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Translational and narrative epistemologies

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# The translational epistemologies of World Literature

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*للإبستمولوجيات الترجمية في الأدب العالمي*

*Las epistemologías traslacionales de la Literatura Mundial*

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*世界文学的翻译认识论*

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- 1 With the decline of interest in Comparative Literature in the English-speaking academy in the closing decades of the twentieth century (Bernheimer, 1995), there was uncertainty as to the future of modes of literary analysis that might move outside the frames of the nation-state and beyond the monolingual assumptions with which that unit is customarily associated (Gramling, 2016). As will become apparent in the discussion below, these debates emerged with different emphases across different linguistic traditions, but the (re-)emergence of an interest in World Literature has revived more broadly critical engagement with the study of literary production within larger and wider frames, characterized by Christopher Bush (2017) as “bigger than the nation, smaller than the world” (p. 171). As examples of this, Bush (2017) cites the following units:

[...] oceanic (the Transatlantic; the Black Atlantic; various framings of the Pacific; most recently the Indian Ocean), continental (the Americas; Europe; Asia), imperial (Ottoman; Mongol; post-Soviet;

Qing); linguistic (the Sinophone; the Sanskrit cosmopolis), and commercial (the silk road; the Mediterranean). (p. 171)

- 2 The advantage of such approaches is that they have the potential to “break open the limits of the national while retaining enough specificity to allow for in-depth research” (Bush, 2017, p. 171). The emphasis on such a post-national project reflects the extent to which World Literature, in a period that juxtaposes economic globalization with a reassertion of populist nationalism, may also be seen as a political intervention rooted in forms of transnational solidarity, i.e., an attempt—through the identification of culturally inclusive literary works or via the adoption of more open reading practices—to foreground or imagine alternative ways of configuring the world—and, by extension, of creating knowledge about it. The juxtaposition of *world* and *literature* poses, however, a series of other questions, raised by critics such as Pheng Cheah (2016), about the role of World Literature as both creative (and of course commercial) phenomenon. It also offers a parallel set of analytical approaches related to constructing and deconstructing knowledge about the world, both in terms of ideology and phenomenology. What has been striking in such debates is the propensity of critics to operate monolingually, either (a) working across a linguistic zone (such as, as Bush suggests, the Sinophone or the Sanskrit cosmopolis) that transcends national boundaries but largely forgets the tendency of languages to co-exist, in diglossic or polyglossic relations, or (b) rendering invisible the work of translation that enables (and inevitably shapes) criticism that seeks to negotiate multiple boundaries. Yet there is increasing recognition in a number of key works discussed below—among them Apter (2013) and Baer and Woods (2022)—of the importance of an active acknowledgement of the challenges of translation and of associated concepts such as the “untranslatable” in discussions of World Literature. This article engages with these ongoing debates. Focusing primarily on the French-language context, it seeks to explore, within the framework of considerations of the “world” that World Literature reflects or constructs, ways of addressing what may be seen in this context as the epistemological functions of translation, i.e., its role not only as a mode of textual circulation but also as a means of building knowledge about the world. It argues that translation is more than a facilitator in that it creates the means by which texts in different linguistic and

cultural traditions may be brought into dialogue; but that translation also plays a definitional and even constitutive function in World Literature, central to its own function of building understanding about literature's broader world-making power.

- 3 The article opens with a discussion of the ongoing debates—including Forsdick (2019), on which the current study in part builds—regarding the relationship between World Literature and translation. It draws on recent interventions but also analyzes the practical example of *littérature-monde en français* (“world-literature in French”). The study then builds on this overview by foregrounding the function of multilingualism as a key (if often ignored) aspect of the World Literature field, suggesting that the linguistic plurality that underpins World Literature is central to its potential to navigate global complexity. In this reflection on the intersections between multilingualism and translation, I emphasize the generative potential of untranslatability, as formulated by Barbara Cassin and mentioned above, and more particularly the role of this concept in identifying World Literature as a site of translational epistemologies. Translingual and cross-cultural creativity, and the forms of reading and analysis it encourages, are seen as key to the elaboration of potential new forms of knowledge about an interconnected, multilingual world. I conclude with a reflection on the later work of Édouard Glissant on translation and relation, suggesting that the archipelagic practices of creation and interpretation that he outlines may be seen to exemplify the translational epistemologies increasingly associated with World Literature.

## World Literature and the function of translation

- 4 Susan Bassnett (2019), reflecting on her experience of the World Literature Summer Institute at Harvard in 2014, referred to the “abyss between the study of world literature and the study of translation” (p. 1). This appears to be a somewhat paradoxical statement given the growing awareness of the indispensability of translation as a tool in the global circulation that allows much World Literature to come into being, to circulate and then to be read. Translation not only permits texts to exist and circulate between and across cultural and linguistic

traditions; it also often plays a crucial role in enhancing their visibility, granting works written in minoritized languages a life beyond their cultural origin (Mercero, 2021) and on occasion elevating writing outside its national frame to the status of a 'classic' (Bandia et al., 2024). In short, as Lawrence Venuti (2013) notes, "World literature cannot be conceptualized apart from translation" (p. 193). The disconnection that Bassnett notes is nevertheless persistent, as is evident, for example, in the critical attention paid to a manifesto published in *Le Monde* in March 2007 that promotes a specifically French version of World Literature, a *littérature-monde en français* (Le Bris et al., 2007). Little of the commentary on this intervention has in fact yet explored, in any direct way, the complex questions of translation implicit in but never fully addressed by this polemical text, coordinated by authors Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud and signed by forty other writers from across the French-speaking world. Instead, what is striking is that much discussion of this "world-literature in French" often seems to be locked into a monolingual, Gallocentric agenda largely dictated by the manifesto itself, reflecting (rather than offering any active solution to) the crises evident in French literature as a national literature since the closing decades of the twentieth century (Marx, 2005; Todorov, 2007). It is important to note that this linguistic self-referentiality exists despite the fact that one of the earliest critics of the document, Jean-Pierre Cavaillé (2007), signalled these very limitations from the outset in an article in the French daily newspaper *Libération*, noting that "What is unbearable is that the world, the wide world, is once again perceived, viewed exclusively via the small end of the telescope of the French language, and from its undisputed and indisputable centre" (Ce qui est insupportable, c'est que le monde, le vaste monde, une fois de plus n'est perçu, aperçu, que par le petit bout de la lorgnette de la seule langue française et depuis son centre en fait incontesté et incontestable) (my translation).

