

## **ARTICLES DE RECHERCHE / ARTICLES**



# What Does A Classic Do? Tapping the Powers of a Comparative Phenomenology of the Classic/al

WIEBKE DENECKE

## 1. Variations on a Classical European Question

“What is a Classic?” This question sounds familiar. We might not remember right away what people have said about it, but it is a question that already implies answers. Not any particular one, but a clearly defined arena animated by forces engaged in Titan Wars of cosmic proportions: timeless authority versus historical coincidence or oblivion; the sanctioned canon versus the mere archive; universal relevance versus local parochialism; sanctioned school book text versus ephemeral entertainment tome and so forth. Unlike other big, unanswerable academic questions like “what is philosophy?,” the answer calls for revelations about personal tastes and values, confessions of our innermost cherished convictions. And readers would expect an author with *gravitas*, of a certain age and with a certain life experience, to take on this question. An authoritative author who can equal the authoritativeness of the subject matter. The question is archetypal and highly personal, calling for the autobiographical.

This is at least what three influential grapplings with the question that span the past one-and-a-half centuries have in common. All respondents were literary men of weight at the time, reaching out publicly on this important issue to their contemporaries. The French literary critic, scholar, and writer Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve was in his mid-forties when he published “Qu’est-ce qu’un classique?” in a newspaper column in October of 1850 and was a well-published poet and critic, who had just published his masterly study of the famed Cistercian abbey Port-Royal and its role in the intellectual and religious life of 17th century France. T. S. Eliot was in his mid-fifties and a magnet of literary life in London when in October of 1944 he delivered his presidential address to the Virgil Society on “What is a Classic?,” as German rockets were falling

on London. And J. M. Coetzee was in his early fifties, a celebrated South African novelist, critic, and academic decorated with numerous prizes, when he presented his own “What is a Classic. A Lecture” in 1991 to an audience in the Austrian city of Graz.

Their various answers could not have been more different. One of the most notable points in Sainte-Beuve’s column is that he promotes the concept of a “classic” of European vernacular – rather than classical Greco-Roman – literatures. This is particularly remarkable given his cult of Latinity, his distaste of popular and contemporary literature and his non-democratic views (Prendergast). Taking his readers back to the *locus classicus* of “classicus” as a term for canonical writers, the Latin erudite raconteur Aulus Gellius (2nd cent. CE), he states: “a writer of value and distinction, *classicus assiduusque scriptor*, a writer who is of account, has valuable property, and is not mistaken in the proletarian crowd.” (Sainte-Beuve 39). The Latin root of the word is socio-economic, referring to the land-owning classes of Roman society; it is patrician and anti-proletarian. Gellius applies it to works of publicly acknowledged worth and reputation, literally pieces of cultural capital. Eliot dismisses the European vernaculars and elevates Virgil’s *Aeneid* to the one and only universal classic, a metaphor for the pinnacle of European cultural history. For him, no works in any of the European vernacular traditions deserve the predicate of “universal classic.” Coetzee, visibly uncomfortable with any assumption of inherent timeless worth, finds the classic in the process of social and academic consensus building, in the fact that it has “passed the scrutiny of hundreds of thousands of intelligences before me, by hundreds of thousands of fellow human beings.” He thus clears space for the critic, like himself, who becomes not the foe, but producer of the classic by “interrogating” it (Coetzee 16).

Throughout their meandering reflections on the topic all three engage, with some *gravitas*, in personal confessions of sorts. For Sainte-Beuve, the classic is also biographical capital, accrued over a life time, that unfolds its full powers in a process of ageing, maturation, and ultimate fulfillment:

Blessed are those who read and reread, those who can follow freely follow their inclinations in their reading! There comes a time in life when – all journeys completed, all experiences made – there is nothing more palpably joyful than to study and reexamine the things we know, to truly savor what we feel, as if we see the people we love again and again: pure delights of the heart, of that taste of maturity. It is then that the word ‘classic’ acquires its true meaning... (Sainte-Beuve 54)

The classic becomes a tool to nurture the sublime maturity of the man of “good taste”; and a tonic against the vagaries of life, offering “a friendship which never deceives and could never fail us” (55). Eliot mentions Sainte-Beuve’s essay and says he doesn’t have it at hand – yet some of Eliot’s concepts seem to owe much to or at least resonate with the Frenchman’s. “Maturity,” both of the individual or a civilization and literature, is the backbone of Eliot’s vision. A language and literature need history behind them to *deserve the appearance* of the classic. What in Sainte-Beuve still resonates as a romantic *éloge* on the personal maturation with and through books, has by Eliot’s time become more of a desperate gasp of the waning 20th-century European *Bildungsbürgertum*.

Just how autobiographical and confessional Eliot’s lecture might actually be becomes clear in Coetzee’s merciless dissection of it. In contrast to Eliot’s lack of explicit engagement with Sainte-Beuve, much of Coetzee’s lecture is devoted to unveiling Eliot’s elevation of the *Aeneid* to the universal classic as an allegory of Eliot’s own life and his attempt to bolster his standing as an American who has made it in British letters and espouses a radically conservative political program of European unity (in 1944!), centered around the epitome of Europe’s Latin heritage and guarded by the Catholic Church. An attempt to be the prophet of this vision and remake his identity “in which a new and hitherto unsuspected paternity is asserted – a line of descent less from the Eliots of New England and/ or Somerset than from Virgil and Dante, or at least a line in which the Eliots are an eccentric offshoot of the great Virgil-Dante line” (Coetzee 6). In a “transcendental-poetic” reading Coetzee sees Eliot inserting himself into a venerable lineage, thereby appropriating the weight of the classic himself. In a “sociocultural” reading he sees Eliot’s essay as the “magical enterprise of a man trying to redefine the world around himself – America, Europe – rather than confronting the reality of his not-so-grand position as a man whose narrowly academic, Eurocentric education had prepared him for little else but life as a mandarin in one of the New England ivory towers” (7).

If the autobiographical and confessional are made visible in Eliot’s essay as a deeper allegorical structure, Coetzee makes an explicit personal memory into the capstone for theorizing his own idea of the classic. The date is summer of 1955, the place his Afrikaans family garden in the suburbs of Cape Town, the revelation are melodies from Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Well Tempered Clavier* drifting by. This was “the first time I was undergoing the impact of *the classic*” (9). His own rather

self-referential answer to the question of what a classic is – defined by generations of critics and academic professionals – emerges from his uncertainty about the nature of his fateful encounter with Bach: was it truly an impersonal aesthetic experience, “connecting” with Bach across the ages? Or motivated by ulterior motives, by his status as a postcolonial South African subject, a “symbolic election on my part of European high culture as a way out of a social and historical dead end” (15)? The belief in the *tested* classic allows Coetzee to move away from (colonial) universalist claims and closer to an institutional definition of the classic. It downplays the aesthetic charisma of the object and elevates those of us who are creating this charisma: the critics, commentators, scholars.

Coetzee’s analysis undoes the self-promoting halo of Eliot’s lecture – which, curiously, still maintains the status of a classic on the classic question despite its ensconced brand of Roman catholic imperialism that today is even more foreign to us than it already was in the middle of the 20th century. What is more, Coetzee’s essay carries the seed of undoing the question and the genre of “what is a classic?” as a whole. It becomes a potentially rotten, embarrassing question and he senses it: “Is being spoken to across the ages a notion that we can entertain today only in bad faith?” (13)

Indeed, in what form *can* and *should* the classic question still exist today? The question “What is a classic?” is in some ways a remnant of 19th century European intellectual life. In the 20th and 21st centuries, with the waning of the naturalized, *a priori* status of Greco-Roman classical literature and humanistic education in Western societies, the question has morphed into: “*why* read the classics?” In times of the global humanities crisis which hits historical research and scholars of the premodern world hardest, the value of classical literature and Classics has become debatable, rather than assumed. This is both liberating and devastating. It is a new global *condition des sciences humaines* that has inspired passionate defenses. They range from the convincingly tautological and nihilistic, in the face of the question’s weight as with Italo Calvino in “Why read the Classics:” “I should really rewrite it a third time, so that people do not believe that the classics must be read because they serve some purpose. The only reason that can be adduced in their favour is that reading the classics is always better than not reading them” (Calvino 9); all the way to the rousingly civic, as in Pierre Judet de La Combe’s *L’avenir des anciens. Oser lire les grecs et les latins* [The Future of the Ancients. Daring to Read the Greeks and Romans], where he solemnly invokes a “Right to Read”

and a “Right to History” (Judet de La Combe). The classic has become a world-wide challenge and the new *why* question is recognized as a new global genre beyond the 19th century European roots and limitations of the earlier *what* question. The *what* question arose in Europe increasingly during the nineteenth century when the previously only Greco-Roman definition of the “classic” was opened to works in European vernaculars and formal education in vernacular languages and literatures rather than just Greek and Latin came to be instituted in the newly developing general education systems. The *why* question, along with European concepts of what a “classic” is and why nations need them, has spread around the world. As with *Naze koten o benkyōsuru no ka* [*Why study the Classics?*], published in 2018 by the Japanese literary historian Maeda Masayuki, it is inspiring scholars around the world to take stock of their own literary heritage, in the climate of a pretty much global humanities crisis.

## 2. The “Comparable Classic” and the Classic Question for a New Age: What Does a Classic Do?

It is Italo Calvino’s answer to the *why* question that opens our eyes to a hitherto disregarded dimension of the classic question, namely the question of a “comparative” or “comparable classic.” Calvino first refreshes some of the previous answers to the *what* question: that classics are works to be reread (with special pleasure in maturity), that they are part of collective memory and the social subconscious. He also evokes the magic power of the classic, its mystic unity with the universe: “A classic is the term given to any book which comes to represent the whole universe, a book on a par with ancient talismans. A definition such as this brings us close to the idea of the total book, of the kind dreamt of by Mallarmé” (Calvino 6 f.). Or, inversely, its mysterious power to attract us, even if we resist it or dispute the author and his work. The evocation of the classic’s numinous powers, paired with the nihilism regarding the *why* question, already makes for a potent mixture. But the real punch-line appears in his sudden confession towards the end of the essay:

I notice that Leopardi is the only name from Italian literature that I have cited. This is the effect of the disintegration of the library. Now I ought to rewrite the whole article making it quite clear that the classics help us understand who we are and the point we have reached, and that consequently Italian classics are indispensable to us Italians in order to compare them with foreign

classics, and foreign classics are equally indispensable so that we can measure them against Italian classics. (9)

In a move that seems to blend lingering enlightenment worldliness with a new 19th-century colonial cosmopolitanism, Sainte-Beuve had added Confucius to a row of Europe's ancient sages and evokes "three Homers" who deserve more attention: Vālmiki, Vyāsa, and Ferdowsi, the respective authors of the grand Indian epics of the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, and the Persian epic "Book of Kings," *Shahnameh*. This is far ahead of Eliot, a century later, but the "foreigners" are still inferior and curiously caught in Christian-Pagan allegory as three "Oriental Magi" trailing after the unsurpassable god-like Homer (Sainte-Beuve 51). It is Calvino who for the first time transcends his own national literary filiation (or adopted cosmopolitan Latin tradition, in Eliot's case), urging us to compare our (Italian) classics with foreign ones.

The *what* question is hardly amenable to comparisons: precisely *what* makes Virgil's *Aeneid* or Dante's *Divine Comedy* a classic is too easily only discussed in the context of their respective literary traditions, even if in "universalized" fashion, as with Eliot. At this moment of a global flattening of historical consciousness and the ensuing retrenchment in classical studies, the *why* question can bring scholars and communities around the globe into a dialogue about the value and studies of their canons and strategies to support them (or not) and build them into the future. Yet, this is a question of the *compared* classic or *compared* field of Classics where scholars of Greek or Sanskrit, Classical Japanese, or Persian from their respective locales can strategize together about the challenges of the present moment for classical studies and their visions for the preservation or invigoration of their literary heritage. This is not yet the question of the *comparable* classic.

To make matters more complex, the academic study of classical literatures around the world today are challenged by political and religious instrumentalization, from the state-sponsored Confucius- and Classics fever of the PRC, to the at times violent zeal of Hindu fundamentalists in India. Promoting one's native classics has become a strategy for increasing both domestic reputation and global soft power. The Chinese government's efforts to promote the playwright Tang Xianzu (1550–1616) during the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's passing shows us the urgent desire of non-western cultures for "comparative recognition." On January 14, 2017, *The Economist* reported "*Shashibiya*, meet Tang Xianzu: How



China uses Shakespeare to promote its own bard.” It came in handy that Tang Xianzu died in the same year and happened to be a playwright – no matter that contemporaneity almost never makes for the best comparisons and no matter the fact that drama developed very late and was much less prestigious in the Chinese literary tradition, such that Tang Xianzu, accordingly, gets nowhere even close to being as canonical and influential as Shakespeare. But the Chinese government insisted, and the occasion inspired a lavish program of events and plays (like *Coriolanus* and *Du Liniang*, where Shakespeare’s Roman general encounters the romantic heroine from Tang Xianzu’s most famous play, *The Peony Pavilion*). There were even plans to build a replica of Shakespeare’s hometown, Stratford-upon-Avon, at Sanweng-upon-Min in Jiangxi Province. On a state visit to Britain in 2015 Xi Jinping had described Tang as the “Shakespeare of the East,” perhaps not quite realizing that this label was not just upgrading Tang in Western eyes, but actually also downgrading him by holding him to Western standards.

We might dismiss this as a tragicomic antic out of the bag of tricks of the PRC’s propaganda machine, but we would be wrong in considering this an isolated incident of limited relevance. In the early 21st century the “compared classic” is carrying two faces: it can unite us over the “why read the classics?” question and allow us to develop more global awareness of and strategies for preserving literary heritage under threat; but it can also generate anxious competitiveness and is (ab)used by governments or fundamentalist interest groups as tool of “nation branding” and populist identity building that is part of the rampant nationalisms that mark our historical moment.

Yet, Calvino was probably not thinking of the “compared classic” of “ours” and “their” classics. He seems to refer to the “comparable classic,” the classic (and academic discipline of Classical Studies) that allows us to grasp culturally distinctive traits of the other, and, not the least, our own literary tradition, when productively illuminated in the defamiliarizing light of other traditions. The “comparable classic” demands an entirely new question, beyond the *what* and *why*. Namely the question “What Does a Classic *Do*?” So far there has been surprisingly little debate around the classic and Classical Studies in full-fledged global terms, both geographically and historically.<sup>1</sup> The *what* question severely discourages

---

<sup>1</sup> Postcolonial perspectives on the classic, like Mukherjee (2013), are certainly important, but they are still constrained by Western concepts of the classic and their

global comparisons, because it typically focuses only on the works and concepts of one classical tradition. But we can transform it into a question of global scope and relevance by shifting the question from an ontological *what* or utilitarian *why* to a question of *doing*, a question of pragmatic action theory, which examines human behavior as purpose-oriented and action-driven. Examining *doing*, both of the classic and of its creators, of its readers, transmitters, contesters, opens a whole new world of questions hitherto hardly explored: what can we identify as *functions* of the classic – social, political, ethical, religious, psychological, aesthetic, philosophical, literary historical? How did *institutions* shape the creation, specific impact, transmission and transformation of the classic? How did these functions and institutions diverge in different regions and periods around the globe throughout history? How could we capture the phenomenon of the classic in the rich archive of the past five millennia of human historical experience on this planet? What are the benefits of studying these questions in comparative perspective and promoting comparative studies of the classical and of Classical Studies? And to what uses can we further put such a new field of global studies of the classic to inspire deeper cross-cultural understanding, empathy, tolerance, dialogue, and collaboration?

### 3. Semantic and Philosophical Paradoxes of the Classic/al

We can certainly define the meaning of the classical historically, as instantiated in particular works, periods, artistic styles or academic disciplines: Virgil's *Aeneid* is a "classic" of Latin (then European, then Western, then world) literature; the "classical period" of Japanese literature to which later ages would look back with nostalgia is the Heian Period (794–1185); Johann Sebastian Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier* is a collection of pieces of "classical (and, here it gets a bit more complicated, Baroque) music"; "Classical Studies" or "Classics" in the West is the study of Greco-Roman civilization and "classical antiquity" that unfolded in European cultural history. Reference works have typically defined and described the "classical" in its historical instantiations, which have

---

impact around the world. Pollock, Elman and Chang (2015) is a pioneering step towards thinking globally about philology, a practice related to the question of the classic.

reached wherever the Latin-derived term of *classicus* spread and was put to further use in new local contexts. Only if we try to conceptualize the term, historicizing it and allowing its meaning to transcend any particular time and place, do we realize how elusive and paradoxical it actually is.

English marks this bifurcation with the suffix “-al.” The “classical” refers typically to the historically instantiated: “classical archeology” (of Greco-Roman antiquity), or “classical works” of Spain’s Golden Age. The “classic,” in turn, carries conceptualized meaning: it is in principle empty of content, a relational linguistic function that contrasts another phenomenon with the “classic,” the originary, traditional, ideally realized and embodied, normative, typical: a “classic stage” of human evolution, “classic cars,” a “classic mistake,” or “that was just classic of him.” While the first, historically instantiated, meaning is strongly value-laden and emphasizes highest standards, values, and accomplishments, the referentially empty, conceptual, relative meaning is typically neutral and only points to the “typical” and “normative” of whatever is at stake: like a “classic” failure that certainly does not represent the pinnacle of accomplishments.

This bifurcation makes definition of *classicus* and its later European incarnations through a conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) less revealing and productive for our understanding what the “classic/al” is, than a conceptual history of “literature,” or even “the canon” would be. There is an interesting grey-area between the purely historically-instantiated and referential and the purely conceptually-relative and non-referential that allows us to locate the (or better “a”) classic/al in an evolutionary model. Whatever the time and place, we know what has to come before: the primitive, the primordial, the archaic. And we know what has to come after (and has done so in European cultural history, if not necessarily in others): the post-classical (such as Europe’s first instantiation of the post-classical: the Hellenistic), the medieval (of the three-step periodization template of Antiquity/Middle Ages/Modernity), the romantic (a 19th century reaction to early modern classicisms), or the modern (which, as the other book-end of our imagined trajectory from classical antiquity to “classical” modernity, is not an antonym but a correlative of sorts; see Damrosch).

