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New York, Capital of World Literature? On Holocaust Memory and World Literary Value

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Abstract: The question of how world literary value is produced has been central to recent debates. While Pascale Casanova's influential account of a relatively autonomous 'world literary space' follows the work of Pierre Bourdieu in applying economic metaphors to processes of world literary value production, this essay argues that Casanova's 1999 account needs to be updated in light of recent economic and cultural developments: the economic and the literary sphere are no longer separate but fundamentally entwined, which means that processes of world literary value creation cannot be modeled as a pseudo-market. The essay traces ongoing debates on the transcultural circulation of Holocaust memory to put forward a more flexible and multifaceted model for the production of world literary value. To demonstrate the claim that world literary value is today articulated with other forms of value, the essay investigates the role of Holocaust memory in the recent world literary consecration of Roberto Bolaño, Karl-Ove Knausgaard, and Elena Ferrante. Concentrated around New York-based publishers and media, these three cases not only demonstrate the crucial role of Holocaust memory in articulating literary value, they also show the recent shift from Paris to New York as a primary center of world literary value production.

1 Introduction: On World Literary Value

There are few more remarkable recent examples of world literary consecration than that of Elena Ferrante: a familiar but by no means widely celebrated figure in Italian literature, Ferrante became a literary sensation – internationally, and also in Italy – after the American publication and enthusiastic critical reception of her *Neapolitan Novels* since 2012. 'Ferrante fever' names both a commercial (with now over 2.6 million books sold in the English-language market) and a literary critical phenomenon. New York plays a crucial role in Ferrante's international

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consecration. Her work is published in English by Europa Editions, a New York-based independent publisher that is distributed by Penguin Random House (one of the so-called ‘Big Five’ publishers, together with Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, and Simon & Schuster), and was broadly promoted in New York-based media (most influentially in an essay in the *New Yorker* by James Wood [2013]) before it embarked on its international career. The consecration of Ferrante exemplifies a number of features that, as we will see, are typical of New York-based world literary consecration: there is the fact that the *Neapolitan Novels* are, among other things, novels *about* literature and *about* the work of writing, and there is Ferrante’s notorious anonymity. While this anonymity seems to pre-empt the kind of personality cults that are a key feature of contemporary literary marketing – as we will see, this has been a crucial aspect of the consecration of Roberto Bolaño and Karl-Ove Knausgaard – her anonymity has in fact ended up fueling debates over the relations between literature and personality and about the limits of literary autonomy in ways that have strengthened the association between the Ferrante phenomenon and the contemporary powers of the literary as such (Kurnick 2015a). This dynamic became even more evident when, at the beginning of October 2016, the Italian journalist Claudio Gatti (2016a) had seemingly definitively established Ferrante’s identity by studying Italian real estate records – i.e., by capitalizing on the convertibility of literary success into economic value. This revelation, in its turn, incited further critical reflection on the value of literature today, which solidified Ferrante’s association with the very notion of the literary (Tortorici 2016); at the same time, the controversy led to a further boost in sales for Ferrante’s books.

The case of Ferrante raises a number of questions: what does the entwinement of the economic and the literary mean for world literary value? What do we make of the centrality of New York as a center of world literary consecration? What does it mean that economic success and critical celebration reinforce (rather than cancel) one another? And there is the curious fact that the article that reveals Ferrante’s identity was immediately followed by a second article that presents the life story of the mother of the writer we know as Ferrante and narrates how she fled the Holocaust and survived “the worst tragedy of the twentieth century as a young girl” (Gatti 2016b: n. pag.) – even though the article admits that there are no traces of that personal history in the novels. What do we make of the association of Holocaust memory and world literary value? Indeed, what do these elements tell us about how world literature value is generated today?

The question of how world literary value is produced has been one of the central concerns in reflections on world literature. How is it that some writing is not only recognized as *literature* (which is itself not a trivial matter; Helgesson 2015a), but also as *world literature*? As the world literature paradigm only took off

after the so-called ‘canon wars’ of the 1980s and 1990s, it never entertained the illusion of the self-evident and timeless superiority of a canon of classics that those wars definitively dispelled; literary value, we now know, always partly depends on processes of denomination, mediation and institutionalization. Still, that insight does not explain how some literary texts seem to transcend their institutional and geographical contexts (Helgesson and Vermeulen 2015). The question of value resonates in some of the seminal texts in the world literature field: think of David Damrosch’s (2003: 281, emphasis mine) definition of world literature as “writing that *gains* in translation”, which sees value as somehow engendered through crosslinguistic circulation; or Pascale Casanova’s (2005: 72) definition of world literary space as “a market where non-market values are traded, within a non-economic economy.” Casanova’s deliberate paradoxes show that, even if we don’t want to reduce the creation of world literary value to market forces, in world literature debates, it is economic metaphors – market, capital, loss, gain – that most readily come to mind when we grapple for words to describe processes of literary value creation (Amitava Kumar’s [2002] notion of “world bank literature” did promise the articulation of literary production with financial value creation, but seems not to have had a lasting impact on the field; outside of the world literature field, the question of value has been the object of considerably more fine-grained theorizations [Rippl and Winko 2013]).

