

**PGT Submission**

Stateless Literatures: Writing Globally from the  
“Margins” of Western Europe

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## Introduction

Since its inception in 1901, the Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded twenty-nine times to writers of English, fourteen times each to writers of French and German, eleven times for Spanish, seven for Swedish, six each for Italian and Russian, and five times to writers of Polish. Of the twenty-four remaining laureates, only three received the prize for work published in a language other than a primary institutional language of their respective nation-states:<sup>1</sup> the Provençal poet Frederic Mistral, who received the fourth Nobel Prize for Literature in 1904 for Occitan-language poetry that “faithfully reflects the natural scenery and native spirit of his people”;<sup>2</sup> Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, awarded the prize in 1913 for his collection গীতাঞ্জলি (translated by the author as *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*), written and published during the rule of the British Raj; and Isaac Bashevis Singer, a Polish-American author who won a Nobel Prize for his work in Yiddish, centred on the experiences of Jewish life in Poland and the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Much discussion of both the awarding of the Nobel Prize and the disciplinary concept of World Literature that it seeks to delineate, has usefully and necessarily sought to highlight and resist the Eurocentric tendencies that haunt comparative approaches to literary study. Gayatri Spivak, in her seminal work *Death of a Discipline*, asks her readers to consider the stability of the notionally global democratic equality on which comparative literature attempts to construct itself: “Can democracy – invariably claimed as a politics, or perhaps *the* politics of friendship – function without a logofratrocentric notion of collectivity? *With the sister allowed in rarely, and only as an honorary brother?*”<sup>4</sup> She thus explores how the study of World Literature around Goethean ideas of centre and periphery, with the centre invariably situated in the Western canon, requires texts of the

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to these three authors, it is worth highlighting the 1905 laureate, Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz, who lived and wrote in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, under the administrative control of the Russian Empire.

<sup>2</sup> Nobel Media, *The Nobel Prize in Literature 1904*, <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1904/summary/>> (2021) [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021]

<sup>3</sup> Nobel Media, *All Nobel Prizes in Literature*, <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/lists/all-nobel-prizes-in-literature>> (2021) [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021]

<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p.32 [emphasis added]

“peripheral” global South to emulate the centre – thematically, morally, linguistically – in order to qualify for entry into the canon of World Literature. Rather than seeking integrate the Other into the Euro-American *we*, for World Literature to attain its goals of marginality and inclusivity, Spivak seeks to decentre it, moving beyond the Western/globally Northern academy. The question posed by David Damrosch, although more succinct, brings to the fore the same challenge for the study of World Literature, recognising its need to go beyond its Westphalian-era genesis: “What new relations between Western Europe and the rest of the globe?”<sup>5</sup> How can the study of literature in its global dimensions and in all its diversity, transcend the political and geographic frontiers and hierarchies that risk limiting its scope to a combined canon of Western European nation-states?

As Spivak shows, in the above examples these questions hold special relevance for the post-colonial scholar, seeking to give the literatures and languages of the global South their rightful place alongside the major European languages. However, in attempting to relate Western Europe to the literary global, Damrosch risks adopting the former term as a shorthand for the major nation-states of the region, paradoxically emphasising the same political frontiers that World Literature seeks to problematise. Barbara Johnson’s perspicacious comments on the nature of difference in literature and the risks incurred in the creation of binary oppositions here seem apposite: she writes that “[t]he differences *between* entities (prose and poetry, man and woman, literature and theory, guilt and innocence) are shown to be based on a repression of differences *within* entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself.”<sup>6</sup> The point is equally critical when reading comparatively: before comparing North and South, Europe and Asia, or even Spain and Great Britain, the critic must first question the assumptions inherent in constructing any one of these units. Otherwise, by assuming the position of Western Europe in the discipline to be universally one of hegemonic domination, internal diversity is elided on the world stage just as it

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<sup>5</sup> David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2003), p.1

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. x-xi

often is within national canons. For this reason, just as the idea of World Literature as centre and periphery, described by Francesca Orsini as a “cartographic”<sup>7</sup> visualisation of the field, is increasingly seen as inadequate, implying a hierarchy even as it attempts to offer a critique of geographically hierarchical conceptions of writing, so too is the notion of European states as homogeneous and privileged literary landscapes, wherein the global reading of texts is predicated on the national (or, more precisely, on the nation-state), a flawed reproduction of established political inequalities.

At its fullest extent, this project of decentring the discipline must, of course, go beyond purely linguistic questions to examine how the social conditions of gender, class, race, and educational access within a state may bring about the marginalisation of writers – and, indeed, of readers – in World Literature. These issues, whilst crucial, are broadly beyond the scope of this essay. Instead, it will focus on what I have termed the “stateless literatures” of Western Europe, primarily considering the literatures of Catalonia, Valencia and Roussillon, and of Wales, with some attention also paid to the situation of Occitan in France. This title term is inspired by the title of an article written by a group of Catalan authors and academics in Barcelona four years after the death of Franco, protesting the structural subjugation of the language and resultant decay during the dictatorship: “Una nació sense estat, un poble sense llengua”;<sup>8</sup> highlighting the unequal relationships between languages within states, the title thus seeks to propose that these “stateless languages” and their literatures have full agency within a decentred conceptualisation of World Literature, acknowledging the relevance of the local within the global.

