Multilingual Literature as World Literature

*Multilingual Literature as World Literature* offers a new conception of world literature that takes it beyond the model of a national literature entering the international arena. Rather, it displays the ways in which literatures that juxtapose and blend what are usually considered to be sovereign linguistic systems contest the very category of ‘national literature’, at the same time as they raise questions about the very concept and definition of language. The provocative ways in which literary works are able to blend languages, and extend and reimagine the borders of language are conceived as central to the ‘worldliness’ of ‘world literature’ in that they demonstrate the movement of literary works not just through the globalized network but across national and cultural classifications in its various configurations of multilingualism.

Abstracts

Part I.

Chapter 1.

Writing in the Presence of the Languages of the World: Language, Literature and World in Édouard Glissant’s Late Theoretical Works

Jane Hiddleston

Glissant’s assertion that ‘j’écris en présence de toutes les langues du monde’ [‘I write in the presence of all the languages in the world’] is repeated multiple times in his later theoretical essays. This chapter will take Glissant’s assertion as a starting-point for a conception of multilingualism in ‘world literature’ that does not rest on the assumption that separate languages might be juxtaposed with one another, but that is constructed out of a more expansive and relational understanding of language usage. Glissant’s assertion on one level announces a commitment to the preservation of minority languages as a principled response to global linguistic diversity and as a challenge to the repressiveness behind any insistence on linguistic hierarchy or segregation. The statement also announces a deep-seated ethics of writing, an approach to language whereby the writer seeks deliberately to exhibit the contingency of his usage and signals an awareness of the myriad potentially unfamiliar languages that surround and shape his writing. ‘World literature’, from this point of view, would be an arena for the performance of idiomatic creativity from a dynamic world of languages and for the continual testing and expansion of particular linguistic systems. Yet even more, writing in the presence of the languages of the world can equally be seen as a way to show how our utterances are formed through our contacts not only with other peoples and cultures but also with the physical environment, conceived in Glissant’s late work as articulating its own form of expression with which his own poetics seeks to communicate. This endeavour to gesture towards this relational expressivity in the writer’s own oeuvre serves as a statement of resistance to the reductive exigencies of what David Gramling has conceived as the dominant monolingual model of ‘world literature’ as it is constructed in the globalised ‘linguacene’. Glissant’s poetics also envisions a mode of language that obliquely contests the human drive to manage, master, and remodel the environment and constructs a poetics open to dialogue with the physical world as an active expressive force.

Chapter 2

(Sino)graphs in Franco(n)texts: The Multilingual and the Multimodal in Franco-Chinese Literature and Visual Arts

Shuangyi Li

This chapter examines the aesthetic of the sinograph (or Chinese characters) in the French-language novels, calligraphic works, and picture books by two first-generation Chinese migrant writers and artists in France, François Cheng and Shan Sa. It will begin with an illustration of Cheng's and Shan's 'Chinese' calligraphic works (accompanied by the artists' French texts and published in France) (*Et le Souffle devient signe: Portrait d’une âme à l’encre de Chine* [2001] & *Le Mirroir d’un calligraphe* [2002]), and explicate their artistic sensibilities and visions informed by traditional Chinese aesthetic concepts, e.g. yin-yang, mountain-water, sentiment-scenery. It will then 'read' these calligraphic images into their respective French novelistic fabric (*Le Dit de Tianyi* [1998] & *L’Impératrice* [2003]) and demonstrate how our knowledge of the sinograph is key to the revelation of these writers' transcultural stylistic innovations and diegetic configurations, a kind of (in)visible multilingualism and multimodality beyond the obvious linguistic translation and lexical borrowing. Franco-Chinese writers and artists have a rather complex and sometimes paradoxical attitudes and relations to the Chinese script, especially facing a primarily francophone audience. Yet, I will argue that this conscious visual poeticization of/through the sinograph in the French language is still a defining aesthetic of Franco-Chinese literature and visual arts. While problematizing the notion of 'Chineseness' that is seemingly essentialized by the sinograph in diasporic Chinese literature and visual arts, I will also draw on the theories of ‘imagetext’ (Mitchell 1994) and ‘the translational’ (Tong King Lee 2013) to investigate the multilingual and multimodal aspects of cultural translation in the critical framework of World Literature.

