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World Literature and the Figurative Push to Sublimate Space

Abstract

This paper examines the influence of Aristotle's theory of place (topos) on the conceptualization of cultural universality. Its main focus is in reinvesting the thought of Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson surrounding the fossilized spatial boundaries that limit understanding in order to scrutinize both the virtual and figurative processes inherent to the sketching of a universal human plane outside of local custom in certain literary works. This investigation yields a concept of "figurative agency" that is then delineated in the Tao Te Ching and Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in order to demonstrate how the concept might serve as a bridge between the extended space of a national culture and the virtual plane invested by world literature.

Keywords: world literature, Henri Bergson, Spinoza, figurative agency, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Tao Te-Ching, literary epistemology

We need more a phenomenology than an ontology of the work of art. A work changes in nature when it moves from a national sphere into a new worldly context; works become world literature by being received into the space of a foreign culture. (Damrosch 9)

Among the numerous problems that plague the scholars, publishers and translators who have conceptualized the process by which a text initially pegged as a locally significant literary undertaking is suddenly thrust onto the prestigious virtual odeum called world literature, the issue of how to frame the idea of a "global locus" is no doubt one of the most challenging. If we take Damrosch seriously when he calls, in What is World Literature?, for a "phenomenology of the work

of art" (Damrosch 9), presumably one that deals with its inherent "worlding," then we need to clarify the kind of epistemic relationship the worldly literary text develops with what might best be described as the "rhetoric of space." Damrosch is the first to acknowledge this when he discusses the difficulty in reconciling the many ways in which the concept of a world literary work has historically been grounded into the manifold topoi of modern literary theory. In this paper, I will argue that we can gain a clearer grasping of the problem by acknowledging the influence and limits of a classical Aristotelian theory of place in marshaling the homogenized spatial conception of time that has contributed to making national European literary traditions so sturdy and difficult to subsume. The argument will allow me to theorize the agency of a despatialized literary thrust and explain how an understanding of its investment of certain key figures can help foster new epistemic approaches to the study of literature's universal reach.

Aristotle's Theory of Place

It would be difficult to overstate the influence of Aristotle's theory of epistemic place (topoi) on the homogenous and extended conception of time ensconced in the national historical narratives which have circumscribed most traditional approaches towards the study of literature. While the interpretation of a universally celebrated work like Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, for instance, can run a particularly motley gamut of theoretical approaches, very few of these approaches dispense with the postulate that the text invests a group of places that we commonly designate either topographically, as "London" and "Victorian England," or thematically, as in the case of those places occupied by the protagonists' "subjectivity" or a moral notion such as "evil." Even disputed concepts like "duality," Freudian "superego," or the metaphysical "English spirit," when invoked in relation to the work, are presented as subjects occupying a conceptual place, the place of a thing being here, in Aristotelian terms, "the innermost motionless boundary of what contains it" (Physics section IV). Once this placeness is established as motionless, it is difficult to deny Aristotle's inference that every place has an end, a teleological reason for being, and that, ultimately, the temporal motion that carries the place's occupant towards its natural telos is determined by an unmoved mover whose exact form can then become the subject of critical investigation.

When a text is read within this epistemic framework, when it is seen as leading its occupants (be it the reader, Jekyll/Hyde, the human psyche, or the metaphysical Subject) toward a specific goal through the agency of a primordial mover unmoved – a scheme which, despite its naiveté, reveals the mythological core inherent to the shaping of European colonial identities – questions about its universality can legitimately be raised. When, at the end of the statement of his case, Jekyll wonders whether Hyde will die upon the scaffold or find the courage to release himself at the last moment, and concludes that "what is to follow concerns another than [him]self" (Stevenson 102), can his words, as many have argued, be read as the expression of a universally fragmented subject? Can the novella, and the writing that sketched out his figure, be considered the "local" materializations of a universal consciousness? The answer to these questions hinges, it seems to me, on whether we conceive the universe as a homogenized motionless boundary that encompasses both the positive topoi of diversified cultural identity and the void lodged in between each individual locus of identity (Aristotle, Physics A 4.); it hinges, in other words, on whether we conceive the universe as a continuing whole, a place with a purpose, whose temporal unravelling we all participate in as both locally diversified and universally bound operatives. If we accept the Aristotelian conception, it becomes quite easy to frame the contemporary notion of a "globalized world," with little concern for its ostensible definition, as the extended outgrowth of a national colonial chronotope. Once this is established, it is almost impossible to investigate a text's universality outside the fractured and factious territory of anthropomorphic characters, historical narratives, spiritual symbols, and staunchly delineated concepts inherited from western philosophy and the positivistic human sciences.

