

On the Comparison of Interliterary Configurations

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**Abstract:** In his article, "On the Comparison of Interliterary Configurations," Armin Paul Frank proposes to draw conceptual and methodological conclusions from what comparatists know but do not always act upon, namely that comparison is essential to an understanding of literature because most authors of primary literature write comparatistically. They inscribe in their texts similarities or differences or both to extant international (and national) texts and sources. This is how literary meaning is produced, this is how status is implicitly but effectively ascribed to works, authors, and literatures, and thus resulting in (inter)cultural work including the enriching of a national literature. From a comprehensive perspective, this is how the history of literature -- which differs from, but is not unrelated to, the history of literary life -- is being made: Not intra-nationally nor in the context of an indiscriminate internationality but within configured sets of more or less closely connected literatures that change throughout time. In order to outline the internationalist making of American literatures and to compare typically American configurations of interliterary processes, Frank presents a number of such interliterary configurations.

**Armin Paul FRANK**

### **On the Comparison of Interliterary Configurations**

The approach I suggest makes conceptual and methodological use of what is common knowledge among comparatists although not always acted upon, namely that comparison is essential for an understanding of every significant work in almost any literature because the authors themselves have always written more or less comparatistically. Inscribing into one's work in progress differences to correlative works not only of national but also of international origin is common practice. This is, after all, how literary meaning is produced, status implicitly but effectively ascribed, and (inter)cultural work carried out. By examining acts of writing in view of how authors responded to extant writings it is possible to disclose the dynamics of literary history, i.e., to identify the changing attitudinal ways by which sets of works and sets of literatures were conjoined or disjoined within what I would like to call "interliterary configurations." These interliterary configurations -- which are, of course, also subject to historical change -- are established by individual and interrelated acts of writing. They differ widely not only in their linguistic, historical, and cultural constitution but also in their patterns of change. Their comparison, which should take similarities and differences carefully into account, may help to identify typical interliterary actions ranging from enrichment through (re)alignment to alienation and the production and resolution of intercultural tensions.

If literary history is a cooperation and counteroperation of individual acts of writing contributing to a process which -- not barring stops, gaps, and turns -- brings about both the homogenization and the differentiation of a literature, both tendencies are, much of the time, due to transfer from the configured set of foreign literatures with which any given literature (except the most ancient of Ancient Egypt) maintains close ties. Whether such contacts are haphazard and individual or, having become habitual and institutionalized connections, form relatively stable networks, interliterary exchange, like all international trade in the broadest sense of the word, relies on mutual expectations and interests, ad hoc rules and traditional customs (which, however, are subject to ad hoc changes agreed upon by participants), as well as on national legislation and trade agreements by interstate agencies or transnational authorities. Drawing on international business research, Anthony Pym has identified this regulatory complex as a *régime*, a circumscribed set of specialized international expectations and actions which, though only in part autonomous, are yet self-regulated by customs as well as agreements on the part of participants. According to Pym, in his article "Les Notions de 'réseau' et de 'régime' en relation littéraires internationales," such *régimes* differ from systems: "Two criteria help to distinguish a 'regime' from a 'system.' First, the idea of 'independent actors,' pointing as it does to a theater for which the play has not yet been written, does not presuppose the kind of unity which a single author or a major world power is capable of enforcing. Second, and more important, the 'substance' of a regime is not so much what goes on at the material level of a network as the very 'expectations' of the actors ... their perception of international relations, current, of the future, or desirable" (13; my translation) ("Deux aspect peuvent nous permettre de distinguer 'régime' et 'système.' D'une part, la notion d'"acteurs indépendant" renvoie à un théâtre pour lequel le drame n'a pas encore été écrit: on ne présuppose pas la sorte de cohérence que pourrait imposer un auteur unique ou une grande puissance mondiale. D'autre part, et surtout, la "matière" d'un régime n'est pas tant tout ce qui se passe au niveau matériel d'un réseau, que les "attentes" même des acteurs ... leur perception des rapports internationaux actuels, futurs, ou souhaitable" (13).

Seen in this light and based on recent research and ongoing projects (see Appendix: Studies Consulted), I invite readers to imagine literary history as the intercultural and intracultural work carried out by individual acts of writing which are not only effective within individual national literatures but whose effective contexts are *régimes*. There are, in fact, a good number of historical situations when *régimes* were more important than the national confines of literatures. From this perspective, in our contemporary situation usually defined as one of internationalization in which the concept of nation has lost its clear outlines (Schöning 47) it is of primary importance to study *régimes* and to synthesize literary histories in their terms rather than in those of nations.