Chapter 3

A ‘Boundless Creative Ferocity’: the ‘Souffles’ Generation, Moroccan Poetry, and Visual Art in Dialogue

Khalid Lyamlahy

In 2016, Morocco celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of *Souffles-Anfas*, a leading avant-garde and bilingual (French / Arabic) journal of culture and politics founded in March 1966 by a group of Moroccan poets and artists. In the first Anglophone anthology from the journal, editors Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio evoke the ‘boundless creative ferocity’ of the journal in reference to its original combination of visually striking texts, illustrations, and artwork. The multigeneric production of *Souffles-Anfas*, as this chapter argues, can be construed as ‘world literature’ because it not only resists national and cultural boundaries but also performs the dynamism of language through linguistic blending as well as literary and visual dialogue. Following Damrosch’s definition of ‘world literature’ as ‘a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is applicable to individual works as to bodies of material’, this chapter investigates the journal’s legacy of ‘worldliness’ as continued in the later and less-known works of Abdellatif Laâbi and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, two Francophone poets from the *Souffles* generation. In *Petit Musée portatif*, Laâbi’s poetry uses artwork by Moroccan and Arab artists to reflect on the themes of exile and belonging, and to create a new model of linguistic blending around the representation of everyday material objects. Similarly, in a book dedicated to the work of Moroccan painter Lahbib M’seffer, Khaïr-Eddine builds upon his own poetic experience to read the artist’s representation of landscapes and to develop a multilingual and dynamic approach to the act of creation. This chapter examines the way in which Moroccan writing, from the journal *Souffles* to the later works of Laâbi and Khaïr-Eddine, displays a ‘worldly’ understanding of language by revealing the interpenetration of art and poetry and revisiting the act of creation beyond cultural, linguistic, and generic boundaries. In doing so, the *Souffles* generation conceives the language of creation as inherently multilingual in the sense of an intensified, permeable, and boundless idiom that encourages in turn a creative mode of reading and thinking literature.

Chapter 4

The Heterolingual Zone: Arabic, English, and the Practice of Worldliness

Claire Gallien

This chapter starts by offering a theoretical framework in order to differentiate between bi-/plurilingualism, which indicates a capacity of speaking in more than one tongue, multilingualism, which highlights the notion of creative intermeshing between languages, and heterolingualism, which adds an agonistic element to the co-presence of languages. I use this conceptual frame to present the specific literary corpus I am working on in the chapter, namely the poetry and prose of writers, who navigate between English, Arabic, in its classical and vernacular forms, and other languages of translation. I then study the implications of considering Anglophone-Arabic writing as “born translated” (Walkowitz) and as pertaining to a “translation zone” (Apter). Subsequent sections of the essay offer close readings of texts that showcase their engagements in heterolingual practices by breaking scripts (Dunya Mikhail, Zeina Hashem Beck), breaking language boundaries and unity (Suheir Hammad), and breaking Orientalist projections (Sinan Antoon). The conclusion that I draw is that the purpose of their practices is not to periodically hybridize monolithic entities (be they script, language, or representation) but to dramatize the creative potentialities of multilingual and heterolingual writing. Their exploration of the multi/heterolingual zone acts as a shaping force configuring their texts and reconfiguring how critics and readers politically and aesthetically engage with (national) literatures and languages.

Part II

Chapter 5

‘O local sen paredes’: The Multilingual Ecology of Manuel Rivas’s *A desaparición da neve (The Disappearance of Snow)*

Laura Lonsdale

The Galician author Manuel Rivas has described his multilingual collection of poetry *A desaparición da neve* (*The Disappearance of Snow*) (2009) as an island or forest of biodiversity and a Noah’s Ark of language, a celebration of ‘the richness generated by linguistic variety’ as well as ‘an ecological protest against the destruction of the planet.’ Published simultaneously in Spain’s four most widely spoken languages (Castilian, Catalan, Galician and Basque), the collection was well received in the national press as a timely intervention in the typically febrile politics of language in Spain. Yet despite the positive fanfare surrounding its publication, it has generated surprisingly little in the way of a response among critics, as if the metaphor of biodiversity had already exhausted all the collection’s interpretative possibilities. These remain largely to be explored, however, particularly if we move beyond the idea of ‘biodiversity’ towards the richer idea of ‘ecology,’ which elsewhere Rivas brings into dialogue with both memory and language. The extension of ecology beyond environmentalism – for all that Rivas is an environmentalist – is reminiscent of Tim Morton’s *The Ecological Thought* (2010), which also employs ecology as a metaphor for complex forms of connection. Both Morton’s ecological thought and Rivas’s ecological poetics are founded on a notion of ecology as the inter-connectedness of all things, figured in the image of a ‘mesh’ by Morton and concentric circles by Rivas. But whereas Morton is entirely dismissive of any localised or located concept of the environment, proclaiming the slogan of ecological thought to be ‘dislocation, dislocation, dislocation,’ Rivas’s ecological poetics retains a very significant space for the local and the located. Indeed, if Morton’s image of the ecological thought is of a ‘vast, sprawling mesh of interconnectedness without a definitive centre or edge,’ Rivas’s concentric circles suggest on the other hand a series of bounded, interlinked unities, an image we might well consider relevant to the linguistic organisation of *A desaparición da neve*. Rivas elaborates in his collection a vision of ‘o local sen paredes’ or localism without walls, a vision that breaks down barriers between nature and art, the natural and the mechanical, the human and the non-human in the name of an ‘ecological’ conception of life on earth, but which preserves a space within which the voice of a minority culture and language can be heard. Inherently local, multilingual and translational, the collection speaks in useful ways to debates in world literature about the local and the global, while staging this encounter in linguistic terms.