A Despatialized Theory of Figuration in Bergson's Durée

Insofar as it deals with a figurative conception of matter that does not occupy any homogenous chronotope, the thesis I would like to set forth can perhaps best be understood as a thought experiment. Figuration has always been a particularly contentious notion; one reason for this is that any serious attempt at defining it will need to tackle the interaction between place and motion. It is precisely this kind of operation – a departure from a theory of tropes premised on the grounded immobility of place – that is undertaken in the writings of Henri Bergson.

Early on in his work, Bergson emphasized the "false-problems" induced by our proneness to engrave our perceptions into a succession of static representations (of fixed "things"), a habit that has made us insensitive to the creative energy that he felt could at all times be accessed by any human mind in order to push his or her consciousness forward, beyond the stale images of tradition, to new increasingly insightful figurative mappings of reality. Unlike the Aristotelian theory of metaphor, which defines figuration as an ebbing between "genus" and "species" (Poetics part XXI) and has often been seen as mainly "promoting to consciousness an awareness of relations that subsist between the objects and concepts that make up our universe" (Levin 25), Bergson, in Matter and Memory, refers to figuration as an "aggregate of images" in order to explain his vision of the dynamic interaction that occurs between terrestrial matter and human consciousness:

> *realism and idealism both go too far; … it is a mistake to reduce matter to the perception which we have of it, a mistake also to make of it a thing able to produce in us perceptions, but in itself of another nature than they. Matter, in our view, is an aggregate of images. And by image we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing; – an existence placed half-way between the thing and the representation. (Matter and Memory [introduction])*

Throughout his work, Bergson distinguishes between the interpretation of an image (which could just as easily be defined as "figure"), in terms of its ability to recollect the past, and the speculative reading that focuses on the image's extension, that is, how the image can be used by human understanding to widen the purview of objective perception. When certain images are accepted as appropriate recollections of the past, they tend to be conceived as symbols of a real moment in time whose integral substance – despite all efforts to collate the fragmented pieces stored away in the museum of a subjective human memory – is lost forever. History, in this case, becomes a succession of separate chunks of "spatialized moments" ready to be synthesized in the bounded purview of an individual consciousness. Bergson's concept of durée runs counter to this kind of logic, as it presupposes that all recollections of the past – no matter how institutionally celebrated, no matter what they are called ("periods" or Foucaldian "épistéme," etc.) are nothing more than still photographs – which can be more or less condensed or dilated – that seize a moment in the evolution of the mind's objective grasping of the truly enduring elements of human existence. In

this process, the enduring existence of a thing as a motionless boundary is an illusion produced by our internalization of long standing metaphysical categories. To Bergson, what truly lasts (in French “ce qui dure,” and hence the concept of durée) is the dynamic relationship between our potentially evolving consciousness and the becoming of what is. This is how he conceives human understanding. What “matters” is the leap or movement – the conduction inscribed in the Greek metaphora – from one image to the next, which will broaden the scope of our grasping of the world. This leap, the force set forth in the figure’s conduction, is inherent to the things that the mind is striving to ascertain, and Bergson describes various examples that support the claim that the force of the leap – what I call “figurative agency” – is indeed transferred to the provisionally grounded images that the human imagination produces with respect to things. These images are the figures that inhabit artistic and cultural production. The question to ask, then, is: where is the figure of my recollection leading my perception? How will my sophisticated recollection of the past lead me to acquire an even more accurate understanding of how the object of my enquiry has evolved and mutated through time?