I propose to summarize recent research on the interliterary configuration of American literatures and of literature in the European Middle Ages and to suggest unlooked for similarities, however great the dissimilarities might be. As a first step, it seems important to explain a few principles and to explicate a few key terms. A comparative discussion of related but different suggestions, findings, and theories by, alphabetically, Walter Jackson Bate, Harold Bloom, Kenneth Burke, T.S. Eliot, Hans Robert Jauss, Linden Peach, Robert Weisbuch, and others cannot be accommodated here (for partial discussions see Frank, "Writing Literary Independence" 66-68; Buchenau and Felsberg).

All writers are, first and foremost, readers. Their reading may, on occasion, be reflected passively in their writing; quite often, it is employed deliberately in order to give meaning and status to the work that they are engaged in writing. Much of the time, a writer's individual acts of writing have, or are thought to have, supra-individual -- local, regional, national, transnational relevance -- contributing as they do to giving a profile to divers units of literary culture. Readers trained in European classical and classicist literatures know how to respond to the art of nuanced variation which the writers displayed rather than concealed; concealment was the rule when the doctrine of original genius prevailed. The models to be imitated or the correlative texts selected for other purposes (such as rejection) were either taken from the writer's own literature or, quite often, from other literatures, either directly or in translation. Literature, it should be added, here carries both the narrow and the broad meaning: writings of literary value and prestige as well as anything represented in letters, whether in print or not. And, be it admitted, it overlaps on other arts as well, insofar as paintings, operas, etc. may be included among the correlative works drawn upon for the purpose of producing meaning and culture.

In order to discern the meaningful use of literary correlations as well as the nature of intracultural or intercultural work, whatever the case may be, carried out by acts of writing, it is important to identify not only the sources a writer has used but the uses that were made of them: what the later writer adopted, omitted, or added, and towards what end(s). So far, five basic strategies, each taking quite different forms in actual practice, have been recently described in the Glossary of *The Internationality of National Literatures in Either America: Transfer and Transformation*. Vol.2: *British America and the United States, 1770s-1850s* (Frank and Mueller-Vollmer). Their nature depends on the particular interliterary configuration within which they are used. I found it easiest to identify them by compounds of the German word for writing, *schreiben*. Two of these strategies, expressing different degrees of subservience, amount to different ways of imitating a model work, writer, or literature: *nachschreiben* (to follow a literary model closely) and *weitschreiben* (to extend and develop a literary model), with *zuendeschreiben* (to carry the impetus found in a model to the end of the line) denoting a subgroup of the second. The two to emphasize rejection are *gegenschreiben* (to correlate one's work to another one in a way that alienates the other) and *vorbeischreiben* (to avoid a likely correlative work, author or literature and to link one's work instead to a correlative in a third literature); the kind of intercultural work of the fifth strategy, *umschreiben* (to adapt a correlative work to one's own context), is to do both.

The intercultural work a strategy is capable of depends on the interliterary configuration as can be seen in international phenomena such as the historical romance in the manner of Walter Scott. The adaptation (*Umschreiben*) of the example of the British "Wizard of the North" to circumstances in the United States of America contributed both to the homogeneity and the dissociation of the Atlantic reading culture in English. For to adopt the conceptual basis of Scott's kind of historical romance amounted to continue writing British, whereas the introduction of American geographical or historical detail meant to bring about a degree of differentiation. But to replace -- as J.F. Cooper did in his first historical romance, *The Spy* of 1821 -- the Scottish Highlands by the Highlands of the Hudson, Evan Dhu's band of marauders by The Skinners, the defeated Pretender by victorious General Washington, etc., is an Americanization merely of the surface. The situation is quite different when French, German, Italian, or Estonian, etc., writers adopted the model of Scott for representations of their own history in their own language. In so doing, they imported a British conceptual model, thus modifying, differentiating, and enriching their own literatures. On the other

hand, the employment of French, German, Italian, or Estonian detail at the circumstantial level serves to maintain a degree of homogeneity within each non-English literature.

