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## NOTE

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of three articles and one responding piece that form the current issue of JOLCEL. The other contributions are “A Critical Juncture: ‘Later’ Latin Literature, the Newest Late Antiquity, and the Period of the Western Classic” by Mark Vessey (pp. 22–42) and “The Ordeal of a Sixth-Century Josef K: Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae* as a Modernist Drama” by Piet Gerbrandy (pp. 44–64). The response piece is “Ins and Outs and Opened and Closed” by Danuta Shanzer (pp. 66–77).

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# Writing in a World of Strangers: The Invention of Jewish Literature Revisited

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## ABSTRACT

The Jewish struggle for admission into the European canon puts a spotlight on precisely those tensions within cosmopolitan literature that are debated in contemporary scholarship: the continuum between unity and multiplicity, the nature of intersectionality and the (im)possibility of cosmopolitan aesthetics, always against the background of persistent foundational notions (this is typically German/Jewish/...) and the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion that these notions trigger. This article demonstrates how in the shadow of Goethe's Weltliteratur the nineteenth-century Jewish philologists developed a parallel programme with, hardly surprising, "eine schöne Rolle" for Jewish literature. In this paper, I would like to briefly introduce that programme, specify the role played by Jewish literature, and draw out some lessons for the current attempt at creating an inclusive, egalitarian canon.

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## 1 Introduction: what the world needs now

In the global village, the stranger is a logical impossibility. Or should be, to say the least. But how to make our hyper-connected, post-diasporic planet an open, hospitable place? As I write, academia is putting its best foot forward to become a more welcoming environment. In an era of fading postcolonial binaries and renewed centripetal aspirations, scholars across the globe are advocating a new togetherness. Close to my own field, they do so by proposing to create "a more inclusive intellectual history that respects the diversity of intellectual traditions and broadens the parameters of thought beyond the narrow limits defined by the

traditions institutionalized in the Western or Eurocentric academy."<sup>1</sup> More inclusive, respectful, prepared to broaden old parameters—judging by its choice of words, the new intellectual history still seems comfortably self-assured and none too radical.

This exemplary global ambition, voiced in 2013 by Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, took me back to an old Hal David-Burt Bacharach song, written in the early 1960s against a décor of racial prejudice, Cold War rhetoric and carnage in Vietnam. "What the world needs now," the refrain went, "is love, sweet love, no not just for some, but for everyone."<sup>2</sup> Trust academia to take a simple flower-power truth and cast it into a convoluted sentence. A sentence, as the Moyn-Sartori quotation shows, that has as much trouble transcending its European origins as it has capturing global thought, a sense of a world untouched by capitalist vice and national benchmarks. Scholars who study global literature therefore tend to differ as to which term (transnational, transimperial, transcultural, cosmopolitan, planetary—anything but 'comparative') to use to denote their object.<sup>3</sup> They do, however, seem to agree on one thing: the need to loosen "the epistemic stranglehold of national historiographies"<sup>4</sup> and to highlight the permeability and dialogicity of cultures and literatures. In their work, global common ground takes precedence over the diasporic, the nomadic and the displaced. So far the universal, the autonomous essence of humankind as postulated by enlightened reason, has failed to make a comeback. Nevertheless, virtually all scholarship on 'world literature' is haunted by the Ghost of Universalism past: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose concept of *Weltliteratur*, though shaped by the geographies and temporalities of nineteenth-century Europe, serves as a premonition of current ecumenical aspirations.<sup>5</sup>

From enlightened universalism to global cosmopolitanism, the wish to combine the unity and multiplicity of the world into a single, productive system has been a constant in human thought. Building a system that does justice to correspondences as well as differences likewise has proven a persistent challenge. For good reasons, scholars have critiqued Enlightenment universalism, pointing at its male elite bias and fatal liaison with colonial imperialism.<sup>6</sup> Others have exposed the implicit Europeanness of our definitions and categories, the product of centuries of white privilege.<sup>7</sup> But how to overcome this hereditary asymmetry

<sup>1</sup> Moyn and Sartori, "Approaches to Global Intellectual History," 7. I am indebted to Lucia Admiraal for the reference.