The task of cleansing our perception and understanding of the metaphysical authority of homogenized space is a great challenge, and Bergson is known to have considered literary expression as a particularly effective means of keying into the progressive mutation of reality; he apparently considered Proust’s Recherche, in spite of what he felt was its paltry attention to bourgeois frivolity, as a fulfilment of durée. Perhaps because his texts mostly rely on examples from psychology and the natural sciences, very little critical attention has been devoted to how his critique of the spatial conception of human understanding might apply to literary discourse. My claim is that the despatialized mode of perception theorized in Matter and Memory and in his other texts allows us to imagine a form of universality that parts with the organic territorial paradigms which afflict discussions surrounding the worldliness of certain literary texts and the cultural apparatuses that are grounded on their authority.

In considering Bergson’s thoughts on the figurative mobility of our mental mappings of reality, we can start to contrive how a “worldly reading” of certain tropes sketched out in texts originally drafted by national literary traditions heuristically accentuate the obstacles the mind faces in processing the images which enter its purview. From a phenomenological perspective, texts are often

assimilated to memory, a faculty that plays a pivotal role in determining how our actions will adjust to our perception. When memory is marshaled into accordance with arbitrarily circumscribed notions which err on the side of static idealism or materialism, as is often the case with fundamentalist discourses of cultural identity, it has forgotten its role as translator of how the body is supposed to deal with the "invitations to act" communicated in the form of physical affections by the material world. This is where the figurative agency mediated through language and literary discourse comes into play:

> *Memories need, for their actualization, a motor ally, and that they require for their recall a kind of mental attitude which must itself be engrafted upon an attitude of the body. If such be the case, verbs in general, which essentially express imitable actions, are precisely the words that a bodily effort might enable us to recapture when the function of language has all but escaped us. (Matter and Memory 48)*

In Matter and Memory, Bergson's analysis is fueled by the conviction that human consciousness can potentially access an unobstructed understanding of the world. His remarks on aphasia implicitly engage with the broader issue of universal consciousness. When the potential for the objective perception of matter remains dormant (or "virtual," as Deleuze would later emphasize in Bergsonism), when the aphasic patient, for instance, finds himself or herself unable to utter a linguistic verb, Bergson tells us the obstructed action (which the verb is meant to imitate) can eventually be actualized by a "motor ally" ("un adjuvant moteur") that pushes consciousness out of a drowsiness induced by its containment in a fixed cognitive (or, in the broader sense, cultural) chronotope. Bergson's implicit postulate, of course, is that what we can truly call universal in the human condition is the ability to free our minds from the colonization of language and custom in order to preserve our ability to make free decisions. These decisions can only take place in a newly harrowed vista from which the mind can survey and appraise the traces so far left behind by human intervention.

My contention is that the same is true of certain universally groundbreaking literary works. If we survey the field of world literature in its broadest sense – if we see it as encompassing significant texts outside their generic grounding in poetry, narrative, or philosophy – we can identify certain key figures whose effect on our consciousness, instead of bounding a thing in a static noun,

becomes that of a motor ally that pushes our minds towards a more refined perception of the transient nature of what truly endures.

The Figurative Push towards Understanding in Spinoza's Writing

One author whose writing reveals how the figurative agency of language can be invested to cultivate an objective grasping of reality is Baruch Spinoza. In the Theologico-Political Treatise, as is well known, Spinoza's intricate analysis is predicated on the idea that, contrary to what had ostensibly been asserted for centuries in the Judeo-Christian exegetical tradition, there is never a moment in the sacred writings when God speaks directly to the reader. Spinoza goes about supporting his thesis in many different ways, not least of which is his debunking of Moses' authorial authority. Once we recognize both that it was, from a strictly empirical perspective, virtually impossible for one human being to singlehandedly author the Pentateuch, and that, nevertheless, the cultural cohesion we have come to associate with the Judeo-Christian tradition would have been unthinkable without the grounding provided by the notion of Mosaic authorship, we can see how Moses' inscription as prosopopeia in the sacred text reveals the figurative force mediated by the various images and stories about him and his relationship to God in the Torah, a force that has been used to ground the infinite and unmovable presence of Jewish culture.

