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Forum

Ends and Beginnings of World Literature

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The essay posits "world literature" and "global literature" as opposites: where the former thrives on intra- and intercultural alterity, the latter conforms to global market demands that erase the distinctions between the local and the global. By way of examples from classical and contemporary Chinese poetry, "world literature" is conceptualized anew through Adorno's idea of the non-identical both at home and abroad. To maintain and express this dual alterity is the ultimate responsibility of the translator.

> Sollte es der Menschheit gelingen, sich durch die Erschütterungen hindurchzuretten, die ein so gewaltiger, so reißend schneller und innerlich so schlecht vorbereiteter Konzentrationsprozeß mit sich bringt, so wird man sich an den Gedanken gewöhnen müssen, daß auf einer einheitlich organisierten Erde nur eine einzige literarische Kultur, ja selbst in vergleichsweise kurzer Zeit nur wenige literarische Sprachen, bald vielleicht nur eine, als lebend übrigbleiben. Und damit wäre der Gedanke der Weltliteratur zugleich verwirklicht und zerstört.
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> ERICH AUERBACH, "Philologie der Weltliteratur" (1952)[1]

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1 In *Weltliteratur: Festgabe für Fritz Strich zum 70. Geburtstag*, Walter Muschg / Emil Staiger (eds.), Bern: Francke, 1952, pp. 39–50. "Should mankind succeed in withstanding the shock of so mighty and rapid a process of concentration – for which the spiritual preparation has been poor – then man will have to accustom himself to existence in a standardized world, to a single literary culture, only a few literary languages, and perhaps even a single literary language. And herewith the notion of *Weltliteratur* would be at once realized and destroyed" ("Philology and *Weltliteratur*," trans. Maire Said and Edward W. Said, *Centennial Review* 13.1 [1969], pp. 1–17).

Goethe's World Literature versus Our Global Literature

Recent scholarship on "World Literature"[2] has done much to question earlier, less innocent uses of the term, opening our eyes to historical and ideological implications that, in the wake of postcolonial critiques, take us far beyond the moment when World Literature first emerged as an idea.[3] It is fair to say that today, no consensus exists not only about what World Literature *includes* but also about what it actually *is*; in Franco Moretti's words, it "is not an object, it's a *problem*."[4] As a result, for a Sinologist like myself to walk into this debate is to walk into a minefield; just about everything one can say has theoretical implications that are controversial at least. And yet, my own reading experiences in both classical and modern Chinese literature lead me right back to the day when the term "World Literature" gained prominence, namely, in Goethe's conversation with Eckermann on January 31, 1827, after Goethe had just read a versified Chinese novel in French translation. It is already right here that I sense a tension within Goethe's idea of World Literature that has become far more pronounced in our own time, and that I would tentatively conceptualize as the antagonism between World Literature and Global Literature. When Eckermann, after hearing Goethe report on his reading experience, exclaims "that must look strange enough," Goethe responds "Not so much as you might think [...] the Chinese think, act, and feel almost exactly like us; and we soon find that we are perfectly like them, except that all they do is more clear, pure, and decorous, than with us [...] there is a strong resemblance to my *Hermann and Dorothea*, as well as to the English novels of Richardson." Shortly thereafter comes his most famous statement on World Literature: "National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and

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2   As the opening salvo, nothing has been more influential – and controversial – than Pascale Casanova's *La république mondiale des lettres*, Paris: Éditions du seuil, 1999; in English as *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

3   Useful introductions to the breadth of the debate can be found in *World Literature in Theory*, David Damrosch (ed.), Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014; *Debating World Literature*, Christopher Prendergast (ed.), London: Verso, 2004; *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, Theo D'haen / David Damrosch / Djelal Kadir (eds.), Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012. As the current essay is repeatedly concerned with the global forces of economic and cultural capitalism, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the Wiley-Blackwell volume, edited at Harvard and published simultaneously in the UK and the US, was typeset in India and printed in Malaysia – two particularly complex sites of literature in the age of globalization that, however, command only limited attention by theorists of World Literature.

4   Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading*, London: Verso, 2013, p. 46.

everyone must strive to hasten its approach." While Goethe did not invent the term *Weltliteratur*,[5] this sentence is often quoted as the defining moment in its development; moreover, it is in particular tied to Goethe's pronouncement that "the Chinese think, act, and feel almost exactly like us."

Yet as pointed out by Damrosch in his perceptive discussion of the (altogether significantly longer) conversation,[6] Goethe's view of World Literature contains much more than a mere appreciation of surprising commonalities between European and Chinese literature. Instead, it is carefully balanced between what he considered universally human and what he recognized as the cultural particularities in which human nature and human society manifest themselves around the globe. Throughout his subsequent discussions of World Literature, Goethe was continuously alive not only to the presence but also to the importance of cultural differences: it is especially in the differences between particular national literatures that he found the meaning and value of World Literature as a system of cultural exchange and mutual influence that elevates both the individual writer, the different national literatures involved, and, indeed, literary language itself. Goethe was fundamentally aware that World Literature thrives on difference, not sameness,[7] and that it comes into being where such difference is embraced as an inspiration and a catalyst of change in one's own literary production.[8] To this end, Goethe was particularly enthralled by the rapidly expanding means of communication within Europe, through which contemporary writers in different languages – many of them also translators of each other's works – could engage in fruitful interaction; repeatedly, Goethe invoked the metaphors of "commerce" and of the marketplace where ideas and literary works were "exchanged."[9] To Goethe the ferocious and

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5   It was first used either by Christoph Martin Wieland or, as early as in 1772, by August Ludwig
    Schlözer; see John Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice*, Baton
    Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006, p. 153, n. 24.

6   See the discussion in David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, Princeton: Princeton University
    Press, 2003, pp. 10–14.

7   See also the discussion in Fawzi Boubia, "Goethes Theorie der Alterität und die Idee der
    Weltliteratur: Ein Beitrag zur neueren Kulturdebatte," in: Bernd Thum (ed.), *Gegenwart als
    kulturelles Erbe: Ein Beitrag der Germanistik zur Kulturwissenschaft deutschsprachiger Länder*,
    Munich: Iudicium, 1985, pp. 269–301, esp. pp. 279–296.

8   For a thoughtful reconsideration of Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur*, see also Norbert
    Mecklenburg, *Goethe: Inter- und transkulturelle poetische Spiele*, Munich: Iudicium, 2014,
    pp. 431–454.

9   See especially Hendrik Birus, "Goethes Idee der Weltliteratur: Eine historische Vergegenwärtigung," <http://www.goethezeitportal.de/db/wiss/goethe/birus_weltliteratur.pdf>, last accessed June 2, 2016.

forever curious reader of every literature he could obtain either in the original or in translation, World Literature was never a canon of classical masterpieces; while he admired the great works from the past – the Greek classics above all, but also Shakespeare and others – they only became part of World Literature in the active embrace by modern authors who absorbed them for inspiration.

Yet while Goethe was unreservedly enthusiastic about the possibilities of exchange and mutual influence, the tension between the local and the global came into sharp relief by the mid-twentieth century: how will the particularities of the local survive under the homogenizing pressures of continuing exchange, mutual influence, and cultural and linguistic diffusion? This is the fear captured in Auerbach's pessimistic remark about the simultaneous realization and destruction of World Literature, and Auerbach was not alone: T. S. Eliot, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and René Etiemble all expressed the same concern.[10] Likewise, Norbert Mecklenburg has recently remarked:

> On the other hand, through ever greater velocity, globalization from Goethe's time to today has also been a process of homogenization with so far one-sided dominance of the West, of capitalism, and of its culture industry. Viewed from this critical angle, interculturality stands not merely in conformity with but in contradiction to globalization. If once there won't be anything culturally alien anymore, there also would be nothing intercultural left.[11]

It may not be accidental that most of these critics are writers not of English but of French and German, perhaps responding to the global hegemony of English as it began to emerge in the mid-twentieth century. Minae Mizumura's Japanese bestseller *Nihongo ga horobiru toki: Eigo no seiki no naka de* 日本語が亡びるとき：英語の世紀の中で ("When the Japanese Language Falls: In the Age of English"), published in translation as *The Fall of Language in the Age of English*[12] aims in the same direction albeit in a flawed

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10   See Hendrik Birus, "The Goethean Concept of World Literature and Comparative Literature," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.4 (2000), http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1090, last accessed June 2, 2016.

11   Mecklenburg, *Goethe* (see note 8), p. 431. "Andererseits ist Globalisierung von Goethes Zeit bis heute bei immer stärkerer Beschleunigung auch ein Prozess der Homogenisierung mit bisher einseitiger Dominanz des Westens, des Kapitalismus und seiner Kulturindustrie. Unter diesem kritischen Blickwinkel gesehen, steht Interkulturalität nicht nur in Gleichlauf, sondern auch in Widerspruch zu Globalisierung: Sollte es einmal nichts kulturell Fremdes mehr geben, gäbe es auch nichts Interkulturelles mehr."