- 5 I begin with these observations on *littérature-monde en français* not as an attempt to single out debates regarding World Literature in the French-language context for their specific monolingual bias or as evidence of any residual ethnolinguistic nationalism in approaches to literature. Such monolingual emphases exist across critical traditions. This article seeks instead to contribute further, from this starting

point in the recent French-language tradition, to ongoing debates about World Literature and translation. It aims to extend the current considerations of the translational dimensions of genre, linguistic diversity, textual circulation, and literary values (Sun, 2019) in order to ask more focused questions about the function of translation, within and across texts, as a key element of the role played by literature in creating knowledge about the world. As I suggested above, the phenomenon of “world-literature in French” has often been understood as one that emerged in a specifically French and Francophone niche (Forsdick, 2010b, 2010c), taking little account of those related and competing concepts—such as “World Literature”, *Weltliteratur* or *litteratura universal*—that have emerged across other linguistic traditions. *Littérature-monde en français* emerged and evolved, as a result, as a strangely oxymoronic phenomenon, monolingually French yet still aspiring towards the more broadly disruptive transnational and translational reach that its active hyphenation of *literature* and *world* implies. This is despite the linguistic realities of the Francosphere, evident not least in France itself, a country that, in tension with the ethnolinguistic (and often linguaphobic) nationalism of its republican universalist ideology, has always already been characterized by multilingualism (Blanchet, 2019). In the light of such an analysis, the term “French-speaking” world itself becomes a misnomer, for the French language exists throughout this zone in the diglossic or polyglossic configurations alluded to above. As such, the phenomenon of “world-literature in French” illustrates the state of the contemporary “global languagescape” in which, as Mary Louise Pratt (2011) has noted, “new forms of linguistic distribution are in play” (p. 279). Speculating on the futures of multilingual, translingual, translational literary forms in which these sociolinguistic phenomena are manifest, Pratt (2011) adds: “This is another reason why even the experts have no idea what the world will look like linguistically a hundred years from now. For many of the same reasons, we have no idea what literature will look like either” (p. 279). There is a need to build on such reflections regarding what a purposefully post-monolingual (Yildiz, 2012) World Literature increasingly resembles—and to ask more particularly whether and indeed how the place of translation in such a designation may move beyond the vehicular to acquire broader epistemological implications.

## World Literature in a multilingual frame

- 6 It has become commonplace to note that any definitive concept of World Literature—since Goethe designated the phenomenon with the German term *Weltliteratur* in his conversations with his young disciple Johann Peter Eckermann in January 1827—has long been elusive. These genealogies are nevertheless telling and underline the distinctiveness of debates about World Literature across different language traditions. It is essential to note, for instance, that the emergence of *Weltliteratur* in the context of the German Romanticist movement was arguably the first attempt to overthrow the Gallo-centric drive, most notably in Friedrich Schleiermacher's writings on translation and his critique of the French imperialist method of translation (Schleiermacher, 1992). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the concept has again attracted close attention across a range of linguistic traditions, not least in the context of the globalization of the novel and of the emergence of contemporary literatures in post-national and transnational forms. Within this broader context, any clear definition of “world-literature in French” itself has been equally absent, with many dismissing the movement as little more than a form of literary marketing, i.e., an example of carefully orchestrated media hype around the already very visible appearance of writing in France and the broader Francosphere that is variously and disruptively postcolonial, transnational, and translingual (Hargreaves et al., 2010).<sup>1</sup> The 2007 manifesto announcing the advent of “world-literature in French” promised much but ultimately delivered little in terms of concrete illustration of the literary tendencies that it proposed. An announced periodical associated with the movement may never have materialized, but the launch in 2014 of two World Literature prizes in France—one for a work written in French, the other for a text originally written in another language but subsequently made available in French translation—indicated some sort of acknowledgement of questions of multilingualism and gestured towards the role of translation in their resolution. This understanding of World Literature as either produced in one specific language or translated into that language as a means of circulation

beyond its context of origin resonates with questions central to this article and raises key questions about the function of translation: including (a) does this recognition reflect a new inclusivity, moving beyond initially monolingual French-language emphases to acknowledge the various translational dimensions of writing in or across different language traditions, as was the case with an earlier literary movement in France, *Pour une littérature voyageuse*, from which “world-literature in French” emerged (Forsdick, 2010a)? Or (b) does it instead represent a more retrograde step, perpetuating that same binary by embedding a distinction (and, by extension, creating an implicit hierarchy) between texts written directly in French and those translated from languages other than French, relegating translation again to its more functional purpose?

- 7 In the absence of any definitive response to these questions or active illustration of their implications beyond the original 2007 manifesto, it remains unclear whether the “world” in *littérature-monde* remains, in this way, fundamentally fractured along linguistic lines (implying the perpetuation of a Gallocentrism in terms of which translation is a means of recuperating and assimilating other literatures into French), or whether a more purposeful foregrounding of the concept of translation might instead open up new possibilities, previously unimagined (and indeed unintended) in the initial outlining of any World Literature in its French-language manifestations. The reflections that follow seek to situate questions of initial language choice more overtly in relation to those of translation—with translation seen here not as a mode of circulation of texts between different linguistic spheres, but instead as a potential site not only of literary creativity but also, by extension, of the creation of knowledge in its own right. Rather than seeing writing as rigidly codified variously as monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, I outline the possibilities afforded by actively understanding the world literary text itself as an increasingly dynamic and translingual “translation zone”. The term suggested by Emily Apter (2006) designates “sites that are ‘in-translation’, i.e., belonging to no single, discrete language or single medium of communication” (p. 6). Apter’s designation is a telling one in the context of the current reflections, for it makes explicit the literary and linguistic dimensions of a cognate concept, designated by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) as a “contact zone”, which refers to “an attempt to

invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (p. 7). In the context of World Literature, this emphasis on the geographic and historical is complemented by attention to the linguistic, allowing these contrasting ideas of co-presence and disjuncture to respond to Bassnett’s reservations about World Literature and translation with which the article opened, and to encapsulate the ultimately entangled phenomena of multilingualism and translation that underpin this article. The readability of various multilingual practices and other literary manifestations of linguistic plurality is accordingly linked to a potentially broader understanding of translation as one of the emerging paradigms underpinning cultural production—and I would add production of knowledge about the world through literature—in the twenty-first century.