Although methods of conceptual history are less helpful to the comparative study of the classic/al, the comparison of its respective etymological networks is more interesting and revealing. This essay takes its cues largely from the Western and the Eastern book-ends of the Eurasian

continent: Europe and the regions that grew out of Romanization and Hellenization on the one end, and, on the other, East Asia's Sinographic Sphere, today's China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and all states, which historically relied on the Chinese writing system, scriptural and literary canons, and institutions of governance among others. The guiding metaphors of their respective etymological networks of the "classic" are strikingly different, with one drawing on socioeconomical imagery and the other evoking cosmological and political analogies.

Our Western, and by now global, hyperconcept of *classicus* was originally a socio-economical metaphor, referring to a person of the highest taxation category. Aulus Gellius (and his spokesman Fronto, to whom he attributes the expression of *scriptores classici* ("first class writers" in Gellius *Attic Nights*), seems to have transferred this expression metaphorically to writers and their works. Note that the supposedly comparable Greek term *enkrithentes* has a somewhat different meaning and, unlike its Latin counterpart, did not go viral in world history (Citroni 205–208). Instead, the Latin *classicus*, in Gellius's metaphorical use, was probably rediscovered in the 15th century and has now been adapted to most languages and cultures around the world. Socioeconomic metaphors have played a large role in the Latin conceptions of the workings of the human world: they also underlie the etymologies of "civilization" or "culture," concepts that are broadly related to the "classic." The citizen, "*civis*," of a city makes for *civilization*; and *culture* relies on agriculture and the cultivation of land, again bringing us to socioeconomic metaphors.

In contrast, the Chinese (and East Asian) concept of *jing* 經, a canonical work or authoritative scripture, described originally textile pattern, namely the warp, or the vertical threads on a loom and meant, by extension, "to regulate," "to govern," or the "normative" and "authoritative." During China's Warring States Period (481–221 BCE), the age of China's foundational philosophical masters, it was attached to works believed to have been compiled by Confucius and with the establishment of a State Academy in 124 BCE it came to refer to the sanctioned Five "Confucian" Classics that were part of its curriculum.<sup>2</sup> Much later it was applied to the scriptures and canons of other civilizations, such as the Bible (聖經 *Shengjing*) and the Koran (真經 *Zhenjing*). Like

<sup>2</sup> For a succinct introduction to the concept of the classic, *jing*, and the Chinese classical canons see Wilkinson 368–72.

the not unrelated concept of *wen* 文 (“pattern,” “human culture”, “L/ letters”, “literature” etc.) it is a cosmological concept rooted in textile imagery. “Regulation” through the “warp” was tied to ideas of harmonic response between the heavens, the Son of Heaven (the emperor), and his realm and the people. *Wen* originally referred to patterned fur of animals or human body tattoos and is the center of the extended etymological network of “human pattern/culture” (*wenhua* 文化), “writing/characters” (*wenzi* 文字), “written texts” (*wenxian* 文獻), “literature” (*wenxue* 文學), “civilization” (*wenming* 文明), and “civility” (as antonym to *wu* 武 the “martial”). By the Han Dynasty the resonance between heavenly, earthly, and human “pattern” (*wen*) became a staple of political philosophy. If in the Latin etymological network of the classical is tied to socioeconomic relations in the city and community of citizens, its comparable East Asian etymological network is associated with cosmological and political order, and the place of humans and their civilizational skills within the extended scope of the cosmos.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries East Asian intellectuals began to coin thousands of new terms to absorb and digest Western knowledge. To render the terminologies of European arts and sciences, which they encountered during their monumental translation efforts of thousands of Western books into East Asian languages, they largely relied on the traditional terms of *jing* and *dian* 典 (canon, also in the form of *gudian* 古典 “ancient canon” e.g. of Buddhism or Confucianism) to translate *classicus* and vernacular European concepts of the classical. In Japanese and Korean, where directed phonetic transliteration of Western terms (rather than semantic translation) is way more common and successfully practiced than in Chinese, a two-pronged concept of the classic emerged. First, “*koten*” or “*kojŏn*” (the respective Japanese and Korean pronunciations of the Chinese *gudian*); or, second, *kurashikku* (クラシック) and *k’ullaeshik* (클래식) (the phonetic transcription of “classic” into Japanese and Korean, respectively). As we might expect, “*kurashikku*” or “*k’ulleshik*” music refers to Western classical music, using the phonetic transcription of the Western concept; while *koten* or *kojŏn* music (unless supplemented with the term “Western”) typically refers to traditional Japanese or Korean music. In Japanese and Korean the historical bifurcation of the concept of the classic/al, of the “native” versus the “Western-imported” cultural and artistic traditions, which occurred through the large-scale encounter with Western knowledge on the threshold of modernity, is much more clearly marked than in

Chinese, which uses the semantic translation of “*gudian*” for both native and foreign traditions.

Stepping away once more from particular etymologies and their global migration history, which are insufficient to comparatively grasp the phenomenon of the classic/al, let’s return to its conceptual thrust. Philosophically, the “classic/al” is a mercurial, paradoxical concept. It can be ontologically deceptive: classical values and norms generated by a particular cultural and historical constellation are too easily enshrined as timeless, existential truths – as it happens with Eliot’s elevation of Virgil’s *Aeneid* to the universal classic where the historically relative is made into an aesthetically absolute. Ethically, the concept of the classic/al is potentially divisive and exclusionist. Having “classics” is a form of cultural capital of “civilized nations” and thus, like other cultural capital such as “philosophy,” “technology,” or “science,” is often monopolized by hegemonic states at the expense of supposedly less civilized others. Epistemologically, the concept of the classic/al is easily circular. Any claims to the normative and prescriptive value of classical aesthetic programs, popular in neoclassicist movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, can only be derived from a deductive description of actual historical instances.

#### 4. Comparative Phenomenology of the Classic/al

But this is not all. The semantic and philosophical paradoxes of the classic/al requires us to proceed with much caution and critical self-awareness in order to avoid simplifying definitions and skewed comparisons. But the single most hampering obstacle in developing comparative studies of the classic is the severe conceptual underdetermination of the “classic/al.” To make matters worse, it is paired with an engrossed cultural historical overdetermination. Conceptually, the classic is underdetermined in a spatial, temporal, and disciplinary sense. We need to leave the (treacherously) safe haven of conceptual history approaches and move away from the historical unfolding of the particular Latin term of *classicus* and its empirically traceable spread around the world by the 21st century, because it dramatically reduces the concept to a Greco-Roman-European-postcolonial phenomenon. Instead, we need to find functional comparanda, however complex but productive comparables, of classical phenomena and classicisms in other places and times. The challenge is that classicisms have occurred at least over the past three

millennia of human history and are ubiquitous. The earliest historical moment to which scholars have applied the concept of classicism (versus modernism) is the textual culture of Egypt's New Kingdom, during the latter part of the second millennium BCE; among the most recent applications is probably "classical modernism" (think anything from Mussolini's Fascist art to Le Corbusier, Franz Kafka or perhaps Arnold Schoenberg). If it can happen almost *everywhere anytime*, how can we meaningfully distinguish these phenomena, across time, space, media of cultural production, and disciplines of academic research? And how can we identify appropriate and productive comparanda in vastly different cultures? This is compounded by the temporal underdetermination of the "classic" and "classicism." Turning our gaze from the cross-cultural and horizontal scope to the temporal and vertical development within a single tradition, waves of various "classicism" typically come and go once the classical – a body of texts, a period, an aesthetical program, a canon of artists – has been established and becomes accepted and operative in specific institutions and communities. Distinguishing one wave from the next in concept and character is challenging and the suffix "neo-" gives us only one single step after an initial "classicism" and is often more confusing than helpful when considering macroregions, like Europe, whose cultures are distinct enough but develop in complex interaction with each other, though with significant divergences and time lags. For example, France's highpoint of "*classicisme*" (especially in literature) occurs in the 17th and early 18th century, followed in the later 18th and 19th centuries by "*néo-classicisme*," especially in art and the decorative arts. But in the German case, literary "*Klassik*" flourished only in the 19th century, and French "*néo-classicisme*" and "style Empire" in the decorative arts is in German only "*Klassizismus*," while "*Neoklassizismus*" is associated with a range of classicizing phenomena in the arts and culture of the late 19th and earlier 20th centuries. Thus, confusion arises both from schematic chronological counting – the tripartite "classical"/"classicist," "neoclassical/neoclassicist" etc. – and from the need to distinguish the classicizing waves in their specificity and rather different timelines within each tradition and across traditions within the same macroregion, not to mention the global scale.

Lastly, in disciplinary and academic terms, the "classical" and "classicism" appear basically throughout history and throughout the range of the arts and even sciences, but the nature, timing, and scholarly terminology, often rooted in long-standing historical



conventions, diverges vastly from discipline to discipline. This makes interdisciplinary dialogue on the subject of the “classical” confusing and frustrating. The spatial, temporal, and terminological ubiquity and thus underdetermination of the “classical” has led to a situation where specific historically-rooted terminologies have come to dominate our cultural historical understanding, which makes it harder to see similarities between classicizing phenomena. Augustan “Atticism,” “Renaissance,” “Enlightenment,” or, to venture further, Chinese Song-Dynasty (960–1279) “Neo-Confucianism” and Japanese Edo Period (1604–1868) “Native Studies” (*kokugaku* 国学), inspired by contemporary classicisms in Japanese Sinology (Japanese philological studies of China), all carry elements of “classicism.” But the historical terminology that has developed around them and has been picked up by modern scholars to typologize periods and intellectual and artistic developments has made them less recognizable as “classicisms.” This has discouraged bolder comparative research of the classic/al and of classicisms, which could bring to light intriguing similarities in their functional dynamic as well as illuminating differences, both within one tradition and across cultures.

The conceptual underdetermination is all the more tantalizing, because the “classical” is so overdetermined in cultural historical terms. Just as anybody yearns for classical canons, periods, writers and artist in order to lay claim to being a “civilization,” “classicisms,” in a very crude, populist conception, are cultural capital for legitimizing or creating traditions. This is visible in the popular and academic politics around the probably most coveted Western classicist movement, the “Renaissance.” It epitomizes crucial aspects of modern Western cultural identity and is considered a period that laid the foundations for Western humanism, for the scientific revolution and Western technological superiority, and for practices of critical, rational academic inquiry. Stephen Greenblatt’s award-winning bestseller *The Swerve. How the World Became Modern*, which masterfully unveils the far-reaching impact of the rediscovery during the Renaissance of Lucretius’s Latin philosophical epic *On the Nature of Things* (*De rerum natura*), illustrates the powerful aura that the concept of the “Renaissance” still exudes for us today. The concept of the Western “Renaissance” has a long history. In the fourteenth century Petrarch began to lament a *medium tempus* (what we call “the Dark Middle Ages”) and celebrated himself as restorer of antiquity.<sup>3</sup> Leonardo Bruni

<sup>3</sup> For a succinct account of the genesis of the concept see Rapp and Kruse (2010).



(1370–1444), who revived the study of Ancient Greek texts, Lorenzo Valla (ca. 1407–1457), who connected the humanist revival of classical Latin to the artistic revival of ancient classical art, and Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) whose radical religious and educational reform program empowered Greek and Hebrew, along with many other important figures, followed. The first person to treat the Renaissance as a historical period was Jules Michelet (1798–1874), who applied it to all of Europe, unlike his younger colleague, the Swiss scholar Jakob Burckhardt (1818–1897), who limited it to Italy and a supposed Italian *Zeitgeist* of the 15th and 16th centuries. Charles Homer Haskins's *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (1927) and Erwin Panofsky's "Renaissance and Renascences" (1944) catalyzed a powerful revolt against the idealized and Italophile myth of the Renaissance as "the discovery of the world and man," as Panofsky put it forcefully (Panofsky 1944, 201). Although Panofsky's essay both bolstered the existence of the Italian renaissance and of earlier, but distinct, previous medieval "Renaissances," it contributed significantly to problematizing the term, in particular in art history. Suddenly many more earlier "renaissances" were discovered: the Carolingian Renaissance under Charlemagne (8th and 9th centuries), the Ottonian renaissance of the 10th century that could for example boast the revival of Latin dramas produced for example, in the spirit of Terence, by canoness Roswitha of Gandersheim, and of course, most prominently, the Europe-wide flourishing of arts and sciences during the "12th century Renaissance." Even Byzantium, in whose cultural history accretion and emulation is far more important than reform and innovation – those fixtures of Western European cultural history – has now gained its share of recognized "Renaissances": the Theodosian (380–450) Justinianic (6th century), Macedonian (9th and 10th centuries), Comnenian (11th and 12th centuries), and also Palaeologan (13th and 14th centuries) "renaissances," before scholars flee the faltering Byzantine empire in the 14th and 15th centuries and catalyze the Italian Renaissance.

Thus the "Renaissance" came to be pushed back into the Medieval Period, even Late Antiquity. Nobody was seriously interested in pushing the Renaissance forward, showing how 14th and 15th century Italy was in fact still "medieval." Instead, everybody was trying to push it back in time to get a precious piece of "Renaissance-ness," unearthing ever earlier classical revivals in the medieval period. This is a clear sign of the powerful cultural capital associated with the "Renaissance" still today.

With all these challenges, how can we (and why should we) go from here in developing comparative studies of the classic/al on a global scale? Conceptual history approaches are of only limited value because of the sore underdetermination of the concept and because of the linguistic hegemony that the Western concept of *classicus* has exerted since the late 19th century, often distorting or even erasing indigenous concepts in languages and cultures around the globe. And, philosophically, we see that the concept of the classic is often involved in projects of power building and self-affirmation – of a nation, a religion, a canon, an aesthetic ideology, or an ego and its biography. Its philosophical paradoxality is precisely rooted in the absolutizing, ideological claims of promoters of the classic/al and in particular of classicisms in the face of their real-life relative, limited nature. This is both the dirty truth and the sublimity of the classical. But we can turn it to our advantage, when we study the classical in functional rather than face-value comparisons.

Three assumptions are central to such a functional comparative approach: the intentionality of the subjects (who produce, interpret, revive, propagate, research the classic/al), our ability to discern distinctive traits of a phenomenon (that allow us to recognize it as a comparable classical or classicizing phenomenon), and, lastly, an awareness of the effect of cross-cultural functional comparisons and their power to fundamentally expand our intellectual, spiritual, and emotional ways of being in the world. Put differently, and in terms inspired by Edmund Husserl's phenomenology that tries to capture the world as experienced through our first-person consciousness: first, human actions are always directed towards some goal and this, however complex, "intentionality" depends on the horizon of their particular cultural and historical moment, their *Lebenswelt* or "lifeworld"; second, to find the distinctive features of something we need to bracket our face-value, unreflected understanding of it (Husserl calls this "bracketing" *epoché* as part of the process of "phenomenological reduction") and tease out its distinguishing features – which will allow us to find substantial and productive rather than just random and superficial comparanda for the classic/al; and lastly, this comparative process produces distance to our current consciousness and "natürliche Einstellung," and allows us not just to learn something specifically new but to help our consciousness change, expand, and grow. Husserl's propositions of a "phenomenology" have been phenomenally productive in philosophy. Most of his work was not formally published in his lifetime but he pursues his topics in

the more intimate and stream-of-consciousness medium of extensive philosophical diaries (the posthumously published “Husserliana”). Entering his complex and fluid stream of philosophical theory building requires nothing short of a “phenomenology” in interpreting the great variety of Husserl’s ever-changing arguments, and this will keep academic philosophers busy. But what is more relevant here is the great breadth of disciplines, in particular in the empirical social and natural sciences, where phenomenology has turned from philosophy into method, informing anything from psychology and psychiatry to anthropology and physics. Husserl himself was interested in this purposeful appropriation into practical fields of study and his phenomenology is currently promoted as a method to apply even in nursing and midwifery education and research (Christensen et al.; though I have not checked, it seems less likely that this would happen to Descartes or Kant). Two aspects make phenomenology particularly attractive for the human and social sciences at this moment: first, academically, the urgent need for “translators” (as different from the conventional roles of the “specialists” and “generalists”) between scholars in different disciplines as well as in different area-studies-based fields; and, in the larger world, the challenges of global large-scale migrations that oblige us to develop cross-cultural understanding of people with very different cultural “classical” roots and backgrounds and to succeed in the difficult project of building functional “multicultural societies.” Put simply, for this we need people with the phenomenological ability to create comparisons and connections based on the recognition of distinguishing features and the critical reduction of non-essential or ideological “white noise” (Godina 52–53).

The comparative phenomenology of the classic/al I am proposing here is both a call for us to become better phenomenological “translators” across the many fields and disciplines that deal with the classic/al; and to recognize the urgent relevancy and ethical responsibility that comes with studying the classic/al in this historical moment. Concretely, a comparative phenomenology describes and discerns the way the classic/al has taken shape in concept and practice – as canons, periods, authors, artistic works, aesthetic styles, intellectual discourses – over the past five millennia of human history. This rich archive of documented human experience with the formation and transformation of traditions provides abundant data and source material for comparative assessment. It is a true treasure house, a virtual lab for conceptualizing significant differences and divergences across periods, cultures, artistic media and scholarly

disciplines, which understands the classical and subsequent waves of classicisms as a fundamental vector in the formation and development of cultures.

What does a Classic *do*? will be the fundamental question to capture a phenomenology of the classic/al and promote comparative studies of premodern worlds as an academic and ethic responsibility in an age of nationalist and religious fundamentalisms.

To capture a broad variety of phenomena it is good to avoid defining the “classic/al” through any particular culture or historical manifestation, but analyze it as a cultural function, a strategy of innovation based on claims to ideological, political, religious, artistic, aesthetic, literary, scholarly aspects of the past.