The first section, ‘Interliterary Interpretation’, will examine the manner in which the literatures in the so-called *minority languages* of these nations and regions, so often read, if at all, in terms bordering on the parochial, can be positioned in relation to World Literature. Challenging

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<sup>7</sup> Francesca Orsini, ‘The Multilingual Local in World Literature’, *Comparative Literature*, 67.4 (2015), p.348

<sup>8</sup> “A nation without a state, a people without a language”; Joan A. Argente and others, ‘Una nació sense estat, un poble sense llengua’, *Els Marges*, 15 (1979), p.3

Deleuze and Guattari's controversial definition of a minor literature ("not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language"), it will instead engage with Michael Cronin's proposed model of "microcosmopolitanism",<sup>10</sup> which seeks to contest pervasive ideas that equate "cosmopolitan" with "major" and that thus confine the literatures of the small, stateless nation to local matters. In the second section, "Major Languages, Minor Literatures", I will explore what relationship the literatures of these nations and regions written in the language of the state, have with the national canon of the nation-state, considering claims by authors such as Joan Fuster in Catalonia that Catalan literature written in Castilian, "per dret propi – temàtica, esperit, tribuna – , pertany a la societat catalana i, per tant, a la seva literatura."<sup>11</sup> Through this exploration, the essay will seek to demonstrate that multiple literary traditions can occupy the same nation-state, including those in the same language and the same geographic space and, similarly, that work of different languages in diglossic regions can share a literary tradition, thus destabilising the direct equivalence between state and nation in world readings.

### **From Cosmopolitan to Microcosmopolitan: Situating Minority Languages within World Literature**

Despite its flaws and limitations, the passage of the Government of Wales Act 1998, which followed the 1997 devolution referendum and established a devolved Welsh Assembly, brought about a renewed confidence in the status of Wales as a nation in its own right within the United Kingdom. With this new self-determination came the hope that policies made in Wales could help to halt the steady decline of the language, and a period of optimism in Welsh literature. In this context, the words of one Welsh critic seem to present something of a manifesto for the revitalisation of Welsh letters:

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<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'What is a Minor Literature?', trans. by Robert Brinkley, *Mississippi Review*, 11.3 (1983), p.16

<sup>10</sup> Michael Cronin, 'Global Questions and Local Visions: A Microcosmopolitan Perspective', in *Beyond the Difference*, pp.186-202 (190)

<sup>11</sup> "in its own right – in its themes, spirit, and platform – belongs to Catalan society and, therefore, to its literature." Joan Fuster, *Literatura catalana contemporània* (Barcelona: Curial, 1972), p.113 [my translation]

Mae hi'n wir bod 'England and Wales' yn welliant ar 'For Wales, see England' ond os yw Cymru o ddifrif yn dymuno bod yn fwy nag atodiad eilradd mewn uned weinyddol (ac y mae dyfodiad y Cynulliad yn awgrymu fod y dymuniad hwnnw'n bodoli), mae angen iddi fynny ei gweld ei hun mewn cyd-destun rhyngwladol ehangach. [... M]ae gweld llenyddiaeth yn Gymraeg yng nghyd-destun llenyddiaethau 'lleiafrifol' eraill yn fodd i weld ein llenyddiaeth ni fel rhan o batrwm rhyngwladol lle nad yw hi'n ymylol ond yn rhan o'r brif ffrwd.<sup>12</sup>

*It is true that "England and Wales" is an improvement on "For Wales, see England" but if Wales wishes in earnest to be more than a second-rate appendage in an administrative unit (and the arrival of the Assembly Government suggests that that wish may exist), she must insist on seeing herself within a broader international context. [... S]eeing literature in Welsh within the context of other 'minority' literatures allows us to envisage our literature as a part of an international paradigm, in which it is not marginal but part of the mainstream.*

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries saw similar expressions of tentative optimism and statements of desire for the institutionalisation and internationalisation of stateless languages begin to be expressed, too, on the other side of the English Channel. In an article published by the Institut Occitan de Cultura in 2018, marking fifty years since the Occitan literary revival movement stemming from the protests of May 1968, the authors cite the growing role of Occitan in translation, education, and music, enthusiastically observing that "Reservat pendent de sègles a l'esfèra del privat e del local, bandit de la boca dels enfants a l'escòla a còps de punicions e d'umiliacions, indigne de la cultura legitima e oficiala, l'occitan, a l'exemple de fòrça autras lengas de França, sembla prenre son revenge al tornant del sègle XXI."<sup>13</sup> The continuity of stateless languages, their cultures and literatures, is thus identified clearly with the need for them to relate to cultures and peoples not only beyond the local, but beyond the state context, expanding the international "margins" beyond the state level to encompass the stateless local.

