implicitly – to base deliberations on the presumption of some sort of pure or pristine entities gradually altering their original state. Maybe this holds true for entities such as companies in the sphere of economics, but it is a problematic supposition in the field of culture. As Habibul Haque Khondker aptly puts it (Khondker 2005: 186):

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[55] Cf. on these, e.g., Ritzer 2007, particularly Chapter 6.

[56] Cf. on these, e.g., Khondker 2005: 186: "The problem of simultaneous globalisation of the local and the localisation of globality can be expressed as the twin processes of macro-localisation and micro-globalisation."

[57] See on this issue particularly Schwinn 2006.

[58] One particular issue I would like to draw attention to in this connection, though, is the issue of conscious blending out of the global on the local scale, as, for instance, shown by Xavier Mínguez López in his study of Catalan juvenile literature (López 2011). I am sure that similar examples can be garnered from various other parts of the globe.

One of the consequences of globalisation is that it opens up doubts about the originality and authenticity of cultures. If one takes a long-term view of globalisation, "locality" or "local" itself is a consequence of globalisation. There are hardly any sites or cultures that can be seen as isolated or unconnected from the global processes.

In the words of John Pizer (PIZER 2006: 119):

Of course, the notion of isolated, pristine regional cultures is itself somewhat of a chimera. Worldwide migratory patterns dating back to the beginnings of human life have guaranteed that few civilizations existed in complete isolation. Prior to the current age of globalization, political imperialism tended to eviscerate the unique character of many areas.

This is just a small sampling of similar statements by various researchers. Possibly these are opinions which might be contested. However, they are no apodictic utterances, but the results of serious research and deliberation.[59] As such, they cannot simply be swept under the rug, even though they might not fit notions held dear by many today. In this connection, it may not be out of place to draw attention to the admonition of William Schweiker, even though this concerns the field of theological ethics (SCHWEIKER 2005: 144f.):

The current intellectual scene is then a balancing act with very high stakes. In the desire to break legacies of distorted discourse and perception, navigate pluralism, and endorse an engaged life, we can easily further the most basic assumptions of a market driven, manipulative, and complacent culture. [...] The various presuppositions that undergird and motivate current intellectual labor require some balancing lest they slide into their own worst expressions.

Transposed to the context we are discussing, this means that one would be justified in questioning the premises behind the vision of 'world' or 'global' literature as mirroring global diversity. Obviously, that would be a highly explosive question.

This shows that, further, any relevant debate on the nature of 'world' or 'global' literature, whatever the constitutive elements of this debate may be, will also willy-nilly have to come to terms with relevant problems of classification and categorisation that might lead straight into controversies having to do not as much with literature as with political stances and ideologies. One such potential case concerns the term "Westernisation," already alluded to as problematic in note 9 above. On this, Habibul Haque Khondker has remarked (KHONDKER 2005: 190):

Thus, Westernisation as a category has limited conceptual value. One can associate certain literary forms, genres, and traits as part of the cultural zone vaguely called "the West," yet these are mere influences as can be seen in artistic, literary, and architectural styles. [...]

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[59]   Cf. too, with a different focus, PETERS 2001: 82: "Notions of culture and place have long been intertwined. Connected with both is a third term, "authenticity," which helps give the concept of culture a polemical edge that excludes certain candidates from its status – the mass media foremost among them."

Westernisation as a concept has some value if used only as a descriptive rather than analytic category. As an analytic category it is rather limited.

But if "Western" and "Westernisation" are questioned as analytical categories, this must needs also apply to any "-ism" or "-isation" arrayed, or seen to be arrayed, against this, whether this be "Sinicisation,"[60] or any others, including those which Joel Whitney characterised as originating from a "School of Resentment" (Whitney 2010: 19).[61] Whatever one's individual position may be in such matters, it is obvious that this cannot but lead into the midst of – probably severe – controversy. And yet this has bearing on delimiting and defining 'world' or 'global' literature, and on making the relevant choices.