Back, again, to our guiding question: What Does a Classic *Do*? What are the most formative institutions that shape the varieties and development of the nature and concepts of the classic/al and of classicisms? First, and most fundamentally, educational systems are prime catalysts of canonization. What textbooks are used? How do they circulate in society? What is the social background and standing of teachers and who has access to education and can be a student? In what physical and institutional spaces do students learn? Based on what criteria are students selected, how is their learning assessed and how are educational institutions connected to particular professions and social prestige? Who are the money-providers and patrons of these institutions and what is their relationship to power and politics? Second, governments and organs of governance are prime brokers of classicizing movements. How have particular political and religious ideologies embraced by governments contributed to the formation and development of concepts and practices of the classic/al and of classicisms? How have political restoration movements mobilized the classic/al for their agenda? How do governments promote their classical cultural heritage to exert soft power, both domestically and globally? Or, especially today, how does governmental funding e.g. for translation of native classical works sponsored by non-Western governments into Western languages, impact the formation of new canons and tastes globally? Third, throughout much of world history, courts have played a prime role in literary production and aesthetic formation of taste through complex patronage systems, courtly institutions and the creation of a courtly literary class. They have been sites of power-legitimizing rituals and lavish occasions for legitimizing spectacles and popular entertainment. And fourth, churches

have colluded and competed in this process, while being able to draw on deeper connections with lower classes beyond the elites, as they offer ritual and spiritual support for the main events in human life, such as birth, marriage, and death. Fifth, canon formation, genres and temporal layers of commentarial literature, and interpretive communities are all institutions of sorts, practices of textual culture, that contribute to the preservation, transmission, or recovery of texts and their elevation to authoritative or canonical status. Less visibly, but quite importantly, meta-reflections by post-classical writers about the nature and values of the classical is yet another institution of textual cultures. They might function as feed-back mechanisms, elaborating ideas of the unsurpassable classic and artistically sublime, while at the same time articulating symptoms of a “post-classical hang-over,” the struggle of later-born writers with their sense of inferiority towards unsurpassable classical models, in short, in Harold Bloom’s terms, with symptoms of “the anxiety of influence.” Other typical themes in meta-reflections on the concept of the classic/al include epigonism versus strategic iconoclasm, connoisseurship and antiquarianism (often as an alternative strategy of later-borns to evade anxiety and prove worthy of the classical through consummate expertise), or oblivion-and-sudden-rediscovery narratives.

How can we make this comparative phenomenology of the classical fruitful for both a deeper understanding of the diverse workings and functioning of classicizing phenomena in very particular moments and places of world history and for a deeper appreciation of the impact of these phenomena on human cultures, past, present, and future? Let’s parachute into a few case studies and see what new questions and potential insights could be gained by pursuing this project.

The earliest historical moment for which modern scholars have discerned the appearance of forms of “classicism” (versus modernism) is Ancient Egypt, in particular the “Ramesside Period” of the 19th and 20th Dynasties of the New Kingdom (1292 – 1077 BCE). During not even three centuries, after the (in)famous Amarna period and the trenchant reforms of the iconoclastic and supposedly “monotheistic” pharaoh Akhenaton, we see a brief flourishing of Late Egyptian literature, with a distinctive orthography and syntax, and largely confined to works in hieratic on papyrus. New vernacularizing writings appear and there is a characteristic linguistic variety in the diglossia between the “classical” and the newly emerging “modern” Late Egyptian. Unprecedented genres flourish, such as intensely sensual love poetry, narrative fiction (typically

one copy each, and almost exclusively on papyrus, indicating that they did not enter the later stream of tradition), and fictionalization of genres such as letters and official reports (Baines). This example inspires intriguing questions: does the “classical” typically emerge when distance to a contemporary “modern” is felt? What is the role of the emergence of vernacular writing styles for the classical and for classicisms? Does it typically emerge out of breaks of a long-standing high cultural tradition? What is the role of fiction for the concept of the classical and “modern”? And, in this particular case, what do we make of the unequal development of the “classical” in different areas of cultural production, namely the fact that Akhenaten’s iconoclastic art and provocative monotheistical ritualism was rejected right after his era, whereas the linguistic and literary impulses of the “modern” continued? And why, in this case, did “modernism” lose out so quickly?

A next classical moment happens, again, in Egypt, but this time it is a moment of long-lasting canon consolidation with a radically different phenomenology: the canonization of Homer and the Greek poets in Ptolemaic Alexandria. Unlike the “classicism” provoked by Late Egyptian “modernism,” we have here a form of transplant classicism intent on showcasing the very best of Greek culture in the wake of Alexander the Great’s conquest of Egypt and ensuing waves of Hellenization. Ptolemy I, Alexander’s friend and general, grew up at the Macedonian royal court of Alexander’s father Philip II, and later succeeded Alexander in Egypt. He was intent on showing the superiority of Greek culture, as he tried to recover as many territories of Alexander’s failed empire in his claim to Hellenistic successorship and ruled through the immigrant Greek upper class. To this purpose the early Ptolemies patronized a vibrant intellectual community around the *Mouseion* [museum], complete with the famous library of Alexandria. During the 140 years that Alexandria flourished (c. 285–145 BCE), court-sponsored scholars created new forms of textual scholarship: they compiled texts and sorted out forgeries, corrected mistakes from old scripts (e.g. the old Attic alphabet); corrected titles and speculated on dating issues; and they invented “critical signs,” such as Zenodotus of Ephesus’s “*obelos*,” which marked lines that were considered spurious interpolations. Their main goal of editing and explaining the poets led to the successive development of grammar (as systematized by Dionysius Thrax), of glossing and commentary composition, etymological study and literary criticism, as well as the scholarly compilation of a catalogue of the Alexandrian library by Callimachus (Dickey 3–6).

This case leads to a different set of questions: while Late Egyptian classicism and modernism seems to have only diffusely been tied to state institutions, the Alexandrian canonization of Greek literature and creation of European philology on Egyptian soil was catalyzed by court-sponsored scholarly institutions. What is the relationship between libraries, grammars, and the development of critical philological scholarship? Is the idea of a fixed “complete” canon of a given tradition – here Greek in Egypt – more easily catalyzed in “transplant classicisms” that unfold in a foreign environment, where the culturalist claim to a “canon” helped assert and preserve cultural identity? How specifically was the canonization of “classical Greek literature” and the emergence of philological scholarship impacted by the complex relationship between Egyptian traditions and Greek immigrant culture in the Alexandria at the time? Have we been paying enough attention to this?

Alexandrian classical grammarian scholarship becomes yet more complex when we see it in the light of Hellenistic literary production. The very scholars who created the classical Greek canon often produced hermetically erudite, sophisticated poetry – clearly postclassical or “modern,” as we could say, with Callimachus (ca. 305–240 BCE) being the most famous example. Latin literature, arguably, emerged as a local Hellenistic, post-classical literature, and this suddenly became an issue when during the first-century “Asianism,” a self-consciously elaborate, hyperbolic style associated with the Eastern Mediterranean, became something of an offensive term in oratorical and literary circles, as the opposite of the ideal of “Atticism,” the style of Greek oratory of classical Athens. Cicero, who himself was accused of the practice, makes us aware of this new Atticist “classicism” that came to flourish under Augustus (“*Asiatici*,” as referring to “orators from the East” appear in *De oratore* 3.43, but the polemic only unfolds in the dialogue *Brutus* (46 BCE)). This devaluation of Hellenistic “modern” eloquence was promoted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Seneca the Elder, and Quintilianus, all writers with classicizing agendas. Although “Asianism” remained popular in Rome – Hortensius was one practitioner in his time – the new movement of writing classicist Attic prose inspired “modern” “Neoteric literature” in Rome, such as Catullus’s. It is unclear whether the classicists’ movement started in Greece, but, as far as we can see from extant sources, it became a central debate in Roman literary culture in the later first century BCE. The attention then moved from Alexandria and Greek – textual editing and a mainly scholarly enterprise – to Rome



and Latin – literary production, meta-literary debates, and the creation of manuals for writing classicist prose and oratory.

While canonizing, post-classical, and reactive classicizing movements moved eccentrically through the Mediterranean in the wake of Hellenistic and Roman conquests and their demographic flows, canonizing and classicist movements developed, more centripetally, on the other end of the Eurasian continent at the court of Han China. The comparative study of the Roman and Han Chinese empires has recently become a vivid field of study and can provide a productive frame for exploring the relationship between classicism and empire building.<sup>4</sup> The Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BCE–220 CE) unified several hegemonic states that during the latter part of the Zhou Dynasty (481–221 BCE) had engaged in constant internecine warfare and created a new, strongly centralized imperial system, which also led to the centralized management of books and knowledge production. Librarians of the Han imperial library did pioneering work in ordering and compiling the earlier fluid textual record, transcribing and standardizing scripts, composing prolific commentaries (both the glossing “chapter-and-verse” (*zhangju* 章句) commentaries and the more interpretive “explanatory commentaries (*xungu* 訓詁)), and engaging in textual critical debates about textual authenticity and forgeries (Connery 40–63).

Yet, empire building, canonization, and literary production intersected in very different ways. Just to raise one point for fruitful comparison, the institutional impact of empire on Roman scholarly and literary production and its classicizing tendencies is remarkably small in contrast to Han China. True, the ways in which early imperial ideology figured in the works of Augustan authors such as Virgil, Horace, or even Ovid – as the most famous exilic outcast of empire – has been a long-standing theme of debate. Yet, imperial institutions were central catalysts for canonizing and classicist movements in Han China. In 136 BCE, Emperor Wu of the Han founded an office of “Erudites” for the teaching and transmission of what became the initial Confucian “Five Classics” of the *Book of Changes*, *Book of Poetry*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Rites*, and the chronicle *Spring and Autumn Annals*. In 124 BCE, this office became the State Academy. Court-sponsored schools would eventually become

<sup>4</sup> See Dettenhofer (2006), Mutschler and Mittag (2008), Scheidel (2015), to name but a few.



the basis for the civil service examination system, which, basically, from the Tang (618–907) to the early 20th century, constituted the main road for tens of thousands of candidates to service in the state bureaucracy, not just in China, but also in neighboring Korea and Vietnam. The courtly competition over interpretation of the classics – also in the form of memorable staged court debates – became a fundamental part of political and institutional culture and contributed, by the latter half of the Han, to the formation of a “literati” class that came to characterize traditional Chinese, and in various forms East Asian, intellectual life from the 3rd century onward into the 20th century (Lu 2013). Exam success (or, frequently, the miseries of failure) and the intellectual networks that were rooted in joint study and success (or the need to deal with failure), collective drinking and poetry composition, the appreciation of poetry, calligraphy, of painting and music, and, by the Song Dynasty (960–1279), antiquarian connoisseurship, were all hallmarks of this culture of poet-scholar-officials, of “literati.” This social class simply has no obvious comparandum in Western cultural history and thus merits thorough comparative attention. The classical education that became the basis for recruitment into government office also required a different material stability of texts: a crucial event in late Han Classicism, reoccurring in later dynasties, was the carving of an authoritative version of the classical canon on stone slabs that were put up in the State Academy around 175 CE. Supposedly thousands of people came to copy the canonical text, creating a commotion and blocking the streets and alleys of the city (*Hou Hanshu* 1981).

Like “Atticism” in Rome, classicist writing styles of various colors emerged, debates over “older” and “more modern” texts and the issues of forgeries developed, but the functional anatomy and phenomenology of these early imperial canonizing and classicist movements in the Ancient Mediterranean and China differs greatly. Accordingly, the phenomenology of later waves of classicisms on the bookends of the Eurasian continent differs ever more significantly, because Chinese dynasties came and went, while the Roman Empire fell (in the 5th and, for the East, 15th centuries), giving way to a multi-state system of European monarchies. In China, the oldest continuous literary tradition, the various Tang Dynasty programs of “Reviving Antiquity” (*fugu* 復古), Song Dynasty nativist reactions against Buddhism and Daoism in the form of classicizing “Neo-Confucianism” with its creation of classical orthodoxy, Ming archaisms, Qing empirical classical scholarship and

classicist “Han learning,” or radical classicist reform programs for an embittered China beleaguered by Western imperialist powers around the turn of the twentieth century (as proposed for example by the Kang Youwei (1858–1927)), occurred largely within the linguistic parameters of Literary Chinese, premodern China’s official cosmopolitan written language. In contrast, the fall of the Roman empire spurred on the emergence of various European monarchies with their own vernacular written literatures. They acquired their own “classical periods” and “classical authors,” be it Dante or Petrarch for Italian, or Corneille or Racine for French. For China and the states in the traditional East Asian “Sinographic Sphere,” vernacular literatures were made into “national classics” only in the twentieth century, through various reformist or revolutionary agendas of intellectuals or governments. This modern myth of the “national classic” expressing a particular people’s “spirit” in the national vernacular language, inspired by 19th-century European romanticism and nationalisms, still dominates the national imagination and education systems in East Asia. It has propelled vernacular works such as Japan’s *The Tale of Genji*, the “world’s first novel” and a sprawling courtly tale spun around the irresistible and flawed male protagonist Genji, and, in Korea, *Hong Kiltong*, a tale of martial prowess of a hero from the class of disprivileged “secondary sons” of Chosŏn Korea’s literati elites, to the top of the canon and reading lists. This is somewhat justified for *Genji*, rather exceptionally, because it enjoyed the status of a classic through its role as a poetry composition manual and provided inspiration for a rich body of commentaries, adaptations, and satires since the 13th century. *Hong Kiltong* certainly had no status in the premodern canon of literary production, but was considered lowly fiction.

Korea, Japan, and Vietnam present particularly stimulating cases for a phenomenology of the classic/al and classicisms. During the first millennium CE, they all promoted state building on Chinese models of governance and their literary cultures are characterized by a distinctive biliteracy, with cosmopolitan Literary Chinese, or the transregional “Literary Sinitic,” blending into a large variety of vernacular inscription styles and genres (Kornicki; Denecke 45–56). In this environment, classicist movements often developed in symbiosis with a nativism that emphasized local needs and cultural sensibility.

Nativist scholars in 18th century Japan harked back to the great works of the Nara and Heian Periods (710–1185), and challenged sinological studies of the Chinese classics with a new form of “vernacular”

classicism: the study, commentary-production, and stylistic emulation of vernacular texts that was strongly empirically founded. The most challenging case in East Asia to study the classic/al and classicisms in depth might well be Korea, not the least because the vast majority of pre-15th-century sources is lost today and the vernacular literary tradition was much less advanced than in Japan. Korea never developed a full-fledged premodern form of classicism, comparable to that which 18<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese nativist scholars like Kamo no Mabuchi and Motoori no Norinaga spearheaded for vernacular Japanese. The reign of King Sejong (1418–1415) has some phenomenological features of a “classical period” of Korean culture. The feverish ordering and compilation of earlier textual records clearly constitutes a historic moment of canonization. It went along with the official invention and promulgation of a vernacular script, today’s *han’gŭl*, and the commissioning of official classicizing texts. These texts created on the one hand new, heavily Sinitified written vernacular styles, but, on the other hand, grounded their philology, historical repertoire and awareness in Chinese texts, as can be seen with the *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven* (*Yongbiŏch’ŏnga* 龍飛御天歌): the first text written in the new vernacular script, it is a heavy-handed panegyrics of the ancestors and founders of the Chosŏn dynasty, glossed by a commentary in Literary Sinitic (which was probably more understandable at the time than the newly created, clumsily written vernacular), and argued through systematic juxtaposition of early Chinese and recent Korean history. Many of the signature texts of Sejong’s reign were propagated in the newly mobilized medium of moveable-type printing, making for a distinctive intersection of so many different, at times paradoxical, elements of “canonization,” “classicisms,” “vernacularization,” “print-based propagation and -popularization,” and a new historical consciousness.

When considering the European vernaculars, Germany constitutes a particularly thought-provoking case for a phenomenology of the classic/al. The classical periods of the vernacular literatures of both France and Germany are both strongly characterized by a creative appropriation of Europe’s Greco-Roman antiquity; this is much less the case for England’s Elizabethan literature or Spain’s literature of the “siglo d’oro.” As the latest “classical age” of the major Western European vernacular literatures, the Goethe-and-Schiller focused “Weimarer Klassik” and other 19th-century German classicisms occurred in an environment radically different from the centralistic 17th-century French classicisms. The German forms of

“Klassik” developed just as academic historicism, in the wake of Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel, gripped Europe’s intellectual life; while modern archeology emerged and classical scholars like Karl Otfried Müller went on expeditions to examine the Greek archeological remains empirically; while Humboldtian humanism was developed, which became the foundation for modern universities in Germany and many places around the world: it contributed to the genesis of the basic humanistic disciplines – history, literature, Classics and philology, as well as “Oriental Studies,” ranging from Ancient Near Eastern studies as an auxiliary discipline for biblical studies, to the Arabic and Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese literary worlds, to comparative linguistics, and the comparative study of religions – which are still with us today. It unfolded against the background of vivid scientific exploration of other botanical, zoological, and cultural worlds, as exemplified by Alexander von Humboldt or Goethe. All these intersecting phenomena make 19th century German classicisms distinctive in the European context. It was a fulminantly cosmopolitan “foreignizing Klassik,” on many levels. Inspired by the early exploits of academic Oriental Studies, Goethe inhabited the poetic persona and genre spectrum of the 14th-century Arabic poet Hafiz and took it to new heights of German literature in his *West-östlicher Divan* (West–Eastern Diwan). (How unthinkable would it have been, for purely historical reasons, to have Dante or Racine write in a voice of cultural impersonation of any oriental literary tradition!). It is thus no surprise that “Weltliteratur,” a concept promoted, if not invented by Goethe, has been inspiring a new form of global literary studies, in particular in North America in the early 21st century: more specifically, the combination of “foreignizing classicism” with forms of cosmopolitanism still resonates with us and “World Literature Studies,” with all the debates this field has created, can provide inspiration for navigating the daunting challenges of socioeconomic globalization.

## 5. Outlook: Benefits and Challenges

A comparative historical phenomenology of the classic/al and of classicisms can help us understand broader patterns in the evolution of societies, past and present. When understood as processes of tradition formation, they become dramatically more important for our general understanding of cultures, past and present. Despite popular prejudices, neither the “classical” nor “Classics” is a dying breed, especially when

considered on a global scale. Comparative studies of the classic/al have tremendously timely critical potential to deal with some of the greatest challenges societies on this planet are currently facing: virulent nationalisms, political or religious fundamentalisms, postcolonial (or neocolonial) inequality, individual and collective traumas inflicted by war and violence and aggravated by failed reconciliation. It is true that classicist agendas have often been advanced for nativist or nationalist purposes, as Melanie Trede laments for example for Japanese art history (Trede). For scholars of classical languages, literatures and culture heritage, this is both a curse and an opportunity, in both good and bad senses. But we can face this challenge through critical comparative phenomenological examination: as scholars we can tap the powers of a comparative phenomenology of classical traditions on a global scale to build respect for differences, shoulder our responsibility to speak truth to power and criticize, or at least historicize, particular abuses of the classical tradition for incendiary populist politics or biased academic discourse.

The questions “What is a classic?” or “Why read the Classics?” became popular as, over the past one and a half centuries, the canonical standing of the West’s Greco-Roman heritage has been fading ever more quickly. They are signposts of fear, which reveal much about our increasing insecurity about the precise nature of the value of premodern worlds and classical cultures in today’s utilitarian capitalist societies. It is about time for a new question. “What does a Classic *Do*?” opens the door into a new world, where a combination of cross-cultural historical comparisons of tradition building and speaking out against fundamentalist abuses of classical heritage in today’s political culture around the globe, can show us the way into a less violent and divisive, and a more shared, empathetic, and cosmopolitan future.