How, then, do we plot world literature’s ‘relative autonomy’ from economic forces? How do we conceive of the “bond between literature, history and the world, while still maintaining a full sense of the irreducible singularity of literary texts” (Casanova 2005: 71)? In this essay, I first show how recent scholarship has refined Casanova’s groundbreaking work in light of cultural and economic developments that her *La République mondiale des lettres*, which was published in 1999, did not really foresee. World literature today, I argue, operates less through claims to autonomy than through multifarious connections to different forms of cultural, symbolic, and economic capital. It is New York, rather than Casanova’s Paris, that serves as the capital of this new world literary space – a space that is no longer defined through its transcendence of the nation but that is rather connected to many contiguous cultural, social, and political domains. In a second move, I turn to recent debates on the transnational migration of Holocaust memory to explore affinities between the circulation of world literary value and the memorial dynamics of traumatic memory. Also shuttling between the singular and the universal and between the local and the global, the transnational drift of Holocaust memory offers an alternative to market metaphors for an understanding of world literary value creation. My focus on Holocaust memory is strategic: in the third and final part of the essay, I show how the production of world literary value as it is relayed through New York is caught up with the moral and memorial

dynamics of the afterlife of the Nazi atrocities. As Amy Hungerford (2013: 610) has suggested, literary oeuvres that address the Holocaust have “reliably elicited significant cultural attention in the US”, to the extent that the Holocaust has come to be an index of literary value as such. Indeed, while the association to the Holocaust is obvious enough for a writer like W. G. Sebald, the object of a massive consecration effort in the 1990s (Denham 2006; “On Bolaño” 2008), it is remarkable that that association persists in recent objects of world literary consecration whose oeuvres are less centrally concerned with the Nazi past. The cases of Roberto Bolaño, Karl-Ove Knausgaard, and Elena Ferrante testify to an intimate affinity between world literary value, New York as an important site for the production of that value, and the Holocaust as a reference point for articulating that value. In this way, they begin to make visible a crucial dimension of current world literary space.

2 World Literary Capital (Paris, New York)

Casanova conceives the relation between the literary and the economic spheres through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology. For Bourdieu, as is well known, economic capital is only one form of capital. More pertinent for the literary field is cultural capital, a form of capital that appreciates through its avowed disinterest in economic gain. Cultural capital is “systematically misrecognized as economically disinterested” (Betensky 2000: 208), and to the precise extent that it goes “unrecognized as capital”, it is “recognized as legitimate competence” (Bourdieu 1986: 49). Cultural capital mostly functions as symbolic capital, in that it depends on social processes of legitimation and recognition (rather than immediate economic pay-offs). In her work on world literature, Casanova focuses on the cumulative process of legitimation through which particular names and oeuvres are consecrated as world literature. For Casanova (1999/2004: 136, 154), this process of consecration – what she calls *littérisation* – amounts to “an actual metamorphosis”, a “[l]iterary transmutation” in which certain agents – publishers, translators, prize committees, critics, and others – transform texts into literature, and literature into world literature. For Casanova (1999/2004: 11–13), the “consecrating authorities” that confer world literary value center around Paris; in her ‘Gallocentric’ model, Paris serves as the “central bank” of the world literature market (23–24). Importantly, Casanova’s many analogies between the economic and the literary spheres achieve two things: they allow her to insist on the differences between the two spheres even while importing the logic of the market as a solution to the puzzle of world literary value. It is “the sanctioning authorities of world literary space”, she maintains, who “are the guardians, guarantors, and

creators of value” (127). Even if world literary space operates separately from the economic sphere, the particular agents, commodities, and values that make up that space relate to one another according to the logic of the market. For Casanova, the world literary and the economic spheres are separate but structurally identical.