12   New York: Columbia University Press, 2015; the Japanese original was published in 2008. In a remarkable twist, this emphasis on Japan and the Japanese language is entirely

argument that valorizes a homogenizing and therefore extremely problematic notion of Japanese as the single national language of the Japanese people[13] where – typical of a "national" literature – texts are read and interpreted "through the lens of the nation-state, whether as that state's embodiment, as the dissent tolerated within its public sphere, as its legitimating precursors, or as its future aspirations."[14]

Not every such critique of global English is nationalist in nature, though. David Crystal imagines the following dystopia: "If it is [in 500 years' time] the only language left to be learned, it will have been the greatest intellectual disaster that the planet has ever known."[15] Still, this view needs to be further complicated: as Alexander Beecroft has discussed, there is no monolithic global English emanating from a single center. Instead, as the English language expands across the globe, it also is being reshaped by those who adopt it and use it in their own way, and in many different ways. In other words, English is not just a centrifugal and dominating force adopted wholesale. On the one hand, it is a force that inserts itself into the very structure of other literary languages,[16] and that contributes to "the international constraints under which literature is written: the limits that the world market imposes on the imagination."[17] On the other hand, it is also, in turn, subject to centripetal influences that generate not one but many versions of English which, furthermore, constantly

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erased in the English title of Mizumura's book; instead, the dust jacket features words from multiple Asian and European languages!

13   Mizumura ignores the fact that the modern Japanese language (especially in its written form) is itself the product of precisely the same process of homogenization that she identifies with the global force of English today, having replaced not only numerous Japanese spoken dialects but also the Ryukyuan and Ainu languages in the southern and northern parts of Japan, respectively. As a result, her critique of the colonizing force of English is blind to the hegemony of Japanese within the modern Japanese nation state. Likewise, she misses an important opportunity to reflect on "the age of English" vis-à-vis Japan's own colonialist history of linguistic *enforcement* in Taiwan, Korea, and elsewhere.

14   Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, London: Verso, 2015, pp. 197 f. Beecroft's discussion of "national literature" (pp. 195–241) that emerges in vernacular form to overcome an earlier "cosmopolitan literature" (in this case of Classical Chinese) directly pertains to the case of Japan (and furthermore to modern China).

15   *English as a Global Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 140; here cited from Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (see note 6), p. 225.

16   For thoughts regarding the power of English to shape expressions in other languages see Tim Parks, "Your English is Showing," *The New York Review of Books*, June 15, 2011; and further Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature* (see note 14), pp. 279–283.

17   Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (see note 4), p. 128.

interact.[18] "English" is not a stable single thing, nor is its canon of literature. As noted by Bruce Clunies Ross, poetry written in English is now recognized as "a multifarious art created in a language which exists as a cluster of variants [...] Its diversity reflects the global spread of English, and its vitality is related to the fact that it is composed not in the centre of English poetry but in a globally devolved network where influences are dispersed [...] From the perspective of poetry, the English-speaking world is polycentric."[19]

And yet, there are the statistics of publication and translation. In terms of speakers, English is only the third-largest language in the world (far behind Chinese, which has about four times as many native speakers, and slightly behind Spanish), but translations from English into other languages are one hundred times those of Chinese, while translations into English are roughly three times those into Chinese.[20] Despite the polyvocality and polycentricity of English literature itself, there is no question about the market forces that determine the global commerce of literature. What is more, in the age of the internet, global capitalism, and instant communication across oceans and continents, the principal threat to linguistic and cultural diversity is not limited to the immediate dominance of just the English language;[21] it is about literature and culture altogether. Here, the pessimistic visions of Auerbach, Eliot, Lévi-Strauss, and Etiemble, formulated many decades ago, prove frighteningly prophetic: what for Goethe was the promise of World Literature as cultural practice – the mutual inspiration and influence of different contemporary literary cultures – has turned into the threat of a Global Literature that, regardless of its place of origin, bends under the pressures of the globalized marketplace where any literature, from anywhere, is already inflected by the experience, usually through translation, of European and American literature. As Franco Moretti has pointed out, "we keep collapsing under a single term *two distinct world literatures*: one that precedes the eighteenth century – and one

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18   Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature* (see note 14), pp. 259–264, *passim*.

19   Bruce Clunies Ross, "'Rhythmical Knots': The World of English Poetry," in: *Debating World Literature* (see note 3), p. 293, and p. 297; see also Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature* (see note 14), pp. 262–264.

20   These statistics, taken from Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature* (see note 14), pp. 253–255, are several years old; if anything, the most recent numbers would be even more skewed.

21   Here, in fact, the tendency goes in the opposite direction: of the ca. one billion websites online today, an estimated forty to fifty per cent are in English, though their growth rate is by now far outpaced by the proliferation of non-English websites, as more and more countries around the world develop their presence online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_used_on_the_Internet, last accessed June 2, 2016.

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* (which I would prefer to call world literary system) is unified by the international literary market; it shows a growing, and at times stunning amount of sameness; its main mechanism of change is convergence [...]"[22] In fact, one might even sharpen Moretti's point: the Global Literature of our time may well be the antithesis and, ultimately, the end of Goethe's World Literature: Global Literature is the result of translation and diffusion; and in return, it not only anticipates translation but is made for translation. It is a literature perfectly attuned to a transnational horizon of expectations, a literature that demands translation to remain economically viable[23] but also one whose translation can no longer be negotiated in the conventional terms of 'source' and 'target' language because the latter is already built into the former.

While already Goethe was concerned about what he called a "Halbkultur" ("half-culture") of triviality driven by market forces,[24] he wrote nearly two centuries before the economic and electronic globalization that engulfs us today. He is helpful to our considerations not because his world is still ours but, to the contrary, because to recognize his world is to throw our differences into sharp relief. He is furthermore helpful, I wish to suggest, because his world, and his literature, embodies ideals that we may have lost, but that we must not forget. Against the emerging dystopia of our time, Goethe – in both his thoughts and in his poetic practice – appears positively utopian, and his utopia, while forever out of reach, remains worth keeping with us, even against our more rational fears. For at this point in history, the dichotomy between World

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22 Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (see note 4), pp. 134–135. As Moretti, p. 130, writes, "the decisive historical watershed is again the establishment of an international market: divergence being the main path of literary change before its advent, and convergence afterwards."

23 Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature* (see note 14), p. 249, notes that "the increasing concentration of the publishing industry, and the increasing need for sales in translation to sustain a literary career, are all factors pushing towards an increasingly homogeneous literary world, one in which universality is achieved through the creation of a monoculture." While acknowledging this not improbable dystopia, Beecroft attempts to counter it with a sunnier view of the future where local, regional, and minority literatures will find their place in World Literature, supported by governmental intervention. Whether such support will materialize, and whether it will suffice to counter the forces of global capitalism and international publishing conglomerates, is a question I am reluctant to ponder.

24 Mecklenburg, *Goethe* (see note 8), p. 444; Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (see note 6), pp. 13 f.

Literature and Global Literature has become urgent. If World Literature thrives on alterity, non-commensurability, and non-identity, Global Literature does the opposite: it enforces identity and conformity under a single, market-driven hegemony, erases difference, and appropriates the Other for the Self not in an experience of otherness but in, and for, one of sameness. This also complicates Damrosch's description of World Literature as "literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin." To take just one particularly prominent example, it is by no means easy to determine what Murakami Haruki's "culture of origin" actually is, however he himself may see it, or to which extent that "culture of origin" is already absorbing, and hence is also being absorbed by, "the West."[25] Whether or not Murakami sees himself as a Japanese author becomes irrelevant; his principal translator Jay Rubin, whose elegant, smooth voice seems decidedly more appealing to a broad American audience than the edginess of Murakami's earlier translator Alfred Birnbaum, gives us an author as "Western" as he is "Japanese," an author so influential in both Japan and North America that – as suggested by Reiko Abe Auestad – terms like "Japaneseness" or "Americanization" have lost their meaning.[26] Today's global juggernaut Murakami is – and wants to be[27] – easy and fast to read, and so he is in translation. Through various dehistoricizing, decontextualizing, anthologizing, and assimilating moves on the part of his translators and editors, Murakami has freely entered the frameworks of foreign literary cultures.[28] His prose is equally at home in both Japanese and English.

This was not Goethe's idea of World Literature. As he notes in his *Maximen und Reflexionen*, "art is the mediator of what cannot be spoken";[29] and

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25   Murakami, often referred to as the "most American," "most Western," or "first global" Japanese author, rejects such characterization and insists that he is only writing from the experience of life in urban Japan – which, of course, is thoroughly an experience of cultural hybridity. See his interview ("The Art of Fiction" No. 182) with John Wray in: *The Paris Review* 170 (2004), http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2/the-art-of-fiction-no-182-haruki-murakami. On Murakami's translators, see Wendy Lesser, "The Mysteries of Translation," in: *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 49.5 (2002), B.7.

26   Reiko Abe Auestad, "Implications of Globalization for the Reception of Modern Japanese Literature: Murakami Haruki," in: Anna Guttman / Michel Hockx / George Paizis (eds.), *The Global Literary Field*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006, p. 23.

27   See his interview with John Wray (see note 25); see also Auestad, "Implications of Globalization" (see note 26), pp. 30 f.

28   Auestad, "Implications of Globalization" (see note 26), p. 33.

29   "Die Kunst ist eine Vermittlerin des Unaussprechlichen"; *Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 729, in: *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Werke* (*Hamburger Ausgabe*), ed. by Erich Trunz, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988, vol. 12, p. 468.