<sup>2</sup> For an iconic interpretation by Dionne Warwick, see "What the World Needs Now" (1966), accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfHAs9cdTgg>.

<sup>3</sup> For a careful positioning of the label 'transnational', see Wiegandt, "The Concept of the Transnational in Literary Studies," 1–20. For an introduction to transcultural studies as a corrective of post-colonial dichotomies, see Danigno, "Transcultural Literature and Contemporary World Literature(s)." On cosmopolitan literature as a dynamic, interacting multiverse, see Verbaal, "Reconstructing Literature."

<sup>4</sup> Wiegandt, "The Concept of the Transnational," 9.

<sup>5</sup> See Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* and the essays, from Goethe, via Tagore, Borges, and Mufti, to Zhang Longxi, collected in Damrosch, *World Literature in Theory*.

<sup>6</sup> Famous milestones are Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, and Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. See also Carey and Trakulhun, "Universalism, Diversity and the Postcolonial Enlightenment."

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Verbaal, "Reconstructing Literature," 6, and the literature listed in n. 16–21.

and develop an objective system that accommodates both oneness and inequality?<sup>8</sup> The ease with which Goethe proposed that his own nation should play a positive role (“eine schöne Rolle”) in the process, has become controversial to say the least.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, for our generation the central question is how to square the global circle *without* introducing new hegemonies and other simplifications.

More often than not that question is posed, and answered, from a privileged position. The (commendable) aim invariably is to replace Europe as the axis of the world, dismiss the nation state as the horizon of cultural belonging, and cancel the Western classic as the ultimate benchmark of literary quality. In an attempt to avoid this shared teleology, this article will start from the opposite end, in terms of both time, place, and perspective, and will follow an inverse route. Instead of mapping twenty-first-century planetary poetics, it will revisit the invention, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, of a small literary subspecies, *in casu* Jewish literature, against the backdrop of German cultural nationalism. Or, better phrased perhaps, as part of the ‘cultivation of culture’ that evolved within the European nation states-in-the-making.<sup>10</sup>

By looking at the historical construction of a single minority literature, this exploration may strike some readers as a methodological retreat, a journey into the heart of darkness. Paradoxically, however, it seems to me that the Jewish struggle for admission into the European canon puts a spotlight on precisely those tensions within cosmopolitan literature that are debated in scholarship today: (a) the continuum between unity and multiplicity, (b) the nature of intersectionality and (c) the (im)possibility of cosmopolitan aesthetics, always against the background of persistent foundational notions and the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion that these notions trigger.<sup>11</sup> To put these topics into historical perspective, we will trace (a) how the Jewish scholars defined the “Whole of General Literature” and explained its synthetic nature; (b) how they balanced the pros and cons of their diasporic minority status; and (c) how they formulated a multinational rather than transnational aesthetic that bypassed both monistic and pluralistic models. As we shall see, working in the shadow of Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* the Jewish philologists developed a parallel programme with, hardly surprising, *eine schöne Rolle* for Jewish literature. In the remainder of this paper, I would like to briefly introduce that programme, specify the role played by Jewish literature, and draw out some lessons for the current attempt at creating an inclusive, egalitarian canon. What the world needs now...

<sup>8</sup> Compare Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” 54–68, 55–56.

<sup>9</sup> “The German is capable and even ought to do most in this respect.” Quoted from Verbaal, “Reconstructing Literature,” 6, n. 8.

<sup>10</sup> For the differentiation, see Leerssen, “Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture.”

<sup>11</sup> For an incisive reflection on foundational notions and how they interfere with academic research, see Corwin Berman, “Jewish History beyond the Jewish People.”

