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The Allure of Synthesis: Science and the Literary in Comparative and World Literature

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Abstract:

This article offers a reconstruction of the scientific lineage of comparative and world literature. It will be argued that the approaches by Philarète Chasles and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe were influenced by the meaning of 'comparative' developed in scientific texts in the long eighteenth century. Building on the assumption that literature may be made into a hard science, a number of nineteenth-century comparatists then sought to elaborate syntheses of literature in the form of universal laws that would hold to all literary texts. I argue that this 'scientifying' approach to literature is still at work to this day, and I conclude my intervention by pointing to the epistemological issues that must be considered when the literary is treated scientifically.

Keywords: science, literary, comparative literature, world literature, analysis, synthesis

1. THE SCIENTIFIC LINEAGE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

'To assume a position on the border-lands of Science and Literature is perhaps to provoke the hostility of both the great parties into which our modern thinkers and educationists may be divided.'¹ 133 years have passed since Hutcheson M. Posnett's *Comparative Literature* (1886), the first book-length study on the discipline, but its opening remark still rings true. Notwithstanding the many appeals to interdisciplinarity made nowadays, bringing literature and science together is still an exercise fraught with caution, if not downright suspicion.²

Comparative and world literature in particular have not seen much in the way of a dialogue with the broad domain of the sciences, with the exception of the digital humanities in recent years.³ This is somewhat surprising, given that the endeavour of comparative literature emerged by way of a conjunction between the two cultures. While

instances of comparison between different literatures by all means pre-exist modern science, the rise of comparative literature as a recognizable field of study built on aspirations to synthesize literary knowledge that were inspired by, and contiguous to, modern scientific methodology. In this article I wish to explore this lineage, and, in the final section, suggest that the practitioner in comparative and world literature must be aware of the implications of applying scientific claims to literary studies.

It is a known fact that the term ‘comparative literature’ is a coinage based on Georges Cuvier’s *Leçons d’anatomie comparée* (*Lessons on Comparative Anatomy*, 1800–05).⁴ This debt was acknowledged by Philarète Chasles, who, in his 1835 Athénée lecture entitled *Littérature étrangère comparée* (*Comparative Foreign Literature*), explains that the ‘sympathie’ (‘sympathy’) between European literatures that he theorizes is an idea derived from ‘la science anatomique’ (‘anatomical science’).⁵ Curiously enough, such an overt admission has not led to a thorough examination of why and how Chasles chose to refer to the budding scientific discipline of comparative anatomy to discuss literature in the first place.⁶ To tackle this question, one must remember that Cuvier’s comparative anatomy was aimed at establishing laws with as much certainty as ‘celle des lois métaphysiques ou mathématiques’ (‘that of metaphysical or mathematical laws’). Chasles’ enquiry into the mutual influences of different literatures was no less ambitious. As it appears from his invitation – ‘calculons l’actions de la pensée sur la pensée’ (‘let us calculate the action of thought upon thought’) – mutual literary influences were not to be simply posited, but determined with mathematical rigour.⁷

These first hints suggest that the ‘comparative’ evoked in the Athénée lecture is a methodology, what Susan Bassnett defines as a ‘process applicable to the sciences, in which comparing (or contrasting) served as a means of confirming a hypothesis’.⁸ This methodology hearkens back to a trans-European proto-scientific tradition which, starting

from the late seventeenth century, tackled natural phenomena on the basis of their being measurable and, therefore, comparable. As early as 1677, astronomer Giovanni Cassini would identify the unknown trajectories of the moon by comparison with the fixed points of the Zodiac.⁹ For an astronomer like Cassini, comparison was the twofold act of taking accurate measurements of clearly observable phenomena and, on their basis, creating knowledge about phenomena that were similar in kind though harder to perceive directly. It must have also been so for natural historians one century later, if an ‘analyse comparée’ (comparative analysis) between several animal skeletons was the method chosen to make sense of an unknown bone found in Paris in 1781.¹⁰

There is good reason to believe that the effervescent empiricist tradition of early-modern England gave the first major impulse to the widespread use of a ‘comparative’ method in the sciences. In *Of the Advancement of Learning* (1605), Lord Bacon had first auspicated the introduction of ‘anatomia comparata’ as a discipline in its own right.¹¹ What Bacon meant by comparison was not the systemic arrangement of specimens but, on the contrary, the identification of their irreconcilable differences. Like many sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century collectors of natural specimens, Bacon prioritized the collection of unique samples whose differences outstripped their similarities.¹² Accordingly, measurement was not contemplated in Bacon’s brand of ‘comparative’ because he considered all specimens as individuals: significantly, experiments such as that on ‘the comparative magnitude of living creatures’ made no attempt at measuring the size of the specimens.¹³

Notwithstanding the claims of continuity made when the Royal Society of London was founded in 1660, there was something of a rift between Lord Bacon’s methodology and that adopted by its early members. For many of the Society Fellows, comparison was tantamount to quantitative measurement.¹⁴ When botanist Nehemiah Grew published his

Comparative Anatomy of the Trunks of Plants in 1675, his aim was to show that all plants are made up of parts whose proportion is 'as all the Mathematical Lines of a Flower or Face'.¹⁵ In the later *The Comparative Anatomy of the Stomachs and Guts* (1681), the descriptions of the intestines of animals as diverse as cats, foxes, moles, squirrels and rats are usually introduced by mentioning the size and length of each sample. This systematic use of measurement for both plant and animal realms had significant epistemological import. Using numbers facilitated comparisons based on quantities (rather than qualities), which, in turn, would produce knowledge based on numbers. Assessing all specimens in terms of quantity meant adopting a common frame of reference to which all samples were made to belong, a frame in which similarities are conceptually more relevant than differences.¹⁶