Goethe's notion of the symbolic is one where "in the image, the idea remains endlessly efficacious and yet unreachable, and even if spoken in all languages, it remains impossible to express."[30] And indeed, toward the end of his long life, in his late poetry including the "Chinesisch-Deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten," Goethe achieved a state of linguistic transcendence that not merely resisted translation but even drove learned native speakers of German, like the mid-twentieth-century authority on Goethe, Emil Staiger, into sighs of sheer despair: "Has Goethe lost his sense of order?"[31] Struggling to grasp the ethereal qualities of Goethe's increasingly paratactic diction, Staiger lost his orientation in a no man's land between "This sentence means nothing" and the "enchantment" ("Zauber") of Goethe's late poetry.[32] Similarly lost were other German scholars[33] before finally, only toward the end of the twentieth century, Goethe's late poetry began to receive adequate reception and recognition.[34]

Goethe's problematization of the relationship between art and language was shared by Adorno in the *Ästhetische Theorie*.[35] "Artful disruptions" ("kunstvolle Störungen") is how Adorno characterized the parataxis in Hölderlin's late poetry,[36] "the transformation of language into a sequence of elements that interlink differently than by judgment,"[37] and "acts of disruption of the spoken language as well as of the high register of German classicism which, except for the mighty formations of the old Goethe, kept camaraderie with

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30 "[...] die Idee im Bild immer unendlich wirksam und unerreichbar bleibt und, selbst in allen Sprachen ausgesprochen, doch unaussprechlich bliebe"; *Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 749; *Goethe*, vol. 12 (see note 29), p. 470.

31 "Ist Goethe der Ordnung nicht mehr mächtig?"; Emil Staiger, *Goethe*, Zurich: Atlantis Verlag, 1959, vol. 3, p. 236.

32 Staiger, *Goethe* (see note 31), p. 234, p. 236.

33 E.g., Joachim Müller, "Goethes Altersdichtung 'Chinesisch-Deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten'," in: Alois Eder / Hellmuth Himmel / Alfred Kracher (eds.), *Marginalien zur poetischen Welt* (*Festschrift Robert Mühlher*), Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1971, pp. 53–87, esp. pp. 59–63.

34 See Kurt Krolop, "Späte Gedichte Goethes," in: *Goethe-Jahrbuch* NF 97 (1980), pp. 38–63, esp. pp. 40 f.; Walter Müller-Seidel, *Die Geschichtlichkeit der deutschen Klassik: Literatur und Denkformen um 1800*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1983, pp. 251–265; Norbert Mecklenburg, *Naturlyrik und Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1977, pp. 74–87.

35 Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1990, e.g., p. 108, pp. 113 f., pp. 121 f., p. 171.

36 Adorno, "Parataxis," in: Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1989, p. 471.

37 "[...] die Verwandlung der Sprache in eine Reihung, deren Elemente anders sich verknüpfen als im Urteil"; ibid.

the communicative word."[38] Adorno understood parataxis as the expression of "the non-identical object" ("des nichtidentischen Objects")[39] which, by virtue of its resistance to assimilation to communicative function, liberates itself from the "spell of the domination of nature" ("Bann der Naturbeherrschung").[40] Parataxis, one of the most ubiquitous and significant devices of classical Chinese poetry, is found everywhere in both Hölderlin and Goethe's late poetry, including in the "Chinesisch-Deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten,"[41] "a poetry of old age that is of special character not only in its art of seeing but by thematizing this art of seeing,"[42] characterized by "abeyance" ("Schwebe") and "transience" ("Übergänglichkeit").[43] This poetry is not one of quietude and tranquility but of dynamic flow. Its intercultural transport and reception require a language of translation which, in Goethe's own words, "in the various dialects corresponds to the rhythmic, metrical, and prosaic ways of speech of the original" and thus makes the other "in its full peculiarity once again delightful and domestic for us."[44]

This briefest recalling of Goethe and Hölderlin's poetry of old age, with Adorno and others as our guides, complicates any naïve notion of World Literature. The Goethe of 1827 who spoke about *Weltliteratur* was the same man, at the very same time, who wrote poetry that was no longer at home in the German literary culture of its time, and wouldn't be for another century. It was a poetry written against the expectations of its native readers, that is, a poetry for which expectations had yet to be invented. Most importantly, it was a

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38   "Störungsaktionen [...] an der gesprochenen [Sprache] ebenso wie am hohen Stil des deutschen Klassizismus [...] der, bis auf die mächtigen Gebilde des alten Goethe, mit dem kommunikativen Wort Kameradschaft hielt"; Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur* (see note 36), p. 479.

39   Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur* (see note 36), p. 488.

40   Ibid.

41   See Erich Trunz, "Goethes Altersstil," in: *Wirkendes Wort* 5 (1954–1955), pp. 134–139; see also Krolop, "Späte Gedichte Goethes" (see note 34), pp. 55–60.

42   "Alterslyrik, die nicht nur durch ihre Art des Sehens besonderen Charakter besitzt, sondern diese Sehweise zu ihrem Thema erhebt"; Trunz, "Goethes Altersstil" (see note 41), pp. 135 f.

43   Peter Eichhorn, *Idee und Erfahrung im Spätwerk Goethes*, Freiburg: Karl Alber Verlag, 1971, p. 137.

44   "[...] die den verschiedenen Dialekten, den rhythmischen, metrischen und prosaischen Sprachweisen des Originals entspräche"; Goethe, "Westöstlicher Divan: Noten und Abhandlungen," in: *Goethe*, vol. 2 (see note 29), p. 257. For a critical discussion of this combination of peculiarity and universality, and of the "as it is itself" and the "as it becomes for us," see Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, pp. 178–180.

poetry composed out of the experience with the Other, including translations of Persian and Chinese literature.[45] And without a doubt, this poetry *was* World Literature for its author who, also late in life, did "not like to read my *Faust* any more in German" but instead preferred it refracted in a new French translation where he found his own work "again fresh, new, and spirited."[46] Goethe's own literary practice at the time when he thought about World Literature was a performance of alterity, self-distance, and deliberate alienation. As often as Goethe seems to emphasize a stable identity of Self and Other – for example, in his frequent generalizations about the literatures of different cultures – he also eagerly allows the Other into the Self, thus undermining any such stability. Goethe's late work, while unmistakably part of German literature, was a poetry displaced and a poetry transcendent. It was World Literature in a double sense: a literature inspired by the reading of writings from worlds beyond his own; and a utopian literature transcending place, culture, and language not yet assimilated to any market domestic or foreign: it was a stranger in its own world.

Damrosch has famously defined World Literature as "not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time."[47] I would like to suggest an addition: World Literature is not only a mode of reading (ideally in Goethe's productive intuition as a reader), that is, reception; it also is a mode of creative composition. *World Literature can be written.* It is a literature written into a cultural space that is at once part of its own linguistic local (not necessarily national) tradition but also different from, and distant to, that tradition; it is a literature that transcends the horizon of expectations by which this tradition is defined, but yet without entering any other horizon. It is decidedly *not* moored to the local, nor to the present time, and cannot be easily domesticated by its native audience. It is a literature whose "intercultural affinity" arises precisely from its "intracultural difference."[48] It seems to me that this literature, with its intrinsic alterity to, and transcendence of, the indigenous lexicon and syntax, has the strongest potential to invite the mode of reading where it, as Damrosch has noted, may even gain in translation – even though its possibilities of translation seem severely complicated and problematized by its purposeful violations of the rules of its own native tongue, its resistance to the "camaraderie with the communicative

45   See, e.g., John Pizer, "The Emergence of *Weltliteratur*: Goethe and the Romantic School (2006)," in: David Damrosch (ed.), *World Literature in Theory*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014, pp. 29 f.

46   Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (see note 6), pp. 6 f.

47   Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (see note 6), p. 281.

48   Mecklenburg, *Goethe* (see note 8), p. 404.

word." In short, it seems possible to me to think of World Literature also as a category of production, in addition to a category of reception.

It is not difficult to think of such literature, or even of cases that take us to the extremes of such literature, such as James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* or Arno Schmidt's *Zettel's Traum*. Nothing of this can be translated without becoming a version totally different, something both more and less, of its original self. Here, we find another interesting tension: the fact that World Literature thrives on translation, and cannot even be conceptualized without pervasive acts of transformation through translation, does *not* mean that works that translate easily are more successful as World Literature. To the contrary: resistance to translation can be a marker of World Literature. That does not mean that Joyce or Schmidt are World Literature because they are fundamentally untranslatable; they are World Literature because they are at variance with their own literary culture of origin. They are performances of alterity in their original form, performances that then have to be doubled, but also sublated, in the transformative reconfigurations of translation.