In his recent book *What is a World?*, Pheng Cheah (2016) argues that Casanova’s use of market metaphors overlooks the intrinsic normative appeal of literary works. Literature, for Cheah, not only travels in the world, or even in the parallel reality of Casanova’s world literary space, but it also has the capacity to decree a world of its own. For Cheah, literary texts, by their very nature as aesthetic constructs and narrative events, have the power to provide “*immanent* resources for resisting capitalist globalization” (2016: 11, emphasis mine). On this account, texts become world literature “by virtue of [their] participation in worlding processes” (2016: 213). Casanova’s reliance on economic analogies prevents her from recognizing these immanent resources: “To think of the dynamics of world literature in terms of those of a global market is precisely to think of world literature as mimicking these global forces” (2016: 28). The “market metaphor” closes off “the opening of a normative horizon that transcends present reality” (2016: 31), and pre-emptly the allure of literature as a force that operates according to a logic that is fundamentally different from that of the market. Casanova assumes that the creation of world literary value depends on the disavowal of economic value (this is also Bourdieu’s central point), yet this prevents her from capturing the more complex and multifarious relations between world literary space and other domains. As James English (2008: 10) explains, “every work of ‘capital’ everywhere exists not only in relation to one particular field, but in varying relations to all other fields and all other types of capital” – literary value is always multiply entwined with political, social, journalistic, economic, and other spheres, to the point where it makes no sense to speak of “a zone or margin of ‘pure’ culture.” World literary value, then, depends less on declarations of literary autonomy than on the “differing rates of exchange and principles of negotiation” (English 2008: 10) that connect world literature to other spheres – all of which figure in the complex puzzle of world literary value.

Casanova’s resistance to a more multifaceted account of literary value is reflected in her apprehension about “the controversial issue of English hegemony and linguistic diversity” (Sapiro 2015: 5) – about the undeniable dominance of Anglophone institutions in the marketing, teaching, and distribution of world literature today. Casanova sidelines these tendencies by insisting on Bourdieu’s distinction between the subfield of restricted production and that of commercial production, and then restricting the influence of Anglophone globalization to the latter in order to safeguard the former. If the commercial domain has seen “the

manufacture and promotion of a certain type of novel aimed at an international market” (Casanova 1999/2004: 171), and if London and New York “tend to acquire more and more power in the literary world” as a result of “the generalization of the Anglo-American model and the growing influence of financial considerations” (Casanova 1999/2004: 168), Casanova yet maintains that they have not replaced Paris as a center of consecration (1999/2004: 119). For Casanova, the Anglosphere’s linguistic domination simply has no purchase in the subfield of restricted production, which, she holds, remains relatively immune from the forces of globalization (2005: 74).

If Bourdieu’s distinction was tenuous at best when Casanova wrote her book in the late 1990s, it has become untenable today. In a recent study of the diminished prospects of French literature in the United States, Gisèle Sapiro (2015: 5) notes that, as “an effect of globalization and of the concentration of publishing around large multinational conglomerates”, the United States have acquired a central place in the world market of translation (see Beecroft 2015: 255; Heilbron 1999). This, she acknowledges, “confers to American firms a high consecrating power in the transnational literary field” (Sapiro 2015: 6). Like Casanova, Sapiro distinguishes between a pole of large-scale circulation and a pole of small-scale circulation, but unlike Casanova in 1999, she no longer believes that the large-scale field is irrelevant for the question of world literary value; as the restricted subfield is made up of university presses and non-profits only, it cannot monopolize the production of literary value. Sapiro distinguishes an upmarket (or even “literary upmarket”) segment *within* the field of large-scale circulation (2015: 5, 14). For Sapiro, this segment is made up of prestigious imprints of the Big Five publishers – all of which have their U.S. headquarters in New York. So while the existence of small non-profits allows Sapiro (2015: 23) to conclude that Anglophone institutions have not definitively erased the importance of Paris and other centers of consecration, New York does emerge as a capital of world literature – of a world literary space that is neither reducible to purely commercial considerations nor magically immune from them. New York, as Andrew Goldstone (2015: n. pag.) notes, is “the capital of a ‘dominant publishing field’ with the power to arbitrate the standing of other ‘national literatures’ on the global stage”, even if the shift from Paris to New York also indicates that such arbitration is never fully divorced from market forces. If in 1999, Casanova (1999/2004: 164) still resisted the ascendancy of New York as a new capital of world literature by noting that we find ourselves “in a transitional phase, passing from a world dominated by Paris to a polycentric and plural world”, that polycentrism and plurality, it turns out, is more often than not filtered through New York-based institutions.