Especially after the publication in 1687 of Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy), which showed that even celestial phenomena could be reduced to a mathematical framework common to all natural phenomena, comparability and measurability became established as two sides of the same methodology – a methodology that should no doubt be applied outside the strictly scientific domain as well. This is evidenced in the entry for 'to compare' in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), the verb identifying the act of making 'one thing the measure of another'.¹⁷ Johnson's definition is supported by a key quotation from John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689): '[t]hus he that has got the ideas of numbers, and hath taken the pains to compare one, two, and three, to six, cannot choose but know that they are equal'.¹⁸ Drawing on a broader debate on how the human mind produces knowledge, Johnson's point via Locke is that comparison is an automatic cognitive operation that establishes identity and difference between quantities. This is a crucial point because, as Locke also suggests in the *Essay*,

knowledge-making is but the arithmetic of simple ideas. All knowledge is produced by combining simple ideas into complex ones; human understanding 'has the power to repeat, compare, and unite [ideas], even to an almost infinite variety'.¹⁹

Spurred by Newton and Locke, eighteenth-century thinkers in Britain set out to find the universal principles that regulated other domains of knowledge. The exploration of what David Hume had famously called the Science of Man went hand-in-hand with the use of 'comparative' as a keyword standing for an experimental method which was expected to yield results as universally valid as those presented by Newton in the *Principia*. The 'comparative' started to be used to identify the process by which all human knowledge may be organized into a limited number of universal laws, leading to a progressive 'scientification' of human knowledge. One glaring example is in the work of physician John Gregory, who in 1765 compared human beings with various animals to 'investigate and ascertain the laws of the mental Constitution' under the assumption that these are 'as fixt and invariable as those of the Material System'.²⁰

This position on comparability must have soon extended to France, possibly because of their Anglophilia for advancements in mathematics and physics, especially those produced by Newton.²¹ The entry for 'comparaison' written by French polymath Louis Jaucourt for the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1766) is similar to Johnson in defining 'comparison' as that mental operation which enables knowledge of 'les idées moins familières de celles qui le sont davantage' ('less familiar ideas than those that are better known').²² As Jaucourt clarifies, comparison is most at home in the domain of the exact sciences, where everything is readily measurable, and results apply universally. But by no means was it considered impossible to draw comparisons in other disciplines. Texts published in the second half of the eighteenth century, especially in France but with rapid translations into other languages (especially into English), abounded in attempts at comparisons within

humanist subjects, with the overt aim of identifying universal principles. Historians (Nicolas Lenglet du Fresnoy, *Histoire universelle sacrée et profane*, 1762; Abbé de Tressan, *Mythologie comparée avec l'histoire*, 1796), linguists (Antoine Court de Gébelin's *Monde primitif analysé et comparé avec le monde moderne*, 1778) and geographers (Edme Mantelle's, *Géographie comparée: ou, Analyse de la géographie ancienne et moderne*, 1779) all assumed that an epistemological shift had made them equipped to establish, once and for all, knowledge based on solid data that could be processed through comparisons.²³ The overt references to the act of comparison in the titles of these works signalled that heterogenous content was bound to be systematized by identifying the fixed, universal features that held for all of it. Comparison, in other words, was increasingly employed to express the confidence that whatever variety was to be found in natural phenomena, man was intellectually equipped to confirm experimentally that 'le fond des choses s'y passe assez de la même manière' ('the core of things is about the same'), as a French naturalist put it in his natural history of animals.²⁴

That this approach applied to literary works too is thus unsurprising. At times this was done by explicitly assigning numerical values to artistic performance, as with charts that offered a 'scale of the Comparative Merit' of the qualities (like 'genius', 'judgment', '*vis comica*', etc.) of tragedians and comedians.²⁵ More radically, in 1764 Charles Batteux claimed that literary traditions separated by centuries, such as Greek and French poetry, could be compared once '[t]ous les points de comparaison y sont donnés avec [...] précision' ('all points of comparison are accurately given').²⁶ Batteux was far from being the first to bring together different literary traditions – in the coda of the *querelle* that had been raging for almost eighty years, Batteux followed in the footsteps of Nicolas Boileau to restate the literary superiority of the ancients over the moderns. What is novel in Batteux's approach, however, is that he grounded this claim in the discovery of principles

of literature that may be determined with mathematical accuracy. Rhetorically, this is a significant move. By claiming to have found the principles of literature, Batteux sidesteps the problem of individual taste to produce a scientific judgment that is allegedly supported by the nature of things rather than the authority of the critic.

Clearly, much of Batteux's argument is discursive acrobatics. His '*objets de comparaison*' ('objects of comparison') tend to be specific literary devices such as the length of syllables, a choice which favours his focus on measurability. But this does not detract from his belief that literature is universal, and thus comparable. In the earlier *Les Beaux arts réduits à un même principe* (*The Fine Arts reduced to the same Principle*) (1746), Batteux showed '*par la qualité même de l'esprit humain*' ('by the very quality of human mind') that the imitation of nature is the '*objet commun*' ('common aim') of all artists, and proceeds to query a number of texts to prove the validity of this principle.²⁷ The same approach would be later adopted by Jean-François Sobry in *Poétique des arts, ou Cours de peinture et de littérature comparées* (*Poetics of the Arts, or, a Course of Compared Painting and Literature*) (1810), which openly sought to unveil the causes of the pleasures we feel in our contemplation of artworks. Even though neither Batteux nor Sobry proposed convincing principles, both aimed at doing so with a scientific objectivity that they felt was required by the intellectual climate they lived in. Even in literary matters, '[l]e public', Sobry contended, '*demande des résultats et non pas de conjectures*' ('the public demands results rather than conjectures').²⁸

2. CHASLES, GOETHE AND THE SEEDS OF SYNTHESIS

We can now appreciate that when Chasles concluded his *Littérature étrangère comparée* by envisioning comparative literature as a '*voyage d'agrément, une promenade au*

hasard' ('a pleasant journey, a random walk') rather than a 'marche géométrique astreinte à une régularité sévère' ('a geometrical march constrained to a rigid regularity'), he was responding to two assumptions that had been in the making for over a century and eventually become engrained in the expectations of his contemporary readers: namely, that all knowledge is comparable because it is measurable, and that all knowledge can be reduced to a handful of universal principles.