Interestingly, these are also the works that tend to become canonical in their own national literary traditions. Here we meet the paradox of tradition: what a tradition retrospectively canonizes as "representative" of its own past is, more often than not, what at its own time had transcended its contemporary horizon of expectations. The canonical text is not only retrospectively canonized; by standing out from its own time, it also is precisely what *never was representative* of that particular time (be it Goethe's, Hölderlin's or Du Fu's late poetry, as opposed to the numerous more successful authors who conformed to the expectations of their time and *for this reason* are long forgotten). These works were decidedly at variance with their own cultural environment, and they retain their original unlikeness as long as we are alive to their intracultural alterity and transcendence. This, I believe, is the only way in which to think of a "canon of masterpieces" that constitutes the canon of World Literature: works that speak beyond their "culture of origin" (Damrosch) because they were never confined to that culture in the first place. Kafka is World Literature – in the German speaking realm as much as in translation – because his idiom is strictly his own: he is as uncommon or even strange to the reader of German as he is to the reader of any other language. As Stanley Corngold writes, Kafka was "prone to be awed by a consciousness of the specialness of his gift," but a gift that made him suffer all the more as he experienced his own strangeness, that is, in Kristeva's term, his being a stranger to himself.[49] He is World

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49   Stanley Corngold, "Kafka and the Dialect of Minor Literature," in: Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Debating World Literature*, London: Verso, 2004, pp. 289 f.

Literature because he resists assimilation, naturalization, and integration into *any* cultural horizon, including that of his own culture and literary world of origin. Perhaps even more extreme is the case of the Japanese winner of the Nobel Prize in literature, Ōe Kenzaburō, whose style departs so starkly from the conventions of Japanese language and literature that schoolteachers, to reveal the exceptional nature of his prose, ask their students to identify "mistakes" in his use of the Japanese language. Yet another example, again from Japan, would be Akira Kurosawa, whose genius has been celebrated far more abroad than in his native Japan. His 1957 *Throne of Blood* (*Spider Web Castle*; in the original Japanese: *Kumonosu-jō* 蜘蛛巣城) is a radical reimagination of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: a transformation of the original play into both a movie and a medieval Japanese story that, however, is told through the aesthetics of traditional Nō theater, cineastically reinventing Shakespeare's play once again as theater while abandoning both Shakespeare's language and the aesthetics of English drama. *Throne of Blood* is neither *Macbeth* nor its translation; it is neither English nor Japanese; it is neither a movie nor a play. And yet, it is "so uncannily the most successful film version of *Macbeth*, though it departs very far from the specifics of Shakespeare's play."[50]

Bei Dao

When Goethe spoke of World Literature, there was a hegemonic region – Europe – and the *Weltliteratur* he imagined had to conform to that region, at least to some extent; but there was no single hegemonic language, and no hegemonic culture within that European region; in fact, European literature was and still is a realm of traveling strangers and exiles both chosen and forced.[51] For Goethe, at least French, English, and German were all en par, and only the starting points from where to reach for the texts from more distant shores.

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50   Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, New York: Riverhead Books, 1999, p. 519. In this, *Throne of Blood* exemplifies Moretti's argument that the "plot" of a novel remains the same while the "style" changes as it travels through different literatures: "Now, plot is largely *independent* from language: it remains more or less the same, not only from language to language, but even from one sign system to another (from novel to illustration, film, ballet …). Style is however nothing *but* language, and its translation – *traduttore traditore* – is almost always an act of betrayal: the more complex a style is, in fact, the greater the chance that its traits will be lost in the process." See Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (see note 4), pp. 133 f.

51   From Dante to Joyce and so many others; see Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (see note 4), pp. 35–40.

Goethe's only absolute point of orientation lay in antiquity: the literature of the Greeks. Our situation today is different: what cannot be read in English (or another language that the Nobel Prize Committee can read) will not win the Nobel Prize.[52] While flows of literature within larger regions – East Asia,[53] Europe, etc. – are not necessarily channeled through English, as soon as authors from individual countries enter the global market, English becomes the primary medium of communication and dissemination, with further translations into other languages often based on earlier ones into English. In terms of cultural capital and economic power (though not in the number of native speakers), all other languages are now peripheral to English.

The pressures for linguistic and literary assimilation are only increasing because cultural and economic globalization do not operate on the same principles. Economic globalization is predicated on the erasure of difference, on economies of scale, on universal uniformity of products and services. We all want the same iPhone. By contrast, cultural globalization, in an ideal case, thrives on notions of sustained alterity and diversity. Within the European Union, such notions are defended, with special rules and exemptions that defy economies of scale, for things like French cheese, Italian pasta, and German beer. There is no such defense for the literary idiom, and we must ask to which extent a contemporary author's global success – contingent as it is on finely calibrated strategies of translation and marketing – reflects the ambition of cultural or the logic of economic globalization.

During my time as a student at Peking University, from 1987 through 1989, I witnessed the final phase and violent ending of the most intellectually exciting period in recent Chinese history. After 1976, and especially after 1978, literature mattered enormously. Poetry and short stories, composed over night and plastered on the "Wall of Democracy" and the walls of university campuses and other sites across the city of Beijing, were considered the social, cultural, and political force of truth. In the late 1980s, one could listen to a different poetry reading almost every night on the campus of Peking University. No few of

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52   As noted by Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature* (see note 14), p. 257, "of the 110 men and women awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature between 1900 and 2013, eight [...] wrote in non-European languages, of whom all except Mo Yan and the two Japanese writers wrote in Europe itself, on Europe's periphery, or while under European rule." Beecroft expresses some understanding for this situation: "judges, after all, can only evaluate works they can read in the original language or that have been translated, and thus inequities in the translation system are almost bound to be reflected in the prize system."

53   See, e.g., Karen Laura Thornber, *Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009.

my Chinese friends imagined themselves as profound existentialists, inspired by their exposure to modern Western literature and philosophy in Chinese translation. But in that spring of 1989, there also was something else: while the students had set up loudspeakers to blast their messages *outwards* across the campus walls, they also blasted foreign English-language radio coverage of their own protests *inwards* across their dorms, self-referentially refracting their protests as a performance validated and encouraged by an international audience that, by way of its broadcast, was then also made a participant. This was a moment of change. Earlier, the authors of "scar literature" (*shanghen wenxue* 傷痕文學), "root-searching literature" (*xungen wenxue* 尋根文學), or "obscure poetry" (*menglongshi* 朦朧詩, initially a denunciatory term) of the early 1970s through early 1980s wrote in Western forms but not for a Western audience; they aimed squarely at disrupting the local literary norms that were also the political norms of acceptable expression. Their own form of World Literature, which rephrased personal Chinese experiences through the catalyst of foreign inspiration, was not directed outward or written for translation, nor was it composed for economic gain or global recognition. And despite its inspiration from Western modernism, it was unmistakably local: not only generically Chinese but distinctly Mainland Chinese, an urban idiom developed in response to the experiences of a new generation growing up in the People's Republic of China. The language of "scar literature," "root-searching literature," or "obscure poetry" was, in terms both cultural and political, expressive of life in the PRC, just as Lu Xun's writings had been expressive of his own time and place. While officially, certain collections of "obscure poetry" were limited to "internal circulation" (*neibu faxing*), even a first-year foreign exchange student at Peking University found it easy to purchase all of them. Yet still, as far as I can tell, nobody made money off these publications; it was a literature written to be read, memorized, hand-copied, and recited, not one to be sold.

By the mid- to late 1980s, a decade after the Cultural Revolution, Western Sinologists discovered this new, quickly written literature and began to publish it in translation, introducing China's new voices – the voices of yet another (now post-Cultural Revolution) "New China" – to an international audience. This literature now published in various European languages was developing into the confident writing of a new generation of Chinese authors who had arrived, and were tolerated by the authorities, in the middle of an emerging intellectual urbanity. Their international publishers were not the global print conglomerates but often academic institutions or smaller, intellectually ambitious presses. Today, all this seems like memories from a distant past. As China has fully joined the global economy, so have some of the more successful authors of Chinese literature. At the same time, literature appears to have lost

much of its intellectual urgency in contemporary China, both culturally and, especially, as a critical political voice. We are left with a small canon of authors known to the global audience, selling copies abroad and being finally recognized with the Nobel Prize for Mo Yan, an author of considerable official stature within the Chinese political system.[54]

Is this canon now World Literature – if for no other reason than that it has thrived in translation to the point of winning the Nobel Prize? And will Murakami be next, as his fans around the world have been expecting, if not demanding, for years now? Maybe. Or Bei Dao, though that seems unlikely, considering the prize committee's need for global balance, which requires to acknowledge others first: not *other authors* and not even *literature in other languages*, but *other nations*, as if Mo Yan now stands not so much for "Chinese literature" but for the literature of the People's Republic of China, just as the CCP's Politburo declared his award "not only an embodiment of the flourishing progress of Chinese literature but also an embodiment of the continuing rise in the overall strength of our state and its international influence."[55] By contrast, twelve years earlier, the Chinese government had roundly denounced the Nobel Prize for the Paris-based author Gao Xingjian, calling the Chinese-born Gao a "French writer," and accusing the Swedish Academy of being motivated by "political purposes."[56] Ironically, the government's rejection of Gao Xingjian as a "French writer" had its parallel in the criticism by Chinese avant-garde writers like Ouyang Jianghe 歐陽江河: for Ouyang, Gao Xingjian's works did not deserve the prize because they represented neither post-Mao Chinese literature nor the experience with contemporary Mainland Chinese social realities.[57] Chinese literature, in other words, is still being asked to stand for something other than itself, with its literary qualities defined by, and subsumed under, its participation in the national political environment.