The historic threat to Welsh literature identified by Crowe and to Occitan described by Lespoux and his colleagues, which served as a barrier to their full participation in the translational movements of culture (that is, the movement of cultures across boundaries) that comprise World

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<sup>12</sup> Richard M. Crowe, 'Cerddi Alltudiaeth: thema yn llenyddiaethau Québec, Catalunya a Chymru (Review)', *Y Traethodydd*, 153 (1998), pp.190-192 [my translation]

<sup>13</sup> "Kept for centuries within the private and local sphere, banned from schoolchildren's mouths on pain of punishment and shame, [branded] unworthy of legitimate and official culture, Occitan, following the example of many other languages in France, seems to be getting its own back at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Yann Lespoux and others, *Lo raionament de la cultura d'òc* (2018) [accessed 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021], n.p. [my translation]

Literature approaches, appears to find echoes in the theory of provincialism espoused by Milan Kundera in ‘Die Weltliteratur’. In this article, he seeks to define two contrasting forms of provincialism, that of small and of large nations, each of which resist the participation of national literatures in a wider global context; describing the erasure of national difference by the nomenclature of Central Europe used in large Western European states, he writes that “large nations resist the Goethian idea of world literature because their own literature seems to them sufficiently rich that they need take no interest in what people write elsewhere”,<sup>14</sup> whilst small nations see it as a lofty ideal unrelated to local contexts.

There is increasingly, in discussions of stateless languages, an attempt to tackle the latter problem, in recognising the risk of falling prey to inward-looking attitudes on a local scale: the turn of the century in Wales, for example, saw an extensive comparative approach to Welsh literature that stated as its goal to “move out of any self-enclosed, exceptionalist, circles where identities are valorized only with reference to themselves”.<sup>15</sup> However, Kundera’s approach to “the provincialism of large nations” risks falling prey to the precise deficit that he critiques in French commentators: the conflation of state and nation. His model, whilst productive in discussions of how stateless literatures and the literatures of large nation-states are able to relate in a global context, does not fully address the historical tendency for large *states* to replicate the same resistance to World Literature internally, to their regional and small national literatures, as they do externally. One may note, for example, the relative absence of Manuel de Pedrolo or Salvador Espriu in canonical readings of the Spanish state, or of Angharad Tomos or John Ellis Williams in the United Kingdom. Works in stateless “minority” languages are perceived as peripheral to the concerns of the wider state, relevant only in the local contexts of their conception, even as being parochial or anticosmopolitan.

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<sup>14</sup> Milan Kundera, ‘Die Weltliteratur: How we read one another’, *The New Yorker*, 1 January 2007. <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/01/08/die-weltliteratur>> [accessed 20 January 2021], n.p.

<sup>15</sup> Alyce von Rothkirch and Daniel Williams, ‘Introduction’, in *Beyond the Difference: Welsh Literature in Comparative Contexts*, ed. by Alyce von Rothkirch and Daniel Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 1-4 (2)

Intending to combat this reductive conception of cosmopolitanism that promotes, in place of diversity, a form of international homogeneity, Cronin marks a distinction between “macrocosmopolitanism”, with an interest in the development of nation-states and supranational structures to promote progressive politics, and “microcosmopolitanism”,<sup>16</sup> by which the specificity of the local is incorporated into a global comparative framework. The value of such an approach is in contesting the common argument, including by the major figures of comparative World Literature, that the stateless local language is an inadequate as a vehicle for expression of the “minor” at an international level, being too concerned with the specific problems of place and politics of its own situation to be applicable. Such is the implication of Deleuze and Guattari’s comments that “because [minor literature] exists in a narrow space, every individual matter is immediately plugged into the political”;<sup>17</sup> geographic smallness and cartographic marginalisation, it is assumed, breed “narrowness” of experience and outlook, and so the physical and political restrictions of the nation are reflected in the external valuation of its cultural output.

This manner of reading stateless literatures is grossly reductive, resorting to outmoded cartographic categorisations built around major states and their languages in order to delineate the sphere of World Literature as major and minor, hegemonic and protest nations. In its place, Cronin’s microcosmopolitanism rejects the idea of an inevitable subsuming of small entities by large ones as history progressers: he instead coins the phrase “fractal differentialism” to “[express] the notion of a cultural complexity which remains constant from the micro to the macro scale.”<sup>18</sup> The evocation of fractals makes reference to the work of Benoit Mandelbrot, whose coastline paradox expounds that the measurement of a length coast increases theoretically infinitely as the detail with which they are measured increases: “as our walker stays increasingly close to the coastline, the distance to be covered continues to increase”.<sup>19</sup> In like manner, Cronin proposes that

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<sup>16</sup> Cronin, pp.186-202 (200)

<sup>17</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p.16

<sup>18</sup> Cronin, p.192

<sup>19</sup> Benoit Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1977), p.26



in the study of the small nation at a micro level rather than in the macrocosmopolitan view of its political influence on an international scale, [t]he traveller on foot becomes aware of the immeasurable complexity of short distances”,<sup>20</sup> in the cultural landscape just as in the physical. The Catalan plays of Manuel de Pedrolo would, if written in French, be counted in the vanguard of Parisian existentialism, their placeless political protest a cutting commentary not on Francoism but rather Algeria; Lloyd Jones’ tale of literary escapism amidst climate apocalypse in *Y Dŷr*<sup>21</sup> may be no more out of place in Rome than in Bangor. Rather than being the cosmopolitanism of the capitalist market, built around the large urban areas of major states and willing to engage with their local cultures only to the extent that these contribute to the bottom line, the microcosmopolitan model insists on the equal cultural value of the rural and urban and the bidirectional cultural exchange that takes place between city and country, just as between nation and world.