Seen alongside his invitation to 'calculate' the influence of 'thought upon thought', Chasles' refusal to see literature as akin to geometry suggests that he accepted the first of these assumptions while resisting the second one. Literature can be measured but it should not aim at a 'synthèse systématique' ('systematic synthesis').²⁹ The use of the word 'synthesis' in this context is telling. Synthesis had been a term widely employed by mathematics-heavy natural philosophers like Descartes and Newton to indicate the systematization of particular natural phenomena into universal causes which, if verified, would hold a predictive power with respect to how nature behaves. Extending the conceptual use of analysis and synthesis to non-mathematical subjects was one of the major legacies left by the Scientific Revolution – as Amy Ackerberg-Hastings argues, during the eighteenth century the two terms became widely employed to parlay a 'fascination with the problem-solving of algebra into attempts to use mathematics to model all human thinking and interaction'.³⁰

The question many late-eighteenth-century European thinkers faced was hardly whether knowledge could be made scientific – that was something of a given – but rather which was to have precedence, analysis or synthesis. The answer depended on the field of study. In his 1786 public discourses, for example, Sir William Jones, one of the initiators of comparative linguistics, regards analysis as having precedence over synthesis when dealing with historical subjects. A 'method purely analytical' is 'calculated' to give

‘complete satisfaction in *historical* disquisitions, where every postulatium will perhaps be refused, and every definition controverted’. Disciplines that are not ‘pure Science, where the principles are undeniable’, are better understood through analytical means, not because they are unscientific – on the contrary, Jones discusses history in terms of theories and methods that will no doubt appeal to all ‘reasonable men’ – but because universal laws cannot be derived straightforwardly from historical events.³¹ Although analysis ought to have precedence because it is more rigorous as a first step when collecting data in subjects that are not immediately mathematical, this does not mean that the two processes stand in opposition. Synthesis is indeed foreshadowed by analysis: as Jules Michelet puts it in the *Introduction à l'Histoire universelle* (translated as *On History: Introduction to World History*) in 1831, the historian can make universal claims only by starting from ‘la minutieuse observation des détails’ (‘the painstaking observation of details’).³²

Probably because of its traditional contiguity to history, it was believed that literature was to start from analysis. This was very clear to early comparatist Abel-François Villemain – so much so that, in the preface to the second edition of his *Tableau de la littérature au moyen âge* (‘A view of literature in the Middle Ages’) in 1840, he claims for himself the merit of having first written a literary history in the manner of an ‘analyse comparée’ (‘comparative analysis’).³³ Thus, when Chasles voices his uneasiness towards comparative literature as ‘synthèse systématique’ (‘systematic synthesis’), he does not do so because synthesis is at odds with literature but, rather, because literature is a field where data must be first gathered analytically. The facts of literary history cannot be determined aprioristically; they should be first collected patiently. Only once a sizeable sample has been obtained will it be possible to organize literary phenomena through principles that unveil their commonalities across time and space.

Chasles' contention that the specimens of literature – authors, texts, genres and national literatures – are all products of the human genius which may be found in all countries and centuries suggests that the commonalities of literature are only waiting to be unveiled. He understands comparative literature as an analytical methodology used to identify the 'éléments constitutifs' ('the constitutive elements') of the genius of great writers, an operation called 'analyse chimique' ('chemical analysis'). The comparatist must detect the fundamental traces of human genius, which will then combine to form literature as a 'œuvre universelle' ('universal work') through a 'travail de sympathies' ('work of sympathies') which is 'universel et constant' ('universal and constant').³⁴ Every writer of genius, that is, is conceived of by Chasles as a kind of Newtonian body subject to a law of exchange of literary energy, something which he significantly calls 'action et réaction' ('action and reaction').³⁵ The universe in which literature is generated is, after all, Newtonian: 'immense et perpétuel' ('immense and perpetual'), its phenomena obey immutable laws of nature which follow 'une étroite exactitude et une miraculeuse régularité' ('a strict exactitude and a miraculous regularity').³⁶ As part of nature, humankind cannot but produce a universal literature.

In this sense, Chasles' conception of comparative literature resonates strongly with Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, on which so many contemporary definitions of world literature rely. Yet there is often a tendency to read Goethe in contrast to Chasles, with the former seen as the theorist of an 'emerging field of literary exchanges' that overlapped, in the early nineteenth century, with the burgeoning global network of commerce and trade.³⁷ This view of Goethe's *Weltliteratur* is to an extent anachronistic, in that it interprets it through Marx and Engels' later commentary on world literature as resulting from a constantly expanding market that brings the bourgeoisie to 'nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere'.³⁸

The Marxist interpretation does not fully account for Goethe's intellectual profile, which was one shaped by the Enlightenment ideal of the universality of humankind. The *allgemeine Weltliteratur* (universal world literature) Goethe proposes builds on his disappointment that, at the level of German literature, there is 'hardly any concern for more universal or loftier matters'.³⁹ In transcending national borders, Goethe indeed prefigures a global literary circuit, but this is less due to the rise of global trade than to his belief in what Fritz Strich calls 'the universally human'.⁴⁰ Looking back at the eighteenth century, Goethe wrote that:

It is obvious that for a considerable time the efforts of the best writers and authors of aesthetic worth in all nations have been directed to what is common to all mankind. In every field, whether the historical, the mythological, the fabulous, or the consciously imagined, one can see, behind what is national and personal, this universal quality becoming more and more apparent.⁴¹

It is significant that the term *Weltliteratur*, which by itself would have been sufficient to indicate the circulation of literature through global circuits of communication, is often qualified by Goethe by the adjective *allgemeine*, meaning 'universal' or 'common'. The adjective is there to stress the universality of literature through the Herderian concept of a universal humanity in which, according to Strich's detailed commentary, Goethe found the 'true source of world literature'.⁴²