In 1990, Stephen Owen's essay "What is World Poetry?" triggered a heated controversy over not only the value but the very nature of Bei Dao's poetry.[58]

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54   For Mo Yan's political stature, see Perry Link, "Does This Writer Deserve the Prize?," in: *New York Review of Books*, December 6, 2012; http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/dec/06/mo-yan-nobel-prize/.

55   As reported in Link, "Does This Writer Deserve the Prize?" (see note 54).

56   See Julia Lovell, "Chinese Literature in the Global Canon: The Quest for Recognition," in: Jing Tsu / David Der-wei Wang (eds.), *Global Chinese Literature: Critical Essays*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, p. 200; and more comprehensively, Julia Lovell, *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for the Nobel Prize in Literature* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006.

57   See Lovell, "Chinese Literature in the Global Canon" (see note 56), pp. 213–215.

58   Owen, "What is World Poetry," in: *The New Republic*, November 19, 1990, pp. 28–32. For references to some of the fiercer responses to Owen, see Jacob Edmond, *A Common*

At the time, Bei Dao's stature inside and outside of China remained tied to his early political verse, and to his courageous editorship of the "unofficial" journal *Today* (*Jintian*) from 1978 through 1980, until the journal was closed by the authorities; during the protests of 1989, his poetry was much recited by students. Today, Bei Dao's own literary development has long transcended its origins and is further complicated by its predication on the author living in exile abroad.[59] However, Owen's principal questions about an "international poetry" whose "poems translate themselves," "a poetry written to travel well," a poetry that is "supremely translatable" in face of "the power and the consequences of the approval of the international audience, that is, the Western audience," are of greater urgency today than they were in 1990. Owen worried about "the strange phenomenon of a poet who became the leading poet in his own country because he translated well," and about a situation where the "international audience admires the poetry, imagining what it might be if the poetry had not been lost in translation" while "the audience at home admires the poetry, knowing how much it is appreciated internationally."

Indeed, Bei Dao's introduction to a larger anglophone audience, especially the anthology of his early poetry that in 1988 was published in English translation under the title *The August Sleepwalker* and became the subject of Owen's review two years later, provides a case study in assimilation. Owen's charge that Bei Dao's poems "translate themselves" was, in fact, prefigured in the translator Bonnie S. McDougall's "Introduction," where she speaks of "the universal nature of Bei Dao's poetry" and calls it "translatable," as its "images are mostly derived from natural and urban phenomena as familiar to readers in the West as in China." Moreover, "the structures of the poems are similarly based on universal geometrical or logical patterns." In sum, according to McDougall, the "surface structure of the poems is therefore not significantly lost in translation."[60]

While I share Owen's concerns, including over the quality of some of the early poems, the poetry included in the *The August Sleepwalker* has become the subject of careful reconsideration. Both Dian Li and Jacob Edmond, among

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Strangeness: Contemporary Poetry, Cross-Cultural Encounter, Comparative Literature, New York: Fordham University Press, 2012, p. 219, n. 13; also Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (see note 6), p. 20.

59   For an excellent analysis of Bei Dao's and other contemporary Chinese authors' work in exile, see Maghiel van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, pp. 138–186.

60   Bei Dao, *The August Sleepwalker*, trans. Bonnie S. McDougall, London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1988, p. 14. For a brief critique, see Dian Li, *The Chinese Poetry of Bei Dao, 1978–2000: Resistance and Exile*, Lewiston: Edward Mellen Press, 2006, pp. 102 f.

others, depart from Owen's critique by focusing more on the Chinese originals than on their English translations. Li points out how Bei Dao's language emerges from a "battle with language," that it is written "against the Dictionary," and that "his enigmatic style, fractured syntax and disjunctive imagery have conspired to resist reading even by expert readers"; he notes "the lack of logical transition from image to image, line to line and stanza to stanza," images that are "a collection of paradoxes," and Bei Dao's "propensity to violently reorganize old linguistic codes"; and he insists on the traditional, if now refracted, Chinese elements in Bei Dao's work.[61] As a result, some of the reactions against this poetry curiously resemble the charges leveled at Goethe's late poetry: both Western and Chinese critics declared that Bei Dao's verse "as a whole did not make any sense" and that "the more I read the less sense he makes to me [...] and the more I try to interpret, the greater the apparent disarray."[62] Altogether, Li takes a position opposite to Owen, claiming that Bei Dao is not the voice of some rootless globalism but its very opposite: "the voice of discontent within the march of globalism, the voice of humanity before mechanization and automatism, and the voice of non-conformity against repression and domination in whatever form, be it a single political ideology or unbridled commercialism."[63]

While Li contextualizes Bei Dao in the Chinese political climate since the early 1970s as well as in the long Chinese poetic tradition, Edmond – also identifying elements of specifically Chinese imagery and syntax – shows how Bei Dao's poetry invites multiple and ultimately inseparable readings as both "Chinese poetry" and "World Literature."[64] Emerging in 1976 as the most influential early leader of what soon came to be criticized as "obscure poetry," Bei Dao radically refused the "camaraderie with the communicative word." But his verse was not merely "obscure" to the political and literary functionaries of his own time and place, nourished on the exposure to modernist Western literature[65] and rupturing the expectations for Chinese poetry. His deep-rooted localism within the Chinese poetic tradition and his life experiences in Mainland China – he was barely seventeen years old when the Cultural Revolution began – also upset in multiple ways the expectations of a foreign literary audience. In Edmond's analysis, Bei Dao's poetry is "limited neither to a dehistoricized world poetry context nor to a historical and autobiographical reading"; even more,

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61   Li, *The Chinese Poetry of Bei Dao* (see note 60), p. 71, p. 83, p. 90, p. 93, p. 107.

62   As quoted in Li, *The Chinese Poetry of Bei Dao* (see note 60), p. 83.

63   Li, *The Chinese Poetry of Bei Dao* (see note 60), p. 126.

64   Edmond, *A Common Strangeness* (see note 58), pp. 95–124.

65   Edmond, *A Common Strangeness* (see note 58), p. 101.

"the tension between historically located and dislocated world-poetry readings of Bei Dao is a structurally critical part of the work."[66]

When Owen in 1990 criticized Bei Dao's poetry as blatantly catering to the demands of a Western audience for a universal "world poetry" that was easy to consume while also retaining just the right amount of "local color" and "cozy ethnicity," he responded, in my own view, less to Bei Dao's Chinese verse than to two phenomena external to it: the emergence of a global literary culture that finally brought contemporary Chinese poetry into the fold of World Literature (as conceived in the West), and Bonnie McDougall's translations that not merely "introduced" Bei Dao to European and American readers but in the process also made him easy to understand, and easy to misunderstand. Contrary to her own assertions (and Owen's interesting praise of her translations of poems that, on the other hand, "translate themselves"), Bei Dao's early poetry was not "universal"; it is only the English rendering that largely erases the original dissonances and tensions within the Chinese poems themselves.

Consider for a moment the very first poem in *The August Sleepwalker*, titled "Hello, Baihua Mountain."[67] The poem was written in 1972, while the Cultural Revolution was still in full force, yet this particular piece of crucial information is nowhere to be found in McDougall's translation.[68] The poem opens with the line "The sound of a guitar drifts through the air," and the reader might wonder which Chinese word is translated as "guitar" here. It is *qin* 琴, which traditionally denotes a Chinese zither but can also be used for string instruments in general. "Guitar," on the other hand, would have been *jita* 吉他, a word phonetically transliterated from English into Chinese that, however, Bei Dao chose not to use here. What, then, motivates the translation "guitar" for *qin*?

In his reconsideration of Bei Dao's original poetry that poses questions to both McDougall's choices and Owen's conclusions, Edmond has pointed to a significant number of other moments, including in "Hello, Baihua Mountain," where it is only the translation that creates a "universal" poetry that, in Owen's words, has "no history" and no national landscape.[69] Dian Li has argued

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66   Edmond, *A Common Strangeness* (see note 58), p. 123.

67   Bei Dao, *The August Sleepwalker* (see note 60), p. 19.

68   In her introduction, McDougall merely states that the poems in the first part of the book were written between 1970 and 1978; see Bei Dao, *The August Sleepwalker* (see note 60), p. 15. Needless to say, this is not merely a period of eight years; it is the period of most dramatic political changes, stretching from the height of the Cultural Revolution to a period of relative openness.

69   Edmond, *A Common Strangeness* (see note 58), pp. 110–123.

for translations of Bei Dao's works to be accompanied by a certain number of footnotes in order to reveal to the Western reader their Chinese cultural undercurrent both traditional and modern.[70] Take, for example, the place name "Baihua Mountain" which refers to a hill near Beijing but which for every Chinese reader, and surely for every Chinese reader who encountered the poem in the 1970s, connotes something else: the disastrous political campaign of 1956–1957, where Mao Zedong had encouraged free speech under the slogan "let a hundred flowers (*baihua* 百花) blossom" only to crush the resulting movement as soon as it seemed to threaten the party's control. Following the suggestive lead provided with the term *baihua*, no Chinese reader living in the terror and violence of 1972 could have read the line about "wild flowers" (*yehua* 野花) – *kaifang, na shi siwang de shijian* 開放，那是死亡的時間 (McDougall: "Their flowering is their time of death") without thinking of the "hundred flowers" from a mere fifteen years before; and no reader would have missed the double meaning of *kaifang* as both "flowering" and "opening and [political] reform." Finally, no 1972 reader would have misread the line *zhe shanzhong kongbu de yaochuan* 這山中恐怖的謠傳 (McDougall: "the mountain's tale of terror") as merely detached modernist, international poetry. What is more, at the time when Bei Dao wrote his hand-copied, underground poetry, he could not possibly have thought of selling it to an international audience interested in "World Literature." In other words, Owen's critique was not only based on a highly assimilating, universalizing translation; it also was published eighteen years after the composition of the poem, the particular time span between 1972 and 1990 that makes all the difference when thinking about the relationship between Chinese poetry and politics, and further about the presence of Chinese literature in the global marketplace.