Casanova’s (2005: 74) defensive posture betrays a fear that the pressure of market forces will automatically lead to aesthetic impoverishment: world litera-

ture will be overtaken by “literary globalization” – “a short-term boost to publishers’ profits in the most market-oriented and powerful centres through the marketing of products intended for rapid, ‘de-nationalized’ circulation.” For Casanova (2004: 171–172), such “denationalized content” leads to “products based on tested aesthetic formulas and designed to appeal to the widest possible readership.” Yet this overlooks that the altered global ramifications of literature can also inspire literary innovation. In her book *Born Translated*, Rebecca Walkowitz (2015) shows how contemporary literature has developed strategies for engaging with different audiences and for challenging the dominance of English – that is, for literary innovation in a situation where the binary between small-scale and large-scale is no longer salient (and where that between native and non-native readers is complicated). Sarah Brouillette (2007: 62–63) has shown that Bourdieu (1992) himself intuited the obsolescence of that distinction in his postscript to *Les Règles de l’art*. At least in North America and Europe, the division between elite and commercial production is disappearing, as “[t]he very nature of the contemporary publishing industry makes claims to an authenticity defined by separation from the market a near impossibility” (Brouillette 2007: 63) – in the “Global South”, and notably in India, the two spheres tend to remain relatively more separate (Gupta 2015; Wiemann 2014). World literature today counts as a particular niche in a literary market in which it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish “between a ‘euphemistic’ realm of artistic promotion and public relations and the unashamedly profit-driven world of modern corporate commerce” (Huggan 2001: 213). The shift from Paris to New York captures this more compromised dispensation.

This gives us a picture of a world literary space that is relatively autonomous, but not as Casanova imagined it. Instead of separate and structurally identical, the literary and economic spheres are entwined in multiple ways that prevents one from functioning as the model for the other. In this dispensation, claims to autonomy no longer make sense, yet value is still articulated in relation to other-than-economic capital – especially as world literature, as David Damrosch (2013) has remarked, now functions in broad mediascapes that also include cinema, music, and digital media (Collins 2010). If Paris, in Casanova’s (1999/2004: 127) world republic of letters, had the power to “denationalize” books and make their authors “universal”, New York functions within a system in which talk of universality is inevitably tainted by associations with the idea of ‘Americanization’ – with the realities of global capital rather than with the lofty heights of the absolute. If for Casanova, world literary value was defined as the power to transcend national contexts, a world in which the importance of the nation has further diminished requires a different articulation of world literary value. In the case of Ferrante, for instance, world literary consecration preceded national recognition in Italy, and it emphasized the centrality of a subnational region

(Naples) to Ferrante's literary project (Falkoff 2015). Indeed, world literature's oscillation between the singular and the universal, between the local and the global, and between inflationary celebration and deflationary reduction is less a reproduction of the logic of the market than a flexible dynamic that can productively be compared to, for instance, the transnational movement of Holocaust memory – a contested issue that is also beset by concerns over its 'Americanization' and torn between local articulations and universal aspirations. Debates over the memory of Nazi crimes have at times asserted the ethnic or national boundaries of cultural memory; at other times, they uphold particular memories as a moral universal; at still other times, the undeniable productivity of Holocaust memory is decried as a sentimental and commercial distortion of grave realities. If we want to understand the economic, cultural, and discursive forces that help generate world literary value, the dynamics of Holocaust memory may provide a (and definitely not the only) more flexible model than the economic logic that Casanova and others invoke.

3 World Literature, World Memory

Studies of Holocaust memory inhabit a morally charged terrain – not only because particular constituencies (Jewish, Romani, and others) may claim privileged access to the memory of Nazi crimes, but also because the mobilization of Holocaust memory (in, for instance, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) may install new inequalities and violence. It is not hard to see that equivalent phenomena are observed in critiques of world literature as a process of denationalization or an assault on vernacular cultures. Because of the undeniable moral sensitivity surrounding Holocaust remembrance, scholarship generally avoids reducing the circulation of traumatic memory to the cold calculations of self-interested actors. As Carolyn Betensky (2000: 208–209) has remarked, plotting the deployment of Holocaust memory in terms of “symbolic capital” or “the prestige of the oppressed” confuses and conflates different forms of capital. At the same time, most scholarship tends to exercise a healthy skepticism as to the absolute, unprecedented, or sacred status of the Holocaust. Notions like “the Holocaust industry” or “shoah business” (Finkelstein 2000) are too reductive to adequately situate such claims, but the field of memory studies has coined notions such as ‘multi-directional memory’ (Rothberg 2009a) and ‘cosmopolitan memory’ (Levy and Sznajder 2002) to capture the transnational circulation of Holocaust memory. Foregrounding the role of memory agents, vernacular forms, and media, these notions emphasize the ineluctable situatedness of the production of memories with more-than-local appeal (without therefore deflating that appeal). Debates

over the trajectories of Holocaust memory also acknowledge American hegemony in the consecration and circulation of Holocaust memory – a concern that goes under the name of the ‘Americanization’ of the Holocaust. If this Americanization often names a fear of sentimentalization and trivialization (Flanzbaum 1999: 103; Rosenfeld 1995), it can also be seen as a phenomenon that successfully circulates value (Landsberg 2004). Indeed, the focus on American institutions – like the methodological decision to conceive New York as the capital of contemporary world literature – helpfully foregrounds “the need to disarticulate notions of universalism from Americanization” (Rothberg 2009b: 125) without dismissing claims to universalism as mere ploys in a struggle for prestige.