While *umschreiben* is a strategy whose efficacy at achieving differentiation is, as a rule, overestimated, the strategy of *vorbeischreiben* -- of bypassing the hegemonial literature -- is usually ignored or, if noticed, misunderstood. At the times when American writers were primarily engaged in the intercultural work of giving their literatures a profile of their own, many of them responded in positive ways not to the metropolitan literature written in the same language but to a different European literature. To deprecate this practice as a form of dependence on Europe is to disregard the dynamics inherent in the interliterary (and interlingual) configuration. For to take one's bearings from a third literature, whether European or not, is to bypass the hegemonial literature by importing features which it is not likely to possess, thus making the American counterpart literature different.

A *reading culture* comprises that habitual complex of six cultural activities that cooperate in the i) making, ii) distributing, iii) reading, iv) commenting upon, v) preserving, and vi) translating of literature. Preservation not only in archives and libraries but also in retrospective anthologies anticipates rereading, reevaluating, and rewriting. The notion of reading culture obviously includes the requisite human, technical, institutional, and financial resources. Whenever a reading culture is co-extensive with the language used by a literate society, and only by one literate society, we encounter one kind of national literature. Reading cultures are linked wherever an individual or an agency is involved in (literary) *transfer*. Literary translation and all it involves is an effective instrument of transfer; for multilingual readers, the importation of books or scrolls and other printed or written matter will do. Transfer is an occasion that motivates processes of literary history. The same holds true when a reading culture cuts across authoritative social entities such as religious communities, nations, and states.

To define nation and state in a few paragraphs is impossible but necessary for the purpose at hand. In a nutshell, the question of what a nation might be involves the consideration of relationships between 1) a people's source of identity (*Wir-Gefühl*, the sense of We over against Them), 2) the source of divine authority, 3) the source of civil authority, 4) territory, and 5) rival sources of supra-familial identities. My objective is not to attempt a typology of nations by systematic inquiry; rather, I use selected historical relationships as a shortcut to make the topic tractable here. This approach has, I think, a further advantage: Historical instances have a way of promoting an understanding without the ubiquitous need of formal definition. I am aware that I am cutting more corners in the following sketch than is, perhaps, good for my argument; but otherwise it would easily run into hundreds of pages. An ideal case -- certainly an ideal case to start -- is that of the Children of Israel according to the First Testament. Here, identity, divine authority, and civil authority, although distinguishable, are not distinct. The identity of the Jewish nation consists in the Biblical doctrine of God's chosen people. Set apart from other nations by obstinately submitting to God's special guidance, they regulated -- some might say, overregulated -- the daily affairs by expanding God's ten commandments into an intricate system of dos and don'ts. Membership in one of the twelve tribes does not seem to have affected the sense of national identity adversely. Territory, important in the sense of a promised homeland, was not essential, for the sense of identity persisted throughout migrations and captivities. Up to the destruction of the Temple, Nationality, Religion, and Statehood were, in principle, identical; under diaspora conditions, Nationality and Religion served the purpose.

National captivity and subjection (enslavement, disenfranchisement, etc.) are historically recurrent phenomena. Nations, defined ethnically in the etymological sense of the word derived from Latin *natio*, related to *nasci*, to be born, and meaning *birth, descent, tribe*, frequently lived under the civil authority of a different nation or, together with several others, under the supranational authority of a prince or dictator, as in the -- different -- historical cases of, say, the Austro-Hungarian ("Hapsburg") empire or the Soviet Union. Such an arrangement does not always work out badly. Especially when religion, not nation, is felt to be the source of identity, and when it is not a matter of suppression, life under a supranational authority is often acceptable. After the religious wars in seventeenth-century Europe, for instance, the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*

brought about a degree of stabilization by relocation. The formula, taking for granted that the owner of a territory is also the rightful ruler and the source of civil authority for his subjects, distinguished (*termino*) logically between civil authority in this proprietary sense (*regio*) and religion. Nevertheless, it decreed the coextensiveness of the two for all practical purposes; nationality was clearly subordinate. If the official religion was observed and the prince's will heeded, it did not really matter what language you spoke and who were your kindred. It was at that time that my forebears were transported from a German-speaking Tyrolean principality that had turned Protestant to live among Czech Catholics in what is now Moravia, with intermarriage more than a rare practice. After 1945, I was among those who were transported from what was then Czechoslovakia because of our nationality. What had happened in the intervening centuries -- first in the newly founded United States of America, shortly afterwards in France, and with a number of other countries following -- was the disjunction of divine and civil authority. The results of the constitutional separation of Church and State, wherever it was effected, were not identical. In the case of ethnic nations, the change was accompanied by the rise and irradiation of the idea of the *nation state*: the fervid belief that each nation has the inalienable right to set up its own civil authority, if necessary by violence that includes ethnic cleansing. Sometimes, religious differences aggravate the resultant struggles and atrocities, witness Ireland, the Balkan, the Near East.