Like Chasles, Goethe views literary works as the natural phenomena of a common universe to which all humankind belongs. Surely, Chasles' imagery is Newtonian while Goethe's certainly is not. *Weltliteratur* is presented as natural history – as René Wellek put it, the 'historical scheme of the evolution of national literatures in which they will fuse and ultimately melt into a great synthesis' – and one of the few public declarations Goethe

ever made on *Weltliteratur* was addressed to an audience of natural scientists.⁴³ Even with this difference, Goethe still shares the same epistemological platform with Chasles. The idea of *Weltliteratur* is couched in eighteenth-century scientific comparison – a process to which Goethe had been accustomed through his scientific studies and of which he recognized the potentiality, if we accept Strich's claim that he 'appreciated the valuable results of the comparative method in Wilhelm von Humboldt's treatment of language, and in Humboldt's letters on the German and the French theatre'.⁴⁴

Differently from Chasles, however, Goethe was aware that comparisons may lead to generalizations which will distort the specimens they seek to explain. This is a point the German thinker was careful to raise in his conversations with Johann-Peter Eckermann, when he insisted that 'we must not bind ourselves to some particular thing, and regard it as a model'.⁴⁵ He made these points about the Nibelungen poems, which are inappropriately compared to Homeric epics, and about the Persian poet Ferdowsi, who Goethe argued should be compared only with other Oriental poets. In methodological terms, Goethe is conscious that data collection is a dangerous process, one through which the specimens are constantly at risk of being adulterated to fit into the expectations of the observer. With extraordinary cultural awareness, Goethe warns that although the ancient Greeks are often taken as the pattern of the beauty of humankind, the proposition is quite perilous. All pre-defined patterns tend to establish a top-down synthesis over literature, ultimately distorting our understanding of literatures written in remote countries and faraway centuries.

3. THE SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES OF LITERATURE

The eighteenth-century overtures of comparative literature were instrumental to advance the view that literature ought to be treated with the rigour of a science. This resulted in a lineage of nineteenth-century approaches that favoured much bolder attempts at reducing all literature to one or few generative laws. Taking 1848 as a watershed in history, for example, Georg Brandes argued that the main currents of literature should all be understood as the consequences of 'one great leading movement with its ebb and flow'. This major movement was the nineteenth-century return of the idea of progress that had been lost in the eighteenth century.⁴⁶ To identify this single principle in a 'spectacle of many scattered and apparently disconnected literary efforts and phenomena', in his 1871 book *Hovedstromninger det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur* (*Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature*) Brandes invoked the use of the 'videnskabelige Litteraturbetragtning' ('scientific view of literature') which he conceives of metaphorically as a 'Kikkert' ('telescope' in the English translation published in 1906, but also 'binoculars') through which the body of literature may be observed by alternatively zooming in and out.⁴⁷

Brandes' telescope is aimed at transcending the limitations of the individual, enabling the observer to shuttle back and forth from the particular to the general, and vice versa, eventually overcoming the 'naturlige Syns Illusioner' ('the illusions of our natural sight').⁴⁸ The suggested link between the comparative method and a scientific type of objectivity that surpasses the limits of the individual would be prototypical of late-nineteenth-century approaches to comparative literature. In *Comparative Literature* (1886), Posnett explicitly argues that literature obeys 'scientific principles'. In Lockean fashion, Posnett claims that the mental operation of comparison was one 'as old as thought itself': it is the logical process whereby the ideas produced by reason and imagination, which are subjective faculties, are made into objective knowledge by

migrating 'from man to man objectively'. Not only 'the colourless propositions of logic', but 'even the highest and most brilliant flights of oratorical eloquence or poetic fancy are sustained by this rudimentary structure of comparison and difference, this primary scaffolding, as we may call it, of human thought'.⁴⁹ Literature is a product of the imagination, and the imagination is, in turn, determined by 'social or physical evolution'. Therefore, comparative literature is the study of 'the internal sources of national development, social or physical, and the effect of different phases of this development on literature', and only by considering literature in this way does it turn into a 'true field of scientific study'.⁵⁰

Seeking to make literature into a scientific subject, Posnett contends that no artificial boundaries should be set to the discipline. In an increasingly interconnected world, a focus on the 'national' is an unjustifiable limitation on our ability to analyse and synthesize knowledge. Literature stems from humanity in a biological sense: since society is the product of a universe with fixed laws, it follows that literature is subject to the same principles. If Posnett claimed that the literary is determined by laws outside literature, French comparatist Joseph Texte, in an intervention celebrating the establishment of comparative literature as a discipline within French academia, concluded that '[q]ui dit science, dit comparaison' ('who says science says comparison'). Texte is more flexible than Posnett in granting that literature might have its own internal rules of development, but he too thinks of comparative literature as an act of scientific discovery to identify the 'lois mystérieuses, ou du moins encore mal définies' ('mysterious laws, or at least still ill-defined') from which literary works are created.⁵¹

Although some vagueness remained as to whether literature had laws of its own, French and English comparatists alike were persuaded that their discipline ought to be treated with the dignity of a science. When, in 1894, Charles Mills Gayley advocated for

the creation of a Society of Comparative Literature, he took it for granted that there was such a thing as a 'literary science'. Its object of study is literature in its 'essential, historical oneness' grounded, like all other scientific subjects, in 'the nature of things'.⁵² Writing at a time of increasing disciplinary specialization in the sciences, Mills Gayley staked his claim for comparative literature as a scientific discipline by presenting an agenda for its future development:

in time, by systematization of results, scholarship might attain to the common, and probably some of the essential, characteristics of classified phenomena, to some of the laws actually governing the origin, growth, and differentiation of one and another of the component literary factors and kinds.⁵³

In order to do this, human presence had to be progressively dematerialized in favour of the data-driven objectivity of 'classified phenomena'. Just as accepted classical authorities had been undermined during the Scientific Revolution, so the approach to 'literature, scientifically determined' advocated by Mills Gayley required a sceptical reassessment of all past authorities, whose works he dismissively defines as 'aesthetics of sporadic theory'.⁵⁴ Mills Gayley refers here to non-systematic criticism of literary works, which, being episodic, are at best useful to make sense of particular cases. Making 'canons of criticism' (such as the poetics by Boileau, Lessing and Aristotle) into universally applicable models is 'illogical' because these do little to explain all foreign literary phenomena. In other words, using Boileau to find the universal principles of literature produced beyond Europe means generalizing without having fully considered the variety of literature. With a cultural sensitivity resembling that of Goethe, Mills Gayley warns that we should beware of taking the familiar as a general pattern. The principles of drama (one

of the examples he mentions) cannot be determined by considering Greek or even European drama alone. Principles must hold for drama everywhere: not only in European countries but also in Peru or China; not only in the nineteenth century but at any stage in history; not only in European enlightened nation states but in any type of past or future civilization.