The great value of Cronin’s conception of the global fluxes of locality in World Literature is that its recourse to the spatial metaphor in the visualisation of the sphere of World Literature in a fractal form, far from the political cartography of frontiers and empires, decentralises the discussion of stateless literatures. The World Literature reader is invited to engage with texts not on the terms of the surrounding state, but a direct consideration of the themes, interest and settings of the text as it is carried across. This emphasis on the importance of incorporating the local in the production of the global is, as Orsini’s “multilingual local” makes clear, a vital enrichment of the practice of comparative literature, a discipline that must aim to “[hold] *both local and cosmopolitan perspectives in view*”.<sup>22</sup> But, as I have alluded to above, this constitutes only half of the necessity of global translation and transmission for stateless literatures. Antoni Martí Monterde, proposing a theory for the “interliterary” reading of the writings of Catalonia and the *països catalans*<sup>23</sup> in relation

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<sup>20</sup> Cronin, p.192

<sup>21</sup> *The Water*

<sup>22</sup> Orsini, p.346

<sup>23</sup> Valencia, the Balearic Islands, and Catalonia, typically including the historically Catalan-speaking French region of Roussillon.

to global literature beyond Iberia, recognises not only that “[t]he internationality of literatures can be understood as their diffusion or *reverberation* outside of their territory”<sup>24</sup> – and this sense of reverberation, as an amplification and a transformation of the local context as it is applied to the Other, is a productive addition to this otherwise Damroschian approach – but also that such a global transmission of the local serves an important role in enriching the literatures of stateless languages in their home contexts. It is through this “way in which a literature becomes constitutively conscious of other traditions”<sup>25</sup> that the local reader may come to see her own context not as insular, but rather as integrated in a global whole.

It must be emphasised, at this point, that the situation of a text in the global context in no way precludes it from an awareness of the local. Nor does it demand that a writer take as the backdrop for his or her work some great international setting, writing characters into a cosmopolitan pastiche. To exemplify an awareness of the place of the local in World Literature, Matylda Figlerowicz’s study of the short stories of Basque author Bernardo Atxaga and Catalan Jesús Moncada, who construct their narratives around a series of vignettes to “make the local acquire a primordial role in the narrative world”.<sup>26</sup> The works are thus firmly anchored in the context of their composition, but in their discussion of the world, its place and influence on the rural reality of the stateless nations, they create the effect of looking outwards from the vividly local towards the semi-mythical global, a process that places the “peripheral” nation at the centre of the comparative process. Contrasting to this clearly enunciated sense of place, the plays of the Catalan author Manuel de Pedrolo, typically set on a stage that gives away no hint of time or place, are nevertheless no less global and no less local. *Tècnica de Cambra*<sup>27</sup> (1964) sees a cast of mysterious lodgers enter a room that they are unable to leave, form alliances, seize control of objects and

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<sup>24</sup> Antoni Martí Monterde, ‘Interliterariness and the Literary Field: Catalan Literature and Literatures in Catalonia’, trans. by Todd Mack, in *Iberian Modalities: A Relational Approach to the Study of Culture in the Iberian Peninsula*, ed. by Joan Ramon Resina (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp.62-80 (64) [emphasis added]

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64

<sup>26</sup> Matylda Figlerowicz, ‘Margin and freedom: The space of world literature seen from the Basque Country and Catalonia’, *Journal of European Studies*, 46.3 (2016), p.301

<sup>27</sup> *The Room*

exercise control over the other occupants. The mysterious figure of the landlady, remaining unseen off-stage, exercises a totalitarian control over their entrances and exits, calling the cast off, one by one. The *mise-en-scène* clearly echoes Sartre's *Huis clos*, leading to some critics view of it as a clear example of Parisian absurdism, but such a reading should be resisted as far as possible. Hidden within its universal appeal, existential questions and great potential of allegorical readings, Pedrolo seeks to export a protest against the political subjugation of Catalan, erstwhile subject to the controls of the Francoist regime. As one character, Cleda, announces to fill the silence, "Dic... Sí, dic coses. Per no quedar-me callada del tot. Perquè, si callés, la dispesera podria sentir-se temptada a omplir el meu silenci amb la seva veu."<sup>28</sup> The playwright, in rendering all the stage a world, may not directly name the local conditions by which the Catalan voice could be replaced; at any rate, the imposition of the Spanish press law would prohibit it. But the shrewd reader cannot help but perceive, within the universal commentary, a cutting local critique. For the stateless language to fall silent, for it to cede to the pressure of the state, would render its demise inevitable.