Chapter 6

Monolingualising the Multilingual Ottoman Novel: Ahmet Midhat Efendi’s *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi*

Keya Anjaria

This chapter will reconsider the critical reception of the Ottoman novel, *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* through its multilingual thematic and prosaic composition. It will premise multilingualism as a fulcrum allowing us to move into new avenues of reading. Until now, 20th century Turkish literary criticism and world literature have determined the reading of the Ottoman novel. These critical activities have largely privileged an identitarian framework, reading the main themes through the historico-socially relevant filters of (over)Westernization, the tension between East and West and the dichotomy between foreign and local. By largely ignoring the multilingualism of *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi*, these critical frameworks have monolingualised it. In this chapter, multilingualism is suggested as the novel’s preeminent feature, and, in doing so, we see new ways to understanding the success of this form. Moving beyond the overdetermining clash of East and West, the chapter will consider multilingual expression as the excesses and celebrations of cosmopolitan play.

Chapter 7

Thinking in French and Writing in Spanish: Rubén Darío’s Multilingualism

Carlos A. Frigsby

Spanish American literature, particularly since the so-called ‘Boom’ of the 1970s and the dissemination of magical realism around the globe, has become an increasingly important part of the canon of world literature. However, it is usually conceived within the confines of the Spanish language, omitting the rich multilingual history which has constituted it from the times of *modernismo*, the first genuinely Spanish American literary movement. When Spanish-language literature was stagnant at the turn of the nineteenth century, Rubén Darío (1867‒1916) sought to bridge the gap between Spanish American literature (a transnational literature in itself) and French literature. He did so by incorporating syntactic, semantic and stylistic elements from French language and literature into his own writing. In doing so, he became the most important poet of *modernismo,* as well as one of the most influential writers in the history of the Spanish language. While the latter is commonplace knowledge among critics, Darío’s relationship to French literature has mostly been framed as the effect of a literary influence across two separate languages. This essay shows that, in fact, Darío is a multilingual writer in whose work multilingualism arises as both the process and the result of the conversation of world literature.

Chapter 8

Multilingual maelstrom: Re-reading Primo Levi’s ‘Canto of Ulysses’

Dominique Jullien

While the figure of Ulysses and the Dantean Canto at the center of *If This Is A Man* have been analyzed extensively in terms of the memoir’s conflicted relation to humanist values, less attention has been devoted to the linguistic mix displayed in Levi’s chapter, where language switching is pervasive and broken bits of German, French, Polish, Italian, Hungarian float along the Odyssean narrative. Critics have likewise overlooked a secondary yet vital intertext, which provides a bridge from the Auschwitz testimonial to the Odyssean trope of shipwreck and survival: Edgar A. Poe’s “Descent into the Maelstrom” where the sailor’s survival from the vortex-shaped abyss is attributable to intellect and ingenuity. The text’s central shipwreck trope seems relevant as a traditional site for teleological doubt, while linguistic plurality appears connected to two major diverging paradigms: on the one hand, the defeat of human intelligence and agency by the Biblical forces of linguistic confusion and the anti-Providential camp narrative; on the other hand, a post-Holocaust, anti-totalitarian reshaping of the traditional humanist bond between classic and audience in the context of broken languages, damaged memory and failed transmission protocols.