## **World Literature and translational epistemologies**

- 8 Deploying these concepts allows a much broader reflection on the role of translation in relation to World Literature than is often the case. In the process, it highlights the implications of growing observations about the overlap or intersection between translation and globalized forms of literary production in the light of critical tensions around concepts such as Anglocentrism (Webb, 2013), epistemicide (Price, 2023), and perhaps most strikingly untranslatability (Cassin, 2004; Apter, 2013; Harrison, 2014; Xie, 2020). It is important, however, to develop, and in many ways move beyond, understandings of the various roles—ranging from the instrumental to the heuristic—that translation is understood to play in the production, construction, and consumption of World Literature. In the context of this special issue, I seek in particular to explore how these interpretations, while remaining important, may be supplemented by more epistemological understandings of the potential of translation in this literary space. It is clear that translation has regularly been deployed as a defining element of World Literature, notably in the foundational work of David Damrosch, who has claimed in numerous contexts that it is circulation among different languages that underpins the ‘gains’ of

any work that falls into the category, i.e., it is translation that permits the text to “circulat[e] out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin” (Damrosch, 2003, p. 12). Such translingual and translational displacements also underpin key elements of Pascale Casanova’s highly influential thesis in *La République mondiale des lettres* (Casanova, 1999; 2004), according to which centripetal passage through Paris (often, importantly, accompanied by translation into French) has functioned as a form of literary consecration, not only in the past but also more recently for emerging national literatures in the specific wake of decolonization. This article explores, expands, and ultimately challenges such reflections on the place of translation in the production and consumption of World Literature. It accepts (as is now broadly accepted) that translation may form in this context a key trope or lens through which writing associated with this category may be identified and explored, but will further suggest in what follows that World Literature may also itself prove to be generative of a broader translational epistemology.

- 9 It is important to reassert that the concept of World Literature—from its initial coining by Goethe in the form of *Weltliteratur*, as alluded to above—has sought to disrupt, through various translational forms of the circulation of texts, the methodological nationalism evident in the study of national literatures. The act of translating World Literature was, for instance, politically motivated in the German Romanticist movement, as it developed the non-domesticating method of translating, as opposed to the French approach to translation as a *belle infidèle*, with an emphasis on elegance of style trumping any adherence to the original text (Venuti, 1995, pp. 84–98). However, as I have suggested in the recent French case, World Literature has often replaced such biases with others, notably those of a limited, monocultural epistemology that risks approaching literature alinguistically, according to a fundamentally monolingual logic. Such an understanding fails to acknowledge the challenges of reading, researching, and more broadly thinking in the actively multilingual ways that seem central to any genuinely worldly World Literature, i.e., “in the presence” (*en présence*)—to adopt the phrase of Martinican thinker Edouard Glissant, of whom more below—“of all the world’s languages” (*de toutes les langues du monde*) (Glissant, 2020a, p. 23/1996, p. 40). It also largely ignores the associated phenomenon that Alison Phipps

(2013) has called a more general “unmooring” of languages in the twenty-first century. Phipps refers here to the way in which the monolingualizing tendencies of historically centralized states such as France—tendencies often shored up by cultural and literary institutions such as the Académie française (Estival & Pennycook, 2011)—have increasingly been superseded by the contemporary condition known as post-monolingualism (Yildiz, 2012).

- 10 The persistence of monolingualism is evident, in particular, in much Anglophone scholarship, but perpetuated through the Anglocentrism and even Anglonormativity cultivated by the global academic publishing industry (Amano, 2023; Salomone, 2022). It has been rigorously critiqued by scholars such as David Gramling (2016), and there is undoubtedly increasing awareness of the potential of a more inclusively translational dynamics that underpins the circulation of works of literature in a global frame. In a pedagogical setting, building on now well-established understandings of the (in)visibility of the translator, students studying World Literature in one language only (usually, but not exclusively, in English) are increasingly taught to read translations consciously *qua* translations (Baer & Woods, 2023), encouraged to focus accordingly on challenges identified and then solutions proposed by the translator as opposed to assuming that they have some sort of seamless, unmediated access as readers to the ‘original’ text. Such an approach relates to the increasing awareness—popularized in the provocative work of scholars such as Clive Scott (2012; 2018)—that translation may itself be the highest form of literary criticism as it engages with the micro and the macro, i.e., implies an incomparable intimacy with the text and a familiarity not only with its polysemy and other linguistic (and indeed multimodal) subtleties, but also close familiarity with intertextual and intercultural resonances.
- 11 This emphasis on the epistemological functions of translation suggests, *in extremis*, that “a text is known *only by translating* it and never by only reading it” (Dickow, 2021, emphasis in original); in other words, translation is a privileged form of reading, but not all reading is translation. Such reflections on the translational dimensions of consumption and reception are complemented with an increasing attention to the place of translation in production, with Rebecca Walkowitz (2015) exploring the extent to which World Liter-

ature is inherently “born translated”, i.e., studying how translation acts as a literary medium in its own right rather than simply as an element of a text’s subsequent circulation and interpretation. Moving then beyond translingual shifts towards the actively translational and focusing on English-language literature, relatively recent studies such as Walkowitz’s *Born translated* (2015) and Fiona Doloughan’s *English as a literature in translation* (2016) have begun to suggest that translation is not secondary to much contemporary literature, cannot be reduced to playing the instrumental or heuristic functions to which I have alluded above, but exists instead as an element essential to the production and interpretation of literature, linked closely to the poetics underpinning its creation. “[T]ranslation”, writes Walkowitz (2015), “functions as a thematic, structural, conceptual, and sometimes even typographical device. [...] [Born translated] works are *written for translation*, in the hope of being translated, but they are also often written as translations, pretending to take place in a language other than the one in which they have, in fact, been composed” (p. 4).