Spinoza was well-aware of this figurative power, and this explains the philological attention he devotes to the Hebrew word roo'-akh as it translates the "spirit of God": "The word roo'-akh, Strong, literally means a wind, e.g. the south wind, but it is frequently employed in other derivative significations" (Treatise chap. I). In highlighting the connection between transcendent spirit, the concept of strength and the figure of wind inscribed in the trope used to convey divine spirit, the Treatise illustrates how it is possible to read a text like the Pentateuch as subsuming the limits inherent to the spatial grounding of phenomena in a circumscribed noun. There is a figurative agency that comes through in reading the text that allows the mind both to recognize the specificity of the things called "wind," "spirit," and "strength," and simultaneously understand how the incompleteness of the nouns that stand in for these things is an invitation to think beyond their static presence in a homogenized space. The same can be said of the Jewish "textual/literary God"

who, in refusing to answer Job's questions about the reasons justifying his tribulations, can only be understood as the unnamable force that pushes one to deny the current grounded sense of "what is," and live another day with the hope of messianic revelation.

In many respects, Spinoza's work is devoted to discovering how the mind can free itself from the tyranny of arbitrary cultural myths, or what he often calls "superstitions." This freedom is ultimately achieved through what his readers know as the improvement of an "understanding" he describes as a specific mental activity that "by its native strength, makes for itself intellectual instruments, whereby it acquires strength for performing other intellectual operations, and from these operations again fresh instruments, or the power of pushing its investigations further, and thus gradually proceeds till it reaches the summit of wisdom" (Improvement axiom 31). Whereas most other 17th-century thinkers tend to characterize rational thought as the acquisition of a method that allows the human mind to reach rational spaces symbolized by the nation-state and the positivistic concepts of scientific knowledge, Spinoza, without dismissing these rational aims, insists on the agency of a "native strength" whose impetus leads the mind to produce the tools needed to push its rational investigations to their natural conclusion.

The argument that the study of world literature can train the mind to produce these tools will obviously have to confront those who vilify the claim by pointing out literature's rooting in unrestrained fantasy. While it is true that the sketching of fabulous places, outlandish plots, and garish characters in certain works can envelop our senses in an unwavering flow which appears to extirpate our minds from the jagged texture of reality, there have always been texts whose writing steers their reader towards that matrix where the precarious substratum of the images that compose our intimate world picture is exposed. These are the texts that should be studied outside the frame of a national tradition, or of any structure (realism, psychoanalysis, genre theory, etc.), that would contain their effects within a strictly delineated area.

Motor Allies in Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde and the Tao Te-Ching

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is a particular case in point. While it is traditionally celebrated as a staple of English literature and a lucid assessment of Victorian culture, a close inspection of its figurative framework reveals it also to be a particularly insightful scrutiny of the prestige of writing, which acts as a motor ally, what Bergson calls in French an adjuvant, allowing us as readers to mentally leap from the ostensible presence of the plot and main characters into a mental panorama where epistemic questions about the precarious footing of human subjectivity can be raised.

Writing is enigmatic in this story, as it is both a major theme and a metaphorical springboard that tills a virtual state of reflection where the power of writing's thematic presence is exposed. Utterson and Enfield, the lawyer and notary, both eminent specialists in the elucidation of writing, fail to identify Hyde's concealed presence in three documents: the writing of the cheque made out to protect the good doctor's reputation, the letter written in an "odd, upright hand," and Jekyll's own will, the ultimate material trace of his human intentions. Only when writing is read as a trope, as the nexus where Jekyll's public image is amalgamated to an anthropomorphic figure of his "hidden" desire, can Hyde be revealed as the toxic adjuvant described in Jekyll's "full statement," created to push the doctor's wanting across the capacious defenses erected by Victorian morality in order to preserve an aggregate image of English civility.