McDougall decontextualizes and dehistoricizes all such moments in the poem. In the final lines, where the Chinese text reads *na shi fengzhong zhi feng, / shi wanwu yinghe, saodong bu an* 那是風中之風，使萬物應和，騷動不安 ("That was the wind within a wind, / causing the myriad things to resonate, yet restlessly and troubled"), the translation gives us "It was a wind within a wind, drawing / An agitated response from the land," eliding both the traditional Chinese cosmological idea of "they myriad things resonating" and then the way this idea is upset in anthropomorphic "agitation" and "trouble"; instead, we find the clever modernist enjambment of "drawing" (with no enjambment present in the original) and some bland, yet entirely invented "the land." In short, everything that is at once traditional and unsettling in the Chinese poem becomes flattened and erased in the universalizing translation, where the very

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70   Li, *The Chinese Poetry of Bei Dao* (see note 60), p. 107.

title "Baihua Mountain," stripped off all its connotations, feeds the desire for some vaguely discernable "local color." Decontextualization and dehistoricization, however, are not accidental or innocent moves; drastic interventions into the author's text, they have a purpose: they create, to use Edward Said's term, a new and entirely different "worldly context." Remarkably, the very same move was performed at the very same time (1989) with Murakami's translated novel *A Wild Sheep Chase* (Japanese: *Hitsuji o meguru bōken* 羊をめぐる冒険, 1982), when the chronological setting of the novel – 1970, a politically tumultuous year in Japan – was removed, which turned the text "into a very different novel" that was then further continued across translations into other languages, based on the first one in English.[71]

Recognizing how Bei Dao's subsequent poetry has been marketed in English translations,[72] one must agree with Owen's critique that his poetry is often read for just its political message that satisfies the international reader's "hunger for political virtue" because, in 1990 as much as in 2016, "the struggle for democracy in China is in fashion." But when talking about an underground poem written in 1972, this critique is anachronistic nevertheless; its actual target is not Bei Dao's original composition but Bonnie McDougall's particular choices in the English publication of 1988. While it is generally true that "writing on the struggle for democracy has very little to do with the struggle for democracy" (Owen), in 1972, the writing of "Hello, Baihua Mountain" was itself – as a formidable speech act – part of the struggle for democracy, and so was Bei Dao's founding of the programmatically titled journal *Today* in 1978. At these moments, long before the advent of any global literary market to which a Mainland Chinese author could aspire, poetry *was* a political act; its political stance was not yet the "selling point" (Owen) into which it had turned a decade later. In fact, even as late as during the 1989 protests, Bei Dao's poetry was publicly recited *as political expression*.[73]

But as Edmond reminds us, Bei Dao's early poetry was never just part of "the struggle for democracy." In 1972, Western modernism (or postmodernism)

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71   Abe Auestad, "Implications of Globalization" (see note 26), pp. 28 f. As Abe Auestad points out, this practice of translating into other languages not from the original Japanese but, for speed and expediency, from the English translation, is itself considered scandalous by some, but endorsed by Murakami himself.

72   See van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money* (see note 59), p. 145. The same occurred further with other poets especially after 1989; see van Crevel, *Language Shattered: Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Duoduo*, Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1996, pp. 99–101.

73   Van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money* (see note 59), p. 150, with further references.

was not yet a fad in China, or the easily reproduced attitude of later decades. In breaking with the conventions of Chinese poetic language while remaining in steady conversation with the literary past, Bei Dao was neither "international" nor "universal," just as Goethe's late poetry, despite its inspiration from Chinese and Persian literature, was not "international" or "universal." It was culturally specific not only because it responded to its own political circumstances and in this was written against the political orthodoxy of its time. Far more importantly, it was specific in the way it radically rejected the structural orthodoxy of Chinese poetry, that is, the very nature of the poet's response to his circumstances. It is for this reason that "The Answer" ("Huida" 回答) is Bei Dao's most significant poem:[74] it reconfigures completely the orthodox poetics of Chinese literature, formulated some two thousand years ago in the "Great Preface" to the ancient *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經), that sees the poem as the outward manifestation of the poet's inner emotional response to his social and political circumstances.[75] In the way it invokes and at the same time restructures the traditional poetic imagery and experience, Bei Dao's poetry is thoroughly modernist yet without being global or universal. When first written, this poetry constituted an alterity incommensurate with anything around it. Its value lay neither in its political function nor in some universalized, and invariably Western, notion of "good poetry." It was, and is, World Literature not because it could be eviscerated and flattened in English translation but because of its "artful disruption" (Adorno) of both the local and the global codes of literary expression. In other words, it is precisely the superficially "universalizing" translation that diminishes what makes Bei Dao's poetry speak to the world: instead of World Literature that emerges from "intracultural difference" (Mecklenburg), we have, in English translation, Global Literature that can be anyone's poetry, from anywhere, seemingly composed in a no man's land where history no longer exists and language is arbitrary.

Wang Wei

If one asks Chinese readers about the five leading poets of the "golden age of Chinese poetry," the Tang Dynasty (618–907), there is a reasonable chance to

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74   For a discussion, see Edmond, *A Common Strangeness* (see note 58), pp. 101–109.

75   For perceptive discussions see Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992, pp. 37–56; and Steven van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, pp. 52–115.

hear the name of Wang Wei 王維 (699–759 or 701–761). If one asks Western readers about the *three* leading poets of the Tang Dynasty, Wang Wei will be mentioned with absolute certainty. He is globally canonized for a particular subset of his surviving oeuvre: a poetry, perhaps inspired by Buddhist philosophy, that is deceptively simple and has been celebrated as an example of "Chinese nature poetry," the internationally most successful "genre" of Chinese poetry altogether. As Pauline Yu has noted, "translations of Wang Wei's poetry […] outnumber those of any other Chinese poet."[76] This is not accidental: the perceived universality and symbolic potential of nature imagery make it easy to integrate a poem from eighth-century China into one's own reading experiences across all temporal, linguistic, and philosophical differences. Nature imagery tends to appear as immediately comprehensible, universal, and archetypal.[77] Thus, Western readings have smoothly assimilated "Chinese nature poetry" to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European ideas about poetry: an ideological construction of poetic ideals that not by coincidence developed at the time of the European industrial revolution, when "nature" became reconceptualized as both "untouched" and "healing," a utopian refuge from, and counter-sphere to, the rapidly changing world of human dominance and human experience. It is no exaggeration to say that the idea of "Chinese nature poetry" is a complete invention in the service of European and American literary and cultural ideology; it mirrors, for example in Germany, the definition of "nature poetry" as the ruling paradigm of poetry altogether.[78] Thus, of all of Chinese poetry, "the landscape poem" became "its most important contribution to world literature."[79] Accordingly, such "landscape" or "nature" poetry has long dominated the translations of Chinese poetry altogether. Or more precisely: the highly selective translation practice of "Chinese nature poetry" as World Literature has defined and dominated what Chinese poetry can possibly be for a global audience. This paradigm of Chinese poetry exists primarily outside of China, though over the past century it has been successfully reimported into China as part of broader self-orientalizing tendencies. "Chinese nature poetry" is not so much a phenomenon of translation as of reconfiguration: the act of

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76   Yu, *The Poetry of Wang Wei: New Translations and Commentary*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980, p. xi.

77   Mecklenburg, *Naturlyrik und Gesellschaft* (see note 34), p. 13.

78   For "nature poetry" as "an unreflecting tag of no critical value" in the interpretation of classical Chinese poetry see Paul W. Kroll, "Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains in the High T'ang," in: *T'oung Pao* 84.1–3 (1998), p. 63.

79   Günther Debon, "Formen und Wesenszüge der chinesischen Lyrik," in: *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft, vol. 23: Ostasiatische Literaturen*, ed. by Günther Debon, Wiesbaden: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1984, p. 19.

remaking a Chinese poem into something that did not exist before the Europe of the eighteenth century. Far from being World Literature in any meaningful sense of a repository and experience of cultural otherness, we find ourselves at home in it, and in a familiar world. In the process, we have collectively forgotten that "in the fine poetry by the Tang poets," according to the perspicacious seventeenth-century Chinese critic Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (1610?–1661), "there has never been one line that just describes the scenery."[80]

The following discussion will focus on a single poem, "Deer Enclosure" ("Lu zhai" 鹿寨), that for its prominence stands out even within Wang Wei's corpus. Here is the original text with its word-by-word counterpart in English, followed by two well-regarded translations:

空山不見人，   Empty / mountain / not / see / person, people
但聞人語響。   Only / hear / person, people / speech / echo
返景入深林，   Return, reflect / light (*or* shadow) / enter / deep / forest, wood
復照青苔上。   Again, resume / shine, luster / blue-green / moss / upon, rise

"Deer Fence" (Stephen Owen)   "Deer Enclosure" (Pauline Yu)

No one is seen in deserted hills,   Empty mountain, no man is seen.
only the echoes of speech are heard.   Only heard are echoes of men's talk.
Sunlight cast back comes deep in   Reflected light enters the deep wood
the woods
and shines once again upon the   And shines again on blue-green moss.
green moss.