One could be inclined to take a backseat view of all this, and to hold that in the long run such debates and controversies are inconsequential, as the ultimate judge will be time, unswayed by current excitements. That may very well be. However, the judgement of time is not a natural force suddenly overcoming humankind, but the aggregate of the judgement of countless individuals bygone, present and to come – and also not necessarily invariable.[62] And for all these individuals to pass judgement, they will of necessity have to have at least some sort of knowledge of what it is that is being judged.

But on what basis can such a judgement of literature actually take place? For this, we may recur to Sartre (Sartre 1972: 341): "Après tout nous pensons avec des mots" ("After all, we think with words"). We cannot get past the fact that (Oschmann 2010: 425)

die Literatur ist sprachlich, nämlich mündlich oder schriftlich, gegeben – oder gar nicht; Sprache ist die Bedingung der Möglichkeit von Literatur.[63]

Literature is invariably language-linked (Urbich 2010: 9):

Was durch Literatur, wie auch immer man sie begrifflich bestimmt, dem Erkennen zugänglich wird, muss grundsätzlich in den Potentialen der Sprachlichkeit begründet sein, in denen sich die literarische Repräsentation vollzieht.[64]

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[60] Cf. on this, e.g., Katzenstein 2012.

[61] Whitney explicates this as: "Marxists, feminists and other fellow travellers."

[62] Cf., e.g., Damrosch 2003: 6: "A given work can enter into world literature and then fall out of it again if it shifts beyond a threshold point along either axis, the literary or the worldly. Over the centuries, an unusually shifty work can come in and out of the sphere of world literature several different times; and at any given point, a work may function as world literature for some readers but not others, and for some kinds of reading but not others. The shifts a work may undergo, moreover, do not reflect the unfolding of some internal logic of the work in itself but come about through often complex dynamics of cultural change and contestation."

[63] "literature obtains in a linguistic, namely oral or written, form – or not at all; language is the precondition for the possibility of literature."

[64] "That which becomes accessible to cognition through literature, however one may define it terminologically, has fundamentally to be rooted in the potentialities of the linguisticality in which the literary representation takes place."

But if literature is language-based, it follows that access to this is language-based too, so that for those with no knowledge of a particular language some means to overcome this lack is required, namely, a change of language. Even though, and intriguingly, literature studies' occupation with language in the context of literature seems only marginally to have been focused on the process of the transferral of literary content from one language medium to another,[65] this is one of the fundamental prerequisites for any 'world' or 'global' literature. And this process is translation, notwithstanding its undervaluation in the realm of literature studies.[66] As Horace Engdahl pithily formulates: "In the realm of literature, there is no universal language other than translation." (ENGDAHL 2010: 45), whilst Michael Cronin points out that "there is no 'world' literature without translation" (CRONIN 2006: 132). Those lacking access to a language have none to the accompanying literature either, unless in the form of translation.[67]

Ning Wang attempts to describe how this process functions (WANG 2010: 3):

> Thus *world literature* also denotes literary works with "transnational" or "translational" significance, common aesthetic qualities, and far-reaching social and cultural influence. World literature is thus by no means a fixed phenomenon but a traveling concept. In the process of circulation, translation plays a vital role, for without it some of these literary works might remain "dead" to other cultures and literary traditions or consigned to their peripheries. As they travel, some works become so celebrated internationally that their renown in new languages overshadows their original national standing, while other works lose their significance and value because they are judged incompatible with foreign cultural soils or literary contexts.

But translation also requires evaluation and choice to decide what merits translation, and what does not. Access through translation is, thus, not a free access, and this must have consequences. Briefly stated: no selection, no translation, no cognisance, no acclaim or influence.[68]

Commenting on the "subjective and dynamic selection of world literature in the Chinese language environment," Wang points out (WANG 2010: 12):

> This principle of selection has honed a canon of world literature unique to China and therefore sometimes at odds with the canon known in the West and in eastern Europe.

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[65]   The two German sources just quoted do not cover this topic either.