- 12 Much of Walkowitz’s analysis here overlaps with arguments around translingual writing, exploring texts that circulate in multiple languages so that the distinction between original and translation collapses (Kellman & Lvovich, 2021). As Vijay Kumar (2007) has noted, “We live in a society where heteroglossia is commonplace. It’s a society where, if you seek to represent that society in a single language, no matter what that language is, you are in some profound way distorting the reality” (p. 104). In the light of this observation on the normalization of multilingualism in the contemporary world, the challenge is to reflect on World Literature as a mode of translation both within and across languages, i.e., as both intra- and interlingual. As Rafael Schögler (2022) notes in his study of the multilingual collection of essays entitled *The great regression*, “In contrast to relationships described with the prefix *inter* or *multi*, the *trans* prefix transcends binaries. It does not designate transfer taking place *between* separate entities, but rather emphasizes intricacies and transformation from within” (p. 29; emphasis in original). World Literature understood in these terms, as a translation zone, acknowledges once more what Bakhtin called (almost a century ago) the “heterology” of the apparently monolingual text. The French, English, Spanish,

Portuguese, and other world languages often seen as the predominant media of World Literature are not only languages variegated in their usage, requiring thus for their study approaches that are more heterogeneous; they are also means of communication that exist in these persistently and increasingly diglossic and polyglossic configurations alluded to above, not least in countries such as France or Britain or Australia or the USA, where they are systematically subject to processes of translation, but also drawn into new linguistic and cultural phenomena such as creolization and translanguaging (Rosenwalt, 2008). Literature can, as a result, be seen as an increasingly translational formation, leading to a progressive provincialization of English, and indeed of French and of other majority languages. Openness to a wider range of languages, or at least to a variety of linguistic interconnections, is integral to a reconfiguration of the frames in which literature emerges, meaning that a concept of literary belonging that associates a single language with a unified geography (whether national, transnational or regional) is increasingly redundant. Reflecting on eco-translation, Michael Cronin (2017) has argued that “communities using minority languages have a right to be heard and translated in a globalized knowledge- and policy-making environment” (p. 2; cited in Schögler, 2022, p. 33), the implication being, in Schögler’s (2022) terms, that there is a need to promote “a translational epistemology which is not limited to producing knowledge but sets out to question and reflect upon prevailing conditions of transnational [...] knowledge-making epistemologies” (p. 33).

## **Literary creativity and/as translational epistemology**

- 13 World Literature, as creative and critical practice, increasingly plays a role in such processes. Studies of contemporary literature have recently responded to these linguistic, cultural, and ideological concerns by actively foregrounding questions of translation, not only as a key phenomenon that enables reading interlingually across traditions, but also as a source of resistance to any monolingual or nationalist status quo. As part of a related reflection on the inherent creativity of the phenomenon (Lukes, 2023), translation has progressively embedded itself in understandings of the actual production of

the translingual and transnational literary text, as if it is not only a mode of circulation and critical consumption, but also a process of world-making in its own right. A recent proliferation of studies on translingual or exophonic writing—with authors opting to operate in languages other than their first—has underlined the contemporary visibility of the phenomenon in a variety of contexts, whilst excavating its historical precedents and their cross-cultural reach (Kellman, 2000). Seen as a particularly striking example of literature as a translation zone, translingualism serves as agent of the active disruption of linguistic and national boundaries, and of the defiance of any attempt to create clear hierarchies between them. This is particularly striking in the Anglosphere, where translingual writing in English has a dynamic of its own, associated with what Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien (2004) dubs the disruptive “weirding” of language evident in the work of exophonic Anglophone authors such as Junot Diaz. Rachel Gilmour (2020) builds on such an analysis to explore what she calls “Bad English”, contemporary writing in Britain that is denaturalized and in the process revitalized by the tangible presence of linguistic difference on the page.

- 14 Such an understanding of an actively translational literary creativity echoes the observation of Reine Meylaerts (2013) on the ways in which multilingualism poses both challenges and opportunities for translation studies:

Traditional definitions considered translation, implicitly or explicitly, as the *full* transposition of *one* source language message by *one* target language message for the benefit of a *monolingual* target public. [...] At the heart of multilingualism, we find translation. Translation is not taking place *in between monolingual* realities but rather *within multilingual* realities. In multilingual cultures (assuming there are such things as monolingual cultures), translation contributes to creating culture, in mutual exchange, resistance, interpenetration. (p. 519; emphasis in original)

- 15 Contemporary manifestations of these phenomena within the multilingual realities of literary production always, of course, need to be historicized in relation to a long tradition of multilingual writing and the production of translation effects in the creative text. Contemporary examples of the literary text as translation zone seem to

indicate new directions: translation is seen as embedded in the text rather than as a process that links separate texts. In other words, there is an active shift away from the traditional definition of translation as the replacement of one language by another, of one literary text by another. In terms of identifying concrete examples of such practices, illustrating a translational poetics that underpins the epistemological potential of World Literature to (re)make the world, the Caribbean provides strikingly creative instances, including the work of the Martinican poet and translator Monchoachi (pseudonym of André Pierre-Louis). Monchoachi's writing, in texts such as *Lémistè*, *Partition noire et bleue*, and *Fugue vs Fug*, published in 2012, 2016 and 2021 respectively, engages with the linguistic translation zones in which the writer operates by adopting what Kavita Ashana Singh (2014) dubs "complicated curations between Creoles and standardized European languages" (p. 91). Literature that emerges from such a poetics of actively intratextual translation depends at the same time, she continues, on the introduction of translational skills in the act of reading: "Frequently written between tongues, then, this linguistic and literary form of creoleness calls on readers to, consciously or otherwise, engage in continuous translation as they navigate these bilingual and multilingual texts" (Singh, 2014, p. 91), suggesting that understandings of world-making in such texts are as much about reception and interpretation as they are about production.