This requirement does not translate into a distrust of comparison. With remarkable confidence in his ability to collect data without adulterating it by personal inclinations, Mills Gayley suggests that the time of synthesis has finally come, for literature, 'as a distinct and integral medium of thought, a common institutional expression of humanity', is 'prompted by the common needs and aspirations of man, sprung from common faculties, psychological and physiological, and obeying common laws of material and mode, of the individual, and of social humanity'.⁵⁵ The late-nineteenth-century comparatist, it turns out, thought of himself (for they were usually men) as up to the task of formulating laws for literature with absolute scientific objectivity.

4. NEW QUESTIONS IN MAKING LITERATURE SCIENTIFIC

Although we may be tempted to circumscribe the efforts of Brandes, Posnett, Texte and Mills Gayley as a positivist fad in literary criticism, the project of making comparative literature into a science is very much alive and well, and so is the confidence in determining the laws of literature with scientific objectivity. The present-day champion of this strand of criticism is Franco Moretti. I am particularly referring here to two papers, 'Conjectures on World Literature' (2000) and 'Evolution, World-Systems, *Weltliteratur*' (2005), in which Moretti seeks to determine the laws regulating the corpus of world literature.

The rationale of both Moretti's contributions is that we must acknowledge that the sheer quantity of literary materials available in our day and age is simply too much for the human mind. A conjecture that brings organization into the vast corpus of literature is needed, and Moretti wants this conjecture to be a scientific 'hypothesis'.⁵⁶ Cognitively speaking, this proposition makes plenty of sense. The human mind strives for patterns, logic and organization, and does not cope well with randomness and lack of organization.⁵⁷ In our exploded age of literature, with books published by the millions every year on top of those published in the past, it is nigh impossible to make sense of the 'Great Unread' of literature (as Margaret Cohen famously defined it) with no direction.⁵⁸ Moretti's proposal rests on the idea, shared by his nineteenth-century forerunners, that laws about literature can and should be formulated. By way of conclusion, I would like to discuss his influential claims about world literature to show that a keen awareness is needed when proposing to apply scientific laws to the study of literature.

The famous argument made by Moretti in 'Conjectures' is that the distant reading of literary works may be fruitfully combined with an application of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory to literature. The explicit theorization of economics as a science plays a crucial role in this approach. It draws on the idea, first popularized by Frederic Jameson, that the Trotskyist theory of the combined and uneven economic development characterizing global capitalism amounts to 'nothing less than a template for *any* consideration of modern culture'.⁵⁹ Moretti claims that, since it is produced within a capitalist global circuit of production, literature must share some commonalities regardless of its place of production.⁶⁰

On the basis of this assumption, Moretti hypothesizes a 'law of literary evolution'. In cultures belonging to the periphery of the literary system, a novel (for this is the genre that Moretti examines) 'first arises not as an autonomous development but as a

compromise between a western formal influence and local materials'.⁶¹ Based on this law, a compromise between foreign forms and local materials should always be expected. After applying his formulation to a variety of contexts (via previous studies by other scholars) to verify its validity, Moretti elaborates a revised version of the law which states that the generative 'compromise' is tripartite and involves foreign plot, local characters and local narrative voice. A set of provisional corollary laws are then stated (which remain, however, largely untested): 1a. formal compromise is a function of a wave of West European translations; 1b. the compromise 'is generally unstable'; 1c. formal revolutions rarely occur.⁶²

In 'Evolution, World-Systems, *Weltliteratur*' (2005), which has not enjoyed the same scholarly fame as 'Conjectures', Moretti acknowledges the incompatibility between the law of literary evolution (which allegedly produces variation) and world-system theory (which allegedly produces uniformity). The proposed solution to this problem is to consider the matter historically. The law of evolution applies to literature created up until the eighteenth century, which Moretti considers as the watershed moment for the rise of the world literary market. This, in turn, made literature into a global phenomenon regulated by the laws of world-system capitalism. As a result:

There are *two* distinct world literatures – one that precedes the eighteenth century, and one that follows it. The 'first' *Weltliteratur* is a mosaic of separate 'local' cultures; it is characterized by strong internal diversity; it produces new forms mostly by divergence [...]. The 'second' *Weltliteratur* [...] is the product of a unified market; it shows a growing, and at times shocking degree of sameness; it produces new forms mostly by convergence.⁶³

This makes for a very neat distinction, perhaps one too neat for Moretti himself, who in another occasion had instead suggested that Petrarchism was a manifestation of the early stages of the world-literary system.⁶⁴ This inconsistency might be due to Moretti's pursuit of laws for explaining literature, which in the case of literary evolution is hampered by the difficulty of finding adequate supporting data. And this is probably the reason why Moretti is so invested in his 'Type 2 *Weltliteratur*', as we may call it. Differently from the law of literary evolution, according to Moretti the world-literary system can be hypothesized against the evidence of previous studies, which are presented (through selected quotations) as unbiased and, thus, objective.⁶⁵ In other words, these studies are presented as data, which, as Moretti remarks in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, is 'independent of interpretation'.⁶⁶ This passage is crucial, for a hypothesis backed by data can be made into a scientific law, that is, a law accounting for how literature has been produced and will be produced.