Wiebke Denecke  
denecke@bu.edu  
Boston University  
Korea University

## Works Cited

- Baines, John. "Classicism and Modernism in the Literature of the New Kingdom." *Ancient Egyptian Literatures. History and Forms*. Ed. Antonio Loprieno. Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1996. 157–74.
- Calvino, Italo. "Why Read the Classics?" *Why Read the Classics*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1999. 3–10.
- Christensen, Martin, Anthony Welch, and Jennie Barr. "Husserlian Descriptive Phenomenology: A Review of Intentionality, Reduction and the Natural Attitude." *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice* 7.8 (2017): 113–18.
- Citroni, Mario. "The Concept of the Classical and the Canons of Model Authors in Roman Literature." *Classical Pasts: The Classical Traditions of Greece and Rome*. Ed. James Porter. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006. 204–34.
- Coetzee, J. M. "What is a Classic: A Lecture." *Stranger Shores. Literary Essays, 1986–1999*. New York: Viking, 2001. 1–16.
- Connery, Christopher Leigh. *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.
- Damrosch, David. "Antiquity." *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism*. Eds. Eric Hayot and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. 43–58.
- Denecke, Wiebke. *Classical World Literatures: Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman Comparisons*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Dettenhofer, Maria D. „Das römische Imperium und das China der Han-Zeit. Ansätze zu einer historischen Komparatistik.“ *Latomus* 65 (2006): 880–97.
- Dickey, Eleanor. *Ancient Greek Scholarship. A Guide to Finding, Reading, and Understanding Scholia, Commentaries, Lexica, and Grammatical Treatises, from Their Beginnings to the Byzantine Period*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Gellius, Aulus. *Attic Nights/Noctes Atticae*. Loeb Classical Library 195. Trans. John C. Rolfe. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946.
- Godina, Bojan. *Die Phänomenologische Methode Husserls Für Sozial- und Geisteswissenschaftler: Ebenen und Schritte der Phänomenologischen Reduktion*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *The Swerve. How the World Became Modern*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2011.

- Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 [Book of the Han]. Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981.
- Judet de la Combe, Pierre. *L'avenir des anciens: oser lire les Grecs et les Latins*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2016.
- Kornicki, Peter Francis. *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Lu, Zhao. *In Pursuit of the Great Peace: Han Dynasty Classicism and the Making of Early Medieval Literati Culture*. PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2013.
- Masayuki, Maeda. 前田雅之. なぜ古典を勉強するのか. 近代を古典で読み解くために [Naze koten o benkyōsuru no ka? Kindai o koten de yomitoku tame ni; Why study the Classics? Reading Modernity through the Classics]. Tokyo: Bungaku Tsūshin, 2018.
- Mukherjee, Ankhi. *What Is a Classic? Postcolonial Rewriting and Invention of the Canon*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Mutschler, Fritz-Heiner and Achim Mittag, eds. *Conceiving the Empire: Rome and China Compared*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Panofsky, Erwin. "Renaissance and Renascences." *The Kenyon Review* 6.2 (1944): 201–36.
- Pollock, Sheldon, Benjamin A. Elman, and Ku-ming Kevin Chang, eds. *World Philology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Prendergast, Christopher. *The Classic: Sainte-Beuve and the Nineteenth-Century Culture Wars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Rapp, Claudia and Jill Kraye. "Renaissance." *The Classical Tradition*. Eds. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010. 807–15.
- Sainte-Beuve, Charles Augustin. "Qu'est-ce qu'un Classique?" *Causeries de lundi*. Vol. 3. Paris: Garnier, 1850. 38–55. Gallica Ebooks (Bibliothèque Nationale de France).
- Scheidel, Walter, ed. *State Power in Ancient China and Rome*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Trede, Melanie. "Terminology and Ideology: Coming to Terms with "Classicism" in Japanese Art-Historical Writing." *Critical Perspectives on Classicism in Japanese Painting, 1600–1700*. Ed. Elizabeth Lillehoj. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. 21–52.
- Wilkinson, Endymion. *Chinese History. A Manual*. Fourth edition. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015.





# **Poésie diasporique, poésie totale ? Devenirs du paradigme avant-gardiste chez Ricardo Aleixo, Ronald Augusto et Nathaniel Mackey**

CYRIL VETTORATO

Formulé dès l'époque romantique mais devenu particulièrement envahissant dans les décennies qui ont suivi la seconde guerre mondiale, le débat entre une approche esthétique (ou textuelle) et une approche historique (ou contextuelle) des textes poétiques, volontiers conçues de façon maximaliste comme mutuellement exclusives, a sans doute fait plus de mal que de bien à la lecture de poésie. Qu'on le croie dépassé, et il ressurgit sous d'autres formes, ici dans l'opposition entre un « lyrisme » réaffirmé contre l'héritage des avant-gardes et une « littéralité » héritière de ces dernières (Collot 24), là dans la tension entre les perspectives critiques « situées » (féministe, postcoloniale, noire américaine) et le « canon » purement esthétique que l'on estime menacé par celles-ci (Bloom "An Elegy").

Un moyen intéressant de prendre en considération les enjeux de cette querelle théorique tenace et polymorphe sans se laisser intoxiquer par ce qu'elle a de réducteur pourrait être d'opérer un retournement de perspective en formulant la question suivante, de façon plus concrète et conjecturale : quelles œuvres rend-on invisibles quand on définit strictement le poème comme un objet esthétique indépendant de son contexte historique et social – et lesquelles, quand on fait l'inverse ? Plus largement, selon quelles modalités les polarisations qui découlent de cette dyade texte/contexte (avant-gardes contre lyrisme, liens aux identités politiques et aux luttes d'émancipation contre canon intemporel) amènent-elles à effectuer une taille dans le maquis des productions poétiques ?

Cette manière de procéder déplacerait notre attention d'une illusoire essence de la poésie qui existerait indépendamment du geste critique pour aller vers quelque chose comme un conséquentialisme appliqué à la lecture littéraire. Procédant de la sorte, on s'apercevrait que le moindre

déplacement du curseur poétologique a vite fait de gommer des multitudes de poèmes peu compatibles avec l'option théorique choisie. Le choix et l'affichage, par les critiques, de partis-pris théoriques qui circonscrivent les contours de « la poésie » a des conséquences très concrètes qui sont d'ordre narratif, désignant implicitement les « personnages » dont l'histoire mérite d'être narrée, et comment. Il n'y a aucune raison de considérer ces conséquences comme intrinsèquement négatives, dans la mesure où le cadre d'un récit et les choix qu'il suppose conditionnent aussi la mise en visibilité positive des auteurs ou mouvements. Toutefois, les conditions particulières de développement et de pérennisation sociales de ces cadres, au sein du monde académique notamment, tout en dépendant largement de facteurs étrangers à la poésie en tant que telle (carrières d'enseignants-chercheurs, choix éditoriaux, dynamiques collaboratives), orientent la pratique de la lecture de poésie et créent un certain nombre d'angles morts qui rendent de nombreux textes poétiques difficiles à recevoir pour le lectorat de poésie – et peut-être, par là même, particulièrement intéressants à explorer pour les questions qu'ils posent à nos habitudes de lecture.

La présente étude voudrait pointer du doigt l'un de ces angles morts. Celui-ci se situe à l'intersection de l'écriture expérimentale des avant-gardes et de la poésie que l'on nomme, selon les cas, postcoloniale, noire, diasporique (et parfois de façon particulièrement pernicieuse, « francophone »), c'est-à-dire la poésie produite par des personnes dont le rapport à la langue et à la tradition poétiques se présente comme affecté d'une manière ou d'une autre par l'héritage historique de l'impérialisme, de la colonisation ou de la traite transatlantique. Ces deux continents poétiques en tant que tels sont loin d'être ignorés par la critique : dada, le futurisme, ou la poésie de montage font l'objet d'études nombreuses, tout comme, dans d'autres cercles, les œuvres d'auteurs comme Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, Amiri Baraka ou Aimé Césaire. Mais à l'instar des subjectivités sociales défendues par les penseuses de l'intersectionnalité (Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins), les poésies qui occupent un espace situé au croisement de ces deux domaines se trouvent invisibilisées. Nous n'entendons pas par-là l'action délibérée d'une hypothétique conscience malveillante et toute puissante, mais un effet de récit – comme dans un roman historique où le choix de personnages principaux considérés comme pertinents pour raconter une certaine histoire relègue les autres au statut de personnages secondaires, voire les évince tout bonnement.

Les spécialistes des avant-gardes ne prennent ainsi pas spontanément en compte les écritures africaines, antillaises, ou diasporiques considérées comme l'apanage des spécialistes de « postcolonialisme » ou de « francophonie », pas plus que ces derniers ne se considèrent spontanément comme concernés par les écritures expérimentales. Quelques études, en particulier au sein du monde anglophone, ont relevé ce biais critique (Nielsen 9–12 ; 39–41 ; Mackey *Discrepant Engagement*; Mackey *Paracritical Hinge* ; Reed). Au-delà de la question noire, il relève d'une « dichotomie entre esthétique et identité qui efface les apports de certains écrivains issus de minorités à l'innovation poétique et obscurcit la dimension sociopolitique des mouvements d'avant-gardes blancs » (Dewey et Rifkin 11).<sup>1</sup> Le poète Ron Silliman, figure centrale de l'avant-garde états-unienne de la *L = A = N = G = U = A = G = E poetry*, exemplifiait bien cette perspective lorsqu'il déclarait en 1988 que « les femmes, les gens de couleur, les minorités sexuelles, le spectre tout entier des personnes marginales — ont un besoin manifeste de raconter leurs histoires. [Pour cette raison] leur écriture apparaît souvent comme beaucoup plus conventionnelle » (Silliman).

L'objectif de cet article sera de réfléchir à la façon dont des poètes situés à un tel point de croisement problématique – en l'occurrence, entre poésie noire et écriture expérimentale héritée des avant-gardes – interrogent et renouvellent la relation entre ces deux catégories de l'histoire littéraire. À travers cette réflexion, nous souhaitons plaider pour la fin du cloisonnement entre l'étude des poésies expérimentales/avant-gardistes et celles des poésies diasporiques/noires ou postcoloniales, séparation d'autant plus artificielle que de nombreux poètes d'Afrique, de la Caraïbe ou de la diaspora africaine explorent à leur manière des questions qui ont animé la pratique avant-gardiste depuis ses débuts en tendant vers cette « poésie totale » dont parlait Adriano Spatola. Plus fondamentalement, nous arguerons que ces poètes, en se plaçant très consciemment dans un état de tension maintenue les deux paradigmes concurrents des pratiques expérimentales et des cultures expressives afro-diasporiques, adoptent une démarche qui est, par excellence, avant-gardiste, puisqu'elle vise à « faire tomber l'une des barrières, surmonter l'une des contradictions qui inhibe la capacité créative », conformément à la formule de Dietrich Scheunemann (43).

---

<sup>1</sup> Toutes les traductions sont de notre fait.

Nous appuierons cette démonstration sur les œuvres du poète états-unien Nathaniel Mackey (né en 1947 à Miami) et des Brésiliens Ricardo Aleixo et Ronald Augusto (nés respectivement en 1960 et 1961 à Belo Horizonte et à Rio Grande do Sul). Leurs recherches poétiques, qui comptent parmi les plus originales des Amériques contemporaines, disqualifient toutes les classifications binaires déjà évoquées comme celles qui leurs sont coextensives (poésie noire/ blanche, poésie expérimentale/ engagée, modernité/oralité) tout en renouvelant l'articulation entre le paradigme expérimental issu des avant-gardes européennes et la perspective diasporique héritée – entre autres – des courants de la négritude francophone, de la *Harlem Renaissance* et du *Black Arts Movement* états-unis, ainsi que du *Nation language* de la Caraïbe anglophone. Il conviendra de mettre en résonance les généalogies multiples que ces trois poètes développent dans leurs œuvres, par l'emprunt notamment de techniques expérimentales et de formes orales, et dans leurs discours, en se référant aux avant-gardes de leurs pays respectifs, pour montrer comment le paradigme expérimental et performatif s'articule chez eux à une réflexion sur les rapports de force qui président à l'écriture de l'histoire et à la définition des communautés. Poètes et fortes têtes, extrêmement conscients des rouages historiques qui démarquent leur champ d'action, tous trois ont fait de leur refus salvateur de choisir entre « poésie noire » et « poésie expérimentale » un principe créatif et l'espace de déploiement d'une singularité irréductible.

## Cartographie d'un moment

Ce qui peut motiver le rapprochement des poésies, souvent qualifiées d'« insituables », d'Aleixo, Augusto et Mackey est moins une hypothétique synchronie au sein de « l'Histoire » que ce que l'on pourrait nommer, en empruntant ce vocable aux sciences sociales, leurs « positionnalités », par quoi nous désignons ici le type de relations créatives, poétiques, foncièrement imprévisibles que chacun d'entre eux s'est construite avec l'histoire de la littérature. Nous n'envisageons pas ici l'histoire littéraire comme un « grand récit » universel et linéaire qui donnerait sens à l'intégralité des productions appartenant au champ littéraire, mais comme l'ensemble hétérogène et continu des « espacements d'un *nous* » (Nancy 261) par lesquelles les acteurs du champ littéraire ont pensé et exprimé leur propre historicité.

Pour s'inventer comme poètes, Aleixo, Augusto et Mackey ont dû faire un sort à une situation de liminalité problématique, et transformer cet état de flottement en une ressource créative. Les décennies 1980 et 1990, qui voient l'éclosion de leurs œuvres, sont en effet celles de la transition entre une période de prégnance du paradigme avant-gardiste et une autre marquée par le récit dominant de la « mort des avant-gardes ». On peut considérer qu'au Brésil, le tropicalisme tardif (ou « post-tropicalisme ») s'essouffle dans la première moitié de la décennie 1970, peu ou prou dans les mêmes années que la *L = A = N = G = U = A = G = E poetry* états-unienne. Mackey, Augusto et Aleixo débent en poésie dans ces années de transition, et ils seront à la fois très marqués par l'héritage des avant-gardes désormais qualifiées d'« historiques » mais aussi acteurs de leur dépassement. Mackey en particulier porte de façon très visible l'héritage du *Black Mountain College*, cristallisé autour de la figure de son mentor et interlocuteur poétique majeur, Robert Duncan. Augusto et Aleixo, pour leur part, inscrivent leur travail dans les pas de ceux des concrétistes brésiliens, en particulier les frères Augusto et Haroldo de Campos.

Mackey commence à publier de la poésie sous forme de plaquettes auto-éditées (*chapbooks*) dans les toutes dernières années de la décennie 1970, même si son premier livre au sens strict est *Eroding Witness* (1985) : il débute ainsi à une période où la dynamique collective du *Black Mountain College* est éteinte (le lieu disparaît en 1957, Charles Olson décède en 1970) mais où des figures individuelles comme Duncan continuent à en développer les préceptes esthétiques et philosophiques. Le jeune Mackey consacre d'ailleurs sa thèse de doctorat à l'écriture de la « forme ouverte », en particulier chez les poètes du *Black Mountain College*, dans des années où les idées du mouvement d'avant-garde sont encore dans l'air du temps (il la soutient en 1975), et il peut rencontrer Duncan à plusieurs reprises avant le décès de ce dernier en 1988.

Ronald Augusto fait également ses premières armes dans les ultimes moments des années 1970, avec l'obtention d'un prix de poésie en 1979 dans son état natal du Rio Grande do Sul et un premier livre, *Homem ao rubro*, paru en 1983. Augusto s'inscrit dans sa jeunesse au sein du mouvement de la *poesia marginal* hostile au régime militaire, tout en s'intéressant fortement aux expérimentations formelles des avant-gardes : le jeu sur l'image, la typographie et la dimension concrète de la langue, qui renvoie à l'héritage du *concretismo*, et l'importance de la voix, de la musique et de la performance, qui évoque entre autres l'influence du mouvement *Tropicália*. Dans le contexte politique particulier du

Brésil, la venue d'Augusto à la poésie prend également place dans un temps où la dynamique de groupe prégnante de la fin des années 1950 à celle des années 1970 (*concretismo*, « *poesia praxis* », « *violão de rua* », *Tropicália*) laisse peu à peu la place à des démarches plus singulières, sur fond de détente politique et de transition progressive vers un régime démocratique, à partir des années 1980.

Si l'effet de groupe qui animait les frères Campos et leurs camarades semble appartenir au passé (la revue *Noigandres*, par exemple, cesse de paraître en 1962), le paradigme concrétiste est loin de s'être éteint en tant que tel dans ces années, puisque des œuvres aussi essentielles que *Galáxias* et *A Educação dos Cinco Sentidos* d'Haroldo de Campos, pour ne citer qu'elles, paraissent en 1985. Ricardo Aleixo, quant à lui, publie ses premières œuvres poétiques au début des années 1990. Dans son état natal du Minas Gerais, il se fait connaître comme poète (*Festim*, 1992) mais aussi par des activités publiques qui lui permettent de s'inscrire comme héritier des avant-gardes historiques. Il coordonne ainsi en 1993 à l'Université Fédérale du Minas Gerais un événement destiné à commémorer la « Semaine Nationale de la Poésie d'Avant-garde » qui avait réuni les grands noms de ce domaine trente ans auparavant, au même endroit. Aleixo place en dédicataires de sa première grande anthologie, *Trívio*, son véritable père et Augusto de Campos, symboliquement placé au même niveau que ce dernier. Le critique littéraire brésilienne a depuis consacré en Aleixo l'un des principaux continuateurs du projet expérimental du concrétisme (Kaplan).

L'effort d'Aleixo, Augusto et Mackey n'est du reste que l'une des facettes d'un effort plus général au sein du champ poétique des Amériques, lequel se traduit dans des positions et formulations contrastées entre nord et sud du continent, mais aussi au sein de chaque espace. La manière dont poètes et critiques mettent en récit l'« après » des avant-gardes oscille entre une réaffirmation « néo-formaliste » des conventions que celles-ci avaient déconstruites (Shapiro) et une attitude qui conserve en les déplaçant certains aspects de leur radicalité et de leur ambition critique (Nichols 535). Dans cette dernière optique, on observe par exemple aux États-Unis une popularisation de l'étiquette de « post-avant-garde », utilisée par des poètes importants comme Reginald Shepherd, Ron Silliman et Bob Perelman. Ce dernier définissait ainsi en 1998 la « post-avant-garde » comme un ensemble de pratiques qui tout en leur empruntant certains traits, se sont détournées de l'historicité unique et universaliste

de l'avant-garde pour mettre en avant le champ social dans sa pluralité et ses rapports de force (542).