[66]   Cf. ROBERTS/NELSON 2011: 54: "The ideology of linguistic originality together with the expressive understanding of literature and culture as an inner, authentic essence – underlined and reinforced by copyright – combined to devalue the very concept of translation and with it the transnational, occluding the hybrid nature of "national" identity."

[67]   In this, there does seem to be a difference to music.

[68]   Though David Damrosch has taken pains to differentiate between translatability and questions of value (DAMROSCH 2003: 289), from the point of view above "value" as a factor is not independent of, but dependent upon translation.

It is obvious that this cannot but hold true, *mutatis mutandis*, for other language environments too, bearing out David Damrosch's assertion that "global patterns of the circulation of world literature take shape in their local manifestations" (Damrosch 2003: 27). Language thus is not only a formative factor for literature, but also a means of selection.

Clearly, translation changes the original; it cannot but do otherwise, for it regulates the passage from one linguistic medium to another.[69] This then raises the question of what it is that is being received, processed and assimilated. Ástráður Eysteinsson remarks on this, simultaneously highlighting the issue of selection (Eysteinsson 2006: 23):

> Which text does the concept of world literature refer to? It can hardly allude exclusively to the original, which the majority of the work's readers may never get to know. On the other hand, it hardly refers to the various translations as seen apart from the original. It seems to have a crucial bearing on the border between the two, and on the very idea that the work merits the move across this linguistic and cultural border, to reside in more than one language.

Though there is a flourishing academic discipline devoted to the theory and application of translation, namely translation studies, I am not concerned here with translation *per se* as a product or as a process, but how it makes individual literary works be seen and received. For translation (Simon 2002: 28)

> is not simply a mode of linguistic transfer but a translingual practice, a writing across languages. [...] The double vision of translators is continuously redefining creative practices – and changing the terms of cultural transmission.

It is, therefore, not the general phenomenon of translation as such that is of relevance here, but what the individual translator does, the person who has to come to terms with parameters set not by any model or theory, but by the individual work he or she is grappling with, and by the target language and culture.[70]

There are different ways of seeing the way in which the translator functions or should function. Thus, one may hold that (Rion 2009: 169),

> translation is always based on somebody else's work and that should be respected. The task of the translator is a humble one, because he is a mediator he is not to be too present in the text; very often, when a great writer translates a literary work, one can find signs of his style, vocabulary or linguistic preferences in the text, then the author is not really a good transla-

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[69] Tonkin/Frank 2010: VIII: "Holding this world together, or keeping it apart, is language. At the boundaries of languages are the translators – mediators of cultures, enablers, but also gatekeepers."

[70] Cf. on the latter Bäuml 1980: 253: "Obviously the reception, the understanding, of written texts, as of everything else, is conditioned by the expectations of the perceiver, which are formed by prior experience."

tor. To translate one has to be chameleonic and respectful of the otherness of the text, conscious of the changes and aware that there has to be a reason for them [...].

Or, one could envisage a more active role for the translator (MURPHY 2011: 43f.):

Translators have gradually become acknowledged as important participants that read, interpret and translate the text inevitably entering into the process and manipulating the source text. [...] Once regarded as a traitor, the translator can now be considered as an essential figure throughout the whole process of translation, to the point of being designated as a *rewriter* of the source text, bringing to the fore different ethical and cultural issues.

But both these points of view do not impinge upon the fact that the translator has the potential to redefine what is being transmitted.[71]

Since each author, text and translator is unique, this poses difficulties for attempts at systematic evaluation. It is probably considerations such as these that led Shimon Markish, who himself was also a translator of literature from or into various languages, to make some very decided, and also polemical, remarks to the effect that (MARKISH 1999: 7)

any general theory of translation has very little to do with the translation of poetry or poetic prose, or of literary translation at all. Theorizing on translation could explain and/or systematize interesting phenomena in such fields as linguistics (first of all), psychology, sociology or ethnology, but is impotent in front of masterpieces of poetic creativity, because a really great achievement of translation is unique, as any original chef-d'œuvre is; so to say, a specific lucky chance which calls for a specific theory. I have always admired Itamar Even-Zohar for example, but I could never understand what his polysystem theory has to do with distinguishing between Good and Evil in translation. [...] "Ibersezn ken ikh nit, ober ikh veis ibersezn"[72] – this is the message I hear in any theory, and specifically in comprehensive ones.