In light of our discussion in the sections above, we can see Moretti's confidence in presenting literature as data and his related attempt to synthesize it into generative laws as a legacy of eighteenth-century science, and particularly of nineteenth-century comparativism. Yet, there is a key difference. If for the comparatists of old making literature scientific was the effect of a naïve reliance on the knowledge-making powers of scientific laws, we are hardly in that position now. Present-day science has had to face unrelenting critical scrutiny by twentieth-century sociologists and historians of science (and sometimes by scientists themselves) on the question of how scientific theories tend to prove their own validity by manipulating the data, if ever so slightly. In Kuhnian jargon, the 'anomalies' that may be discovered in scientific research always tend to be ironed out, either by slightly misrepresenting them or by hiding them altogether, because they carry the potential to disprove the hypothesis upon which a given theory is constructed.

Conversely, 'normal' elements that fit well into a theory are routinely given a prototypical value – i.e., they are given as much emphasis as possible by presenting them as the examples that prove a given hypothesis as true and validate the resulting theory.⁶⁷

This mechanism governs all systems that seek to organize knowledge scientifically, but it assumes great relevance when it comes to literature. The reason is that, as far as specimens go, literary works are quite peculiar. Literary works are not produced by experiments carried out in a controlled environment (in the way one could perform a chemistry experiment or a clinical trial); regardless of whether they are written, oral or otherwise, literary works are created – singularly, collectively, with distributed authorship, and so on – by human beings who are unique in terms of how they assimilate the contexts they come from (in terms of community, society, politics, culture, language, etc.), and who tend to process (wittingly or unwittingly) the facts they know through their personal and collective imaginations; and no measuring instrument has yet been invented to measure literary works in unambiguous terms. And that is, of course, without considering that literary works also hold the power to affect, and even alter, the world.

These properties of literary works – their unpredictability, uniqueness and immeasurability – problematize all presumptions to determine the laws of literature on the basis of verifiable data. They help us point our attention to the tacit assumptions that always drive the collection and presentation of data. Taking again Moretti's world-literary system as an example, a running list of tacit assumptions would go as follows: that world literature is the 'sum total of the world's literary production';⁶⁸ that the world-system circulation of the novel is representative of other genres;⁶⁹ that the novel as a genre exists in non-Western contexts under different names;⁷⁰ that all literary works circulate within the system;⁷¹ that all authors worldwide are influenced by translations of Anglo-French novels; that randomness plays a negligible role in the diffusion of

literature;⁷² that aesthetics is a function of world-system mechanics. These assumptions must remain covert, for making them explicit would challenge the underlying theory.

I have taken Moretti's world-literary system to task because his application of scientific principles to literature has been deeply influential for comparative and world literature in the past twenty years. But the circularity of formulating a hypothesis, gathering data and then using it to verify the initial hypothesis to make it into a law is common to all attempts to produce scientific knowledge. This mechanism is particularly relevant for practitioners in comparative and world literature, since none of us is immune to the temptation of organizing literature into theories with some kind of predictive value. Indeed, one could argue that this is precisely what comparative and world literature are all about. This is why knowing the history of the discipline is essential, and not only because historians have long been aware that, whatever the discipline, data is always collected 'according to an agenda which is already pointing towards a synthetic approach'.⁷³ Often overlooked by scholars or reduced to a short footnote in handbooks, the scientific lineage of 'comparative literature' is ingrained in our practice. The past of our discipline, as David Damrosch reminds us, 'has shaped and constrained our vision', and it has done so in ways that may be difficult to recognize.⁷⁴ But this is no good reason to discount the subtle ways in which our ideas of comparative and world literature are affected by the way the discipline has been practised, and taught, over the centuries. The variety of syntheses of literature since the dawn of time stands as evidence that our observations, no matter how solid and well-contextualized they might seem at first, are infallibly theory-laden.⁷⁵ As experts in comparative and world literature, we should force ourselves into an unflinchingly sceptical approach and consider all theories as falsifiable.

This is a daunting task, all the more so because all approaches to comparative and world literature are to some extent theories that bring together heterogenous specimens

of literature and combine them into a forceful synthesis. As the history of the discipline teaches us, once we assume the comparability of literature across different times, spaces and contexts, we are also automatically proposing a synthesis. An argument might even be made that since we always tend to create systems of knowledge, how does one challenge an innate drive of the human mind? There are no easy solutions to this question, but the key might well be in what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls ‘provisional system making’.⁷⁶ While acknowledging our need for organizing knowledge, we should also make an effort to make it provisional. Actively looking for so-called ‘problems of induction’ is extremely helpful: single instances always hold the power to disprove a theory, and work to show that all syntheses are provisional constructions based upon a selective and convenient collection of data. This is why anomalies are so important: they exert pressure on conventionally accepted theories.

Perhaps comparative and world literature at their best elaborate ‘des synthèses’ in the plural, as Simon Jeune once put it.⁷⁷ Such syntheses might well be conceived of as processes of continuous negotiations and constructions, an ever-lasting dialectics between the anomalousness of the literary – its innate changeability that cannot be pinned down to a specific feature other than, perhaps, its dealing with the λόγος (*logos*) – and the tendency to compare and systematize that appears to be a deep-seated impulse of the human mind.⁷⁸ In practice, this could mean accepting the invitation proffered by Erich Auerbach (in the version offered by Marie and Edward Said) to start from an *Ansatzpunkt* (point of departure), ‘a handle, as it were, by which the subject can be seized’, in order to reconstruct the whole, and then, in Borgesian fashion, start from another handle and reconstruct another whole, and so on indefinitely.⁷⁹ Or it could mean, following Maurice Blanchot’s suggestion, that ‘l’une des tâches de la critique devrait être de rendre impossible toute comparaison’ (‘one of the tasks of criticism should be to make

all comparisons impossible'), that is, that we should engage in an everlasting confutation of all theories.⁸⁰ Perhaps it means that we should strive to elaborate anti-syntheses made solely of incomparable exceptions – an anti-taxonomical horizontal literature like the one Emily Apter calls (with slightly bewildering terminology) literature as 'addition' rather than as 'sum'.⁸¹ Or, perhaps, we should heed René Étiemble's advice to think of 'literature' in the general, without adjectives – itself a synthesis so comprehensive that it no longer counts as one.⁸² Whatever the case, the dubious glory of the practitioner of comparative and world literature might well reside in accepting that syntheses are to be created only in order for us to falsify them, and then begin afresh again and again, a Sisyphean task indeed.