The two translations of "Deer Enclosure" by Stephen Owen and Pauline Yu are perfectly fine mainstream representations of the text in English. Their differences are minor and relatively inconsequential – yet both are based on crucial choices that make the Chinese text commensurate with our own experiences and expectations. There seems to be something vaguely "Chinese" about it, which for most readers could also be "Japanese," unless they know the difference between a Chinese quatrain and a Japanese *haiku*; whatever the case, at a minimum it is not a text we would mistake for something originally written in English. Yu's version is considerably closer to the diction of the classical

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80   Here cited after John Ching-yu Wang, *Chin Sheng-t'an*, New York: Twayne, 1972, p. 41.

Chinese text but still relies on some of the same interventions as Owen's to create a readable poem in English.

Let us briefly review the Chinese text. Verbs in classical Chinese do not express tense or aspect, nor do nouns differentiate gender or number; some of these markers may be added, but they are optional and usually absent within the tight structures of a short poem of twenty words. There is no conjugation or declination of any kind. Sentences may or may not have their subject made explicit, and in poetry they usually don't. Word classes exist, but the syntactic use of a word is flexible; in Wang Wei's poem, one crucial problem is whether to take the final word as a preposition (a postposition in Chinese) or a verb.

Lines one and two apparently have no subject – unless one takes the mountain itself as the subject – forcing both translators to employ a passive construction. Owen further over-translates the first word *kong* 空 ("empty") as "deserted," redundantly implying the absence of people that is mentioned explicitly in the same line; he diminishes *shan* ("mountain") to "hills" (but chooses a plural here), and he rearranges the word order. The specificity of "deserted hills" is not there in the Chinese; instead, Wang Wei speaks in archetypes, denoting not things but categories of things.[81] Most problematic is the translation "no one" (Owen) or "no man" (Yu) because either choice makes "no" the negation of "one" or "man" while in the Chinese, the word *bu* 不 negates not the subject but the verb "to see." In other words, the line is not about *what* is (or is not) seen but about the inability to "see." This is a profound philosophical difference, and it defines what the poem is all about: in my reading, the Chinese text, couched as it is in archetypes of things and words, is a statement about the possibilities of human perception and expression.

By contrast, both translators make it about a landscape scene that emphasizes the absence, or merely indirect presence, of people. The first line in Chinese has only two archetypal nouns, "mountain" and "man/person/people" (*ren* 人), inflected by the negation of "seeing" (the archetypal *jian* 見) and the conceptual archetype "empty/emptiness." The second line opens with another restriction "only/merely" (*dan* 但), followed by the archetypal "hearing" (*wen* 聞), the repetition of the archetypal "man/person/people," and, finally, "speech/talk/language" (*yu* 語) inflected by "echo" (*xiang* 響). In short, while both translations imply the presence of the human subject, and while Owen creates a

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81   The use of archetypes is common in Wang Wei's poetry, as noted in Yu-Kung Kao and Tsu-Lin Mei, "Meaning, Metaphor, and Allusion in T'ang Poetry," in: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38.2 (1978), p. 281 f. Remarkably, something similar has been said of Goethe's late poetry; see Eichhorn, *Idee und Erfahrung im Spätwerk Goethes* (see note 43), p. 88; and Karl Vietor, *Geist und Form: Aufsätze zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte,* Bern: A. Francke, 1952, pp. 152–154, p. 192.

specific landscape for this subject, the Chinese text, as an artifact of human language, is a self-denying philosophical statement on the impossibility of the two most basic forms of human perception, "seeing" and "hearing." The text itself is the poetic subject; and it is not clear at all what particular "scene" it may or may not be describing. In fact, there is no scene and no description. Instead, there is the categorical *double* negation of both human perception and the perception of human presence (or even existence). This double negation constitutes a purely philosophical world.

The second half of the poem responds to this situation. Here, the subject (*fanjing* 返景; "reflected light" or "sunlight cast back") is explicitly marked, and action is not negated but emphasized: it "enters" (*ru* 入; not the more specific and directionally reverse "comes") the archetypal "forest/wood" (*lin* 林) which is itself inflected as "deep" (*shen* 深; not "deep in the woods" but "deep woods"), that is, possibly, "dense" or "dark." Interestingly, some traditional editions of the poem have not the character *jing* 景 ("light") but *ying* 影 ("shadow"); commentators declare both terms interchangeable and interpret either *fanjing* 返景 or *fanying* 返影 consistently as the slanting sunlight at dusk. Yet whether as "light" or as "shadow," it is only an indirect (*fan* 返; "reflected" or "cast back") phenomenon of light that brings with it long shadows; its mediated nature corresponds to the preceding "echo" of human speech. The final line starts with the word *fu* 復, which as "again" may be taken as an adverb for "to shine on" (*zhao* 照) or as another full verb "to return, to resume." Semantically, it is directly parallel to the adjective "reflected" or "cast back" (*fan* 返) in the previous line. The single truly descriptive phrase in the entire poem is "(blue-)green moss" (*qing tai* 青苔), yet even here, the color word *qing* 青 ("blue," "green," "blue-green," "azure") is more archetypal than it is specific.

The most critical word of the poem, however, might be the very last, in its strategic position. Both translators take *shang* 上 as the postpositional (in English prepositional) "on, upon," creating a smooth reading in English. But this reading is problematic for two reasons: first, and most importantly, the postposition "on, upon" is already implied in the verb "to shine upon" (*zhao* 照), making the combination of *zhao* 照 ... *shang* 上 as "to shine upon" ungrammatical. Second, somewhat less compellingly, prosody normally demands the word *shang* (rhyming with *xiang* 響 ["echo"] at the end of line two) not in the departing (*qusheng* 去聲) but in the rising (*shangsheng* 上聲) tone.[82] In this tone, however, the word is not the postposition "on, upon" but unequivocally the verb "to rise."[83]

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82   In the rhyme group *yang* 養.

83   The tonal distinction of *shang* as a rhyme word, while generally observed in Tang poetry, has a sufficient number of exceptions, including in Wang Wei's own poetry and in that of

There are different ways to interpret this line. Peter A. Boodberg believed that the poet "must have depicted here one of the ever-wondrous aspects of sunset: its glow slowly ascending a mountain to its very top and fading into the void," by which the poem, in a "rondeau effect" returns to the "empty mountain" of its beginning.[84] But there are other possibilities, too: first, *zhao* may not be verb but a noun, making *fu zhao*, as "resuming," "returning," or "responding" light perfectly parallel to the "reflected light" (or shadows) in the preceding line. With this, "blue-green moss" is not "shone upon"; instead, it is that from which the light "arises."

But why does all this matter? The final line is the climax of the poem, and the smooth English translations are not just flattening and trivializing but inaccurate: in my understanding of the text, they remove precisely what the poem may be all about. The multiple possibilities embodied in the final line are not the problem but the very point of its parataxis: if this is a text fundamentally concerned with perception, then the polyvalent ending *performs* the possibilities and limits of human epistemology on the linguistic level. Where the first half of the poem draws the limits of "seeing" and "hearing," the second half unfolds the cosmic drama of existence through the dynamic depiction of the

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his friend Pei Di裴迪 (b. ca. 714). On the other hand, a database search within the *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Complete Poems of the Tang) yields 2,643 instances of *zhao*. Of these, there is only a single case that would seem to have *shang* following *zhao* as postpositional "upon" – but even that one case has a known textual variant in place of *shang*. By contrast, if *zhao* [...] *shang* had been a regular grammatical structure as "to shine upon," we would see countless examples of it – but we don't, and nor do we find them in the *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Complete Prose of the Tang). Thus, as *zhao* unambiguously implies *shang*, the construction *zhao* [...] *shang* as "to shine upon" would be redundant and ungrammatical. Finally, the only way to read *shang* not as the verb "to rise" would be to reconstruct *qing tai shang* 青苔上 as a contraction of *qing tai zhi shang* 青苔之上 ("[the place] above the green moss"), where *shang* would then, as a noun, be the direct object of *zhao*. This reading, however, seems outweighed by the other evidence (tonality of *shang*, parallelism of *fan ying* and *fu zhao*). – I thank Paul W. Kroll, Thomas Mazanec, and Li Linfang 李林芳 for their comments and help in reviewing both the tonal and the grammatical issues involved in this final line of the poem.