One of the most discussed arguments for the social production of the Holocaust as a ‘moral universal’ is that of the American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander. For Alexander (2009: 3), the Holocaust’s origin as “a specific and situated historical event” does not preclude its universal normative claims; moral universals, for Alexander, are socially constructed, and the Holocaust has become “a generalized symbol of human suffering and moral evil” that fosters “ethnic, racial, and religious justice, [and] mutual recognition.” So what has made the Holocaust “free-floating rather than situated – universal rather than particular”? Alexander’s account shows more than a few parallels with standard defenses of literature’s capacity to bridge communities and promote empathy; like such defenses, it fails to factor in irreducible cultural difference and economic inequality. The two processes that made the Holocaust universal, for Alexander, are “symbolic extension and psychological identification” (2009: 5). Alexander equates symbolic extension with a process of departicularization: the mass killing of Jews functions as “a bridge metaphor” thanks to the “nonreferential quality” of the notion of the Holocaust (2009: 31) – a notion that “detach[es] the issues surrounding the systematic exercise of violence against ethnic groups from any particular ethnicity, religion, nationality, time, or place” (2009: 49); by shedding cultural specificity, the Holocaust “enlarged the human imagination”, and informed “an unprecedented universalization of political and moral responsibility” (2009: 35).

Responses to Alexander’s essay have objected to the momentous leap from the local contexts in which Holocaust memories are produced to the claim for their universal validity. This leap dispenses with the patient study of the agencies and institutions anchoring the appeal to more-than-local value, and it brackets resistance to the claim to universal value. After all, there are contexts in which Holocaust memories “operate more as a metaphorical fortress than as a bridge” (Manne 2009: 145). Alexander’s account too easily elides the undeniable prominence of the Holocaust in Western cultural memory with a normative universalism, which not only bespeaks a problematic Eurocentrism (as if cultures in which the Holocaust is not central were somehow morally challenged; Craps 2013: 79),

but also fails to factor in what Michael Rothberg (2009b: 125) calls “the heterogeneity of exchanges between memory of the Holocaust and memory of other histories of trauma and extreme violence.” These critiques of Alexander resonate with developments in the field of world literature that call for “a more textured conception of world literature” and “a denser understanding of the overlapping, intersecting, and contradictory forces shaping literature” (Helgesson 2015b: 253; cf. Ganguly 2015).

Just as a more polycentric and plural understanding of the circulation of world literary value corrects the excesses of Casanova’s “single-system world literature theory” (Helgesson 2015b: 253), a focus on the localized interactions between cultural memories can counter Alexander’s unwarranted leap from the transnational to the universal. Yet just as debates on world literature must factor in the centrality of New York in contemporary world literary space, memory studies has confronted the issue of the ‘Americanization’ of the Holocaust. The Americanization of the Holocaust has been decried in terms that are eerily similar to those used to criticize the alleged aesthetic debasements of denationalized literature – or of what Tim Parks (2010) has called the “the dull new global novel.” In Alvin Rosenfeld’s *Commentary* (1995) article that launched the ‘Americanization’ trope, we read that the American inflection of the Holocaust “flatten[s]” and “radically relativizes” it and reduces it to an “empty and all but meaningless abstraction” that “foster[s] a great complacency” (Rosenfeld 1995: n. pag.). Yet even in Rosenfeld’s account, Americanization not only bespeaks the reduction of a purportedly more authentic remembrance, but also hints at the exchange of different cultural traditions. In his claim that Americanized Holocaust memory is marked by “a preponderant emphasis on the saving power of individual moral conduct and collective deeds of redemption”, the upbeat tenor is less a universal than a particularly American one. The notion of Americanization, then, makes it possible to foreground the tensions between trivialization, globalization, and universalization (Rothberg 2009b: 127); it makes it possible to interrogate – rather than bewail – the role of the United States as a delivery system for transnational cultural memory. In a comparable way, a focus on the centrality of New York in the production and circulation of world literary value is an occasion to study the ‘Americanization’ of world literature without either celebrating or bemoaning the entwinement of the literary and the economic spheres.