¹ Hutcheson M. Posnett, *Comparative Literature* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1886), p. v.

² See Sharon Ruston, 'Introduction', in *Literature and Science*, edited by Sharon Ruston (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), pp. 1–12.

³ Another exception is Jüri Talvet, *Critical Essays on World Literature, Comparative Literature and the 'Other'* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), especially Chapter 2.

⁴ René Wellek and Rosa Maria Colombo, 'Definizione e natura della letteratura comparata', *Belfagor*, 22.2 (1967), 125–151 (pp. 131–132); Theo D'haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 50–51. Bernard Franco, 'Comparative Literature and World Literature: From Goethe to Globalization', in *Tensions in World Literature: Between the Local and the Universal*, edited by Weigui Fang (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 65–75 (p. 67). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

⁵ Philarète Chasles, 'Cours de M. Philarète Chasles à l'Athénée. Littérature étrangère comparée', *Revue de Paris*, 13 (1835), pp. 238–262 (p. 245). On the concept of sympathy in anatomy, see Eric Schliesser, *Sympathy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Chapter 2; Matthew Landers and Brian Muñoz, eds, *Anatomy and the Organization of Knowledge, 1500–1850* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁶ A partial exception is Roger Bauer, 'Comparatistes sans comparatisme', in *Comparative Literary History as Discourse: In Honor of Anna Balakian*, edited by Mario J. Valdes, Daniel Javitch and A. Owen Aldridge (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 41–47. On Cuvier, see also Franco, 'Comparative Literature', p. 67.

⁷ Chasles, 'Cours', p. 243.

⁸ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 12.

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- ⁹ In Claude Gadois, *Lettre de M. Gadois a Monsieur de La Grange Trianon* (Paris: Lambert Roulland, 1677), p. 5.
- ¹⁰ M. Berniard, 'Mémoire', *Journal de physique, de chimie, d'histoire naturelle et des arts* 18.1 (Paris: Bureau du Journal de Physique, 1781), 278–299 (p. 278).
- ¹¹ Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 5 vols (London: A. Millar, 1765), I, 68.
- ¹² Katharine Park and Lorraine J. Daston, 'Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England', *Past & Present*, 92 (1981), 20–54.
- ¹³ Bacon, *Works*, I, 312–313.
- ¹⁴ On the methodological discontinuities between Lord Bacon and the early Royal Society fellows, see Peter Anstey, 'Francis Bacon and the Classification of Natural History', *Early Sci Med*, 17.1-2 (2012), 11–31.
- ¹⁵ Nehemiah Grew, *The Comparative Anatomy of Trunks Together with an Account of their Vegetation Grounded thereupon* (London: Walter Kettily, 1675), 'Dedication'.
- ¹⁶ Nehemiah Grew, *The Comparative Anatomy of the Stomachs and Guts* (London: W. Rawlins, 1681).
- ¹⁷ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (London: W. Strahan, 1755), I, 424.
- ¹⁸ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 651.
- ¹⁹ Locke, *Essay*, p. 119.
- ²⁰ John Gregory, *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man with Those of the Animal World* (London: J. Dodsley, 1765), pp. 5–6.
- ²¹ See John B. Shank, *The Newton Wars and the Beginning of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- ²² Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, eds, *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, 17 vols (Paris: Briasson et al., 1751–1772), III, 744.
- ²³ Some of these works were readily translated into English, for example Nicolas Lenglet du Fresnoy, *Chronological Tables of Universal History: Sacred and Profane* (London: A. Millar et al., 1762); Abbé de Tressan, *Mythology Compared with History* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797). Others, like de Gêbelin's *Monde Primitif* ('The primitive world analysed and compared with the modern world') and Edme Mantelle's *Géographie comparée* ('Comparative geography: or, an analysis of ancient and modern geography') were not translated, though their authors were fairly known in Britain.
- ²⁴ Louis Daniel Arnault de Nobleville, *Histoire naturelle des animaux*, 2 vols (Paris: Desain et Saillant, et al., 1756), II, 210.
- ²⁵ Anon., *The Theatrical Review* (London: J. Coote, 1758), pp. 45–46.
- ²⁶ Charles Batteux, *Principes de la littérature* (Paris: Desain et Saillant, 1764), pp. 33–34.
- ²⁷ Charles Batteux, *Les Beaux arts réduits à un même principe* (Paris: Durand, 1746), p. ix.
- ²⁸ Jean-François Sobry, *Poétique des arts, ou Cours de peinture et de littérature comparées* (Paris: Delauney et al., 1810), pp. 5, 7.
- ²⁹ Chasles, 'Cours', p. 260.
- ³⁰ Amy Ackerberg-Hastings, 'Analysis and Synthesis in John Playfair's "Elements of Geometry"', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 35.1 (2002), 43–72 (p. 53).
- ³¹ William Jones, *Works*, 13 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), I, 19–34.