## 2 After rabbinic obscurity: Zunz on Jewish literature

"What is Europe? It is the Bible and the Greeks."<sup>12</sup> This bold metonym was penned down by Emmanuel Levinas in 1988 but would have been equally at home in nineteenth-century German thought. The simple identification of European selfhood with these two sources of Western civilization of course raises numerous questions. Here I merely wish to highlight how it underscores the supposed irrelevance of a *post*-biblical Jewish cultural presence on a supposedly Christian continent.<sup>13</sup> In Christian Europe, Jews and Judaism had been defined in terms of religion, not ethnicity, habitus, or civilization. But even as a (superseded) religion Judaism was having a hard time in nineteenth-century Germany. Its collective legalism was framed as the antithesis of personal religiosity (*Glauben* and *Innerlichkeit*), its covenantal tribalism as incompatible with the principles of *Humanität*. And whereas Protestant theologians could muster a certain regard for the pristine *Hebraismus* of the biblical prophets, they had no sympathy whatsoever for 'degenerate' post-exilic *Judenthum*.<sup>14</sup> To mark the transfer of power from Judaism to Christianity, they suggestively placed a declining *Spätjudentum* alongside a vital and spirited *Frühchristentum*.<sup>15</sup> All subsequent manifestations of Jewish life and lore were lumped together under the label *Rabbinismus*, "a failed attempt at restoring [Old Testament] Hebraism" according to theologian Wilhelm de Wette,<sup>16</sup> a wretched state of backward praxis and mentality in the eyes of the broader public. With the lens thus pointed at Judaism's spiritual and civic defects, serious doubt was cast on the Jews' potential for integration into the social fabric of modern Europe. The Enlightenment project of *bürgerliche Verbesserung*, of political emancipation and economic stakeholderhood, seemed to have met its nemesis in 'obstinate Rabbinism'.<sup>17</sup>

The answer to this stalemate was formulated neither by the rabbinate, nor by the lay leadership, but by academy-trained Jewish philologists and is known today as the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* or Science of Judaism. It originated in Berlin in the late 1810s, on the fringes of the newly established Humboldt university. Aimed at political emancipation, framed as a riposte to Christian theological polemics and modelled on contemporary *Altphilologie*, it advocated the study, by

<sup>12</sup> Levinas, *In the Time of the Nations*, 133.

<sup>13</sup> Compare Zunz, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, 3–4: "Dennoch dürfen wir uns nicht verhehlen, dass auf dieser Literatur ein Missgeschick zu ruhen scheint. Man kennt sie wenig, man achtet sie nicht den übrigen gleich, ist ihr abhold, schliesst sie aus als eine überflüssigè, unberechtigte." ("Nevertheless, we must not hide from ourselves that there seems to be a misfortune resting on this literature. One knows little of her, one does not think she is equal to the others, is averse to her, excludes her as superfluous, unjustified.")

<sup>14</sup> This influential distinction was formulated by Wilhelm de Wette (1780–1849) in his *Biblische Dogmatik des Alten und Neuen Testaments*. For a discussion, see Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism*, 77–94 (= the chapter on "W.M.L. de Wette: Judaism as Degenerated Hebraism").

<sup>15</sup> For the rise, spread and decline of the term *Spätjudentum*, see Schmid, "The Interpretation of Second Temple Judaism," 141–53.

<sup>16</sup> "[E]ine verunglückte Wiederherstellung des Hebraismus" De Wette, *Biblische Dogmatik*, 116–17.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhardt, "Frühneuzeitliches Judentum und 'Rabbinismus.'" On the highbrow anti-Judaism of German classicism, with little reference to Rabbinism, see Witte, *Moses und Homer. Griechen, Juden, Deutsche*, chapter 2 ("Juno Ludovisi und das Zeremonialgesetz. Der Eintritt des Judentums in die europäische Kultur der Aufklärung und der Anti-Judaismus der deutschen Klassik"), 53–96.