- 16 Writing by authors such as Monchoachi, himself a translator of Samuel Beckett into Martinican Creole, is not so much a challenge to the translator as a questioning of the usefulness or necessity or even possibility of translation itself, as the text achieves a form of expression that Lise Gauvin (2012), drawing on the work of Édouard Glissant (1997) and adapting his concept of the *Tout-Monde* (Whole-World), has dubbed a *Tout-langue* (Whole-Language). This is not the search for a universal language, but the development of a linguistic consciousness in which translation and solidarity with wider networks of multiple languages become apparent, disruptively and unsettlingly so as they create what Gauvin (2023) has recently called a literary "intranquility". Paul Bandia (2012) has identified the more general implications for French-language poetics of such a shift: the emergence in postcolonial contexts—in the wake of pioneering

earlier writers such as Ahmadou Kourouma—of a “heterolingual literature, where several languages or language varieties are at play, defying traditional monolingual translation principles and calling into question the status of the original versus the translated text” (2014, p. 421). Complementary tendencies are also evident in other contexts, notably contemporary North African literature, in which the novel is increasingly understood as—in Hoda El-Shakry’s (2016) terms— “pluralistic, polyphonic and polysemic” (p. 8), developing Moroccan author Abdelkebir Khatibi’s earlier reflections in texts such as *La Mémoire tatouée* and *Amour bilangue*, published respectively in 1971 and 1983, on literary bilingualisms and the status of North African literature in French as a “permanent translation” (El-Shakry, 2016, p. 13).

- 17 These creative and theoretical interventions foreground the status of World Literature as a potential site of epistemic and cultural difference, in the understanding of which translation plays privileged and multiple roles. As such, there is a pressing need to move beyond translation as part of what remains an important broader multilingual methodology that is gaining increasing traction in the context of the decolonization of knowledge (Phipps, 2019). Specifically, there is a need to foreground an actively translational epistemology to respond in particular to the growing emphasis on linguistic sensitivity in the construction of knowledge, evident notably in Barbara Cassin’s (2004) philosophical interventions around the notion of the *(in)traduisible*, or *(un)translatable*, a notion developed in relation to World Literature by Emily Apter (2013) and others. The concept of the *(un)translatable* is central to the study of World Literature itself, not least as readers and critics grapple with the divergences and convergences between the term and its (not-quite-)equivalents in other linguistic traditions alluded to earlier (*Weltliteratur*, *littérature-monde*, *literatura mundial*,...), and as they seek to address different understandings of translation itself, encoded in the various etymologies of the words (*traduction*, *Übersetzung*, ...) used to describe the process across different languages (Guldin, 2022). At the same time, as Dilip Menon (2022) has recently demonstrated in *Changing theory: Thinking from the Global South*, any systematic attempt to develop critical approaches suited to analyzing the global depends not only on generating a conceptual vocabulary that jolts us out of Anglo-

centrism and broader Euronormality, but also on forcing recognition that the monolingual risks being the monologic. Vocabularies such as those proposed by Menon and his collaborators are underpinned by epistemological sensitivities that will necessarily be multilingual. At the same time, these vocabularies are freighted via translational approaches that seek actively to de-create language hegemonies, avoiding in the process the polarizing implications of any bilingual (or even multilingual) approach, yet also following Tim Ingold and others in challenging the assumption that translation undermines a concept of “the world in which people dwell as a continuous and unbounded landscape, endlessly varied in its features and contours, yet without seams or breaks” (Ingold, 1993, p. 226).<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion: Translation as archipelagic practice

- 18 I turn in conclusion to Edouard Glissant, one of the key thinkers to articulate such an approach in an initially Antillean but then more global frame. Glissant's work has already been cited above. Signatory of the 2007 manifesto “for a world-literature in French”, Glissant nevertheless openly questioned the closed concept of *littérature-monde* through his notion of the *Tout-Monde*. He did this in part by challenging the monolingualism inherent in the “en français” by which that body of writing was oxymoronically defined, in part by linking his own reflections on writing “in the presence of all the world's languages” (*en présence de toutes les langues du monde*) to a coherent statement of translational epistemology (Glissant, 2020a, p. 23/1996, p. 40). This statement is articulated throughout his work, as both literary practitioner and global thinker, notably around the concept of what he called *la Relation* (Glissant, 1990), a reflection on the forms of global co-existence, interdependency and co-constitutiveness that transform borders (including linguistic ones) from being impermeable to becoming points of entanglement and passage. This approach also resonates with his engagement with language in the context of the *Tout-Monde*, according to which multilingualism is not a quantitative accumulation of languages but a qualitative reflection on their relationality (Gauvin, 1999, p. 282; Sofo, 2022, p. 79). In one of his final essays, *La Cohée du Lamentin*, Glissant

foregrounds translation not as a secondary activity but as a literary genre in its own right and no longer a tool in the service of other literary genres: “It is not only an invention limited to marvellous equivalences between two language systems; it also creates new categories and concepts, it shakes up existing orders” (Elle n’est pas seulement une invention limitée à des équivalences merveilleuses entre deux systèmes de langage, elle crée aussi des catégories et des concepts inédits, elle bouscule des ordres établis) (Glissant, 2005, p. 143, my translation; see also Britton, 2008a). Translation is seen here as “put[ting] languages and cultures into circulation in new interlocutory contexts, joining them and their historical traditions in new and dynamic ways” (Bermann, 2014a, p. 80). Although for a long time largely invisible in the literature on translation theory, Glissant in fact produced across his career a substantial body of thought on language and translation. At the same time, as part of an emerging canon of World Literature, his own writing has itself undergone a process of translation that has ensured its impact on postcolonial thought more broadly.<sup>3</sup>