This chapter focuses on the multilingual paradigm that is prominently showcased, yet also oddly unacknowledged, at various levels of Levi’s camp narrative, and more directly confronted in Levi’s final metabook *The Drowned and the Saved*—not only the the Babelian hell that is Auschwitz, but Levi’s quixotic attempt to teach Italian through Dante’s poetry, the bi- or multilingualism of numerous characters, the constant translation moments, or indeed the multilingual layering implicit within the Dantean intertext itself. Drawing on Wai Chee Dimock’s theory of deterritorializing canonical texts for new communities of readers, Yasemin Yildiz’s argument about “unacknowledged multilingualisms” and J.M. Coetzee’s post-humanist, skeptical definition of the classic as a text which survives “interrogation”, I propose to query this multilingualism as a paradoxical dimension of the survival strategy.

Part III

Chapter 9

Ghetto, Nakba, Holocaust: New terms (of relationship) in Elias Khoury’s *Awlād al-Ghītū*

Nora E. Parr

“Manal didn’t know what the word ‘ghetto’ meant or where it came from. All she knew was that the people of Lydda heard it from the Israeli soldiers.”

*Children of the Ghetto*, Elias Khoury

Words take on specific, lived and used meanings within unique spatio-political contexts. Words also travel, and when they do their meaning—however subtly—changes. When these new/old words are deployed they take on two meanings (at least) from their two contexts (at least). Reading how words like ‘ghetto,’ and ‘trauma’ are policed and defined in a post-War ‘World’ community, this paper looks at what happens when words themselves are ghettoized, when they become resistant to change—are regulated, even as they travel across uneven contexts. Take ‘ghetto,’ a word “intentionally and generically referring to a place of obligatory Jewish residence" (Debenedetti-Stow, 1996). The word has no other meanings, though the OED notes it is ‘transferred,’ or used ‘figuratively’ to describe ‘any’ *similar* isolated group. It’s meaning has not otherwise been changed by later usages. The relative uncertainty about the origins of ‘ghetto’ has meant a conceptual and temporal narrowing reinforced by a contemporary policing of usage. The lived and narrated realities of other ghettos remain subsets of a policed ‘original’—it is somehow ‘untranslatable.’ The same is true for ‘trauma.’ Though constructed as a universal, the word and the idea have undergone a similar process of policing, no less attached to the experience of Europe, but this time codified into medical and psychological practise and psychology (Fassin and Richtman, 2011), as well as literary theory (Craps, 2016). Lebanese author Elias Khoury’s 2012 novel *Children of the Ghetto* is a challenge to the undiagnosed problem of words, and to the theory of untranslatability. It tells the story of the Lydda Ghetto, created by the brand new State of Israel shortly after declaring its independence in 1948. The ghetto, and the experiences of those inside it, makes claims on both ‘trauma’ and ‘ghetto,’ but almost without reference to their ‘originary’ definitions. Rejecting the notion of (un)translatability, ‘ghetto’ and ‘trauma’ in *Children of the Ghetto* are insistently multilingual. The words (the concepts, really) recognize the time and place of origin, but at the same time and without translation or accent offer a parallel and no less originary definition that must be accounted for. Reading the novel, this paper explores what happens when world experiences demand a re-conceptialization of the ‘travelling terms’ of World Literature.

Chapter 10

Multilingual Others: Transliteration as Resistant Translation

Dima Ayoub

What happens when multilingual authors are rejected from the national and local literary systems they write in? When Egyptian author Somaya Ramadan’s *Awrāq al-narjis* was awarded the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature shortly after its publication in 2001, critics disparaged the text and claimed that Ramadan “does not know how to write Arabic.” The criticism, while certainly reflective of a gendered entitlement to question the abilities of a woman author, points also to the multilingual nature of the book, in which Arabic, English and French are present throughout the text, and further function as linguistic protagonists whose interplay is integral to the story itself. Translated by Marilyn Booth the same year of its publication under the title *Leaves of Narcissus*, the novel invites us to consider the ways that multilingual literature challenges normative understandings of language and literature. Using strategies like transliteration and intertextuality, *Awrāq al-narjis* blurs the boundaries between Arabic, English, and French and seeks to question the notions of home, origin, and belonging

Chapter 11

Hauntological versions in Isabel del Río’s bilingual *Zero Negative/Cero Negativo*