Despite such innovations in Europe's minority literatures, the patronising globalism of Peter Coulmas in *Weltbürger: Geschichte einer Menschheitssehnsucht*,<sup>29</sup> for whom "small is beautiful" but "this nostalgic looking back is clearly opposed to the onward march of history towards larger political entities"<sup>30</sup> remains, alas, all too common in today's discussions of the stateless nation in Europe. Comments such as those by Javier Barbancho, writing in *El Mundo*, that "[e]l idioma ha sido utilizado en Cataluña como una forma de rechazo a todo lo español y como un instrumento para la segregación",<sup>31</sup> and the ongoing (often unconscious) denigration of Occitan and Gascon in the south of France as "patois" – a term whose use fortunately appears to be receding – reinforce

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<sup>28</sup> "I say... Yes, I say *things*. So I'm not left silent forever. Because, if I go quiet, the landlady could feel tempted to fill my silence with her voice." Manuel de Pedrolo, "Tècnica de Cambra", in *Tres textos*, ed. by Jordi Coca (Barcelona: Repertori Teatral Català, 2018), pp.61-117 (114).

<sup>29</sup> *World Citizens: History of a Longing for Humanity*

<sup>30</sup> Peter Coulmas, *Weltbürger: Geschichte einer Menschheitssehnsucht* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1990), pp. 272, 303; cited in Cronin, p.288

<sup>31</sup> "language has been used in Catalonia as a form of rejection of everything Spanish and as an instrument for segregation"; Javier Barbancho, 'Acabar con la discriminación del castellano', *El Mundo*, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2018. <<https://www.elmundo.es/opinion/2018/02/17/5a87352ae2704e0e618b4616.html>> [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021]

this popular perception of these languages as exclusionary, divisive or, perhaps worse still, decorative. In the words of one Welsh political activist and singer-songwriter, “mae’r Saesneg yn *esensial*, meddai nhw, / Ac mae’r hen iaith yn dymunol, meddai nhw”;<sup>32</sup> the macrocosmopolitan view sees the national identity within the state as, at best, a pleasingly parochial tourist attraction. Meanwhile, the sterile utilitarian idea that the only means of avoiding pernicious nationalism is via a form of cosmopolitanism that seeks to conduct all its exchanges in a *lingua franca* is one that inevitably marginalises the stateless language, condemned by its numerical disadvantage to always be the lesser language in such asymmetrical exchanges.

Faced with such attitudes, the production of art and literature in a stateless language becomes an existential imperative; more specifically, its project must be the integration of art and literature into global paradigms of reading, to allow the blurring of lines between local and global to open the minor Self to the Other. Lespoux and his colleagues describe the situation of Occitan literature “[d]ins un país devesit entre sa capitala, París, e tot çò qu’i a a l’entorn, la ‘província’ (designacion mespresanta que significa literalament ‘país vençut)’”.<sup>33</sup> To escape this sphere of metropolitan influence, then, requires not just the dissemination of the stateless idiom as a fit means of literary expression, but an approach to writing that situates the work within its global literary context. William Calin’s suggestion that “[m]odern approaches and the books to which they give rise can help surmount the indifference or condescension with which London and Paris normally hold their minority cultures”<sup>34</sup> offers a starting point for literatures from the European “margins” to begin to distance themselves from the label of provincialism, in search of a cosmopolitan poetics of the local.

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<sup>32</sup> “English is ‘essential’, so they say, / and the old language [Welsh] is pleasant, so they say.” Dafydd Iwan, *Mae’r Saesneg yn Esensial* (Caernarfon: Sain, 2012) [on CD]

<sup>33</sup> “in a country divided between its capital, Paris, and all that surrounds it, the ‘province’ (a contemptuous designation which means, literally, ‘defeated country’”, Lespoux and others, n.p.

<sup>34</sup> William Calin, *Minority Literatures and Modernism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p.11

## Major Languages, Minor Literatures: The Plural Role of State Languages

The processes of linguistic revitalisation, reaffirming the status of “minority” or stateless languages as proper vehicles for literary expression, undoubtedly served a vital role in asserting the distinct literary identity of the stateless nations and cultural regions of Europe, in many cases prefiguring the establishment of some form of political self-determination (such as the Catalan *Mancomunitat*, later *Generalitat* and the *Cynulliad*, now *Senedd*, in Wales). It is notable that processes of cultural rebirth tended to begin by attempting to forge linguistic and literary continuity with medieval heydays: the nineteenth century Catalan *Renaixença*, for example, began abruptly with Carles Aribau’s ode ‘La pàtria’, which, published (perhaps incongruously) in the Castilian-language industrialist periodical *El vapor* in 1833, bemoans the loss of the “cant dels trovadors”<sup>35</sup> and the “llengua llemosina”<sup>36</sup>, the Occitan literary koine of medieval Catalonia. The later (re)establishment of the *iocs florals*<sup>37</sup> as a tradition “que es volia continuadora dels certàmens medievals”<sup>38</sup> emulated the earlier work of Welsh poets, most notably Iolo Morgannwg in the 1790s, to restore the Welsh bardic tradition of the *eisteddfod* as a cultural festival and the place of Welsh as a literary language. (In the case of the *eisteddfodau* and Morgannwg’s *gorsedd*, it is also worth remarking on the timing of this move for cultural reestablishment in the context of wider European events; Elizabeth Edwards, pointing out the pervasive theme of freedom, notes that “the alliance between the eisteddfod and its new sponsors stands out because it coincides so suggestively with the French Revolution. The Gwyneddigion Society was founded, its members claimed in 1789, on principles of ‘Freedom in Church and State’.”<sup>39</sup>) The twentieth century revival of Breton *festoù noz* and