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- ³² Jules Michelet, *Introduction à l'Histoire universelle* (Paris: Hachette, 1831), p. 465.
- ³³ Abel-Francois Villemain, *Cours de littérature française: Tableau de la littérature du moyen-âge en France, en Italie, en Espagne et en Angleterre* (Paris: Didier, 1840), I, i. See also Wellek and Colombo, 'Definizione e natura', p. 132.
- ³⁴ Chasles, 'Cours', pp. 249, 255.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 243.
- ³⁷ Mariano Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), p. 15. See also Andrew N. Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), especially the introduction. Far from being disinterested in comparative literature, Goethe thought highly of Villemain's first efforts in the discipline. See Franco, 'Comparative Literature', p. 66.
- ³⁸ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, translated by Samuel Moore and Frederick Engels (London: William Reeves, 1888), p. 36.
- ³⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Essays on Art and Literature', in *Goethe's Collected Works*, edited and translated by John Gearey, 12 vols (New York: Suhrkamp, 1986), III, 226. See also Angus Nicholls, 'The "Goethean" Discourses on *Weltliteratur* and the Origins of Comparative Literature: The Cases of Hugo Meltzl and Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 54.2 (2018), 167–194.
- ⁴⁰ Fritz Strich, *Goethe and World Literature*, translated by C. A. M. Sym (London: Routledge, 1949), p. 35.
- ⁴¹ In *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38. Goethe's assumption of literature as the common possession of all humanity is directly linked to an aesthetic 'universal judgment' based on 'universal modes of feeling'; Nicholls, 'The "Goethean" Discourses', p. 169.
- ⁴³ René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), I, 221. Goethe's address was made at the Congress of Natural Scientists in Berlin, 1828.
- ⁴⁴ Strich, *Goethe*, pp. 75-76.
- ⁴⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Johann-Peter Eckermann, 'Conversations on World Literature', translated by John Oxenford, in *The Princeton Sourcebook of Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*, edited by David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 17–25 (p. 23).
- ⁴⁶ Georg Brandes, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature*, 6 vols (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906), I, vii.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. viii.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ Posnett, *Comparative Literature*, pp. 5, 73.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.
- ⁵¹ Joseph Texte, 'Les études de littérature comparée à l'étranger et en France', *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*, 25 (1893), 253-269 (pp. 264, 269).
- ⁵² Charles Mills Gayley, 'What is "Comparative Literature"', *Atlantic Monthly*, 92 (1903), 56–68 (pp. 59, 65).
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵⁶ Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review*, 1 (2000), 54–68 (p. 55).

⁵⁷ On the cognitive processes involved in pattern recognition, see Nick Lund, *Attention and Pattern Recognition* (Hove: Routledge, 2001), especially Chapter 5. A fascinating collection of enquiries into the role played by human cognition in literature is Mark J. Bruhn and Donald R. Wehrs, eds, *Cognition, Literature and History* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

⁵⁸ Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 23.

⁵⁹ Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 11. Jameson's theorization of world-literature as an expression of the world capitalist system is presented in 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–88. One of the first works to draw an explicit connection between world literature and economy was Andrew F. Jones, 'Chinese Literature in the "World" Literary Economy', *Modern Chinese Literature*, 8.1/2 (1994), 171–190. Alongside the WReC study referenced above, a recent example of this approach is Melissa Kennedy, *Narratives of Inequality: Postcolonial Literary Economics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). To my knowledge, the most cogent critique of this strand of criticism has been advanced in Sarah Brouillette, 'World Literature and Market Dynamics', in *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets*, edited by Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 93–106.

⁶⁰ Moretti, 'Conjectures', pp. 55–56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 59, n. 9.

⁶³ Franco Moretti, 'World-Systems Analysis, Evolutionary Theory, "Weltliteratur"', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 28.3 (2005), 217–228 (pp. 227–228). Now in *Studying Transcultural Literary History*, edited by Gunilla Lindberg-Wada (Berlin: de Gruyter & Co, 2006), pp. 113–121.

⁶⁴ Moretti, 'More Conjectures', *New Left Review*, 20 (2003), 73–81 (pp. 73–74). Wallerstein himself argued that the beginnings of the world-system approximately date back to 1450. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, 3 vols (New York, San Francisco and London: Academic Press, 1974), I, 66–129.

⁶⁵ Moretti, 'Conjectures', pp. 59–60.

⁶⁶ Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 30.

⁶⁷ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), especially Chapters 6–8. For a recent reassessment of Kuhn's classic work, see Robert J. Richards and Lorraine Daston, eds, *Kuhn's 'Structure of Scientific Revolutions' at Fifty* (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

⁶⁸ Alexander Beecroft, 'World Literature Without a Hyphen: Towards a Typology of Literary Systems', *New Left Review*, 54 (2008), 87–100 (p. 88).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91. Also see Jonathan Arac, 'Anglo-Globalism?', *New Left Review*, 16 (2002), 35–45.

⁷⁰ For example, in the tendency to approximate the Japanese monogatari to the novel. See Michael Emmerich, *The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization and World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

⁷¹ See Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), especially Introduction and Chapter 1.

⁷² On randomness in literature, see Susan Bassnett, Alessio Mattana and Laura Lucia Rossi, 'Alessio Mattana and Laura Lucia Rossi speak to Susan Bassnett: Translation, Literature and Reading', *The Translator*, 25.3 (2019), 282–288 (pp. 286–287).

⁷³ Carlo Ginzburg, 'Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian's Craft, Today', in *Historical Knowledge: In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence*, edited by Susanna Fellman and Marjatta Rahikainen (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), pp. 97–119 (p. 113).

⁷⁴ David Damrosch, 'Rebirth of a Discipline: The Global Origins of Comparative', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 1–2.3 (2006), 99–112 (p. 99).

⁷⁵ Imre Lakatos, 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes', in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, edited by Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 91–195 (pp. 99–100).

⁷⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 6.

⁷⁷ Simon Jeune, *Littérature générale et littérature comparée: essai d'orientation* (Paris: Minard, 1968), p. 39.

⁷⁸ Even this universalizing view might be challenged by an external perspective, as Haun Saussy does in his 2011 ACLA introductory address by taking the fictitious point of view of a non-terrestrial being. Haun Saussy, 'Interplanetary Literature', *Comparative Literature*, 63.4 (2011), 438–447.

⁷⁹ Erich Auerbach, Marie Said and Edward Said, 'Philology and "Weltliteratur"', *The Centennial Review*, 13.1 (1969), 1–17 (p. 14).

⁸⁰ Maurice Blanchot, *Henri Michaux ou le refus de l'enfermement* (Tours: Farrago, 1999), p. 69.

⁸¹ Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 2.

⁸² René Étiemble, 'Pourquoi et comment former des généralistes?', in Étiemble, *Essais de littérature (vraiment) générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 339–350.