Quite a different national situation is characteristic of the United States of America and those among the immigration countries that followed the example. The British Americans were the first in modern times to devise a nation as a constitutional democratic and republican system of civil authority valid for an underpopulated and underdeveloped territory open to immigration and improvement (to use the eighteenth-century term). Immigration was taken as a self-evident act of consent to "the American system," and citizenship was considered as the membership card to the American constitutional-territorial nation consisting of comers from, ideally, all ethnical nations. To the extent that this kind of nation of nations (or transnational nation) was made possible by deliberate choices the political one of ratifying the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Constitution (1789), as well as, later, the millions of individual decisions to immigrate and take out citizenship, it seems reasonable to characterize this kind of nation as an *ethical* one. (Greek *ethos* means *character* -- but how better prove character than by making choices?). The ideal situation is somewhat modified by such realities as the near extermination -- partly accidental, partly deliberate -- of the pre-European Americans, the transportation of slaves from Africa, the WASP ethnic nationalism of the latter part of the nineteenth century that has survived regionally, immigration quotas, and non-WASP ethnic nationalisms which, it seems, were inadvertently promoted rather than alleviated by the doctrine of multiculturalism (see Welsch). The argument, at this point, suggests a more radical distinction between the ethical and the ethnic concept of nation than is allowed by constructivist theory. While the ethically conceived nation may well be an imaginary construct in Benedict Anderson's sense, the ethnic one is differently grounded. Even so, the different concepts of what makes for a people's identity must be taken equally seriously, as must the conjunctions and disjunctions with the sources of divine and civil authority, territory, and rival identities in order to have a realistic basis for identifying nations as well as one factor for the distinction of national literatures and interliterary configurations.

In *The Internationality of National Literatures in Either America*. Vol.1: *Cases and Problems* (Ed. Armin Paul Frank and Helga Essmann), I suggested that "genuine interest in literature never stopped short at any border or dividing line, whether geographic, linguistic, religious, dynastic, political, national, social, or cultural ... It is equally true that literature has often been used to help drawing or strengthening the artificial ones among these boundaries, sometimes by the authors themselves, sometimes by managers of ulterior purposes. Not unfrequently, strictly literary ad hoc distinctions preceded official or semi-official demarcations. Literary nationality is, therefore, not necessarily a consequence of political nation-building, nor do traits of literary nationality inevitably coincide with ideological or political ones" (1). I also sketched eight interliterary configurations. Although I am aware that the list reflects my own limitations and although my own studies are so far restricted to the British-English American domain, I want to take this occasion to elaborate the



sketch in a way which, I hope, will invite scholars with a more extensive reading to think along similar lines.

The eight interliterary configurations are: 1) literatures in new vernacular languages under the roof, as it were, of a common language shared by the learned, as in the European Middle Ages; 2) literatures following the model of a literature of the past (or two), as in the European Renaissances; 3) literatures that are, in theory, equal and compete with each other, as in Europe after the *Querelle*; 4) literatures of the new nation states in cases such as Norway (although I am aware of important differences, I wonder whether the case of Roman literature in relation to Greek may not be a variant); 5) the dissociation of literatures in settlement colonies and their successor nations from the respective metropolitan literatures, with each new literature being written in the same language as the established one, as in the case of the Americas; 6) the hybridization of literatures, written in the language of the (former) hegemonial power, in trade colonies and their successor states, as in the case of India; 7) splinter literatures eking out a precarious existence in countries (land ownership but no state) whose official literature is written in the dominating language, as in the case of Afrikaans literature; 8) diaspora literatures persisting perhaps even more precariously (neither land nor state) in a more or less ghettoized state in several countries, as in the historical case of Hebrew literature.

The following main points about the internationality of literatures in either Americas can be confidently made after extensive historical study (see Appendix: Studies Consulted).