Recent scholarship on the transnational migration of the memory of the Nazi atrocities has emphasized the productivity of memory interactions. Michael Rothberg’s (2009a: 3) concept of multidirectional memory underlines that attention to one particular form of memory need not go at the expense of other memories, but can in fact reinforce attention to it; memory interaction is less “a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources” than a process “subject to ongoing negotiation,

cross-referencing, and borrowing.” Cultural transfer, for Rothberg (2009b: 128), is never only a process of detachment, as it is for Alexander, but also requires reattachment in other local contexts. Even global memories, like those of the Holocaust, are always articulated with local elements. In this way, Rothberg’s concept, like Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider’s (2005) notion of cosmopolitan memory, makes it possible to study cultural transfer as more than a process of denationalization and detachment, and to conceive it as a multifaceted process of subnational and even extranational rearticulation. James English (2008: 304–306) has remarked that this is a crucial feature of world literature: world literature is not “merely a culturally and geographically expanded version of [national literature]”, but a complex process of “subsumption and rearticulation” that cuts across national hierarchies; world literary space, for English, is decidedly less predictably stratified than Casanova’s economic model would presume. Flexible notions like multidirectional and cosmopolitan memory foreground “the fiery interaction between the local and the global” (Levy and Sznaider 2005: 13) and so offer a better model for the ways in which this space produces world literary value.

Three elements in the transnational circulation of Holocaust memory seem especially pertinent for the study of world literary value. First, there is the sustained focus on the inevitably localized exchanges that produce the allure of global value, as well as the insistence that transnational appeal should not be confused with universal value. Second, the rubric of Americanization captures concerns over the effects of inequalities within the field and makes it possible to see these as productive rather than competitive (we are, after all, no longer in a pseudo-market). In the case of Ferrante, for instance, translation into English preceded translation into, for instance, German and French, and decidedly heightened the visibility of these later translations (and even of the Italian originals [Falkoff 2015]). A third aspect concerns the emotional and moral charge that debates on the cultural memory of atrocities inevitably carry. The key insight here is that emotional engagements with the transnational career of Holocaust memory are a crucial feature of what makes up the dynamics of memory, and can be studied as such; the resistance that the movement of memory generates is itself an ineluctable part of the dynamics of remembrance, and an account that fails to factor it in is necessarily incomplete. In the field of literary studies, Sarah Brouillette (2014) has shown that controversies over cultural appropriation and transnational drift are a feature and not a bug of contemporary literary production. In an argument that echoes Rebecca Walkowitz’s (2015) case for contemporary literature’s deliberate engagement with the fact of its crosslinguistic reception, Brouillette demonstrates how contemporary writing incorporates the controversies it generates – something that is only all too apparent, as we have seen, in the

debates occasioned by Ferrante's anonymity and (later) by her brutal identification. Debates over literary value are co-constitutive of world literary space; they enable that space "to produce its own criteria for cultural distinction" and "to subvert global relations of force with a different kind of international conversation" (Mukherjee 2013: 13, 46). When the literary and the economic spheres are no longer separate domains, these conversations articulate world literary value with other forms of economic, cultural, and symbolic value. As I argue in the last section of this essay, Holocaust memory is a key constituent in conversations through which world literary value is currently being produced. Indeed, that the Americanization of world literature is routed through the remembrance of the Nazi genocide shows the reciprocal imbrication of different registers of value – a process of which both Holocaust memory and world literature partake.

4 Articulating Value (Bolaño, Knausgaard, Ferrante)

Tim Parks (2010) notes that contemporary world literature, as it shifts away from cultural and linguistic specificity, is now marked by "the deployment of highly visible tropes immediately recognizable as 'literary' and 'imaginative'." The critical discourses through which world literature is consecrated is similarly marked by recurring reference points, and it is my contention that the Holocaust is currently one such marker. According to Amy Hungerford (2013: 609), for instance, the combination of "the Big Subject of the past century" and literary innovation explains the critical success of a writer like Jonathan Safran Foer. The link between the Holocaust and literary innovation is not accidental: as Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (2008: 116) has noted, "literature of genocide, war and disaster" automatically raises questions of the limits as well as the special affordances of the literary (cf. Hungerford 2013: 609). And as debates over the possibilities and liabilities of literature are constitutive of contemporary world literary space, as the case of Ferrante demonstrates, it is unsurprising that Holocaust memory and world literary value gravitate toward one another. Nor is it all that strange that New York is the primary site of their encounter: there is not only the Americanization of the Holocaust, but also the fact that New York-based publishing conglomerates and venues like the *New Yorker*, the *New York Review of Books*, and the *New York Times* have been instrumental in endowing particular literary oeuvres with world literary value. In the rest of this essay, I briefly look at three recent instances in which world literary reputations were forged in New York before being relayed to international audiences: Roberto Bolaño – Sebald's

successor as the object of “once-in-a-decade beatification” (“On Bolaño” 2008) –, Karl-Ove Knausgaard, and again Elena Ferrante. Of course, the consecration of these figures draws on a wide variety of elements – there is the appeal of the so-called ‘Bolaño myth’, Knausgaard’s carefully cultivated charisma, and the enticing anonymity of Ferrante, for instance – but it is at least remarkable that world literary value is in all three cases connected to the memory of the Holocaust. In the current regime of world literary value, it seems, Holocaust memory not only indicates moral seriousness, but also literary value as such.