On peut rencontrer des types de discours analogues au Brésil, comme le montre éloquentement Marcos Siscar dans son ouvrage *De volta ao fim*. Siscar y dépeint l'idée omniprésente de la « fin des avant-gardes » non comme un fait objectif, mais comme « une opération critique et discursive – présente dans des textes essayistiques, littéraires, journalistiques – elle-même productrice d'histoire »<sup>2</sup> (9). Il renvoie notamment à un article de Ricardo Fabbrini, « *O fim das vanguardas* », où l'idée de pluralité des poétiques du présent est opposée au programmatisme et à l'élitisme de la génération précédente – et dans lequel Fabbrini fait usage d'une catégorie, celle d'imaginaire « *pós-vanguardista* » (Fabbrini 111), très proche de celle qui s'est imposée aux États-Unis. Toute une contemporanéité poétique, à la fois chez les théoriciens et les poètes, se serait ainsi inventé une historicité en scénographiant la « fin des avant-gardes » et le refus du genre du manifeste pour affirmer un nouveau paradigme critique adapté au tournant du vingtième siècle, celui de la « pluralisation des poétiques possibles » (Siscar 19).

Pour Aleixo, Augusto et Mackey, l'histoire littéraire n'est pas seulement un grand récit collectif au sein duquel il s'agirait de trouver sa place en se confrontant aux « ancêtres » poétiques, selon le modèle de l'« angoisse de l'influence » chère à Bloom (*The Anxiety of Influence*). C'est une forme de narration indissociablement théorique-poétique, dans laquelle la place que l'on occupe, pense occuper ou aspire à occuper se mêle sans cesse à des interrogations sur le mode d'existence même de cette narration, sur sa légitimité, sur ce qui mérite d'y figurer, sous quelle forme et pourquoi. Le critique américain John Ernest proposait de nommer « chaotique » une forme d'histoire littéraire qui se fonderait sur la critique de l'histoire littéraire hégémonique dans sa prétention à l'universalité, et prendrait garde dans sa proposition d'histoires alternatives à ne pas retomber dans les travers de celle-ci en réinstaurant un fil narratif unique et essentialiste (Ernest).

De fait, l'idée même d'histoire littéraire a pour nos poètes quelque chose de chaotique – de dépourvu de limites, de règles, d'unités de mesure fixes – dans la mesure où les personnages même autour desquels

<sup>2</sup> « uma operação crítica e discursiva – presente em textos ensaísticos, literários, jornalísticos – ela mesma produtora de história »

s'écrit ce récit portent en eux des conceptions qui peuvent le miner (ou « contaminer », dirait Duncan) et le mener dans des directions radicalement nouvelles et imprévues. Au sein des avant-gardes d'après-guerre, l'idée même d'histoire littéraire est repensée à nouveaux frais, dans une démarche consubstantielle à leur écriture poétique. Un bon exemple de cette participation active des poètes à la théorisation de l'histoire littéraire est le débat entre le critique et historien de la littérature Antonio Candido et Haroldo de Campos, retracé avec une grande netteté par Gonzalo Aguilar dans son ouvrage de référence sur l'histoire du concrétisme (Aguilar). Candido se proposait de faire de sa très influente *Formação da literatura brasileira* (1959) une « histoire des brésiliens à travers leur désir d'avoir une littérature » (Candido 25), dans les mêmes années où les concrétistes commencent à intervenir dans le champ littéraire brésilien. Or la position de Campos, typique des avant-gardes, se fonde sur un refus de croire en une dimension « organique » de la littérature nationale comme à son aspect « représentatif » : au contraire, les concrétistes appellent à aller chercher dans le passé ce qu'il est de plus inorganique et de plus discontinu. Haroldo de Campos développe une théorie de l'histoire littéraire comme pratique au présent : dans ses articles de 1967 « Poética Sincrônica » et « Texto e História », Campos propose le concept de « lecture synchronico-rétrospective » – en portugais, « *leitura sincrônico-retrospectiva* » (Campos “Poética Sincrônica” ; Campos “Texto e História”), qu'il présente ainsi :

Nous pourrions ainsi imaginer, alternativement, une histoire littéraire moins comme *formation* que comme *transformation*. Moins comme processus achevé, que comme processus ouvert. Une histoire où ressortent les moments de rupture et de transgression et qui entend la tradition non sur un mode 'essentialiste' mais comme une 'dialectique de question-réponse', une interrogation constante et renouvelée de la diachronie par la synchronie.<sup>3</sup> (Campos *O Seqüestro* 63)

<sup>3</sup> “Poderemos imaginar assim, alternativamente, uma história literária menos como formação do que como transformação. Menos como processo conclusivo, que como processo aberto. Uma história onde relevem os momentos de ruptura e transgressão e que entenda a tradição não de um modo 'essentialista' mas como uma 'dialética da pergunta e da resposta', um constante e renovado questionar da diacronia pela sincronia.”



Aux yeux de Campos, sa propre poésie et celle de ses camarades concrétistes est la réalisation parfaite de cette conception active et critique de l'histoire littéraire :

La pensée poétique d'auteurs étrangers bien précis (Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Joyce, Cummings, Pound), qui n'avaient encore jamais été mis en rapport dans un même contexte et avec des objectifs définis, a été agencée de façon critique en fonction des nécessités créatives d'une poésie brésilienne.<sup>4</sup> (Campos *Teoria da poesia concreta* 151)

Au nord du continent, Robert Duncan élabore également une pensée de l'influence qui si elle diffère fort du raisonnement des concrétistes, conçoit bien celle-ci sur le mode de la relation synchronique et, au moins en partie, choisie. L'illustration la plus notoire en est le rapport fusionnel qu'établit Duncan avec H.D., véritable communion gnostique qui se réalisera pleinement dans l'écriture poétique, lieu de « mise en présence » des deux esprits. Il y a chez Duncan une croyance en une pratique de l'hermétisme à travers le poème, qui fait accéder le sujet à une sorte de « société secrète » historiquement anachronique : Freud, H.D., Pound et Duncan lui-même deviennent contemporains dans l'instant poétique (O'Leary 53). Mais la relation d'influence n'est pas nécessairement aussi consciente et volontaire chez Duncan que ce que l'on a pu voir chez Campos : elle prend aussi la forme d'une maladie, d'une contagion, faisant du corps du poète le site et l'emblème de la présentéité poétique (O'Leary 172).

Peter O'Leary propose encore de voir dans Nathaniel Mackey un continuateur du projet de Duncan, à son tour habité par les figures de Duncan, H.D. et Pound – ce que l'étude magistrale que Mackey lui-même a consacrée à Duncan, et qui peut se lire tout autant comme une introduction à sa propre poétique, semble confirmer assez nettement (O'Leary 171–216 ; Mackey *Race in American Poetry*). On notera d'ailleurs que l'une des citations duncanienues fétiches de Mackey, que celui-ci emprunte à son mentor pour penser sa propre poésie jusqu'à faire de ses termes centraux l'un des piliers de son discours poétologique, place la même insistance sur l'idée de rupture que le faisait Campos : “*Praise*

<sup>4</sup> “O pensamento poético de determinados autores estrangeiros (Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Joyce, Cummings, Pound), nunca antes relacionados num mesmo contexto e para propósitos definidos, foi pôsto criticamente em função das necessidades criativas de uma poesia brasileira.”

*then the interruption of our composure, [...] the juncture in the music that appears discordant” (Duncan Bending the Bow ix-x).*

Parce qu'elle s'inscrit dans le sillage de ces gestes poétiques radicaux, la manière dont Aleixo, Augusto et Mackey vont produire poétiquement leur propre historicité en se mettant en tension avec plusieurs modèles est hautement intempestive, et constitue en tant que telle un geste interprétatif aux riches ramifications philosophiques et politiques. La question de la communauté qu'ils envisagent (communauté de lecteurs, mais plus largement, communauté culturelle) dans le cadre de l'échange poétique est inséparable de l'imagination de sa propre historicité : comme le dit joliment Jean-Luc Nancy, « le 'Nous' vient toujours du futur » (Nancy 266). C'est depuis le futur que permet d'envisager telle ou telle disposition poétique de l'histoire de la poésie qu'il faut considérer la question de l'histoire littéraire comme persistance d'une pratique de récit collectif dans une époque qui n'a plus foi dans la possibilité d'un récit unique et universel. Que gagne-t-on à relire Mallarmé avec Campos, et Campos avec Cruz e Sousa, comme le fait Augusto ? Quelles perspectives nouvelles se dégagent lorsque l'on relit Pound avec Duncan, et Duncan avec Brathwaite, comme le fait Mackey ? C'est à partir de ces questions qu'il faut penser la collision chez nos trois poètes de questions historiographiques qui relèvent d'un axe horizontal (comment cadrer le récit des œuvres du passé, doit-il privilégier des figures exemplaires ou représentatives, ou bien mettre en avant des ruptures radicales), et qui proviennent largement de leur inscription dans l'héritage radical des avant-gardes dites « historiques », et de questions qui relèvent plutôt d'un axe vertical, celui du social comme espace structuré de façon agonistique, et qui proviennent de leur engagement critique avec les littératures de la diaspora africaine.

## Ipséités suspectes

« Tout peut coexister avec tout », proclamait crânement Haroldo de Campos dans l'une de ces formules incisives qui ont fait sa réputation (Campos « Da razão antropofágica » 244). Au-delà de la lecture chronologique de la formule, dont nous avons déjà trouvé en route des éléments d'élucidation, il est temps d'explorer sa dimension sociale et communautaire. La revendication d'un pluralisme qui mettrait en défaut les histoires univoques et ouvrirait la porte du champ poétique à toutes les altérités du monde social se retrouve aussi bien dans le *concretismo*

que chez les « postmodernes » du *Black Mountain College*. Cette question affleurerait du reste déjà au cœur de la poésie de la première génération moderniste des années 1920, aux États-Unis (Eliot et Pound citant des langues et religions d'Asie) comme au Brésil (le projet « anthropophage » porté par Oswald de Andrade et mis en œuvre de façon emblématique par Mário de Andrade et Raul Bopp).

Dans les deux cas, les générations d'après-guerre ont dû se positionner, autour de cette question, face à leurs prédécesseurs et leur héritage idéologique ambivalent – sympathies fascistes de Pound et antisémitisme d'Eliot d'un côté, échos entre le projet des modernistes brésiliens et l'idéologie national-populiste de l'*Estado Novo* porté au pouvoir par Getúlio Vargas de l'autre. Cette renégociation a pu prendre la forme d'une prise de distance assez nette avec certains aspects du travail de Pound et Eliot chez Duncan et Olson, ou au contraire d'une forme de continuité mâtinée de prudence dans le « nationalisme critique » d'Haroldo de Campos relisant Oswald de Andrade (Ploegmakers) et affirmant, sans renoncer à la « brésilianité », la nécessité du « polyculturalisme » et d'une « hybridisation ouverte et multilingue » (Campos « Da razão antropofágica » 244).

Nous rejoignons ici l'idée défendue par Ming-Qian Ma d'écriture poétique comme « relecture » et révision critique des textes du passé (Ma). La génération qui nous occupe ici a dû faire à la fin du siècle des choix analogues à ceux de la génération d'après-guerre : réévaluer les poétiques du passé à partir d'évolutions sociales qui les ont amenés à percevoir chez leurs prédécesseurs des contradictions et des dissonances comme autant d'appels à créer et réinventer. Dans ce cas précis, lesdites évolutions ont eu pour conséquence de déplacer la question du rapport entre soi et « l'autre » au sein même de la figure du poète, pour qui la question même de savoir s'il se positionnera comme « autre » ou non de la tradition nationale, en tant que Noir, devient elle-même un site de tension créative.

Comme nous avons tâché de le montrer ailleurs (Vettorato *Poésie moderne*), la revendication par des poètes états-uniens ou brésiliens d'une inscription au sein d'une histoire poétique noire s'est faite sur un mode lui-même pluriel et contradictoire, dans un dialogue constant avec des champs connexes (musique, traditions orales, langue populaire, musique, militantisme politique, sciences sociales) et avec d'autres histoires littéraires, dont celle des modernismes et des avant-gardes nationales. Aux États-Unis comme au Brésil, l'idée même d'une « poésie noire » ou

africaine américaine/afro-brésilienne a été et est toujours l'objet de débats aussi véhéments que complexes. Et s'il n'y a aucune automaticité pour un poète d'origine africaine à s'inscrire dans ces contre-histoires littéraires, il faut bien constater que leur puissance problématique, au sens d'une capacité concrète, au sein du monde social, à poser des questions vitales à la pratique même de l'histoire littéraire, est devenue trop importante pour être simplement ignorée. C'est ce qu'illustre bien le fait même que des poètes aussi singuliers, indépendants d'esprit, rétifs à toute forme d'enfermement identitaire ou communautaire, et peu désireux de rompre avec les poètes du passé qui appartiendraient à une hypothétique « poésie blanche » que Mackey, Aleixo et Augusto aient néanmoins ressenti la nécessité de se situer à leur façon par rapport à l'idée de poésie noire – ou de leur propre « négritude » en tant que poètes.

Pour ce faire, l'une des stratégies mises en œuvre par les poètes est la revendication de modèles que les habitudes critiques qui nous ont habitué à ne pas faire coexister : aux modernistes et avant-gardistes d'après-guerre (Duncan, Olson, Campos, João Cabral de Melo Neto) ou du début du siècle (Pound, H.D., Oswald de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira) s'ajoutent chez eux des figures de la diaspora africaine comme le symboliste João da Cruz e Sousa ou le poète engagé Oliveira Silveira, évoqués par Augusto, ou encore Amiri Baraka et Kamau Brathwaite, placés par Mackey parmi ses principales influences. Ricardo Aleixo pousse très loin cette logique de l'« inventaire à la Prévert » au sein d'une longue liste qu'il soumet à ses lecteurs, et où se côtoient (et nous en passons) John Cage, Augusto de Campos, Marcel Duchamp, Jean-Luc Godard, Paulo Leminski, Jimi Hendrix, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Spike Lee, Paul Zumthor, Sun Ra, Cruz e Sousa, Fluxus, Aimé Césaire, Kurt Schwitters, Henri Salvador, Haroldo de Campos, Friedrich Nietzsche, Thelonious Monk, Gil Scott-Heron, Luiz Gama, Amiri Baraka, Oswald de Andrade, ou encore Gilles Deleuze (Trielli 30–31). Au-delà de l'effet plaisant de cette galaxie hétéroclite, se dit sans doute une vérité plus profonde : que pour le poète toutes ces références que sépare l'esprit académique et disciplinaire sont en réalité coprésentes, contemporaines au sens fort du terme dans le présent contagieux de l'acte créatif – conformément à l'« histoire littéraire synchronique » d'Haroldo de Campos (Faleiros 108).

Outre cet affichage de filiations multiples, le désir manifesté par nos poètes de décloisonner les champs de la culture expressive noire et des avant-gardes passe par un travail de théorisation personnelle. Tous trois sont acteurs d'une forme de réception spécifiquement noire, à la fois comme

poètes et comme critiques – et sans que ces deux éléments ne puissent jamais être tout à fait séparés. En cela également, ils sont des héritiers de la poésie d'avant-garde qui, comme l'écrit Antônio Mendonça, « est en tant que telle une activité critique » (Mendonça 13). Ricardo Aleixo participe activement de la légitimation d'une perspective « afro » dans les discours sur la poésie, comme lorsqu'il analyse dans la poésie de son ami Edimilson Pereira une écriture de la voix qui trouve ses sources dans la culture orale afro-brésilienne (Pereira 15). Ronald Augusto a également travaillé dans ce sens, comme lorsqu'il écrit un article théorique au sein du volume collectif *A mente afro-brasileira*, véritable pierre de touche de l'affirmation d'une perspective noire au Brésil (Augusto « Transgressão »). Nathaniel Mackey a consacré de nombreux travaux à des poètes africains américains, dont il cherche à rendre manifeste la dimension expérimentale du travail – on songera notamment à ses recherches sur Amiri Baraka et Kamau Brathwaite. La camaraderie littéraire avec des acteurs moins réticents du champ de la « poésie noire » n'est pas rejetée, mais elle est soumise à un régime d'exigence intellectuelle extrême, signe d'un malaise face aux enfermements identitaires quels qu'ils soient (Frederico 300–301).

Plutôt qu'une « angoisse de l'influence » (Bloom *The Anxiety of Influence*), il y a chez nos poètes quelque chose comme une angoisse de la réception. La pression du monde de la poésie et ses attentes classificatoires sont présents à l'esprit des auteurs, et mis en scène au sein de leurs poèmes. Dans son texte intitulé « Exercício de lira maldizente », Ricardo Aleixo fait par exemple défiler sur la page les multiples réactions stéréotypées qu'il imagine voir opposées à ses poèmes. Faut-il se lancer dans des expérimentations formelles ? « Si tu expérimentes, tu n'es qu'une copie d'Augusto [de Campos] » (« *Se experimentais – cópia do Augusto* »), s'entend-il rétorquer comme par une voix intérieure (Aleixo *Máquinazero* 33). Faut-il pour autant se présenter comme un « poète noir » en lutte pour son peuple ? C'est le meilleur moyen de se trouver enfermé dans les stéréotypes primitivistes et complaisants hérités du modernisme que Ronald Augusto soumet à un jeu de collage vengeur dans son poème « Em reposta a uma solicitação que lhe fizeram », raillant entre deux citations importées « cette claire époque durant laquelle/chair blanche de poisson intrépide convertissait les dures peines/éthiopiennes en mussum muscle musique » (Augusto « Em reposta »).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> « aquela época clara em que / cabra seco carne branca de peixe convertia a duras penas / etíope em mussum músculos música »

Il suffit de parcourir les pages de la revue majeure du mouvement poétique afro-brésilien, *Cadernos negros*, pour constater que la réception spécifique de la poésie noire est loin d'être neutre, et que les expérimentations formelles chères à Augusto et Aleixo y sont moins prisées que des poèmes engagés exprimés dans une langue accessible. Cela ne signifie pas qu'aucun poète ne peut transcender ces barrières, mais lorsque c'est le cas, cette « double légitimation » se fait selon des modalités qui portent les marques de critères différents. Ainsi le dictionnaire des écrivains afro-brésiliens d'Eduardo de Assis Duarte, qui contient pourtant cent entrées, ignore-t-il tout bonnement Aleixo et présente-t-il Augusto dans des termes qui, de manière très révélatrice, opposent expérimentation formelle et négritude, la seconde venant en quelque sorte racheter la première. Après avoir expliqué qu'Augusto explore le langage, les « signes » et les jeux formels hérités des avant-gardes, frôlant dangereusement un « risque d'hermétisme », l'auteur se tourne plus particulièrement vers les poèmes où des questions liées au racisme sont abordées, pour conclure que chez Augusto « la poésie est avant tout invention. Mais une invention qui n'est jamais innocente » (Duarte 233). On imagine le sourire du poète face à cet *approbatur* embarrassé...