All American literatures written in European languages represent a single significant type of interliterary configuration, with the constitutive literatures and the relationships among them differing from nation to nation.

By an interliterary configuration, I intend -- it will be remembered -- a set of literatures that, regardless of language, are closely connected, and connected in special ways, by writers responding, in their works, to those of certain foreign writers, irrespective of whether they participate in a common reading culture or not. These responses and their nature, identifiable by writer response criticism, amount to acts of intercultural work.

The colonization -- in the sense of the settling -- of the Americas by Europeans brought about the extension, across the South or North Atlantic, not only of the dominion but also of the reading culture of each participating European power to include the American possessions. What we now call American literatures began as colonial extensions of European literatures. Early on, each reading culture spanning the Atlantic was homogeneously European.

The Atlantic reading cultures have remained in place up to the present day. Their internal and external dynamics have undergone considerable changes.

Today, the coexistence, in the same language, of two or more literatures (for instance, British, English American, and English Canadian) is uncontested. While, contrary to evidence, contemporary literary histories typically take it for granted that these literatures are independent of each other, they are, in historical truth, connected yet distinct.

The existence of distinct American literatures written in European languages presupposes the dissociation the breaking up of the homogeneity of the Atlantic reading cultures in Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French. This process took place within interliterary configurations that are characteristic of the relationship between the literatures of colony and metropolis as well as of the new nation and the former imperial power.

The typical core of this configuration consists of i) the American literature in the making, ii) the European counterpart literature, and iii) a -- European -- prestige literature. The wider compass includes iv) other modern European literatures, v) literatures of classical antiquity, vi) other American literatures, and vii) literatures of other parts of the world. In the case, for instance, of the literature of British America and the subsequent United States (English American literature) through 1900, the core includes British literature and, primarily for a few decades after 1815, German. The importance of other European literatures varies, sometimes by author. Of these, Scandinavian (including Finnish) and Southern European literatures serve important intercultural purposes in the work of H.W. Longfellow, as does Hebrew literature. More generally, French literature, together with Russian, gained ground in the latter part of the nineteenth century, as did

Japanese seen in such as the *Madame Butterfly* effect (e.g., James Luther Long, 1898; David Belasco, 1900; Giacomo Puccini, 1904).

Drawing on the writing strategies outlined above, it is possible to sketch the typical dynamics that characterizes the literary history of American settlement colonies and their successor nations. The different time frames and circumstances that characterize the literatures in Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French modify but do not invalidate the common pattern. A particular problem of Spanish-American literature is its double context: It is regarded both as a distinctive non-European literature written in Spanish and as the literatures of a number of sovereign Spanish-speaking nations of South and Central America.

As has been noted, reading and writing in European languages in America began when the reading cultures of the imperial powers were expanded across the Atlantic to include the transatlantic possessions. This "European state" of literatures in America extended not only through each colonial period but long into postcolonial times, for a number of reasons: Persistence of literary tastes, unauthorized reprinting of popular works originating in the European counterpart literatures, expressing loyalty to the "Mother Country" by means of *nachschreiben* and *weilerschreiben*, especially during early political quarrels and military strife. The making of distinctive American literatures by acts of writing that served to dissociate the Atlantic reading cultures was a parallel process. The first attempts in colonial times were, as a rule, dissimulated (one motive was the desire to make a mark in the metropolitan book market: there was no reasonable other) and remained, quite often, isolated. Insofar, each American literature has several beginnings. And each American literature -- each in its own way -- went through a succession of states, that of major *dissociation*, *stabilization*, and *self-confidence* and *foreign recognition* before it was ready to participate in the normal give and take among literatures that are, in principle, equal but, subject to change, have greater or less prestige as model literatures (*Leitliteraturen*). Major dissociation is characterized either by adversary responses to the European counterpart literature (*gegenschreiben*) or a turning, for models, to a third literature (*vorbeischreiben*) -- usually the respective European prestige literature -- or by both. Stabilization is primarily a matter of consolidating dissociative gains either by building intraliterary continuities (see Brodhead; Strout) or by sequences of quasi-parallel acts of dissociation (see Frank and Müller-Vollmer). A typical sign of literary self-confidence is the deliberate and large-scale disruption of American continuities, first, perhaps, in the form of satire (Mark Twain) but later, and more importantly, in dead earnest; the importation and adaptation of realism and, later, of (French) naturalism amounted to a break with important aspects of earlier modes of romantic writing in many American literatures. This kind of self-confidence is, of course, helped by advanced foreign recognition: by the recognition not of the contributions by individual writers who happen to be Americans (Garcilaso el Inca, Benjamin Franklin) but of whole fields of literature that are, or are supposed to be, distinctive of an American literature (for instance, "the American short story"), and not only critical, translational, and anthological recognition but recognition by positive responses on the part of authors.