- 19 In *La Cohée du Lamentin*, Glissant links translation to the notion of *Relation*, which is central to much of his work, suggesting that translation may in fact be seen as a form of multirelation, a way of making sense of the world. Translation links all parts of the world without relying in the process on any move towards universal equivalence that ultimately erases or absorbs political, cultural, and historical specificities. Celia Britton (2008b) sees translation in Glissant as “the invention of a new *langage* that bridges two *langues*” (p. 78), i.e., it functions as a form of creativity that creates links between cultures in a process that activates distinctive linguistic and cultural systems while transforming that linkage into a new form of relation that is purposefully translational. Translation thus attains a key epistemological function in Glissant’s notion of a new archipelagic thought, in which opacity operates in a similar way to untranslatability, avoiding any rigid polarization of closed systems of thought and remaining “non-systematic, changeful, open to the unexpected” (Bermann 2014b, p. 4). Such an approach is evident also in attempts to render Glissant’s own work into multiple languages, where concepts lend themselves to an “archipelagic reading” (Sofa, 2020, p. 1) via which processes of deliberative, thick, prismatic translation allow the reader

to grapple productively with the opacity of Glissant's work, which "can only be read in Relation to its translations, in this multilinguistic 'rhizome' created by the fruits of the linguistic and literary hybridization that it has itself produced" (Sofa, 2020, p. 11). In his *Traité du Tout-Monde*, Glissant elaborates a translational epistemology via description of an "art de la fugue":

La traduction est comme un art de la fugue, c'est-à-dire, si bellement, un renoncement qui accomplit. Il y a renoncement quand le poème, transcrit dans une autre langue, a laissé échapper une si grande part de son rythme, de ses structures secrètes, de ses assonances, de ces hasards qui sont l'accident et la permanence de l'écriture. Il faut consentir à cet échappement, et ce renoncement est la part de soi qu'en toute poétique on abandonne à l'autre. L'art de traduire nous apprend la pensée de l'esquive, la pratique de la trace qui, contre les pensées de système, nous indique l'incertain, le menacé, lesquels convergent et nous renforcent. Oui, la traduction, art de l'approche et de l'effleurement, est une fréquentation de la trace. Contre l'absolue limitation des concepts de l'Être, l'art de traduire ramasse l'étant. Tracer dans les langues, c'est ramasser l'imprévisible du monde. Traduire ne revient pas à réduire à une transparence, ni bien entendu à conjoindre deux systèmes de transparence. Dès lors, cette autre proposition, que l'usage de la traduction nous suggère : d'opposer à la transparence des modèles l'opacité ouverte des existences non réductibles. (Glissant, 1997, pp. 28-29)

Translation is like an art of flight, in other words, so eloquently, a renunciation that accomplishes. Renunciation when the poem, transcribed into another language, has given up the greater part of its rhythm, its secret structures, its assonances, these accidents that are the chance and the permanence of writing. We must accept these losses, and this renunciation is the part of oneself that in any poetics we give up to the other. The art of translation teaches us the thinking of evasion, the practice of the trace, which, as against systematic thought, points the way to the uncertain, the threatened, which come together and strengthen us. Yes, translation, art of the approach and the light touch, is a way of frequenting the trace. Against the absolute limitation of the concepts of 'Being', the art of translation brings together the 'being'. To trace in languages is to gather together the unpredictable in the world. Translation does not

consist of reducing something to transparency, nor of course in joining up two systems of transparency. Hence, this other proposition, which the practice of translation suggests: to set against the transparency of models the open opacity of irreducible existences. (Glissant, 2020b, p. 16)

- 20 Glissant moves here beyond any understanding of translation as an instrumental practice that regularly accompanies the creation of knowledge, or even as the crucial heuristic concept central to processes of making meaning. By foregrounding translation in his own concept of Relation, he raises it instead to what Schögler (2022) dubs “the level of an epistemology, where the knowledge-making potential of translation practices is recognized, and where researchers drawing on the assumptions that underpin such an epistemology can engage with translation in a self-reflexive manner to frame their (scholarly) knowledge-making practices” (p. 43). Moreover, the epistemological is underpinned here by a clear ethical purpose, by an ethics that “would accept the ‘opacity’ of the source text, while not overwhelming it or pretending to fully comprehend and transparently restate it in an equivalent semantic and syntactic structure” (Bermann, 2014b, p. 7). Acknowledgement of these translation practices in analyses of World Literature suggests the extent to which this phenomenon might not only serve as a means of reflecting on or analyzing the world, but increasingly also plays a key epistemological role in unmaking and remaking knowledge about that world.

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## NOTES

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1 While this article focuses primarily on current debates in a French-language context, the argument I outline here might be developed beyond the immediate French context in two ways: first, by situating this discussion within a broader historical overview of French translation methodology (considering, for instance, early modern debates in the work of Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt and others about adaptation rather than translation); and secondly, by reflecting on parallel developments in an Anglo-American setting, where World Literature—as was made clear in the opening paragraphs of this article—acts as the direct heir of Comparative Literature, with World Literature now taught widely as a course across Anglo-American universities and colleges.

2 On Ingold and translation, see Harding (2021).

3 This is a process we seek to continue through the Glissant Translation Project, of which I am co-director. See <https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/topic/book-series/the-glissant-translation-project>.

## RÉSUMÉS

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## English

Translation has regularly been deployed as a defining aspect of World Literature. This is notably the case in the work of David Damrosch, who claims in a number of studies that it is circulation between contexts in different languages that underpins the ‘gains’ of any work falling into the category. This article explores, expands, and ultimately challenges such readings by focusing, in addition, on the production and consumption of World Literature, suggesting not only that translation may form, in such contexts and in the light of such understandings, a key trope or lens through which writing associated with this category may be identified and explored, but also that World Literature, conceived in such circulatory and relational terms, potentially allows us to analyze the presence and function of a translational epistemology in this body of writing. As such, the argument seeks to move beyond translation as methodology to propose the presence of a set of translational epistemologies, contributing thus to the growing emphasis on linguistic sensitivity and global relationality in the construction of knowledge, as illuminated notably by Barbara Cassin’s philosophical interventions around the notion of the *(in)traduisible* and Edouard Glissant’s reflections on translation in the *Tout-Monde*.