Ellen Jones

*Zero Negative/Cero Negativo* (2013) is a bilingual short story collection by the British-Spanish writer Isabel del Río. Each of its stories exists in two versions, one in English and one in Spanish, and the volume insists on being read as a bilingual whole rather than in monolingual parts. This chapter offers a reading of *Zero Negative/Cero Negativo* via its hauntological characteristics – its uncertain and multiple identities – using Jacques Derrida’s thought to help trace the ghosts discernible in its content, its language and its form. It argues that a thematic concern with states of ontological inbetweenness echoes the volume’s linguistic and formal characteristics: its positioning of the stories as neither fully ‘original’ nor fully ‘translation’, but rather hauntingly similar ‘versions’ of one another that are best read together. The chapter then goes on to examine the volume’s emphasis on English and Spanish as global languages of late modernity and its questioning of the usefulness of translation as a means of achieving global portability. Ultimately it argues that *Zero Negative/Cero Negativo* champions bilingual reading for its ability to promote critical rigour as well as empathetic, open-minded engagement with cultural others.

Chapter 12

*transition*, untranslatability, the ‘Revolution of the Word’

Juliette Taylor-Batty

The modernist magazine *transition* (1927-1938) aimed to revolutionise avant-garde literature through an untiringly internationalist agenda. The magazine is characterised, however, by a complex and shifting approach to translation: in its early phase, translation is given prominence as a kind of ‘bridge’, but as the magazine develops we find a growing sense of untranslatability. By *transition* 22 (1933), the editors have declared a policy of non-translation, a shift that is accompanied by an increasing number of texts that are themselves multilingual. This essay surveys the changing translation policy of *transition*, from the magazine’s early faith in translatability as a mode of literary dissemination through to its final adoption of a multilingual editorial policy. Through close analysis of one pivotal issue, *transition* 21 (1932), I demonstrate that translation, untranslatability, translational mutation and interlingual distortion become the source of productive and playfully experimental literary processes within the pages of the magazine. I argue that *transition*, in its later phase, challenges the translational model of World Literature, developing instead a subversive editorial and creative model that critically scrutinizes translation and that challenges the idea of world literature as exchange between defined national literatures and language. By making us confront difference directly, by encouraging us to engage with different languages and cultural forms, *transition* begins to function both as a ‘bridge’ between cultures and as what its editor Eugene Jolas described as a ‘crucible’ for the construction of new linguistic and literary forms. Within the magazine, translation holds a parallel function: what begins as a mode of communication and dissemination of world literature ends as a mode of experimentation and *production* of multilingual world literature.

Chapter 13

How each sound becomes world

yasser elhariry

This essay makes a case for the multilingualism of monolingualism in literary cultures that do not readily conform to the definitional standards of world literature, generally understood as an entanglement of competing cartographies of lingual-national order; protocols of market-driven literary publishing, translation, and prizes; and spatialized understandings of a world where literary artefacts circulate away from a point of origin. The dual approach, to a difficult literary corpus and the fraught debates of literary worldliness, demonstrates longer historical conceptions of the relationships between sound, sense, and language, by closely following the sounds of the human tongue in its emancipation from the single, countable language. This happens intertextually in Egyptian surrealist Georges Henein by way of Louis Aragon; in Lettrism co-founder Isidore Isou by way of René Maran; and in the lyrics of francoarab hip hop duo PNL by way of Isou, Maran, and performance poet Christophe Tarkos. As an intertextual constellation, these artists showcase a peculiar kind of historical precedent that generates lingual diversity within (imagined) monoculture. Against the grain of world literature today, wherein translation and success in the literary marketplace represent the yardstick by which to measure the becoming-world of literature, literary circulation across cultures was once (as with the vanguardists) transacted in single—but infinitely malleable—languages that cut through and across multilingual sociocultural strata. The case studies united here undo lingual and literary order from within. Monolanguage, in other words, always already contains the terrible beauty and poetically destructive germ of lingual fraying. The poetics of sonic transmission revealed by the close readings present a series of movements that gradually progresses across discrete lingual units—letter, phoneme, vowel—only to uncouple them from the contiguous trappings of the sentence, the word, and the consonant, respectively. These movements evoke an aural kind of fuzz, a historical lingual and sonic mode of expression which has always bristled against the mono/nonmono dichotomy as its distorted underbelly.