Le symptôme poétique le plus flagrant du positionnement de nos poètes face aux injonctions contradictoires et chaotiques de l'histoire littéraire est une écriture de l'oralité qui déconstruit la poétique de la présence. L'association de l'oralité, du cri, de l'onomatopée avec les poétiques de la diaspora africaine a joué au vingtième siècle un rôle à la fois moteur et ambivalent dans la revendication de critères esthétiques propres pour la poésie de la diaspora africaine (Vettorato *Poésie moderne*). Signe de ralliement et vecteur de solidarité militante, cette association a aussi pu apparaître comme stéréotypée et limitative sur le plan poétique. Dans tous les cas, elle participe à coup sûr de la construction d'un contexte de réception au sein duquel les expérimentations formelles et la déconstruction du langage deviennent volontiers suspectes de mettre en danger l'assertion vigoureuse et sans équivoque de la négritude. Or Mackey, Aleixo et Augusto manient tous trois les poétiques de l'oralité qui portent la trace des avant-gardes qui les ont inspirés. Le recueil *Puya* (1987) de Ronald Augusto s'ouvre ainsi sur une série de vers qui tendent vers l'onomatopée et l'illisibilité, dans une forme de parodie de la voix et du rythme « nègres » légués par le *modernismo* brésilien et le *negrismo* hispano-américain du début du vingtième siècle: « *zum zum zum golo logo / rum rum rum golo louvo* » (Augusto *Cair de costas* 61). Ce n'est pas tant une

oralité qui imprègne les vers du poète que le matériau historique même de l'oral-négritude-signes-de-la-présence-et-de-l'authenticité comme « mixte mal analysé » (Deleuze 19) qui est mis en poème. Le signe de ce qui devrait dire le plus haut degré d'intensité verbale, de vie, de communion avec « l'être », devient le lieu stratégique d'expérimentations iconoclastes.

On trouve aussi chez Aleixo de tels jeux sur les attentes des « poétiques de l'authenticité » qui se sont trouvées petit à petit associées avec l'oralité et les traditions orales. C'est particulièrement le cas, au sein de *Trívio*, des poèmes « Marcial entre os kuikúro » et « Ñamandu » (48–49). Les deux poèmes sont présentés en vis-à-vis, sur une double page. Le page de gauche contient huit vers qui comportent des marques d'oralité (« claro ») et des mots entre parenthèses semblant interrompre la parole principale (« aposto »). Les attentes primitivisantes appelées par le titre et les marques d'oralité « pour l'œil » viennent buter contre maints effets expérimentaux (syntaxe incomplète, espaces entre les caractères, segments répétés jusqu'à sembler faire signe vers leur propre matérialité). La page de droite radicalise encore ce dispositif en présentant les mots en un bloc de lettres espacées de manière variable, et parfois en gras, ce qui donne au poème un air de composition visuelle difficile à lire. D'une manière qui évoque fortement la poésie concrète des frères Campos, certains mots sont découpés, créant une ambiguïté de sens – par exemple « pétala » (pétale) aux vers 8 et 9, que l'on pourrait aussi être tentés de lire « pé / tala » - pied (humain) et « attelle » ou pied (d'une plante) et « labour ». Certaines suites de mots en gras sont si saturées d'allitérations et d'assonances qu'elles finissent par produire une étrange musique presque mécanique, où se rejoignent l'écriture primitiviste de la voix et les expérimentations de la poésie sonore (« **d e u s / q u e s e d e s / d o b r a a o s o l** »). Dans la partie du livre réservée aux notes de l'auteur – convention paratextuelle avec laquelle Aleixo joue ostensiblement – l'auteur ne cache rien de l'absolue facticité de sa « poétique de la voix marginale » : « 'Marcial entre os kuikúro' est une adaptation **plus-que-libre** d'un mythe des indiens Kuikúro recueilli par l'anthropologue Bruna Franchetto. 'Ñamandu' se base **vaguement** sur un mythe des indiens guaranis du Paraguay, recueilli par l'anthropologue Pierre Clastres » (*Trívio. Poemas* 85, nous soulignons).

Il est fort tentant de dresser une parallèle entre ces aveux et ceux du locuteur poétique du *Blue Fasa* de Nathaniel Mackey, qui s'identifie « en jeu » au peuple traditionnel Fasa découvert entre les pages de Marcel Griaule, et donne pour nom à l'idéal de communauté nomade et plurielle qui se dessine entre ses pages, à la fois comme utopie politique et comme

figuration d'un « moment » (ou d'un « nous ») qui l'unirait à ses lecteurs/auditeurs, celui de « *truly pretend Fasa* » – « des Fasa authentiquement inauthentiques » (Mackey *Blue Fasa* 154). L'identification de la figure poétique avec un sujet unifié et authentique, sous le masque de la « voix noire », se trouve court-circuitée et réinjectée dans des dispositifs expérimentaux où tout est toujours-déjà langage. Le procédé même de la sérialité emprunté à Duncan, avec ses reprises et variations jamais closes de formules, mine la poétique de la voix tout en maintenant son souvenir ou son fantôme, en arrière-plan du papier et de l'encre, créant un sentiment troublant de présence-absence. L'oralité pernicieusement authentique du primitivisme est dépassée par celle, expérimentale et délicieusement discordante, du *free jazz* : l'« ipséité suspecte » (*suspect ipseity*) cède ainsi la place à un « jeu de cache-cache ipséique » – *ipseic / hide and seek* (Mackey *Blue Fasa* 80).

Nos trois poètes poursuivent en les déplaçant les expérimentations des avant-gardes historiques jusque dans leur pratique de la performance. Le moment de la présence, du surgissement du corps et de la voix, font pleinement partie du déploiement chaotique de signes et d'historicités contradictoires qui compose leurs poèmes. Chez eux, la performance se fait avec et au-delà de l'oralité, comme une façon de « faire moment » tout en interrogeant les contours de cette expérience d'être-en-commun. Nous avons montré dans un article précédent comment, au sein de ses lectures poétiques volontiers accompagnées de musiciens, Nathaniel Mackey imaginait des formes contemporaines de performance qui épousent de façon critique l'ambition collective de l'épique (Vettorato « Les éléments épiques africains »). Sa pratique transcende radicalement l'idée de texte pour disséminer l'expérience indivisiblement sensorielle-intellectuelle du poème entre de multiples supports : plaquettes autoéditées, livres, performances seul ou accompagné, ou encore enregistrements musicaux comme avec l'album de 1995 *Strick (Song Of The Andoumboulou 16–25)*, réalisé en collaboration avec le saxophoniste Hafez Modirzadeh et le percussionniste Royal Hartigan. Ronald Augusto associe poésie visuelle, dessins, théorie, chansons et vidéos, et il a collaboré avec le danseur Robson Duarte et la comédienne Ligia Rigo pour créer l'œuvre poético-scénique *Homem ao Rubro*. Ricardo Aleixo est réputé pour ses performances où il lit, chante, joue de la guitare et des percussions, utilise son ordinateur pour manier sons et vidéos, ou encore emploie un accessoire de son invention, le *poemanto* – un grand drap noir couvert de mots dont il s'entoure, comme pour mimer la relation d'inclusion



mutuelle de l'homme et du langage. La voix, y compris comme timbre, comme vibration d'un corps qui éructe, est toujours enroulée de signes, de caractères.

Ricardo Aleixo, Ronald Augusto et Nathaniel Mackey, par leur pratique de la performance et de la mise en tension des médiums, disséminent le poème en mille endroits, rendant inopérante toute imposition d'un sens ou d'une essence du poétique. L'un des pouvoirs de la poésie comme *poiesis*, ou création imaginative, est peut-être précisément de retourner contre eux-mêmes certains horizons d'attente et autres cadrages caducs de façon à libérer l'énergie créative – une démarche, une fois de plus, typique du paradigme avant-gardiste. Mais cette énergie créative n'est pas nécessairement à penser au sein d'un milieu neutre et lisse, loin des catégories du monde social. Le motif duncanien de la « dissonance » peut trouver, relu à l'aune des musiques africaines américaines par Mackey, un espace de déploiement et d'évolution salutaire ; tout comme l'impératif concrétiste de la « transgression » (« *transgressão* »), reformulé par Augusto en « transnégression » (« *transnegressão* ») irrévérencieuse et ravageuse pour toutes les assignations identitaires venues de l'extérieur comme de l'intérieur de sa communauté (Augusto « *Transnegressão* »).

Peut-être gagnerait-on à enjamber les barrières séparant poésies « situées » et poésies expérimentales et à penser ensemble, comme nous y invite Peter Middleton, les manifestations écrites et orales de la poésie, avec tout ce qu'elles peuvent charrier d'imaginaires sociaux – qui nous engagent. Tout comme le texte, le paratexte, la mise en page et autres stratégies éditoriales ou scripturaires, la performance poétique est un moment où tous les acteurs de l'échange « interprètent ensemble » un petit « drame » où les questions de l'auctorialité, du statut du texte, de l'interprétation et de la production d'un « moment » collectif se trouvent mises en jeu (Middleton 74). C'est dans ce moment d'interprétation – dans les deux sens du terme – que nous pouvons peut-être, en tant que lecteurs de poésie, saisir quelques échos de l'historicité du poème en train de se faire, avec nous, à travers nous.

Cyril Vettorato  
cyril.vettorato@gmail.com  
Université Paris Diderot

## Bibliographie

- Aguilar, Gonzalo. « Anexo: Construir o passado. Alguns problemas da história da literatura a partir do debate entre Antonio Candido e Haroldo do Campos ». *Poesia concreta brasileira: as vanguardas na encruzilhada modernista*. São Paulo: Edusp, 2005. 335–56.
- Agustoni, Prisca. « Um corpo que oscila: performance, tradição e contemporaneidade na poética de Ricardo Aleixo ». *Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea* 33 (janvier-juin 2009): 25–49.
- . « O desejo de dizer ou a performance de exu na poética de Ricardo Aleixo e Edmilson de Almeida Pereira ». *Terra Roxa e outra Terras* 17 (décembre 2009): 102–12.
- Aleixo, Ricardo. *Antiboi*. Belo Horizonte: LIRA/Crisálida, 2017.
- . *Modelos vivos*. Belo Horizonte: Crisálida Editora, 2010.
- . *Máquinazero*. Belo Horizonte: Scriptum Livros, 2003.
- . *Trívio. Poemas*. Belo Horizonte: Scriptum Livros, 2002.
- de Assis Duarte, Eduardo, dir. *Literatura afro-brasileira. 100 autores do século XVIII ao XXI*. Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 2014.
- Augusto, Ronald. « Transgressão » (1995). *A Mente Afro-Brasileira/The Afro-Brazilian Mind*. Dir. N. Afolabi, M. Barbosa et E. Ribeiro. Trenton et Asmara: Africa World Press, 2007. 91–102.
- . *Cair de costas*. Porto Alegre: Éblis, 2012.
- . « Em resposta a uma solicitação que lhe fizeram ». *Babel poético* 1.4 (août-septembre 2011): 9.
- Barreto Ferreira, Laisa et Moisés Oliveira Alves. « O expandido em *Modelos vivos*, de Ricardo Aleixo ». *Revista Discentis* 7.1 (février 2019): 28–41.
- Bloom, Harold. «An Elegy for the Canon.» *The Western Canon. The Books and School of the Ages*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1994. 15–24.
- . *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-garde*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.
- de Campos, Augusto, Haroldo de Campos et Décio Pignatari. *Teoria da poesia concreta: textos críticos e manifestos 1950–1960*. São Paulo: Edições Invenção, 1965.

- de Campos, Haroldo. « Da razão antropofágica: diálogo e diferença na cultura brasileira » (1983). *Metalinguagem e outras metas*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1992. 231–56.
- . *O Sequestro do Barroco na Formação da Literatura Brasileira. O Caso Gregório de Matos*. Salvador: Fundação Casa de Jorge Amado, 1989.
- . « Texto e História ». *A Operação do Texto*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1976. 13–22.
- . « Poética Sincrônica » (1967). *A Arte no Horizonte do Provável*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1969. 205–12.
- Candido, Antonio. *Formação da Literatura Brasileira: Momentos Decisivos*, vol. 1. Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1981.
- Collot, Michel. « Lyrisme et littéralité ». *Lendemain* 49.134–135 (2009) : 14–24.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Le Bergsonisme*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1966.
- Dewey, Anne and Libbie Rifkin, eds. *Among Friends: Engendering the Social Site of Poetry*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013.
- Duncan, Robert. *Bending the Bow*. New York: New Directions, 1968.
- . *The H. D. Book*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- Ernest, John. *Chaotic Justice. Rethinking African American Literary History*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Fabbrini, Ricardo. « O fim das vanguardas ». *Cadernos de Pós-Graduação do Instituto de Artes da Unicamp* 8.2 (2006): 111–29.
- Faleiros, Álvaro. « Antropofagia modernista e perspectivismo ameríndio: considerações sobre a transcriação poética desde Haroldo de Campos ». *Ipotesi* 17.1 (janvier/juin 2013): 107–19.
- Finkelstein, Norman. “Nathaniel Mackey and the Unity of All Rites.” *Contemporary Literature* 49.1 (Spring 2008): 24–55.
- Frederico, Grazielle, Lúcia Tormin Mollo et Paula Queiroz Dutra. « ‘A poesia tem seus limites’: entrevista com Ronald Augusto ». *Estudos de literatura brasileira contemporânea* 51 (mai-août 2017): 300–05.
- Heuving, Jeanne. “An interview with Nathaniel Mackey.” *Contemporary Literature* 53.2 (Summer 2012): 207–36.
- Kaplan, Hilary. « Obra Sonora Poética: 1980–2010 ». *Deslocamentos críticos*. São Paulo: Itaú cultural/Babel, 2011. 115–28.

- Ma, Ming-Qian. *Poetry as Re-Reading. American Avant-Garde Poetry and the Poetics of Counter-Method*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008.
- Mackey, Nathaniel. *Blue Fasa*. New York: New Directions, 2015.
- . *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.
- . "From Gassire's Lute: Robert Duncan's Vietnam War Poems." *Reading Race in American Poetry: An Area of Act*. Ed. Aldon Lynn Nielsen. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 209–24.
- . *Discrepant Engagement. Dissonance, Cross-Culturality and Experimental Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- . "Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol." *Callaloo* 30 (Winter 1987): 29–54.
- Mendonça, Antônio Sérgio. *Poesia de vanguarda no Brasil. De Oswald de Andrade ao poema visual*. Rio de Janeiro: Antares, 1983.
- Middleton, Peter. *Distant Reading. Performance, Readership and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005.
- Mossin, Andrew. "Unveiling Expectancy: Nathaniel Mackey, Robert Duncan, and the Formation of Discrepant Subjectivity." *Callaloo* 23.2 (Spring 2000): 538–62.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *La Communauté désœuvrée*. Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1986.
- Naylor, Paul. "An Interview with Nathaniel Mackey." *Callaloo* 23.2 (Spring 2000): 645–63.
- Nichols, Peter. "A Conversation with Bob Perelman." *Textual Practice* 12.3 (Winter 1998): 525–43.
- Nielsen, Aldon Lynn. *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- O'Leary, Peter. *Gnostic Contagion. Robert Duncan and the Poetry of Illness*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002.
- Pereira, Edimilson de Almeida. *Casa da palavra*. Belo Horizonte: Mazza Edições, 2003.
- Ploegmakers, Ruud. « A revista *Tendêcia* contra a poesia concreta ». *América. Cahiers du CRICCAL* 20 (1998): 41–46.
- Reed, Anthony. *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

- Rowell, Charles. "An Interview with Nathaniel Mackey." *Callaloo* 23.2 (Spring 2000): 703–16.
- Scherer, Telma. « Ricardo Aleixo: o poeta em trânsito ». *Organon* 31 (2016): 1–16.
- Scheunemann, Dietrich. *European Avant-garde: New Perspectives*. Amsterdam: Brill/Rodopi, 2000.
- Sell, Mike. *The Avant-Garde: Race, Religion, War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Sell, Mike. *Avant-garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism. Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Shapiro, Alan. "The New Formalism." *Critical Inquiry* 14.1 (1987): 200–13.
- Silliman, Ron. "Poetry and the Politics of the Subjects: A Bay Area Sampler." *Socialist Review* 18.3 (1988): 63.
- Silva-Reis, Dennys et C. Leonardo B Antunes. « Poesia, crítica e tradução. Entrevista com Ronald Augusto ». *Translatio* 13 (juin 2017):323–34.
- Siscar, Marcos. *De volta ao fim. o "fim das vanguardas" como questão da poesia contemporânea*. Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras, 2016.
- Spatola, Adriano. *Verso la poesia totale*. Turin: Paravia, 1978.
- Trielli Ribeiro, Guilherme. « Ricardo Aleixo. outro, o mesmo ». *Elyra* 1.3 (2013): 25–38.
- Vettorato, Cyril. *Poésie moderne et oralité dans les Amériques noires. Diaspora de voix*. Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2018.
- . « Les éléments épiques africains et la quête d'une épopée moderne: l'exemple du Blue Fasa de Nathaniel Mackey ». *Le Recueil Ouvert*. Mis à jour le 09/10/2017. <http://ouvroir-litt-arts.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/revues/projet-epopee/267-les-elements-epiques-africains-et-la-quete-d-une-epopee-moderne-l-exemple-du-blue-fasa-de-nathaniel-mackey>



## Genres as Gateways to the World for Minor Literature: The Case of Crime Fiction in Galicia

CÉSAR DOMÍNGUEZ

In his 1978 lecture “El cuento policial” (“The Detective Story”), Jorge Luis Borges foresaw what world literature scholars (see King, “Crime Fiction”; Nilsson, Damrosch, and D’haen) have recently been discussing, namely, that crime fiction may claim to be world literature – at least in one of its several dimensions – when he stated that “There exists a certain species of contemporary reader: the reader of detective fiction. This reader [...] may be found in every country in the world and ... numbers in millions” (Borges 492). Arguably, it would have been much more difficult for Borges to imagine that one day crime fiction would be so powerful as to make possible the international academic recognition of a peripheral literature, i.e. Galician literature. On May 13, 2014, the Modern Language Association of America approved the creation of a Section of Galician Studies. In their request letter, the signatories made several arguments, among which translations of Galician literary works played a prominent role. The list of translations includes several poetry anthologies – either individual or collective – in accordance with the central role played by this genre in Galician literature since the Middle Ages, while contemporary narratives are mainly represented by two best-selling writers, both in Galicia and abroad, Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar. Rivas has forayed into crime fiction only occasionally, with one short story (“O muíño” [“The Mill”]) and the 2010 novel *Todo é silencio* (*All Is Silence*). Villar, in turn, is a crime fiction writer who has been awarded several crime fiction prizes and has been included by the novelist Ann Cleeves in her list of the top ten crime writers in translation.