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<sup>35</sup> “song of the troubadours”, Carles Aribau, ‘La pàtria’, *Base documental d’Història Contemporània de Catalunya*. <<http://www.xtec.cat/~jrovira6/isabel21/oda.htm>> [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021], l.19

<sup>36</sup> “limousine language”, *Ibid.*, l.23

<sup>37</sup> floral games

<sup>38</sup> “that aspired to be a continuation of medieval competitions”, Josep M. Domingo, “Els Jocs Florals en la literatura catalana contemporània”, *Catalan Historical Review*, 6 (2013), p.179

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, ‘Romantic Wales and the Eisteddfod’, in *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, ed. by Geraint Evans and Helen Fulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.285-305 (288)

establishment of literary schools in French Occitania had, at their heart, similar motivations for the legitimisation of stateless languages alongside the so-called “great” literatures of Europe.

At its origins, then, the notion of an authentic and autochthonous national (or regional) literature, distinct from the “great” literary canon of the French, Spanish and British states, was largely predicated on the use of the local language. Even as late as the end of the twentieth century, the term “Anglo-Welsh” was in widespread use to describe authors such as Dylan Thomas, writing in English on recognisably Welsh backdrops and themes – and, of course, in the case of his 1954 BBC radio drama *Under Milk Wood*, in distinctly Welsh accents. In the case of Catalonia, the erasure of the boundaries between nation and Spanish state is often still more absolute; Castilian-speaking Catalan writers are frequently read both in Spain and abroad as Spanish authors, which has the effect of estranging them from the literary tradition of the *països catalans* even as they are adopted by the hegemonic literary norms of the Spanish state.

Barcelonan author Juan Marsé commented on this tendency in his acceptance speech for the 2008 Cervantes prize, countering with the claim that “soy un catalán que escribe en lengua castellana. Yo nunca vi en ello nada anormal”.<sup>40</sup> In this acknowledgment of the normality of such an identity, Castilian-language Catalan literature reflects the shift marked by Diana Wallace from “Anglo-Welsh literature” to “Welsh writing in English”; she asserts that this change

is more than a trivial change of literary critical nomenclature. It maps a movement from the initial identification of a relatively narrow early canon of literature in and about Wales in English, which was male-dominated and inward-looking, to the acknowledgement of a wider and more diverse body of writing *which could take its place as a major literature in its own right on an international stage*.<sup>41</sup>

No longer was the identity of a Welsh writer *à titre entier* to be denied to non-Welsh speaking writers; and, on a related note, no longer was the authority for literature in one of the two languages

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<sup>40</sup> “I am a Catalan who writes in Castilian. I never saw anything unusual about that.” Juan Marsé, ‘Discurso de Juan Marsé, Premio Cervantes 2008’, *Premio Cervantes*, RTVE, 23 April 2009, online video recording, <<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20090423/juan-marse-premio-cervantes-2008-soy-escriptor-catalan-escribe-castellano/269088.shtml>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021]

<sup>41</sup> Diana Wallace, ‘Inventing Welsh Writing in English’, in *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, pp.557-575 (557) [emphasis added]

of Wales (the two *official* languages, as of the introduction of the Welsh Language Act in 1993) to be lexically married to England: Welsh culture from without or belonging to the English Other. How, then, can an understanding of the literature of stateless nations in Europe properly encompass not only the works written in the native languages of these areas, but also avoid reproducing in negative the process of marginalisation that takes place between the state and its regional languages, within the stateless region? How, in other words, does the reader of World Literature, having conceptualised the division between nation and state, break the assumed direct relationship between nation and language?

This question will seem intimately familiar to scholars of postcolonial literatures. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin describe the problem posed in many post-colonial nations by the “displacement of the pre-colonial language by English”<sup>42</sup> in the sphere of literature, administration and education. They suggest that, regardless of the lack in English of a central authority for the language analogous to the Académie française or Real Academia Española, the norms of the literary standard following broadly English conventions mean that “the weight of antiquity continues to dominate cultural production in much of the post-colonial world”,<sup>43</sup> as literary output of postcolonial countries is placed into the context of an asymmetrical corpus of English literature wherein the metropolitan sets the standard: “the sister as an honorary brother”, to return to Spivak’s imagery. The proposed solution is that English, “the colonizing language, [be] replaced or appropriated as english”,<sup>44</sup> whose absent majuscule serves as an attempt to disconnect it from the English of the former colonial power. This serves, in many ways, as the counterpoint to Damrosch’s “globalization of English”,<sup>45</sup> the movement of English writers and their works across global borders, a process by which traditional hegemony and the major/minor distinction

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<sup>42</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.10

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>45</sup> Damrosch, p.213

is reinforced. Spivak, too recognises the dangers inherent to World Literature in the control of the metropolitan European languages; in her proposal that “planetary” should replace the global, overwriting the imagined political boundaries of cartographic approaches to world literature to allow subaltern literatures of the global South to be received without the colonial baggage of political mapping, she simultaneously calls for readers “to transmute the literatures of the global South to an undifferentiated space of English rather than a differentiated political space”,<sup>46</sup> thereby dissociating English from the colonial models of ownership stemming from the prestige dialect of South East England.