84   Boodberg, "Cedules from a Berkeley Workshop in Asiatic Philology (with Postcript by S.H. Chen)," in: *Selected Works of Peter A. Boodberg*, comp. by Alvin P. Cohen, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, p. 175. Burton Watson, in his analysis of the poem, also points to the problem of *shang*; see his *Chinese Lyricism: Shih Poetry from the Second through the Twelfth Century*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1971, pp. 10–12. Watson notes that his own translation, "now that the reader has some knowledge of the coriginal, will be seen to abound in unhappy compromises": "Empty hills, no one in sight,/only the sound of someone talking:/late sunlight enters the deep wood,/shining over the green moss again."

most evanescent of all phenomena, light – and not even direct light but "re-flected" light (or shadows) and "resuming/returning/responding luster." While the first couplet contrasts "seeing" and "hearing," the second couplet juxtapos-es light "entering" and "rising" – or even "shadows entering" and "luster rising." In short, "Deer Enclosure" is not at all a small vignette of quiet landscape medi-tation. If we describe it in non-Chinese "Western" terms – which we must and can, as long as we are aware of the transpositions involved – we might call it a cosmological, phenomenological, and epistemological discourse.

I read Wang Wei's poem as a work of World Literature in a double sense. First, its linguistic structure is *not* the standard fare of Tang poetry. Staged in the simplest possible language, it undermines and upsets the codified certain-ties of expression where the final couplet provides us with the poet's emotion-al conclusion; further, its linguistic simplicity sublates the high craft of poetic expression for which Wang Wei was celebrated in the first place. The seemingly obvious surface meaning of its final line – recreated in the two English transla-tions but also shared by *all* modern Chinese interpretations I have seen – is revealed as deceptive only with the final breath of the poem, in the difference between a rising or falling intonation of the word *shang* (and its correspond-ing grammatical function). Vocally, this intonation mimetically stages the up-ward (verb) – as opposed to downward (postposition) – movement of the light phenomenon depicted, creating a somatic experience in the reader/speaker as soon as he or she sounds out the poem, mentally or viva voce according to the prosodic rules of Tang poetry. Even beyond the question of basic grammar (with "on, upon" already implied in the verb "to shine upon"), this somatic ex-perience directly collides with the modern reading.

The second sense in which I take "Deer Enclosure" as World Literature lies in the depth of meaning and structure it contributes, potentially, to any under-standing of what poetry can be. Both formally and semantically, Wang Wei's poem questions the normative worldview of its culture of origin where the natural cosmos is framed in the image of the imperial state.[85] In translation, it is not possible to recreate its entire original parataxis and syntactic polyva-lence, carefully crafted through syntactic and semantic parallelism – and this loss on the formal level we must accept. But this does not provide license to abandon the profound meaning embodied in the poetic form altogether. Syn-tactic discontinuity, ambiguity, dislocation, and tonality are not accidents but

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85   See Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 31, passim.

deliberate choices in Tang poetry.[86] Likewise, "ambiguities not only act to shatter the narrow sense of the words; they establish another relation between the words. Breaking the linearity of unitary meaning in the sentence, they introduce a process of reversibility or of reciprocal becoming between the subject and the object, between here and elsewhere, and, finally, between what is said and what is unsaid."[87]

To give up on these fundamental aspects of Wang Wei's poetry means to give up on that poetry altogether. Instead, we should strive to transform the original text into a work that recreates the cosmological experience of the original poem and, as a result, constitutes an experience of striking alterity in translation – rather than pulling the text, and its readers along with it, into the gentle, deadly lull of our very own "Chinese nature poetry." That sort of "nature poetry," as it still dominates orientalist translations across European languages (perhaps nowhere more kitschy than in German),[88] has nothing to offer and is largely responsible for the overall marginality of classical Chinese literature in critical comparative contexts.

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86 Yu-Kung Kao and Tsu-Lin Mei, "Syntax, Diction, and Imagery in T'ang Poetry," in: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 31 (1971), p. 64: "When one noun or noun phrase immediately follows another, the condition is *discontinuity*. When two or more grammatical constructions coexist in a line, the condition is *ambiguity* […] both work against a forward movement of the poem. A third condition is *dislocation* – when the normal word order of a line is disturbed, or when a phrase intrudes in the middle of a line which otherwise has a natural flow."

87 François Cheng, "Some Reflections on Chinese Poetic Language and Its Relation to Chinese Cosmology," in: Shuen-fu Lin / Stephen Owen (eds.), *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice: Shih Poetry from the Late Han to the T'ang*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 40.

88 Consider this quite representative sample of titles of classical Chinese poetry in German translation, all published or republished within the last three decades: *Mein Haus liegt menschenfern doch nah den Dingen. Dreitausend Jahre chinesischer Poesie* [My House Lies Far From People Yet Close To Things: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry]; *Frühling im Jadehaus* (Spring in the Jade Mansion); *Chrysanthemen im Spiegel* [Chrysanthemums in the Mirror]; *Wang Wei. Jenseits der weißen Wolken. Die Gedichte des Weisen vom Südgebirge* [Wang Wei: Beyond the White Clouds – The Poems of the Wise Man From the Southern Mountain]; *In den späten Jahren begehr' ich nur die Stille: Klassische chinesische Gedichte* [In My Late Years I Only Desire Quiescence]; *Gedichte vom Kalten Berg: Das Lob des Lebens im Geist des Zen* [Poems from Cold Mountain: The Praise of Life in the Spirit of Zen]; *Leise hör' ich die Blüten fallen: Gedichte aus der chinesischen Klassik – Tang – Dynastie* [Quietly I Hear the Blossoms Fall: Poetry from the Chinese Classical Period – The Tang Dynasty]; *Windgeflüster: Chinesische Gedichte über die Vergänglichkeit* [Whisper in the Wind: Chinese Poems about Transience].

How, then, might a translation look like that begins from the assumption that "Deer Enclosure" is not the standard fare? Clearly, the poem does not "translate itself" (although on its surface, it may well look like an extreme case of poetry made, and made easy, for translation); any translator will have to choose from many possibilities. What is not optional but must be captured, however, is the radicality of a text that is not descriptive but dynamic, and a philosophical challenge to the reader. It might go like this:

> The empty mountain: one does not see a person,
> only hears echoes of human speech.
> Reflected light enters deep woods,
> Responding luster from green moss rises.

This reading may well be open to various challenges. But when one of the most learned and accomplished authors in the Chinese poetic tradition reduced poetic expression to its absolute minimum, he defied the prevailing aesthetic norms of its time in multiple ways: the poem offers virtually no description of anything, provides no historical reference, foregoes the rich tapestry of Tang poetic imagery, metaphor, and lexicon, and offers no emotional response. It is defined in entirely negative terms, and it performs its negative aesthetics through the continuous expression of denial and refraction ("empty," "not," "only," "echo," "reflected," "responding"). That such poetry from eighth-century China is now read under the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European paradigm of "nature poetry" is a case study in assimilation, erasure, and recon-figuration through translation. In such a reading and translation, "Deer Enclo-sure" has little to offer to World Literature: neither what was special about it in its own environment, nor an experience of "fresh, new, and spirited" (Goethe) alterity beyond its place of origin. In fact, even my translation offered here may be an exercise in futility: because we are so conditioned to identify particular texts under the paradigm of European "nature poetry," the translation, if iso-lated from a destabilizing interpretation, may fit that paradigm just fine. To read it differently, does one have to avoid translating it altogether?[89] Is there – and should there be – anything identifiably "Chinese" about it? And in not translating it for those who need a translation, how can we get to why this poem is worth reading?

But perhaps, with perceptive readers, we do not have to accept translation as failure and erasure. The words quoted above to describe Goethe's late poetry

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89   To allude to Emily Apter's provocative *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untrans-latability*, London: Verso, 2013, that speaks to many of the questions raised in the present essay.

apply as well to Wang Wei's verses, identifying a poetry "of special character not only in its art of seeing but by thematizing this art of seeing." It also is the kind of poetry for which Goethe himself demanded a language of translation that "corresponds to the rhythmic, metrical, and prosaic ways of speech of the original." If taken in this way and translated and read on its own terms,[90] "Deer Enclosure" might reward us with the delights of World Literature as we begin to experience its cosmological drama and unusual linguistic properties. We won't be able to reproduce the "rising tone" of the final syllable, but we can easily translate the actual word that this tone requires, and to reveal it as the unusual choice it was in eighth-century China.

Here, finally, it is useful to return to the paradox of tradition: what makes Wang Wei, Bei Dao, and Goethe part of World Literature is not at all that they are representative of their time or that their poems "translate themselves." It is that they are different. "Deer Enclosure" puts the same demands on its readers as Goethe did with his late poetry, or Bei Dao with his early works: all of them are written against the norms of their own place and time of origin. In each case, the poetic idiom is not merely discontinuous with, but disruptive of, its own tradition. We only must be careful not to disfigure such intracultural difference into cross-cultural conformity and "camaraderie" (Adorno) on a global scale. At stake is either the end or, when things go well, another beginning of World Literature.

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90   I do share my colleague David Bellos's optimistic outlook on the possibility of translation (see his *Is That a Fish in Your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything,* London: Particular Books, 2011), but only as a utopian endeavor: translation must recognize and respect the untranslatable and, on that basis, proceed with utmost effort, knowing that it must *create a new text, while making that act of creation visible as a reflection of the quality of the original.* From this perspective, a text that "translates itself" is either mistranslated or never worth translating in the first place.