A synopsis of this article can be found [here](https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.475) (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.475>).

## Français

La traduction a régulièrement été identifiée comme un aspect déterminant de la littérature-monde. C’est notamment le cas dans les écrits de David Damrosch, qui affirme dans plusieurs études que c’est la circulation entre contextes dans des langues différentes qui sous-tend les « gains » de toute œuvre relevant de cette catégorie. Cet article explore, puis fait évoluer et finalement remet en question ces lectures en se concentrant également sur la production et la consommation de la littérature-monde. Il suggère non seulement que la traduction peut constituer, dans de tels contextes et à la lumière de telles explications, un trope essentiel ou une lentille à travers laquelle on peut identifier et explorer l’écriture associée à cette catégorie, mais aussi que la littérature-monde, conçue en termes circulatoires et relationnels, nous permet d’analyser l’existence et la fonction d’une épistémologie traductionnelle. De cette façon, il cherche à aller au-delà de la traduction comme méthodologie pour proposer une épistémologie traductionnelle, ce qui contribue à mettre l’accent davantage sur le rôle de la sensibilité linguistique et la relationnalité globale dans la formation des savoirs, évidents notamment dans les interventions philosophiques de Barbara Cassin (2004) autour de la notion de l’(in)traduisible et les réflexions d’Édouard Glissant sur la traduction dans le *Tout-Monde*.

Un synopsis de cet article se trouve [ici](https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.494) (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.494>).

لطلما أدت الترجمة دوراً محورياً في فهمنا للأدب العالمي، وتبرز هذه الفكرة في كتابات ديفيد دامروش الذي يرى في عدد من دراساته أن تداول عمل أدبي بين سياقات متعددة في لغات مختلفة يعزز مكانته ويضفي عليه طابع العالمية. أمّا هذه المقالة فتأتي لتستكشف مثل تلك القراءات وتُفصّل فيها وتحدّثها أخيراً من خلال التركيز على إنتاج الأدب العالمي واستهلاكه؛ إذ أن الترجمة -بالمفهوم هذا وفي سياقات كهذه- ليست مجرد أداة أو عدسة يمكن من خلالها التعرف على الكتابات المرتبطة بالأدب العالمي ودراساتها، بل أيضاً تشير إلى أن الأدب العالمي -عند تصوّره بهذه الطريقة التداولية والعلائقية- يسمح لنا برؤية إبستمولوجيا ترجمية تؤدي دوراً في هذا النوع من الكتابات. لذا يسعى هذا الطرح لتجاوز اعتبار الترجمة مجرد منهجية ويقترح وجود مجموعة من الإبستمولوجيات الترجيمية، مسهمًا بذلك في التأكيد المتزايد على الحساسية اللغوية والعلائقية العالمية في بناء المعرفة، ومن أبرز القائلين بهذه الفكرة هما باربرا كاسين في كتاباتها الفلسفية عن مفهوم "(in)traduisible" ("عدم قابلية الترجمة") وإدوار غليسون في نظريته للترجمة في "Tout-Monde" ("العالم الشامل").

بإمكانكم الاطلاع على ملخص المقالات عبر هذا الرابط (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-tra>) (nslation.570).

### Español

La traducción se ha utilizado regularmente como un aspecto que define la Literatura Mundial. Este es el caso, en particular, de la obra de David Damrosch, quien afirma en una serie de estudios que es la circulación entre contextos en diferentes lenguas lo que sustenta las "ganancias" de cualquier obra incluida en la categoría. Este artículo explora, amplía y, en última instancia, pone en tela de juicio tales lecturas centrándose, además, en la producción y el consumo de la literatura universal, sugiriendo no sólo que la traducción puede constituir, en estos contextos y a la luz de dichas interpretaciones, un tropo o lente clave a través del cual se puede identificar y explorar la escritura asociada a esta categoría, sino también que la Literatura Mundial, concebida en términos circulatorios y relacionales, nos permite potencialmente analizar la presencia y la función de una epistemología traslacional en este cuerpo de escritura. Como tal, el argumento trata de ir más allá de la traducción como metodología para proponer la presencia de un conjunto de epistemologías traslacionales, contribuyendo así al creciente énfasis en la sensibilidad lingüística y la relacionalidad global en la construcción del conocimiento, tal y como iluminan notablemente las intervenciones filosóficas de Barbara Cassin en torno a la noción de lo (in)traduisible y las reflexiones de Edouard Glissant sobre la traducción en Tout-Monde.

Aquí (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.562>) se puede acceder a una sinopsis de este artículo.

### Magyar

A fordítást gyakran alkalmazzák a világirodalom meghatározó aspektusként. Így tesz munkásságában például David Damrosch is, aki számos tanulmányban állítja, hogy a különféle nyelvű kontextusok közti csereforgalom az, amely alátámasztja a világirodalom kategóriájába tartozó bármely mű 'nyereségeit'. Jelen tanulmány feltérképezi, kitágítja és végsősoron megkérdőjelezi az effajta olvasatokat azzal, hogy a világirodalom termelésére és fogyasztására is figyelmet fordít. Egyrészt azt állítom, hogy effajta kontextusokban és értelmezések fényében a fordítás olyan kulcsfogalom vagy lencse, amelyen keresztül a világirodalom kategóriájához sorolható írások beazonosíthatók és tanulmányozhatók; másrészt arra is rámutatok, hogy egy körforgásként és viszonyrendszerként elgondolt világirodalom potenciálisan lehetővé teheti egy fordítási episztemológia jelenlétének és funkciójának elemzését ebben a korpuszban. Ekként jelen írás a fordítást mint módszertant kívánja meghaladni, hogy helyette fordítási episztemológiák jelenlétét javasolja, tovább fokozva a nyelvi érzékenységre és a globális relacionálásra tett növekvő hangsúlyt a tudástermelésben, amit Barbara Cassin a(z) *(in)traduisible* [lefordítható/lefordíthatatlan] fogalma köré font filozófiai intervenciói, valamint Édouard Glissant fordítással kapcsolatos gondolatai a *Tout-Monde*-ban is érzékletesen megvilágítanak.