When Hyde signs the cheque with a name that Mr. Enfield could not mention, "though it's one of the points of [his] story, but it was a name at least very well known and often printed" (Stevenson 2), he is revealed as a presence that cannot be contained in the placeness of a name, no matter how prestigious the epithet. He is a figurative agent – an entropic, cosmic-seeking adjuvant that Jekyll's confession imagines as transiting through a seemingly choate body:

> *I began to perceive more deeply than it has ever yet been stated, the trembling immateriality, the mist-like transience of this seemingly so solid body in which we walk attired. Certain agents I found to have the power to shake and to pluck back that fleshly vestment, even as a wind might toss the curtains of a pavilion. (Stevenson 79)*

The references to flesh in this passage point to the somatic seat of the force that Jekyll attempts to describe by analogy to natural elements like mist or wind. Whereas it quickly becomes clear that

attempts to render Hyde's peculiar essence in an alphabetic signifier are bound to fail, it is precisely in detailing this failure that Stevenson's writing sketches out a new type of protagonist invested with a fiendish thrust programmed to warp even the most innocent human presence:

> *All at once, I saw two figures: one a little man who was stumping along eastward at a good walk, and the other a girl of maybe eight or ten who was running as hard as she was able down a cross street. Well, sir, the two ran into one another naturally enough at the corner; and then came the horrible part of the thing; for the man trampled calmly over the child's body and left her screaming on the ground. It sounds nothing to hear, but it was hellish to see. It wasn't like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut. (Stevenson 4)*

In this excerpt where Enfield describes the entity that has taken a mysterious dominion over Jekyll's writing, the use of the words "figure" and "juggernaut" create a tropological connection between jagannatha, the Sanskritian "lord of the universe," Ratha Yatra, the Hindu temple car, and Hyde, the queer and unfathomable alter-ego. Similar examples abound throughout the text. The force personified through Hyde is neither metaphysical spirit, nor bodily function, but something closer to the type of movable energy conceptualized as libido in psychoanalytic theory. It is perhaps not an accident that Stevenson's writing, famously inspired by a dream, accords with Freud's description in the Interpretation of Dreams of the revision that dreams go through when they are marshaled by human consciousness. As with all texts whose writing undermines the homogenized theoretical spaces in which they would be confined by national literary traditions and the myriad generic models institutionalized in the 20th century, "the modifications which the dream undergoes in its revision by the waking mind are just as little arbitrary. They preserve an associative connection with the content, whose place they take, and serve to show us the way to this content, which may itself be a substitute for yet another content" (The Interpretation of Dreams chapter 7).

Whether we agree with Jekyll that there is duality at the heart of the self, whether we see Hyde as a representation of pure evil or the Nietzschean Übermensch, these considerations matter little if we read the text with a view to learning something about how a literary work mitigates the homeostatic and ultimately drowsing effect induced by the various spaces in which the human faculty of conceptualization places the mind in order to help it identify worldly phenomena. Hyde is

a body where certain hidden things are placed, named, and identified, and yet his true nature can never be described. Certainly, it is possible to read The Strange Case as one would interpret the so-called "content" or "fable" of a dream, by framing the narrative as a distorted mirror reflection of the hypocrisy of Victorian England, for instance. Surely, there is nothing "incorrect" about this frame, and yet any close reading of Hyde's passing in the narrative will inevitably be struck by the extent to which the text has woven into its skein the actual metaphors we use to conceptualize the reflective act, thus unmasking the sleight of hand that gives a concept like "representation" its condensed presence. Here, we can appreciate the difference between unmasking and debunking: the singular nature of the figuration at play in the text does not deny the representational value of literature, but instead reveals the transient becoming of the movement that we are attempting to seize through the concept of representation. If we regard the figure of the mirror, for instance, as both a narrative device used to reveal Hyde's impalpable presence and a traditional metaphor of cognitive representation, we can appreciate how Stevenson's writing enacts an intuitive ebb and flow from the shore of narrative and character to the sea of figurative language in that part of Jekyll's confession which describes how Hyde "would pass away like the stain of breath upon a mirror" (Stevenson 86).

When Freud argues that the conscious act of thinking about the "content" of the dream is not a loss of any sort, he is characterizing human thought as suspended between the dream's fanciful content and an unconscious desire which we tend to designate as a place where the dreamer is being led. This mode of designation obviously poses a problem to anyone who identifies with Freud's annoyance at any aggressive grounding of his theories into topological paradigms: the place where the act of thinking about the dream's content is leading the dreamer might be just another allegorical content. What matters is less about reaching a destination where the dream makes sense than developing a mental discipline that gives the mind a flowing license to explore what lies beyond its reassuring defensive horizon.