And so as is so often the case in World Literature, the matter of forming minor literatures in major languages once again returns to questions of cartography. Damrosch’s definition of World Literature as “encompass[ing] all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language”<sup>47</sup> may *seem* like the ultimate statement of democratic cosmopolitanism, but in the context of the difficulties we have seen, it raises more queries than it resolves: where are the boundaries of the “culture of origin”? How are texts transformed in translation, both linguistic and physical (carrying across), and (how) can the context of a “minor” stateless nation, its existential threats and linguistic unquities, be adequately understood beyond its context of origin? And what of the inescapable market dynamics of the global, the unavoidable capitalist conception of literature as a good? As Orsini writes in response to Damrosch’s optimism, “publishers will tell you that the market for translations is, apart from a few exceptions [...], a niche market”,<sup>48</sup> and all the more so for those authors from those regions perceived as marginal. Far from being the great leveller, Damrosch’s model falls into the same cartographic trap, the global over the planetary.

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<sup>46</sup> Spivak, p.72

<sup>47</sup> Damrosch, p.4

<sup>48</sup> Orsini, p.350



*Translations*, a play by Irish playwright Brian Friel, offers a stark warning of the risks to the stateless language and literature of an uncritical globalising view on the margins of Europe. Set in 1833 in Inis Meadhon, a rural Irish-speaking island on the western edge of colonial Ireland, the play centres around the translation of local placenames into English for the new Ordnance Survey maps, and the establishment of a national school, an imperial tool to modernise and standardise education in English, to replace the Irish, Latin and Greek of the local hedge school. As Hugh, the old schoolmaster, comments of the translated town names in the final act, “We must learn those new names. [...] We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home.”<sup>49</sup> In the imperial process, translation serves assimilation and the stateless language (and with it, the identity of the stateless nation) is eroded by the hegemonic language of the imperial state. It is perhaps not surprising that *Translations* counts among the relatively few works of modern literature from outside the United Kingdom to have been translated into Welsh, a country for which a similar process of linguistic and institutional subjugation was imposed for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; its translated title, *Torri Gair – Breaking Word* – renders all the more unequivocal the violence that cartographic conceptions of World Literature exercise against the minority language.

In many ways, this example also serves as exemplary of the institutional problems often present in faculties of literature and languages. Dominic Keown, exploring the distinctions between Hispanism and Iberian studies in the study of Iberian languages in Great Britain and Ireland, describes the danger of subscribing to a view of the discipline “influenced by a vision in keeping with the imperialist designs of a whole generation of intellectuals for whom Spanish philology was synonymous with the promotion of the language of Castile and its culture and the corresponding exclusion of other tongues native to the state”.<sup>50</sup> This, then, is the form of

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<sup>49</sup> Brian Friel, ‘Translations’, in *Modern Irish Drama*, ed. by John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton, 1991), pp.319-374 (372)

<sup>50</sup> Dominic Keown, ‘Dine with the Opposition? ¡No, gracias! Hispanism vs Iberian Studies in Great Britain and Ireland’, in *Iberian Modalities*, pp.23-36 (23)

homogenising globalisation of literary disciplines that must be avoided in World Literature: a system wherein internal difference is elided in favour of a neat national whole, slotted carefully into the world map of global readings. In aid of his argument, Keown calls to the reader's attention T. S. Eliot's project for maintaining the cultural diversity of Great Britain, expressed in his *Notes Towards the Definition*. Keown perhaps overstates Eliot's credentials of "peripherality"; his view remains distinctly that of an (adoptive) Englishman. Describing the "satellite" nature of Scotland and Wales in relation to England, he is likewise quick to stress the cultural and political reliance of the former on the latter in asserting that "[f]or Ireland, Scotland and Wales to cut themselves completely off from England would be to cut themselves off from Europe and the world."<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, he resists the current of English critics and political commentators to attempt to assimilate within an Anglocentric model the cultures of the United Kingdom's constituent nations, advocating instead for "a constellation of cultures".<sup>52</sup> In short, such insight acknowledges that studies of Great Britain, like studies of Iberia, France, Italy, and Europe as a whole, must imperatively find an approach to their literatures that maintains the plurality of these literatures (that is, in Joan Resina's words, not to "subsumirlas bajo un unitarismo cultural estéril"<sup>53</sup>) whilst permitting the ongoing dialogue both between different "locals", and between the local and the world.