Whatever one may hold of this view, it is clear that in the context of 'world' or 'global' literature the process of mediation plays a crucial role, and that the quality of this mediation is an important factor in establishing the status of what is mediated. But this quality cannot but depend upon the skills of the *individual* mediator. Whether this function of an individual is something that can be theorised or not, it surely needs to be given more consideration and prominence than seems hitherto to have been the case.[73]

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[71]　While this holds true for any translation, it must be kept in mind that we are here concerned with its application in only one sphere, namely that of literature, however defined. The problematics of other spheres, such as news media, are not part of these deliberations. For such issues, as well as related issues such as crowdsourced translation or internet translation communities, see, e.g., SALZBERG 2009.

[72]　Yiddish: "I can't translate, but I know all about translating."

[73]　This also holds for the widened usage of "translation" referring no longer to the translation of texts (as in the discussion here), but more and more to intercultural transactions which are not necessarily text-based (cf. on this development of the concept of "translation," e.g., BASSNETT 2011: 102–104).

Awareness of this aspect of the matter is already there, as the following remarks of Kirsten Malmkjær make evident (Malmkjær 2011: 122):

> Meaning is formed on each occasion of linguistic interaction and is therefore unique and not replicable. Therefore, a translation can never 'mean' the same as the source text. But this does not matter, because practice and the principle of charity suffice to ensure that translators 'get away with' translating sufficiently well sufficiently often – as the fact of the spread beyond a single language, and regular refinement through re-translation, of texts from everywhere testifies.

One is, in fact, tempted to see just such an approach in Umberto Eco's work on translation first published in 2003 (Eco 2010), which consists basically of developments and musings based on his own encounters with translation and translations.

Finally, there is the question of by what exact means a process by origin not only multilingual, but also, and maybe even more problematically, multicultural, can effectively take place even through the means of translation. One alternative is a multitude of interconnected nodes, each node representing the interface of two or more different languages, a multitude of different languages thus being involved. The other is a single node where all other languages interface with one language. Though obviously the alternatives do not preclude each other, and various permutations and combinations of the two are possible and also to be actually found, the inertia of convenience can be expected to tend toward the single-node alternative, as this involves just one language serving as an interface, a language which thus has to be mastered for general interaction. Even in the multiple-node alternative, the number of nodes cannot be infinite, but will tend towards privileging certain languages and thus minimising the number of nodes.

One may find this unfair, one may decry the dominance of one language, or only certain languages, over others, but the fact is that literature in a global(ised) context is not a game played on a level field. Some languages are more equal than others when it comes to establishing global reach. And I do not think that there can be any doubt that paramount among these today is English. Indeed, there is at present no other language in sight which actually or potentially can serve as a similar interface, even among people who are not mother tongue speakers, in the same manner.

Though English of course still functions as an important mother tongue, its international predominance today is most probably owed to its status as a lingua franca and discourse tongue. However, this status cannot satisfactorily describe the literary interface function, in which English is clearly more than any of the above, more than a "language of communication," but not a "language of identification" (on these terms see, e.g., Fiedler 2011). One is inclined to see English as a "stepmother tongue" (Skinner 1998) here, but this term was coined to refer to authors whose mother tongue is not English, but who write in English (Skinner 1998: 11). The interface function, however, also implies the passive usage (such as reading) of the language in literary contexts by people having it neither as a mother tongue nor actively using it as a literary medium. This does not justify calling English the predominant international *Kultur-*

sprache[74] (which I am sure would raise more than a few hackles), though it does imply mastery of it in a register which entails more than the transmission of information for practical purposes. And, though English is indeed a "prestige language"[75] in various human aggregates, and also a *Bildungssprache*,[76] in the context we are here dealing with this is not its primary function. I must admit to not having a convenient label for the usage and status of English in the context described.