This sketch cannot help but omitting a consideration of such important but not essential phenomena as dialect and regional literature, the use of indigenous material by Euro-American writers and the use of Euro-American forms by indigenous, Afro-American or Asian-American writers, and the two precarious roles of splinter literatures in languages other than English. The latter are exclaves of foreign literatures whose writers frequently have a double loyalty: Politically, to the American nation whose citizens they are, and culturally to the literature whose language and literary schemas they employ, with variations (see Wood); and they are enclaves, sometimes ghettoized, sometimes made fashionable, sometimes even translated, in the large field of the respective dominant American literature written in a different language (see Rølvaag). This omission is only partly due to considerations of space; the splinter literatures have never been objects of systematic research; a start has been made for the United States (see Sollors).

Both are dominated by a single language. Medieval Latin was, however, not in any sense national but -- in more senses than one -- clerical, and used with universalist pretensions. Unlike in America, the geographically restricted vernacular languages, roughly analogous to the American



splinter languages, are essential: Whether of Latin origin or not, they were not recessive (as were all American splinter languages, with the possible exception of Spanish in the contemporary United States), but expansive. Eventually, several of them became national languages. While this first observation represents common knowledge, the following presuppose findings made by a recent cooperative project. From 1997 to 1999, a group of Medievalists specializing in Latin, French/Provençal, and German literatures at the University of Göttingen studied the textual diversification in the various narratives of Alexander between the end of the eleventh and the middle of the thirteenth centuries. The keywords being *interdependence* and *Selbstkonstitution* (gaining an individual, local, or regional profile in linguistic and literary terms), it is evident that the objectives of the Medievalist group were fairly similar to those of the Americanists. So are the two historical-geographical situations in that the medieval period under study and the American colonial period were, politically, pre-national.

For the Medieval configuration, the opposition *regional / transregional* makes more sense than *national / international*, with region defined as an area possessing a distinctive political and cultural center, and *transregional* designating a literary effort that aimed at transcending regional confines or that achieved such a transcendence, whether intentionally or not (Schöning 51). By comparison, the extension of the several European reading cultures to span the Atlantic also amounts to the opening up of potential regions. The concept of region is, with one modification, indeed applicable to Loyalist writing in America. Loyalist writing (*nachschreiben*, *weilerschreiben*) is provincial in the sense that, while the European empires were intact, political and cultural centers in the Americas were, in fact, sub-centers. One of the rare exceptions is Québec during the Vichy *régime* in France when the Canadian province was, for a brief period of time, something like the publishing center of the French-speaking world. On the other hand -- always remembering that literary maneuvers within each Atlantic reading culture (including efforts at literary Americanization) share a single language -- the dissociations resulting in distinctive American literatures are neither regional nor transregional but -- in keeping with this paradigm -- *supraregional*: Aiming at what, in the United States of America, was called (literary, cultural, intellectual) independence, *gegenschreiben* and *vorbeischreiben* had *national* import even before an independent American nation had come into existence because they were effective at the same level at which the status of established national literatures written in the same languages (say, Spanish or British literature) were located. It is this peculiar situation which the term *Eigenliteratur* (a literature of one's own, a distinctive literature) was designed to identify. The European Middle Ages were also pre-national, although in a more general sense than that of an American colony striving for cultural independence from an established European nation: In the Middle Ages, nations as we know them now did not yet exist. This circumstance makes it likely that yet another dissimilar similarity can be identified. An examination of literary relationships between political and cultural regions for attitudes implying a sense of hierarchy subordination, superordination, insubordination is likely to provide reasons to complement the distinction *regional / transregional* by a third element, *supraregional*. I should not be surprised if writer-response studies would help to distinguish a vernacular (not Latin) supraregion, composed of several (vernacular) subregions as nucleus of a proto-national vernacular literature in the making. A good candidate seems to be the region around the royal court in central France.