The posthumous career of Roberto Bolaño offers a clear example of how “metropolitan publishing centers ratify a severely limited number of writers from less powerful regions” (Kurnick 2012). First gaining visibility in the Spanish-speaking world through publication in a regional center of literary value (Barcelona), Bolaño’s work began to be translated into English by an independent publisher (Pollack 2009: 355–356). It only gained world literary status, however, when Farrar, Straus and Giroux acquired the publishing rights for Bolaño’s two long works, *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*. When *The Savage Detectives* was published in 2007, it was “the subject of high-profile raves in *The New York Review of Books* (penned by Francisco Goldman), *The New York Times Book Review* (by James Wood), [...] and a lengthy profile/review in *The New Yorker*” (Esposito 2015a). Both long novels made the *New York Times*’ yearly list of best five fiction works, which is “perhaps the most reliable gauge of the approbation of an author by the U.S. literary establishment” (Pollack 2009: 346; since 2008, the only translated work to make this list is Elena Ferrante’s *The Story of the Lost Child* in 2015). Interestingly, the role of New York was complemented by that of Seattle, as Amazon’s aggressive marketing of the book played a significant role in its mainstream success (Pollack 2009: 357). Bolaño’s career in the U.S. was not just an extension of his success in the Hispanosphere, but obeys a different, and properly world literary, logic; he was marketed less as a representative of Chile, or even of Latin America, than as a displaced bohemian and a “transnational figure”, “making him feel less like a foreign writer and more like an international celebrity” (Esposito 2015a). In world literary space, Bolaño’s name becomes a signifier of value, as endorsements by him came to circulate as “literary commodities”, exemplifying a logic in which literary and economic value circulate quite apart from any national context (Pollack 2013: 665). Bolaño’s case confirms that world literary value is generated in a particular niche of the literary market, and not in splendid isolation from it; it shows that world literary value is not just an extension of national literary value, but rather a more multifaceted process of rearticulation and subsumption (English 2008: 312).

Bolaño’s relation to the Holocaust is crucial in this regard. Reflected in titles such as *The Third Reich* and *Nazi Literature in the Americas* (reviewed in the *New*

York Times with the title “The Sound and the Führer”; D’Erasmus 2008), and a sustained concern in 2666, Bolaño’s interest in fascism was an enabling factor in his American consecration (“On Bolaño” 2008). If his work is thematically more deeply invested in Latin American Dirty Wars, the associations in his work between those events and Nazism enabled the uptake of his work beyond the Latin American context. David Kurnick (2015b: 108) has shown how the properly transnational scope of Bolaño’s work is powered by his “career-long preoccupation with the twentieth-century’s supreme comparand of state crime, National Socialism.” Bolaño’s work never just mobilizes the Holocaust as an allegory of evil, but situates it in a multidirectional constellation of atrocities and state-sponsored crimes (Kurnick 2015b: 128). Héctor Hoyos (2015: 33) has noted that the very availability of “literary themes related to Nazism” points to a process of “cultural globalization” that authors like Bolaño can productively engage with; as he shows, Bolaño’s work rehearses these themes in order to interrogate the geography of cultural difference and capitalist exploitation (59–64), and these concerns also feed the critical reception of his work. “Literary Nazism” (Hoyos 2015: 34) is a site where the affordances and the limitations of literature can be tested and where the inequalities of the world system can be explored. It is then Bolaño’s engagement with Nazism (among other things) that facilitated his world literary consecration, and made him available for celebration as an exemplary transnational figure rather than a Latin American modern classic.