This usage of individual languages has been going on for ages, though not on such an international scale. Prominent examples of languages used thus are, for instance, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and Chinese. The supersession of such a language by some other language is a gradual process, and may be accompanied by regulatory measures trying to stem the development (French is a good example). But so far the process has always taken place, or is taking place today. This makes many assume that it will also take place with regard to English. On the other hand, the spread and usage of English is unprecedented in human history. David Crystal has speculated that this might result in a critical mass of users being reached which would cement the dominance of English "for ever" (obviously hyperbole for: a very long time) (CRYSTAL 1997: 139f.). Should this happen, then it would, of course, also ensure the use of English as *the* interface for literature internationally, certainly with repercussions on the nature of the literature passing through the interface.

Should, however, English gradually be replaced, then the question is, clearly, what might replace it. Nicholas Ostler has advanced the theory that no other language can in the future achieve a similar status, but that technological advances will create instantaneous machine-based interfaces, making it unnecessary for languages to directly interface with each other (OSTLER 2010). It is intriguing to speculate on what this would mean for 'world' or 'global' literature.

Such a development, too, would, of course, only underpin the contention that communication or interaction in a globalised context cannot, as a rule, function on a major scale unless through the medium of some common interface, whatever that may be. The need for this interface means that, on the one hand, there will always be some sort of distortion due to the necessity of adaptation, at both ends, to this interface, which, as should be evident, can never be culture-detached as long as it is by origin grounded in a particular human group. What this means has been summarised by Eleonora Federici (FEDERICI 2011: 155):

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[74] "Kultursprache" is used as a loanword in English scholarly publications, though it is not found in the OED. Suggested equivalents such as "cultural language," "civilisational language" or "language of culture/civilisation" do not convey quite the same meaning.

[75] On this concept, cf. particularly KAHANE 1986, though note that this study is concerned mostly with Europe, which might impinge upon the deductions made when dealing with other parts of the world.

[76] This is another German term difficult to reproduce adequately in English; various equivalents proposed being "academic language," "language of schooling," "scientific language," "language of education" etc. It may refer to a particular language, but also to a particular register of a language. Commonly taken to refer to "the language in which topics of general interest are discussed in public and which is also prevalent in the field of education" (THÜRMANN/VOLLMER/PIEPER 2010: 9 note 2), it is, in fact, a multivalent term (cf., e.g., MOREK/HELLER 2012, also GOGOLIN 2009: 96f.).

The receiving context affects in some way the translator's choices and strategies, primarily because the reader interprets the intertextual references according to his own literary, historical and cultural archive, his own baggage. At the same time, the translator's choices influence the reader's reception of the text in the target context. His insertion of new elements or omissions inevitably characterise the text, and the paratextual elements he can include assure a communicative act between the agent of the translation and the reader.

On the other hand, those not able to utilise this interface, or ignored by it, will either not be heard at all, or else not as prominently as they might deserve. In this, 'world' or 'global' literature is definitely both "*one* and *unequal*" (MORETTI 2000: 55f.).

There is, thus, no means by which we can obviate the necessity for some sort of interface, or maybe interfaces. And the dominant one today is English. In the light of this development, it is no use lamenting about the dominance of English internationally. Indeed, one might at times have the feeling that those complaining the loudest might be doing so precisely because they would like their own language to have this status, and not because they as such deplore any one language having this status.

These rambling ruminations might leave one with a sense of frustration, since they cannot, and have not even attempted to, answer the question of what 'world' or 'global' literature actually is and how it may be arrived at. But that was not the point of the exercise. What was attempted was to show up and discuss the various ramifications of the concept and the problematics associated with it, in the context of a globalisation hitherto unprecedented. Franco Moretti has resignedly stated that "world literature is not an object, it's a *problem*" (MORETTI 2000: 55). One need not adhere to this view, but one does feel sympathy with it.[77]

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Prof. Dr. Rahul Peter DAS is the Professor for Languages and Cultures of Post-classical South Asia at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in Germany, and the President of the German Association for Asian Studies. Further particulars on <http://www.suedasien.uni-halle.de/das.html>.