While the modern signification of the juggernaut as an unstoppable force that tramples anything standing in its way can legitimately be read as a complex foreshadowing of the Freudian concepts of Id and Thanatos, the power of this polysemic figure resides in the circumscribed manner in which it weaves a yarn that is at once intertextual, intercultural, and interdisciplinary. This "manner"

of connecting Hindustani culture to 19th-century European concerns with unconscious desire has little to do with an act of grounding or an arbitrary yoking of exotic material; it is closer, in my assessment, to the "throwing together" that C.S. Peirce sees as the essence of the symbolic, a vista which brings us back to the presence of the agent who chooses when and what to throw. This is the object of Jekyll's questioning at the end of the full statement of his case: who is the real agent of his existence? Is it Dr. Jekyll, the paragon of English decorum, or Hyde, the queer precipitate resulting from a mysterious impurity added to the chemist's admixture? The question is utterly rhetorical, of course. The only thing that the writer of the full statement can be sure of, ultimately, is that "what is to follow concerns another than myself " (Stevenson 103).

In the end, it is indeed the triangular relationship between the writers (Jekyll, Hyde, Stevenson), the residual documents left behind (the will, the cheque, the final statement), and the writing itself – an act, in the full sense of the term, of Barthesian écriture – that reveals Hyde, the dematerialized juggernaut, as the tropological agent who pushes Jekyll's local diegetic tragedy – the crisis of a Victorian-era bourgeois – toward its ultimate otherness, toward that problematic and yet unavoidable existential mode of being where names and places come and go like the waves that wash up on the crags of Lord Tennyson's poetic shoreline.

The figurative agency depicted in Stevenson's novella has little of the robustness that characterizes concepts, like "representation," that occupy a familiar motionless boundary, concepts that we have internalized into the scope of what we expect a literary work to teach us about the world. And yet, once we stop confining the objects of our perception to the artificial territories colonized by Western metaphysics, structuralism, and literary history – namely those that pertain to evolution and diachronic historical progress – we can appreciate how certain works accentuate the tension inherent to the mysterious process by which we name those things that seem to exist beyond local custom or national culture. If we look carefully, we will see that the writing that produces these texts emerges in a host of different venues, genres, and historical periods. We see it, for instance, in the remoteness of the 6th-century Zhou dynasty's Tao Te Ching, a text whose relationship to the Taoist tradition can only, according to Taoist scholar Isabelle Robinet, "be grasped in its concrete manifestations" (Robinet 9):

The named is the mother of myriad things
Thus, constantly without desire, one observes its essence
Constantly with desire, one observes its manifestations
These two emerge together but differ in name
The unity is said to be the mystery
Mystery of mysteries, the door to all wonders (Tao Te-Ching 1)

These opening verses of the Tao establish an implicit separation between "the named" and things, a distinction reminiscent of Aristotle's famous contention that it is impossible to discuss things in themselves; in their place, we must use their names as symbols (On Interpretation part I). The manifestation of things in language happens "with desire," it happens through a mysterious agency that results from the symbols that name things, leaving us perpetually wanting. In the Taoist framing of the cosmos, it would be a mistake to believe that this wanting calls for the intervention of some transcendent deity, since one can always mutatis mutandis observe its essence "without desire." In her study on the origins of Taoist thought, Robinet explains how the sketching of desire in the Tao distinguishes itself from western conceptions in that it relates to the provisional near-sightedness induced by the investment of energy in a concrete denomination, a process that naturally morphs into a far-sightedness that opens up the consciousness to the agency of the Qi:

The universe is involved in a constantly evolving process of perpetual self creation (one of its denominations is 'the ten thousand transformations'), in a perpetual movement of genesis and becoming, emanating from the unique material of the primordial (Yuanqi) Breath (or energy), which is neither matter, nor spirit[1] *(Robinet 14)*

In its accentuation of a force that undermines the totalization (i.e., the naming) of its way (the metaphor used in western translation to signify the tao) in a localized space, the Tao Te-Ching is one of many texts, like The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, that portray an enigmatic correlation between figuration and human consciousness. One of the benefits of the study of world literature rests in its comparative study of narratives that plot out a place in the figurative language

and imagery registered by human perception for the mysterious creative process by which presence and meaning "take place."