There is thus a need for the languages of the major Western European states to be deterritorialised in their relation to the minor nations and regions within those states; diglossia must not be read as cultural dependence. I am not, however, referring to deterritorialisation in the same terms as those employed by Deleuze and Guattari, who propose that "Even if it is major, a tongue is capable of intensive use which spins it out along creative lines of escape, a use which

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<sup>51</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p.55

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58

<sup>53</sup> "subsume them under a sterile cultural unitarianism"; Joan Ramón Resina, *Del hispanismo a los estudios ibéricos* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2009), p.46, cited in Keown, p.28

now forms and constitutes an absolute deterritorialization.”<sup>54</sup> For them, the only true minor writing is that written in a major language and a marginal context, a context wherein the major language seems cut off from its cultural space, perhaps even unnatural or *unheimlich*. This is emphatically not the case for the English of Wales, the French of Occitania or the Spanish of Catalonia (as well as being subject to much debate in its application above to Kafka, writing German in Prague).

Instead, I wish to resist as far as possible the references to centre and margin that are so fundamental to Deleuze and Guattari’s theorising; World Literature, if it is to be truly global, must be a discipline of many centres and none. This same *malaise* applies to the reproduction, fractal-like, of models of centre and periphery within the stateless nation, or between the stateless nation and its neighbours: Fuster’s alarm at “la despersonalització idiomàtica, a benefici del castellà o del francès”<sup>55</sup> at the borders of the *països catalans* in Roussillon, Valencia and the Balearic islands whilst based on concern for the erosion of Catalan and Valencian, seems just as ill-conceived, in its implication that French and Spanish are lesser vehicles for national expression, as does the tendency of the Spanish and world press to categorise Catalan writers of Spanish as belonging primarily to the wider Spanish state by virtue of language. Figlerowicz’s desire for World Literature as a “structure with a hollow centre in which the freedom of every literature originates from its relations with other literatures”<sup>56</sup> instead seems most adequate; rather than insisting on the distinctness or oppositional nature of literatures written in stateless and state languages, or equating the state language with the cultural monolith of Spanish/British/English literature, it is through the coexistence of global and local, an engagement with the Other, that stateless literatures may seek to relate to the global sphere of World Literature.

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<sup>54</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p.27

<sup>55</sup> “An idiomatic depersonalisation, in favour of Castilian or French”, Fuster, p.402

<sup>56</sup> Figlerowicz, p.307

## Conclusions

“It is a recurrent theme of this essay, that a people should be neither too united nor too divided, if its culture is to flourish. Excess of unity may be due to barbarism and may lead to tyranny; excess of division may be due to decadence and may also lead to tyranny.”<sup>57</sup> These words, written by T. S. Eliot in 1948, remain an apt summary of the paradox at the core of World Literature seventy years later, and hold a special resonance for a comparative study of minority literatures. An excess of unity on the global scale, the ultimate anticanonical reading of the discipline, wherein claims of cultural distinction would be sacrificed at the altar of global (and globalised, in the full sense of Spivak’s financialised use of the word) uniformity would be as culturally destructive to the stateless language as it would be academically impractical; it would produce only the “notional ‘global literature’ that might be read solely in airline terminals”<sup>58</sup> that Damrosch derides, a literature that is neither here nor there. The international exchange of literary ideas under such a practice would be governed not by aesthetic or cultural judgment, but by the tyranny of the unthinking sink-or-swim dynamics of the global free market, wholly antithetical to an ethical World Literature. Likewise, the excess of division requires the imposition of strict national categories, leaving no space for their blurring or mixing. Such a literature, whatever its language, could not help but become inward-looking and parochial.

After all, where does the local end? Returning to Mandelbrot, we could argue that, as the Spanish erases the Catalan, so too does the Catalan erase the Gironan; “Welsh” elides the distinctions of Powys and Gwynedd, or indeed of Conwy and Caernarfon. The comparatist would become like the eponymous protagonist of Borges’ ‘Funes el memorioso’ who, cursed with perfect memory, is cut off from communication by the inadequacy of shared language to express his perception of the world, leaving him thus unable to think: “Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es

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<sup>57</sup> Eliot, p.50

<sup>58</sup> Damrosch, p.25

generalizar, abstraer.”<sup>59</sup> So we must read in abstractions, at least a little. Read beyond the borders of our own national experience, of course, but defying the temptation to preemptively assign to a text a simple label that seeks to define its place in the world and its relationship with others. Stuck between the comparative rock of the global and the hard place of the local, Cronin offers a comforting compromise: “it is the microcosmopolitanism of the margin rather than the macrocosmopolitanism of the centre that allows for a cultural politics which is crucially recentred but not, ultimately, self-centred.”<sup>60</sup> For the literature of the stateless nation to find its place in World Literature, it must seek its global literary roots and influences, not oppositionally via the surrounding state, but in the way that it relates to the local reality.

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<sup>59</sup> “To think is to forget differences; it is to generalise, to make abstractions.” Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2004), p.135

<sup>60</sup> Cronin, p.200

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