Chapter 14

Vahni Capildeo’s multilingual poetics: translation, synaesthesia, relation

Rachael Gilmour

‘English’ is forever being interrupted in Vahni Capildeo’s poetry, which insists on its right not to be in any one language. As they write in ‘*From* the End of the Poem’: ‘Who said which language | the book had to be in, anyway?’ Capildeo’s poetry explores experiences of language that emerge on the one hand from the polyphonic ‘fluidity and zigzagging of Trinidadian speech’, on the other as an outcome of linguistic ‘expatriation’, both of which constitute a move decisively beyond and away from understandings of languages as singular and self-contained. Their work shares with a growing field of multilingual poetry a concern with monolingualist language politics: a refusal of linguistic and national borders, an exposure of the racial dynamics at work in exclusionary language ideologies. Yet what marks out Capildeo’s experimental poetics is a concern not only with how different kinds of language intersect with, overlap, blur into, interrupt one another, but how language readily becomes other things. Contesting the idea of a sovereign linguistic system, Capildeo goes further, asking how far language is really distinct from other kinds of communication, sound effect, or sensory experience. As this chapter argues, synaesthesia is a central figure in Capildeo’s poetry, which imagines processes of meaning-making – writing poetry, speaking, translating, talking with others, inner thought – that move restlessly not only between different kinds of language but between the linguistic and the non-linguistic. In the synaesthetic explosions of Capildeo’s poetry, language not only calls up more language but also turns readily into sound, colour, shape, touch, sensation. In this, their poetics resembles what Édouard Glissant calls *Relation* – a bringing-together in improvisatory ways, that does not depend on reducing difference to sameness. Like Glissant, Capildeo’s relational poetics posits both a vision of language and a model of connection that longs for what is different from itself. As the chapter concludes, instead of demanding that we ‘speak the same language’, Capildeo’s poetry asks us to imagine what it means to connect outside the strictures of linguistic comprehensibility, or language as such.

Chapter 15

‘Le mystère de notre présence au monde’: Monchoachi, Creole Proverbs, and World Literature as Restoration

Chris Monier

Adding to the corpus of critical readings that understand the ‘world’ of ‘world literature’ in terms of the spatial globe, Pheng Cheah has argued that world literature might also be defined as a kind of writing ‘that worlds’, or that brings the world into relief. My chapter builds on Cheah’s approach by considering the idea that human language itself (often in its simplest forms) *already* encodes or gives out a world – and it is literary writing that emerges as a response to this world’s force and depth, as an effort to restore or be ‘in accord’ with it. My focus here will be on the creative approach of the Creole and French language poet (from Martinique) called Monchoachi. As we will see, Monchoachi de-emphasizes the idea that the poet creates the poem *ex-nihilo*. Instead, he views the poet as a ‘responder’, someone who listens for forces of communication already active in the world and who speaks best only when nurtured by those forces. This entails an ethic of listening to nature and to place--but also to language itself. To explore one way this works in Monchoachi’s oeuvre, this chapter looks specifically at how the poet, out of more than an ethnographic curiosity, turns towards Creole proverbs, approaching these sayings as the decolonial source of his poetics.

Chapter 16

Configurations of Multilingualism and World Literature

Wen-chin Ouyang

This chapter moves away from the familiar paradigm of world literature that locates international circulation of literary works in translation. Instead it explores the diverse avenues of aesthetic encounters in the divergent configurations of multilingualism in the literary texts of the 18th and 19th centuries. It is interested in the multilingual poetics generated in two Arabic literary texts, the eighteenth-century *al-Badr al-sāfir* (1781-1783) by Moroccan al-Miknāsī and the nineteenth-century *al-Sāq ʿalā al-sāq* (1855) by Lebanese al-Shidyāq. These two works are re-writings of the two author’s earlier travelogues, the former to Spain, Malta and the Kingdom of Sicily and Naples and the latter to Malta, France and Britain, in the classical Arabic *maqāma* genre within the frame-within-frame narrative structure of *The 1001 Nights*. The two works creatively melo-dramatize encounters with the strange, including modern cultural institutions expressed in Italian, Maltese and Spanish in al-Miknāsī, and English, French and Maltese in al-Shidyāq, and playfully engage with aesthetics inherent in different combinations of European languages in two different eras and regions, each producing its own poetics. The poetics of the each text is singular because the configuration of multilingualism in each text is unique. World literature, this chapter argues, thrives in language encounters, which are re-enacted in literary texts. It demonstrates that multilingualism in a text circulates aesthetics across languages, literary traditions and cultures, and must be taken into consideration in theorizing world literature.

Keywords: World literature, multilingualism, configurations of multilingualism, languages in dialogue, word, image, sound, writing, reading, performance