Not all great works of literature are worldly in this sense. Not all of them concern themselves with the adjuvant push that, as Bergson explains in Matter and Memory, leads us away from the stale images of pure memory into the active figures of an imagination engaged in understanding how each individual consciousness can seize the objective and lasting conditions of its own becoming. These conditions are difficult to fathom for the mind that believes that what lasts must be understood in terms of a time that "holds sway." Unlike Heidegger, Bergson's durée, his entire way of thinking about duration, refuses to piously bow down to a time-towards-death, or to any homogenous spatialized time cradling life itself:

> *This imaginary homogeneous time is, as we have endeavoured to show elsewhere, an idol of language, a fiction of which the origin is easy to discover. In reality there is no one rhythm of duration; it is possible to imagine many different rhythms which, slower or faster, measure the degree of tension or relaxation of different kinds of consciousness, and thereby fix their respective places in the scale of being. To conceive of durations of different tensions is perhaps both difficult and strange to our mind, because we have acquired the useful habit of substituting for the true duration, lived by consciousness, a homogeneous and independent Time. (Bergson, Matter and Memory, 256)*

In the preface to his second book on Spinoza's intellectual legacy, Yirmiyahu Yovel denotes Spinoza's contribution to what he calls the "world of immanence," a concept that he admits remains elusive: "Is it Nature, as in Spinoza, or rather Spirit, History, Wille, or any other metaphysical construction? Should it be individuated as a single, infinite totality? Should it also be deified? What structure applies to it: mechanical causality, organic purposiveness, dialectical logic – or a much more fluid and flexible model?" (Yovel xi). These are important questions, and perhaps it is time to experiment with new epistemic models which allow us to rethink and reshape our understanding and applied spatial paradigms regarding any immanent global world. Space is a powerful source of illusion when it is taken in as a succession of static photographs. One of those illusions is that certain places – whether physical or symbolic, nation-states, traditions or scientific concepts – are infinitely organic. Bergson's intellectual legacy is all about replacing these stills with mental

projections that account for the fact that true human understanding and development doesn't proceed from any preconceived, monotheistic, and transcendent plan. Although it would be foolish to believe that human consciousness can dispense with placing its perceptions in the ground that our intellectual traditions have shaped into linguistic signifiers, symbolic images, and rational concepts, we need to remind ourselves of the objective insight that has been gained in studying the way certain works of art provide us with flexible tools that help our minds materialize and reflect on the graceful mutations that define an examined and cultured human life. These tools, which I have designated under many different names in this paper, revolve around the artistic figure, with a particular focus on adjuvant, cosmic-seeking figures that, when properly digested by human consciousness, help perform a sublimation of the homogenous extended space which plays such a key role in reinforcing current anachronistic paradigms of cultural dominance and distinction.

My focus on the push of what I identified as "figurative agency" should not be interpreted as a call for a return to romanticized notions of literary spirit, Hegelian aesthetics, or authorial genius. I would prefer that it be seen as an appeal to the cultivation of an intuitive approach to world literature, one that does not make the mistake of believing that our current projections of reality are an extension of a universal plane that has seemingly always held sway. It seems to me that the future and relevance of world literature studies hinge on our ability to understand and clarify the nature of the push that is performed in the writing of those extraordinary texts that led Goethe to the intuition that what binds all humans together is best expressed through literary expression.

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[1] “L’univers s’autocrée perpétuellement en une évolution constante (l’une de ses dénominations est ‘les dix mille transformations’), en perpétuels genese et devenir, a partir d’un matériau unique, le Souffle (ou énergie) primordial (Yuanqi) qui n’est ni matiere, ni esprit.” (All translations from the French text are mine).


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