The diversificatory reading of medieval epics on the life of Alexander may eventually produce something like a "literary geography of medieval images of Alexander" consisting of regions characterized by widely varying interpretations of the common theme (Schöning 51). Would it be possible to regard these varieties as indicators if not of different "imagined political communities" (Anderson 15) then of the literary and cultural specifics of "communities of literary communication" (Schöning 21)? The German term *literarische Kommunikationsgemeinschaften* ("communities of literary communication") is, no doubt, neater; it is particularly useful because it serves as a reminder that the writer-mediator-reader-relationship in the Middle Ages, narrowly circumscribed as it was regionally, was also a matter of a rather rigorous separation of social groups, for instance by the criterion of literacy, or a special kind of literacy (Cölln 23). It is in this immediate context of regional literary identities that medievalists also found use for the term

*Eigenliteratur*, without, however, ascribing to the literature thus designated the status of a supraregional literature -- something like a national literature *avant la lettre*. This reticence was a wise one, not only because nations in the sense that is required in order to support the concept of a national literature had not yet been formed in the Middle Ages but also because the experimental setup was calculated to yield but a single cross-section. More study is necessary in order to gain historical depth for a better understanding of the regional literatures to the extent that the diversificatory reading of the matter of Alexander has identified them. One possibility might be to study other extensive epic literature for areas of overlap or discrepancies, another to focus on one region -- perhaps on central, royal France and the pertinent configuration of regional *Eigenliteraturen* plus Latin -- over a period of time in view of two objectives: 1) to identify its reading culture the habitual complex, it will be remembered, of six cultural activities that cooperate in the i) making, ii) distributing, iii) reading, iv) commenting upon, v) preserving, and vi) translating of literature as well as adjacent ones, with the dividing lines provisionally defined by less intensive literary activities and 2) to determine whether literary processes of differentiation, accretion, emancipation and such like -- whether similar to, or dissimilar from the ones identified in Atlantic reading cultures -- can be distinguished that allow an interpretation in terms of the formation of a proto-national literature: one that has supraregional rank and status and later developed into a national literature.

A fourth dissimilar similarity, one that connects the Middle Ages and the contemporary situation world-wide, was implicitly suggested by the director of the Medieval project, Ulrich Mölk (Schöning 47): The use of Latin and English as *linguae francae*, as convenient languages of international communication. The differences may, at first glance, seem to outweigh the similarities which, nevertheless, warrant a careful examination. All I can do here is offer a few exploratory remarks as follows. In the Middle Ages, Latin, although from one point of view a dead language, was the repository of two cultures: the political and literary culture of Rome (whose native language it was) and the Roman Empire, on the one hand, and, on the other, the piety and religious culture of Christendom, for which, certainly after the completion of the *Vulgate* in 405, Latin was a truly living, though acquired language. The interest was clearly focused on the Christian, not the pagan tradition. Contemporary English, by comparison, doubles as a natural medium of communication in several national varieties on three continents (with the Anglo-American variety clearly predominating) and as an acquired language of international communication for speakers of other languages. The coexistence of these two overlapping uses accounts for some complications and animosities. I should think that *Franglais* is felt to be particularly offensive because it is seen as a contamination of French with the language of contemporary foreigners for whose culture one feels a fascinated dislike, whereas medieval Latin was no one's language and could therefore serve as anyone's and enrich all the vernaculars. The areas for which Latin was used, and English is currently employed, overlap but are not identical. While medieval Latin literature has long been an object of study, a consistent inquiry into the interliterary configurations involving peoples where English as an acquired language is essential to a culture - for instance, in India where literature written in one of the regional languages is habitually translated into English as basis for parallel translations into other regional languages -- might well yield further points of comparison. What seems clear, however, is that a common sociolinguistic paradigm has become obsolete: the one which considers English to have a common core and several larger or smaller areas of national specifics: Americanisms, Britishisms, Canadianisms, etc. The use of English as an acquired language is another such core function. As an international auxiliary language for those members of the scientific and scholarly as well as the international business (including show business) communities -- not to forget internet users -- who have or have not gone beyond the pidgin stage it yet differs from medieval Latin. It is not really a repository of traditional wisdom but an instrument to facilitate specialized communication. Will it eventually become the repository of a transnational culture that has its origin not in 405 but in the latter part of the last century?

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## Appendix: Studies Consulted

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