A tanulmány összefoglalója [itt](https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.564) (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.564>) olvasható

Omsetjing har ofte vorte sett på som ei definerande side ved verdslitteraturen. Dette gjeld særskilt for arbeidet til David Damrosch. I ei rekkje studiar hevdar han at det er vekslinga mellom samanhengar i ulike språk som utgjer tilskotet til alt arbeid som fell inn under kategorien. I denne artikkelen utforskar, utvidar og, til slutt, utfordrar eg slike lesingar ved også å setje søkjelys på tilverkinga og forbruket av verdslitteratur. Eg foreslår ikkje berre at omsetjing, i slike rammer og i ljøs av slike forståingar, kan vera ein nykkeltrope og ei -linse som verdslitterær skriving kan gjenkjennast og verta utforska gjennom. Eg gjer òg framlegg om at verdslitteratur, som er oppstått så sirkulært og relasjonelt, tillet oss å greia ut nærværet og verk-naden av ei omsetjingsepistemologi. På den måten freistar argumentet å gå vidare frå omsetjing som metodologi, for heller å foreslå ein omsetjingsepistemologi. Såleis vil eg medverka til ei aukande vektlegging av språkleg varleik i kunnskapskonstruksjon, slik det kjem til syne i dei filosofiske intervensjonane til Barbara Cassin rundt ideen om *(in)traduisible* og Édouard Glissant sine tankar om omsetjing i *Tout-Monde*.

Eit oversyn av denne artikkelen finn du [her](https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.567) (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.567>).

**Türkçe**

Çeviri sıklıkla dünya edebiyatının tanımlayıcı bir unsuru olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bu görüş, özellikle David Damrosch'un çalışmalarında öne çıkmaktadır. Damrosch, birçok çalışmada söz konusu kategoriye ait eserlerin elde ettiği 'kazanımların' temelinde farklı dillerin bağlamları arasındaki dolaşımın yattığını iddia etmektedir. Bu makale, dünya edebiyatının üretim ve tüketimine de odaklanarak bu tür okumaları araştırmakta, genişletmekte ve son olarak sorgulamaktadır. Ayrıca yalnızca çevirinin bu tür bağlamlarda ve anlayışlar ışığında söz konusu kategoriyle ilişkilendirilen yazıların belirlenip araştırılabileceği kilit bir mecaz veya mercek işlevi görebileceğini değil, aynı zamanda böylesi dolaşımsal ve ilişkisel koşullarda tasarlanmış olan dünya edebiyatının, potansiyel olarak bu yazı bütününde bir çeviri epistemolojisinin varlığını ve işlevini incelememizi sağlayacağını da öne sürmektedir. Bu kapsamda, söz konusu argüman metodoloji olarak çevirinin ötesine geçerek özellikle Barbara Cassin'in (in)traduisible kavramı çerçevesindeki felsefi müdahaleleri ve Edouard Glissant'ın Tout-Monde'da ortaya koyduğu çeviri hakkındaki düşüncelerinden hareketle, bilginin inşasında dilsel duyarlılık ve küresel ilişkiselliğe yönelik giderek artan öneme katkıda bulunan birtakım çeviri epistemolojilerinin var olduğunu ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bu makalenin genişletilmiş özetine [buradan](https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.565) (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.565>) ulaşabilirsiniz.

## 中文

翻译经常被用作“世界文学”的一个核心特征。戴维·达姆罗施 (David Damrosch) 的著作就是一个典型的例子，他在多项研究中声称，不同语言语境之间的流通支撑起任何属于这一类别的作品获得的“收益”。本文通过关注“世界文学”的创作和消费，探索、扩展并最终挑战了此类解读，文章不仅表明在这样的背景和理解下，翻译可能形成一个关键的桥段或视角，通过它可以识别和探索与这一类别相关的写作，而且，以这种流通和关系术语构想的“世界文学”可能使我们能够分析翻译认识论在这一写作中的存在和功能。因此，该论点试图超越翻译作为方法论，它提出一套翻译认识论的存在，从而促进在知识构建中越来越强调的语言敏感性 (linguistic sensitivity) 和全球关联性 (global relationality)，正如芭芭拉·卡辛 (Barbara Cassin) 对“(不可)翻译”[(in)traduisible]概念的哲学干预和爱德华·格里桑 (Edouard Glissant) 在Tout-Monde概念中对翻译的反思所阐明的那样。

本文的 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.569>)概 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.569>)要可以在 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.569>)这 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.569>)里 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.569>)查阅 (<https://dx.doi.org/10.35562/encounters-in-translation.569>)

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### Keywords

translation, world literature, opacity, French, monolingualism, multilingualism, Edouard Glissant

### **Mots-clés**

traduction, littérature-monde, opacité, le français, monolinguisme, multilinguisme, Édouard Glissant

### **الكلمات المفتاحية**

الترجمة, الأدب العالمي, الغموض, الفرنسية, الأحادية اللغوية, التعددية اللغوية, إدوار غليسون

### **Palabras claves**

traducción, literatura mundial, opacidad, francés, monolingüismo, multilingüismo, Edouard Glissant

### **Kulcsszavak**

fordítás, világirodalom, átlátszatlanság, francia, egynyelvűség, többnyelvűség, Edouard Glissant

### **Anahtar kelimeler**

çeviri, dünya edebiyatı, opaklık, Fransızca, tek dillilik, çok dillilik, Edouard Glissant

### **关键词**

翻译, 世界文学, 不透明, 法语, 单语主义, 多语主义, 爱德华·格里桑 (Edouard Glissant)

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