Such international recognition, however, is at odds with the situation of crime fiction in both Galician literature and Galician studies. As for the former, Galician crime fiction has met a wide readership whose taste goes beyond Villar’s novels and includes other successful writers such as Carlos G. Reigosa (King, “Reconstructing the Nation”) and, most

especially, Diego Ameixeiras, despite the fact that their works have not been translated into other non-Iberian languages. Furthermore, the success of these writers has resulted in older examples of the genre being republished, along with the translation into Galician of crime fiction from other languages (Ameixeiras, for instance, is a translator into Galician of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler). As for academic attention, with the notable exceptions of the overviews of Stewart King (2003) and Dolores Vilavedra (2010), crime fiction has not been thoroughly analysed, nor have any preliminary or basic steps in this direction been undertaken, for example in the form of a compilation of a list of crime fiction works. The marketplace and academia symbolically meet, then, at what I will call the “May 17 void.” May 17 is the “Día das Letras Galegas,” the celebration of Galician language and literature that has taken place every year since 1963. The 1989 special issue of *Cadernos “A Nosa Terra,”* which was devoted to crime fiction, included a foreword in which it was asked: “If major sales in Galician literature are represented by crime fiction, why not a May 17th devoted to crime fiction?” (“Presentación” 3, my translation). Thirty years after this question was first posed, the reply is still pending.

In this essay, I will focus on Domingo Villar, who is undeniably the most international Galician contemporary writer. His work has been translated into over fifteen languages besides Spanish-Castilian, a number close to that of Manuel Rivas (with twenty languages) and to that of the most widely circulated Galician work, *Memorias dun neno labrego* (1961) by Xosé Neira Vilas, which has been translated into sixteen languages.<sup>1</sup> My analysis will be restricted to the three main translations of Villar’s work, namely, Galician, Spanish-Castilian, and English. It may come as a surprise to talk of a Galician “translation” instead of a Galician original. A key feature of Villar’s writing, however, is that there is no version that may be called “original,” unless, by original, one understands the source language upon which translations into non-Iberian languages are based. In this case, Villar’s originals are in Spanish-Castilian and not in Galician.

As Villar is exclusively a crime fiction writer, his novels are a representative example of what Eva Erdmann has described as a genre which “is developing into the dominating literary discourse of a global

<sup>1</sup> These figures are only tentative, for there are no reliable sources; neither has the Index Translationum an updated register of translation for these Galician writers.



local knowledge” (278–79). Yet, I do not completely agree with her when she states, on the one hand, that “the genre of the crime novel fulfils the function of a world literature in the sense in which literary history determined this concept in the early nineteenth century” (278) and, on the other hand, that it is assumed that “the internationality of the crime novel, unlike that of world literature classics of single works of genius ... applies to the entire genre” (278). Both statements result, in my opinion, from overlooking the fact that some crime fiction novels come from “minor literatures” (see Domínguez, Di Rosario, and Ciastellardi) and that an opposition between “works of genius” and crime fiction writers is no longer tenable – if it ever was.

In the first part of this essay, I will discuss the treatment of crime fiction in Galician studies and the role it has played within the mainstream narrative of Galician literature. Obviously, my account cannot claim to be comprehensive. Rather, it will be restricted to some key issues which, nonetheless, become essential when the “dissemiNational” systemic constitution of Galician literature is taken into account.<sup>2</sup> In the second part of my essay, I will examine how Domingo Villar negotiates the basic set of crime fiction rules within the Galician context. The case of Villar is exemplary, not only given his role as the most internationally acclaimed Galician crime fiction writer, but also, and more importantly, as a writer who requires to be approached dissemiNationally rather than nationally. Some concluding remarks will follow these two parts, in which I will apply some insights derived from my Galician case study to the understanding of crime fiction as world literature.

## 1. “A bazaar in Vigo, one of those where authentic English objects are sold.”

For the mainstream narrative of Galician literature, the first example of Galician crime fiction was published in 1984 – i.e. Carlos G. Reigosa’s *Crime en Compostela* [Crime in Compostela] –, though some critics opt for Xosé Fernández Ferreiro’s *Corrupción e morte de Brigitte Bardot* [Brigitte Bardot’s Corruption and Death] (1981). Fernández Ferreiro is

<sup>2</sup> I am obviously drawing here from Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of “dissemiNation,” which in the specific case of Galician society needs to be related to “the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering” (Bhabha 139) as a result of diaspora.

also credited with having written the first Western novel in Galician: *A morte de Frank González* [Frank González's Death] (1975). In either case, the foundations of crime fiction in Galician literature must have been laid in the early 1980s, a hypothesis based upon (at least) two implicit assumptions. First, there are no previous examples of crime fiction in Galicia or, if they exist, they do not comply with the defining rules of the genre and fail to correspond to what is generally understood by "Galician literature." Second, crime fiction in Galician literature emerges later than in Spanish-Castilian literature. I will briefly and separately survey each of these assumptions for the sake of clarity, although they are evidently interlinked.

As for the non-existence of crime fiction in Galicia before the 1980s, my arguments will mainly draw from Maurizio Ascari, who advocates the need for a "counter-history" of crime fiction on the basis that current definitions of the genre are indebted to the foundational 1920s–1930s theoretical and historical approach, which "tended to consign it [the genre] to a space of rigid rules. In their attempt to assert the dignity of the genre, writers and critics emphasised its rational elements at the expense of other components and consequently pushed the more sensational aspects into the background" (3). On the contrary, for Ascari, crime fiction entails a "centuries-long process" of "interaction between realism and fantasy" (xi), the latter having been erased from the definition of the genre for, as suggested by Tzvetan Todorov's reading of the fantastic, fantasy literature reflects "the uneasy conscience of the positivist nineteenth century" (xi).

Interestingly, a Galician female writer, Emilia Pardo Bazán, argued for the relevance of the sensational in crime fiction already in the early twentieth century on the occasion of surveying the reception of Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* novels in Spain. Her opinion on Conan Doyle's realism deserves to be quoted in full:

No cabe lectura más adecuada para *girls* y *boys*. Allí ni por casualidad se desliza una frase, un pormenor escabroso. El terrible elemento pasional, tan frecuente en el crimen, ni asoma, o asoma tan envuelto en pudibundez, que no hay mejor disfrazada máscara. Al lado de este idealismo que produce impresión de falsedad, muestra Conan Doyle un realismo que halaga los instintos de sus compatriotas; realismo puramente epidérmico, local.... En las novelas de Conan Doyle el fondo, los tipos, los personajes, las decoraciones, lugares, muebles, armas (¡qué de armería!) son genuinos y castizos de Albión, y sin embargo, al acabar de leer, no ha penetrado en nosotros ni un átomo

del sentido íntimo del alma inglesa. Creemos salir de un bazar de Vigo, de esos donde se expenden objetos ingleses auténticos. (Pardo Bazán, “Conan Doyle’s Novels” 122)

[There is no more adequate reading for girls and boys. One cannot find a single lurid sentence or event. The horrific passionate element, so frequent in crime, does not show up, or, if it does, it is wrapped up in a mask of prudish decency. Along with this idealism, which produces a feeling of falseness, Conan Doyle uses a realism that satisfies his fellow compatriots’ instincts; a purely epidermal realism, a local one.... In Conan Doyle’s novels, the background, the types, the characters, the decoration, the settings, the furniture, the arms (what an armoury!) are genuinely from Albion; and yet, when one finishes reading the book, there is not a single atom of the English soul. It is like exiting from a bazaar in Vigo, one of those where authentic English objects are sold.] (my translation)

Pardo Bazán not only despises Conan Doyle’s “purely epidermal realism,” which she relates to the wrong “idea that for solving a crime, it is only necessary to have a lot of activity, great power of reflection and insight” (“idea de que para descubrir un crimen hace falta, no solo mucha actividad, sino gran reflexión y penetración”): she also sees in other examples of crime fiction the re-emergence of the Gothic, a “wild power of creation” (“desenfreno inventivo”), a “new form of old horrifying stories in the mood of the English novelist, Ann Radcliffe” (“nueva forma de los viejos relatos espeluznantes de la novelista inglesa Ana Radcliffe”; Pardo Bazán, “Detective Novels” 254, my translation). In short, realism does not clash with the sensational within masterpieces of crime fiction. Realism, on the one hand, is enshrined in the attention to detail that is characteristic of the genre, while sensationalism, on the other hand, is derived from crime itself. Imposing realism over the sensational results in “invented crimes” (“crímenes inventados”) similar to those found in Conan Doyle’s works, i.e. “cerebral or, better, geometric and mathematical [crimes] – so different from human reality and so similar to chess problems” (“cerebrales, o mejor, geométricos y matemáticos – tan distintos de la realidad humana y tan parecidos a problemas de ajedrez”; Pardo Bazán, “Conan Doyle’s Novels” 122, my translation).

In view of this counter-genealogy of crime fiction, the scholar approaching the Galician case faces an additional problem. Indeed, the existence of fantasy as a genre has been denied not only in Galicia but in the whole of Spain in accordance with the centuries-long ideology of realism, as epitomised by Cervantes, which informs mainstream

literary history. Suffice it to mention here that the reconstruction of crime fiction in Galicia during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century would require researching its presence in journalism, both in terms of its rhetorical emplotment as news and the publication of short stories or serial novels. As Pardo Bazán mentions, “[when] I read the story of a crime in a newspaper, I want to see everything, the places, the furniture, for, if I could, I would discover a lot and find the clue to the true criminal” (“leo en la prensa el relato de un crimen, experimento deseos de verlo todo, los sitios, los muebles, suponiendo que, de poder hacerlo así, averiguaría mucho y encontraría la pista del criminal verdadero”; “Conan Doyle’s Novels” 122, my translation). In her contributions to *La Ilustración Artística* between 1909 and 1912, Pardo Bazán evokes famous crimes that took place in both Madrid (the slitting of Vicenta Verdier’s throat) and Paris (Marguerite Steinhek’s murder of her stepmother and husband). Strangely, Pardo Bazán never refers to one of the most brutal crimes in the country’s history which took place in Galicia, near Vilalba, in 1911: Ángel Castro Cabarcos was killed after having his facial skin torn away from him while alive. This specific murder would probably have interested her as result of its blend of realism and fantasy on the one hand, and the fact it took place in her homeland on the other. While some attributed the facial abrasion to an attempt at making the victim unrecognisable, others linked it to folk medicine practices according to which the face skin of a beardless man possesses curative effects. Pardo Bazán, president of the Galician Folklore Society, cherished these combinations of realism and fantasy, as shown by several of her crime fiction works, such as the short story “Rabeno,” in which the inhabitants of a small Galician village kill a man they identify with Rabeno, the criminal who, in Galician folklore, kidnaps and attacks young women to extract their fat. Needless to say, for a feminist such as Pardo Bazán, female revenge against sexual crimes should not be punished in the same way as in the case of men insofar as “women do not completely enjoy their civil rights” (“la mujer no disfrute de la plenitud de los derechos civiles”; “Contemporary Crimes” 762, my translation).

As far as I know, no research has been carried out about the presence of crime fiction in newspapers and periodical publications. Such research should arguably start with *El Heraldo Gallego*, the literary journal founded by Valentín Lamas Carvajal, which played an essential role in the *Rexurdimento* (Galician Renaissance) and to which key literary figures

contributed, such as Rosalía de Castro and Pardo Bazán herself.<sup>3</sup> Published in two instalments in January 1880, the short story “O demo das Rías Baixas” [“The Devil from the Rías Baixas”] – written in Spanish–Castilian by Víctor G. Candamo – offers a perfect example of crime fiction set in Galicia, including a sea storm, a sexual murder, and the revenge of the victim’s brother fifteen years later. Interestingly, Domingo Villar also used all these elements in *A praia dos afogados* (*Death on a Galician Shore*). The case of “O demo das Rías Baixas,” of course, constitutes only an isolated example. Further research would be necessary in order to draw more general conclusions about crime fiction in Galicia.

Pardo Bazán perfectly illustrates the first assumption I mentioned above – there exist no examples of crime fiction in Galicia before the 1980s or, if they exist, they fail to correspond to what is generally understood by “Galician literature.” According to an enduring definition, Spanish crime fiction comprises stories “written by a Spaniard in which some or all of the characters are Spanish, and which [are] usually set at least in part in Spain” (Hart 13). However problematic this definition may sound, let me apply it, for a moment, to the Galician case, so that it would read as follows: *Galician crime fiction is written by a Galician in which some or all of the characters are Galician, and which is usually set at least in part in Galicia*. Though many works of Pardo Bazán’s crime fiction comply with all these requirements, none of them could be fully considered as belonging to Galician literature for the simple fact that they were written in Spanish–Castilian rather than in Galician. And yet, Pardo Bazán’s criminal stories perfectly portray the Galician *Ancien Régime* geography of crime, to which contemporary crime fiction is indebted: they move from the border between Galicia and Portugal (the setting of smuggling and criminals running away from national laws, as in her short story “Santiago el Mudo” [“Santiago, the Mute”]), to a depiction of the increasing number of thefts in the Atlantic cities (as in “La cana” [“The White Hair”]), and the sexual violence of inner Galicia (as in the above mentioned “Rabeno”). All these settings were permeated by the factor which Pardo Bazán identified as quintessential for crime,

---

<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it should be noted that during the nineteenth century, the biggest urban concentrations of Galicians were located neither in Galicia nor in the rest of Spain, but in cities such as Buenos Aires, Mexico, and La Habana (Colmeiro 132). As the detective novel can be regarded as an urban genre, this certainly constitutes a relevant issue for its history in Galician literature.

passion, at least from the perspective of the chroniclers of the period. In his 1846–50 *Diccionario geográfico-estadístico-histórico de España y sus posesiones de Ultramar*, Pascual Madoz stated that Galician people “are so vengeful that anybody who causes offence to them may be sure they will be harassed by the eternal revenge of both the offended and their relatives” (qtd. in Iglesias Estepa 415, my translation).

Nevertheless, the exclusion of works from Galician literature on the basis of a philological-national definition (see González-Millán) still dominates mainstream criticism and continues to affect the crime fiction genre. This is illustrated in the omission of Marina Mayoral’s *Cándida, otra vez* [Cándida, Again] (1979) – in contrast to her other crime fiction novel, *Case perfecto* [Almost Perfect], written in Galician – and of Alfredo Conde’s *Huesos de santo* [The Saint’s Bones] (2010).

This assumption I have just dealt with influences the second one, namely, the belated emergence of crime fiction in Galicia in comparison with Spanish-Castilian literature. There is a general consensus about the existence of two groups of crime fiction writings in Spanish-Castilian. The first one includes works from the 1970s, when the genre experienced a boom after the end of Franco’s regime, and works from the transition period to democracy (see Craig-Odders). A defining feature of the works created during this time is that the police have no role at all in conducting an investigation, a logical consequence of the suspicion this symbol of the totalitarian establishment still raised. Furthermore, these works aim to rewrite official history. The second group of crime fiction emerged as the result of the metamorphosis of the hard-boiled model that took place in Spain in the mid-1990s. It addresses issues of the current era of globalisation, including the unprecedented migration flows and global events, such as the Olympic Games in Barcelona as well as drug trafficking and real estate speculation.

Against this background, 1980s Galician crime fiction included a limited number of works that reflected the social and political changes of Galicia. A discussion of the possibilities of creating an authentic Galician crime fiction then ensued. Some critics, such as Silvia Gaspar, doubt that the emergence of crime fiction in Galicia constitutes something “natural” or that it results from publishing strategies (26). Other critics, such as Xesús González Gómez, consider “there does not exist a Galician crime fiction novel as of yet. There are some titles. The number is limited, and quality is nowhere. And this is so because almost all Galician Noir novels are full of stereotypes; they do not know how to avoid clichés” (27, my

translation). Dolores Vilavedra has described the new re-emergence of the genre, of which Domingo Villar's novels are a key example, as "a reaction against the disintegration of the model; hence the success of the new works that are faithful to the traditional hermeneutics of crime fiction" (136, my translation).

## 2. "I don't know from where it got translated."

Domingo Villar's crime fiction novels belong to world literature, at least if one considers that, on the occasion of the 2008 Edinburgh International Book Festival, his novel *Ollos de auga* (*Water-Blue Eyes*) was included in the category "World Literature," reserved for those writers who neither come from an English-speaking country nor write in English. In an interview, Xabier Cid called Villar's attention to the fact that the English translation does not make any reference to the original in Galician. Villar then replied: "I don't know from where it got translated" (Cid 91, my translation). Such a reply accurately describes not only the translation into English, but also Villar's writing process as a whole. So far, his crime fiction works include the 2006 novel *Ollos de auga/Ojos de agua*, the first to introduce the inspector Leo Caldas and his deputy Rafael Estévez; the 2009 novel *A praia dos afogados/La playa de los ahogados*, the second book in the Leo Caldas series; the 2009 short story "Las hojas secas" ["Dry Leaves"], which does not feature Caldas; the 2010 short story "El último verano de Paula Ris" ["Paula Ris' Last Summer"], which provides a prequel to the Caldas series; the 2010 short story "Die Bestie von Oelde" ["The Beast from Oelde"] and the 2016 short story "El Lobo" ["The Wolf"], neither of which feature Caldas. In 2015, a third novel in the Caldas series under the title of *Cruces de pedra/Cruces de piedra* was announced and finally dismissed, while in 2019 his true third novel was published under the title *O último barco/El último barco* [The Last Ship]. His fiction includes, therefore, three novels in Galician/Spanish-Castilian, three short stories in Spanish-Castilian, and one short story in German.