The world literary consecration of Karl-Ove Knausgaard’s *My Struggle* series is remarkably congruent to that of Bolaño. The publication in translation by a New York-based not-for-profit (Archipelago; in the case of Bolaño, this role was played by New Directions) was followed by the paperback republication by a Big Five publishing house (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, now part of Macmillan Publishers), which initially generated a critical success (Parks 2014) and only later a commercial one (Esposito 2015b). Present, also, is a title that evokes Nazism and the Holocaust (the Norwegian title of *My Struggle* is *Min Kamp*); it is notable that the American editions of the different parts of *My Struggle* prominently display the series title, unlike, for instance, the Dutch, British, and German editions, which market the different books as separate novels with individual titles and, in the case of the German edition, leave out references to the original Norwegian title altogether (the series is there called *Das autobiographische Projekt*). As in the case of Bolaño, Knausgaard’s critical reception foregrounds the author’s personality, the relation between his work, the Holocaust, and atrocities that can more directly be linked to him (Dirty Wars and dictatorships in the case of Bolaño, Anders Breivik’s 2011 mass killings in the case of Knausgaard), but also the ways in which his literary project raises the question of the limits and potentialities of literature as such. The decision to spend 3,500 pages chronicling the minutiae of a decid-

edly mundane existence and to forego conventions of fictionalization raises questions about the viability of the novel form – the form Knausgaard’s project is either taken to expand (to epic proportions) or to disrupt (as more of a memoir or a confession than a novel).

As with Bolaño, the *New Yorker* (in which Knausgaard has published a long essay on Breivik), the *New York Times* (in which he has frequently published, most notably a two-part account of a trip to America), and the *New York Review of Books* took the lead in shaping the Knausgaard phenomenon (Esposito 2016). The *Times* ran an extensive profile, in which the rationale behind the book’s title takes center stage; in the *NYRB*, an essay by Zadie Smith circumstantially – that is, without mentioning either Hitler or the Holocaust directly – ties Knausgaard’s project to the Holocaust (Smith 2013), and praises its ability to generate a sense of immersion that, the essay implies, can counter the drive to “corpsification” that the Holocaust exemplifies. In a long review in the *New Yorker*, James Wood praises Knausgaard’s achievement by reading the works’ “plenitude of detail” and its “omnivorousness” as a measure of its existential seriousness and its sustained concern with mortality (Wood 2012: n. pag.). In Knausgaard’s world literary consecration, then, the articulation between value and the Holocaust is not restricted to the title of his work; rather, the title is used as an occasion to assert the literary seriousness and formal accomplishments that warrant consecration.

These brief discussions of the resonances between New York, Holocaust memory, and the ways world literary value is currently produced are meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive; they show that these phenomena are more intricately entwined than the themes of Knausgaard’s and Bolaño’s oeuvres would lead one to expect; in this respect, their cases are more instructive than that of a writer like Sebald, whose work makes references to the Nazi past almost unavoidable. Even more instructive is the case of Elena Ferrante, with which I began this essay. While her work is not thematically invested in the Holocaust at all, efforts to fill the Ferrante-shaped hole left by her anonymity have yet been unable to avoid reference to it. American media have extensively covered the figure of Ann Goldstein, Ferrante’s American translator, who has become the object of, for instance, profiles in the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Atlantic* (accolades the translators of Knausgaard and Bolaño, for instance, did not receive). Goldstein is, apart from an editor at the *New Yorker*, also the translator of *The Complete Works of Primo Levi* – including his Holocaust memoirs. In another notable development, an “educated guess” (which we now know to have been false) about Ferrante’s real identity early in 2016, which was reported in the *New York Times*, identified her as the wife of “a well-known figure in the tiny Naples Jewish community [who] worked to promote Holocaust education” (“Mystery Solved” 2016). In light of this, it becomes less surprising that the (probably) definitive revelation of Ferrante’s

identity in October 2016 identifies her as the daughter of a “German-born mother [who] fled the Holocaust” (Gatti 2016a: n. pag.), and, as I explained, went on to capitalize on the decidedly loose connection between the Holocaust and Ferrante’s literary work by pairing the revelation with an extensive account of the mother’s fate during and after the Holocaust (Gatti 2016b).

Of course, these few facts would have no more than anecdotal relevance if they did not resonate with the peculiar prominence of the Nazi past in the cases of Bolaño and Knausgaard. Taken together, the three cases strongly suggest that the intersection of world literary value and Holocaust memory is a compelling feature of contemporary world literary space. Of course, the association between the two is not absolute, and world literary consecration remains possible without it. In between Sebald and the three authors I discuss, the most notable case of world literary consecration in the U.S.A. was arguably that of Haruki Murakami; and while the Second World War is an important point of reference in such novels as *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, *Kafka on the Shore*, and especially *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, it was not central to Murakami’s American reception and subsequent international circulation. What I am proposing is not a new grand theory of world literature – like Stefan Helgesson (2015b: 253), I believe “single-system world literature theory has had its day”, and more textured and plural accounts are needed. Still, studying the ways in which certain discursive formations and economic constellations reinforce one another and combine to perpetuate unevenness in the field of global literary value production helps to remind us that a less unified world literary field is not for all that a more equal, let alone a more plural and polycentric one. Such values remain to be achieved.

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