Interestingly, Villar's novels were published almost simultaneously in Galician and in Spanish-Castilian: around one month apart (see Sánchez Zapatero 808–09). While the Spanish-Castilian version of *Ollos de auga* comes with a paratext reading "Traducido del gallego por el autor" [Translated from the Galician by the author], the Spanish-Castilian versions of *A praia dos afogados* and *O último barco* do not



include such information and present themselves as originals. Thus, one might consider that a Galician original has been translated into Spanish-Castilian in the case of *Ollos de auga/Ojos de agua* or that we are dealing with four originals – in Galician and in Spanish-Castilian – in the case of *A praia dos afogados/La playa de los ahogados* and *O último barco/El último barco*. However, the writing process becomes more complicated, if one takes Villar's own description into account. In an interview with María Míguez in October 2010, Villar explains: "I start writing in Galician and translating into Spanish-Castilian the very same day. I finish at the same time in both languages because I use translation to correct.... translating does not consist of switching one word with another. It is about dismantling the text, going down to the substrate and assembling it again, something which makes it possible to see the inner architecture, the details, from a wider perspective" (n.p., my translation.).

Whereas self-translation is usually associated with a consecutive translation, in which the authority of the original survives only in temporal terms, Villar's writing process involves a simultaneous self-translation. In this process, the distinction (even temporal) between the original and the self-translation collapses insofar as the result comprises two variants of a non-existent original. Interestingly, the consecutive translation into a non-Iberian language transforms both variants – in Galician and in Spanish-Castilian – into originals. The paratext informs the reader of both *Water-Blue Eyes* and *Death on a Galician Shore* that the English version has been "Translated from Spanish." Textually, however, the equally important role of the Galician version is undeniable, for, as Rainier Grutman puts it, "each monolingual part calls for its counterpart in the other language" (20). This transfer process has also been reproduced in translations other than the English one.

However creative this kind of rewriting might be, it retains its own contradictions. They strike one as especially acute when the asymmetries of minority situations are taken into account. While the translation into a non-Iberian language (here, English) is based upon a Spanish-Castilian version calling for its counterpart in Galician, such a translation does not rely upon a Galician version claiming a Spanish-Castilian equivalent. Thus, I wish to stress the prevalence of the mediating role of the dominant language (here Spanish-Castilian), in typically bilateral translation flows. In this regard, Stewart King's argument about the sales of originals and translations needs to be qualified when applied to minority cultures. According to King, "Whereas the Spanish original [of



Rosa Ribas' *Entre dos aguas*] has sold between 3,000 and 4,000 copies, the German translation is currently in its third print run and has sold between 15,000 and 17,000 copies, which suggests that her works have had a greater resonance among German readers" ("Don't Forget" 76). The higher sales of Villar's Spanish-Castilian version, however, do not indicate that Spanish-Castilian readers received his works better than the Galician readers. Indeed, that would imply overlooking both the higher number of Spanish-Castilian readers (some of them also Galician), the different sizes of each market, and the monopoly of Spanish publishing houses in Latin America.

Self-translation constitutes a double-edged sword in minority contexts (see Dasilva for the Iberian context). While some minority writers revert to consecutive self-translation to reach a wider audience and gain institutional recognition from the hegemonic culture, they prefer to entrust it to outside translators once their careers have been established in the major culture. This enables them to consolidate their positions within the minority culture. This has been the case of Manuel Rivas in Galicia and Bernardo Atxaga in the Basque country. The fact that Villar has opted for simultaneous self-translation may indicate that the Galician literary system has entered a new phase in which bi-literariness is acceptable. Alternatively, it may suggest that Villar has developed a strategy meant to compensate for the lack of "linguistic visibility" of the minority culture resulting from translation flows not predicated on Galician as a source language.

To conclude this second part, let me briefly touch upon how bilingualism and diglossia are thematically represented in Villar's work, for these issues precisely stand at the core of his writing process. Every chapter of both *Ollos de auga/Ojos de agua* and *A praia dos afogados/La playa de los ahogados* begins with the definition of a term which, either as such or in a derivative form, reappears in the following pages. If one compares the definitions provided by the writer with those found in standard dictionaries, it becomes clear that Villar introduces additional meanings. If one performs such a comparison for a single term in both languages, one can conclude that the consecutive self-translation process I have described above does not affect the linguistic identity of each language. Indeed, the number of meanings attached to a single term in Galician and in Spanish-Castilian varies considerably. As already stated, crime fiction has created a reader of its own that replicates the procedures of investigation. By initiating every chapter with the definition of a term,

Villar transforms the reader into a “linguistic investigator,” who has to trace this specific term within the chapter and evaluate the accuracy of the several meanings applied to the specific situation. In this regard, the suitability of the crime fiction genre for normalisation should not be overlooked, both in linguistic and political terms, especially in the case of minority languages/societies.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, *Ollos de auga/Ojos de agua* and *A praia dos afogados/La playa de los ahogados* have been translated into English by two different translators – respectively Martin Schifino and Sonia Soto – and, yet, in both cases, the definitions have been deleted. Though I do not know the exact reasons for this choice, one can only read it as a reminder that all languages – Spanish-Castilian included – are potentially minority languages.<sup>5</sup>

The couple comprised of Inspector Caldas and his deputy Estévez further posits bilingualism and diglossia as a major feature of Villar’s novels. In *Ollos de auga*, the reader learns that Rafael Estévez has been transferred from Saragossa, his place of birth, to Vigo only a few months ago. The Galician cultural character, therefore, constitutes an excellent tool for exploring the divergent views on Galicia and its language held by Caldas (a Galician and, hence, a bilingual) and Estévez (an Aragonese and a Spanish-Castilian monoglot).<sup>6</sup> Nowhere in the novels can one find evidence that Estévez has learned Galician. So, the reader has to assume

---

<sup>4</sup> In the Galician case, it is telling that Reigosa’s *Crime en Compostela* was published in 1984, one year after the Law of Linguistic Normalisation. As crime fiction depicts several sociolects, especially those of low and marginal social classes, it becomes a testing ground for a language fighting for its public use and rights. In terms of political normalisation, Nels Pearson and Marc Singer’s argument concerning the link between detective fiction and self-conscious societies proves relevant: “Much of the current criticism views the genre as formally diverse, flourishing in multiple cultures, and engaged with the production of knowledge and transformation of consciousness within and across societies” (2). For a discussion of the role played by the literary character of the detective and the identity and visibility of marginalised societies, see Soitos; for the specific case of Iberian peripheral societies, see King (“Peripheral Detectives”).

<sup>5</sup> Here, I am interpreting the elimination of the “Spanish lexicon” in the translations into English as a symbol of the hegemonic position of English globally.

<sup>6</sup> “From its inception, the detective genre has been intrinsically engaged with epistemological formations that are not simply those of ‘society’ in the abstract – that is, dominant cultural groups and their hegemonic discourse – but those produced in encounters between nations, between races and cultures, and especially between imperial powers and their colonial territories” (Pearson and Singer 3). Concerning national stereotypes in Villar’s fiction, see Rivera-Candoso.

that the officer somehow can understand people speaking in Galician, while he only interacts with them in Spanish-Castilian. As all the dialogues in *Ollos de auga* and *A praia dos afogados* are transcribed in Galician, the possibility of linguistic conflict is not foregrounded. Instead, the Galician character becomes visible through language:

O axente aceptara sen especial desagrado traballar en Vigo, aínda que había varias cousas ás que lle estaba a custar un pouco máis tempo do previsto acostumarse. Unha era o impredecíbel do clima, en variación constante, outra a continua pendente das rúas da cidade, a terceira era a ambigüidade. Na recia cachola aragonesa de Rafael Estévez as cousas eran ou non eran, facíanse ou deixábanse sen facer, e supoñíalle un esforzo considerábel desenlear as expresións cargadas de vaguidades dos seus novos veciños. (Villar, *Ollos de auga* 16-17)

The officer had accepted his job in the town of Vigo without any visible displeasure, but he was finding it difficult to adjust to some things here. One was the unpredictable, ever-changing nature of the weather; another the steepness of the streets. The third was ambiguity. To Rafael Estévez's stern Aragonese mind, things were this way or that, got done or didn't, so it was only with considerable effort that he managed to decipher the ambiguous expressions of his new fellow citizens. (Villar, *Water-Blue Eyes* 6)

Conversely, the reader of the Spanish-Castilian versions will likely assume that, though all the dialogues are couched in Spanish-Castilian, Inspector Caldas and most characters speak Galician, except for Officer Estévez. An important question, however, still remains: which language will the English-speaking reader assume most of the characters in the novel speak, as the information concerning the "original language" of the work is concealed?

\*

Whereas Manuel Rivas has been presented to the English audience as a Galician writer who writes in Galician and whose works have been translated into English from the Galician, Domingo Villar has been introduced to the English readership as a Galician writer who now lives in Madrid.<sup>7</sup> While Villar's original language cannot be determined, his works have been translated into English from the Spanish-Castilian. Both Villar's presentation and the choice of the source language for translations

<sup>7</sup> Compare the paratextual information included in Rivas' *All Is Silence* and Villar's *Death on a Galician Shore*.

are strongly influenced by his writing techniques. Consecutive self-translation makes the Spanish-Castilian version an authoritative one for translations into non-Iberian languages.

Whether consecutive self-translation has been instrumental in securing a wide international readership for Villar or not remains a matter for speculation. Much more influential has been his genre choice – crime fiction – both in terms of artistic emergence and development in post-Larsson times. The Nordic Noir as a global phenomenon (Hedberg; Berglund) seems to be responsible for what Eva Erdmann has described as the evolution from “enigmatic bodies, murders and crime scenes” into “a geopolitical genre that conveys primarily one thing to the general public: an extensive knowledge of geographical orientation” (274). Villar has put Galicia on the map, both literally – as the map of Galicia for English-speaking readers in *Death on a Galician Shore* indicates – and symbolically – by providing the reader with a detailed description of the Galician weather, landscape, cuisine, and character.

However, this leads to a contradiction. Indeed, such a detailed description may have a voyeuristic appeal for foreign and non-Galician readers. But will it affect Galician readers in the same way? Consider here the case of Donna Leon, who has forbidden the translation of her novels into Italian. “That’s my choice,” she says, “because I do not want to live where I am famous.... I don’t like being approached by people in a differential way” (Petrocelli n.p.). I cannot avoid wondering, though, whether the detailed “Italian thickness” of Leon’s novels has played any role in her rejection of translations into Italian. When such a thickness does not constitute the focus of interest for the reader, the success of the work depends only on the uniqueness of the plot. Be this as it may in the case of Leon, the minority situation of Villar’s Galician novels should not be overlooked. In his case, the appeal of his works for the Galician audience may be due to both the gratification of “presentativity,” highlighted by the “external” vision of Officer Estévez, and the return to the “traditional hermeneutics of the Noir” detected by some critics (Vilavedra 136, my translation).<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> “Presentativity” is a term coined by the Slovak comparatist Dionýz Ďurišin (61–62) to refer to those situations whereby peripheral literatures are not limited to aesthetic issues but rather give a prominent place to political aims and ambitions. I extend the definition to embrace an inflation of local details, which in the case of Leon I have called “Italian thickness.”

Yet, it is important not to forget the caveat about crime fiction identified by Pardo Bazán. Crime fiction's traditional hermeneutics corresponds precisely to what the Galician writer characterised as "something very listless, elaborated with the technique of childish monotony" ("una cosa muy lánguida, desarrollada con procedimientos de monotonía infantil"), while detailed description may result in "a purely epidermal realism, a local one" (Pardo Bazán, "Conan Doyle's Novels" 122, my translation). Therefore, this dangerously encodes a typical paradox of the globalisation process. Indeed, the undoing of crime fiction for worlding Galicia confronts the reader not with a bazaar in Vigo, but rather with Vigo as a bazaar.

César Domínguez

cesar.dominguez@usc.gal

Universidade de Santiago de Compostela

## Works Cited

- Ascari, Maurizio. *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction. Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Berglund, Karl. "With a Global Market in Mind: Agents, Authors, and the Dissemination of Contemporary Swedish Crime Fiction." Nilsson, Damrosch, and D'haen. 77–89.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Detective Story." *Selected Non-Fictions*. Ed. Eliot Weinberger. Trans. Ester Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger. London: Penguin, 2000. 491–99.
- Cid, Xabier. "Interview. Domingo Villar, autor de *Water-Blue Eyes* (2008)." *Galicia 21: Journal of Contemporary Galician Studies* 1 (2009): 90–94.
- Cleeves, Ann. "The Top Ten Crime Writers in Translation." *The Guardian* (22 Jan. 2014): n.p. [www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/22/top-10-crime-novels-translation-ann-cleeves-scandinavia-montalbano](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/22/top-10-crime-novels-translation-ann-cleeves-scandinavia-montalbano).
- Colmeiro, José. "Visións periféricas, posicións globais. Resituando a cultura galega contemporánea." *Grial: Revista galega de cultura*, 198 (April-June 2013): 131–43.

- Craig-Odders, Renée W. "Introduction." *Crime Scene Spain: Essays on Post-Franco Crime Fiction*. Eds. Renée W. Craig-Odders and Jacky Collins. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. 1–9.
- Dasilva, Xosé Manuel. *Estudios sobre la autotraducción en el espacio ibérico*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2013.
- Domínguez, César, Giovanna Di Rosario and Matteo Ciastellardi. "On Writing a Comparative Literary History: Delocalising Minor Literatures in European Languages in the Age of 'Big Data'." *Arcadia: Internationale Zeitschrift für literarische Kultur*, 53. 2 (2018): 278–307.
- Đurišin, Dionýz. *Notions et principes*. Trans. Alena Anettová. Vol. 6 of *Communautés interlittéraires spécifiques*, Bratislava : Institut de Littérature Mondiale/Académie Slovaque des Sciences, 1993.
- Erdmann, Eva. "Topographical Fiction: A World Map of International Crime Fiction." *The Cartographic Journal* 48.4 (2011): 274–84.
- Gaspar, Silvia. "Crime Fiction in Galicia." *Anima+!: Revista cultural para tódalas especies* 1 (1991): 26.
- González Gómez, Xesús. "Novela policial galega: un policial de cliché." *Anima+!: Revista cultural para tódalas especies* 1(1991): 27.
- González-Millán, Xoán. "O criterio filolóxico e a configuración dunha literatura nacional: achegas a un novo marco de reflexión." *Cadernos da Lingua* 17 (1998): 5–24.
- Grutman, Rainier. "Auto-Translation." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. Ed. Mona Baker. New York: Routledge, 2000. 17–20.
- Hart, Patricia. *The Spanish Sleuth: The Detective in Spanish Fiction*. London: Associated University Press, 1987.
- Hedberg, Andreas. "The Knife in the Lemon: Nordic Noir and the Glocalisation of Crime Fiction." Nilsson, Damrosch, and D'haen. 13–22.
- Iglesias Estepa, Raquel. "Aproximación a la criminalidad gallega de fines del Antiguo Régimen." *Hispania* 65.2 (2005): 409–42.
- King, Stewart. "'Condenada a la modernidad': memoria e identidade cultural en la novela criminal gallega." *Memorias y olvidos: autos y biografías (reales, ficticias) en la cultura hispánica*. Eds. J. Pérez Magallón, R. de la Fuente Ballesteros, and K.M. Sibbald. Valladolid: Universitas Castellae, 2003.. 183–93.
- . "Reconstructing the Nation and the Detective Novel: Carlos G. Reigosa's *Crime en Compostela*." *Galician Review* 5–6 (2006–2007): 82–96.

- . “Peripheral Detectives and Detectives on the Periphery: Crime Fiction in the *nacionalidades históricas*.” *Antípodas: Journal of Hispanic and Galician Studies* 18 (2007): 265–85.
- . “‘Don’t Forget the Tejedor’: Community and Identity in the Crime Fiction of Rosa Ribas.” *The Foreign in International Crime Fiction. Transcultural Representations*. Eds. Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda, and Barbara Pezzotti. London: Continuum, 2012. 75–86.
- . “Crime Fiction as World Literature.” *CLUES: A Journal of Detection* 32.2 (Fall 2014): 8–19.
- Míguez, María. “Interview with Domingo Villar.” *El Mundo* (4 October 2010): n.p. <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2010/10/03/galicia/1286130050.html>
- Nilsson, Louise, David Damrosch, and Theo D’haen, eds. *Crime Fiction as World Literature*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Pardo Bazán, Emilia. “Conan Doyle’s Novels.” *La Ilustración Artística* 1.416 (15 February 1909): 122.
- . “Contemporary Crimes.” *La Ilustración Artística* 1.456 (22 November 1909): 762.
- . “Detective Novels.” *La Ilustración Artística* 1.581 (15 April 1912): 254.
- Pearson, Nels and Marc Singer. “Introduction. Open Cases: Detection, (Post)Modernity, and the State.” *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World*. Eds. Nels Pearson and Marc Singer. London: Ashgate, 2009. 1–14.
- Petrocelli, Elaine. “At Lunch with Donna Leon.” *Grove Atlantic*. n.p. <https://groveatlantic.com/book/uniform-justice/>
- “Presentación.” *Relato policial*. Special issue of *Cadernos “A Nosa Terra” de pensamento e cultura* 3 (May 1989): 3.
- Rivero Grandoso, Javier. “Crímenes y humor en las novelas de Domingo Villar.” *Madrygal* 14 (2011): 109–16.
- Sánchez Zapatero, Javier. “Domingo Villar: novela negra con sabor gallego.” *Signa* 23 (2014): 805–26.
- Soitos, Stephen F. *The Blues Detective: A Study of African American Detective Fiction*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.
- Vilavedra, Dolores. *A narrativa galega na fin de século. Unha ollada crítica dende 2010*. Vigo : Galaxia, 2010.
- Villar, Domingo. *Ollos de auga*. Vigo : Galaxia, 2006.

- . *Ojos de agua*. Trans. Domingo Villar. Madrid: Siruela, 2006.
- . *A praia dos afogados*. Vigo : Galaxia, 2009.
- . *La playa de los ahogados*. Madrid : Siruela, 2009.
- . *Water-Blue Eyes*. Trans. Martin Schifino. London: Arcadia Books, 2009.
- . *Death on a Galician Shore*. Trans. Sonia Soto. London: Abacus, 2011.
- . *O último barco*. Vigo: Galaxia, 2019.
- . *El último barco*. Madrid: Siruela, 2019.