Jews and for Jews, of Judaism-as-culture with the help of historical methods.<sup>18</sup> The addition “by and for Jews” is by no means futile here. Viewed and reconstructed from within, historical Jewish culture was the perfect antidote to the Christian Rabbinitism frame. It served to make Jews aware of their own Jewish *Geist*, it helped them recognize themselves as representing the ‘Idea of Judaism’ and, ultimately, would also compel that fundamental recognition in others. Thus armed with a healthy dose of Hegelian self-consciousness, or so the *Wissenschaft* believed, the Jewish polity would be well-equipped to enter modern European society.<sup>19</sup>

In its earliest publications Jewish culture, then a conceptual *novum*, was defined as a combination of *Literatur und Bürgerleben*, of cultural history and civic existence, joined in a close reciprocal relationship.<sup>20</sup> With typical nineteenth-century reductionism literature was presented as the key to the understanding of a nation’s entire diachronic *Culturgang* and of its synchronic, current state, which was perceived as the result of that historical route.<sup>21</sup> This holistic approach demanded that the new Jewish *Wissenschaft*, or *jüdische Philologie* as founding father Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) called it, should employ a broad definition of Jewish literature, one that transcended the limited rabbinic corpus.<sup>22</sup> Zunz, however, decided to go one step further and proposed a fundamental reevaluation of values. “Ehe der Talmud nicht gestürzt ist,” he wrote to his former teacher Samuel Meyer Ehrenberg, “ist nichts zu machen.”<sup>23</sup> Modern Jewish self-consciousness, in other words, required the breakup of the normative rabbinic tradition. And Zunz, in his youthful optimism, was more than ready to grab a hammer and strike the blow: *rabbinische Finsternis* (*rabbinic darkness*) was to be smashed into *jüdische Literatur*.

His first and doubtlessly most famous shot at revolutionizing the Jewish canon was *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur*, published in Berlin in 1818. The title was an ironic corrective of Christian as well as Jewish prejudice: Jewish literature, it suggested, was more than backward Rabbinitism or rabbinic literature

<sup>18</sup> The literature on the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is vast. For its connection to nineteenth-century historicism, see esp. Schorsch, *From Text to Context* and the essays collected in *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness*.

<sup>19</sup> See further below, 8–11. For the *Wissenschaft*’s obligation to Hegelian philosophy, see Rose, *Jewish Philosophical Politics in Germany*, chapter 3 (“Locating Themselves in History: Hegel in Key Texts of the Verein”), 90–145. For a helpful discussion of Hegel’s conception of *Selbstbewußtsein* as expounded in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, chapter 4, see Jenkins, “Self-Consciousness in the Phenomenology.”

<sup>20</sup> See e.g., Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur*, 4: “Nicht um einen Knäuel zu entwirren, an der geschicktere Finger sich versuchen mögen, sind wir von der Litteratur eines Volkes in seine Existenz abgeschweift. Wir kehren vielmehr, nach dem wir *beider Wechselwirkung aufeinander* mit einem Paar zügen gezeichnet [...]” (italics mine) (“Our goal in digressing from the literature of a people to the existence of the people itself was not to untangle a knot at which more skilful fingers might try their hand. Rather, after having sketched the interaction of the two in a few features, we return [...]”)

<sup>21</sup> “Wie die Litteratur einer Nation als den Eingang betrachtet zur Gesamtkennntnis ihres Culturganges durch alle Zeiten hindurch [...] – und wie endlich die Gegenwart, aller dagewesenen Erscheinungen als nothwendiges Resultat dasteht.” Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> “[D]enn das All spiegelt sich in den jüdischen Werken wie in den nichtjüdischen ab,” Zunz, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> English version in Glatzer, *Leopold and Adelheid Zunz*, 13. For an intimate, detailed account of Zunz’s life and work, see Schorsch, *Leopold Zunz*.

*stricto sensu*. In an attempt to show Jewish *Bildung* from a neutral perspective, Zunz situated its genres within a universal knowledge order. The totality of human endeavour, he explained, was divided into three subdomains: (1) the sphere where human activity connected with its divine inspiration; (2) the sphere where it interacted with God's creation, i.e., with nature and the material world; and (3) the sphere of human *Geist* and society where, with the help of language and text, "das universale Leben der Nation," i.e., its cultural course took shape. In the first category, Zunz grouped together Jewish theology, law, and ethics, once united under the anthropocentric label *halacha* (lit. "the walk"), besides adding liturgy, which until then had been known and performed as daily prayer. In the second category, he distinguished the theoretical study of nature, notably the sciences, from its practical use and exploitation, be it utilitarian as in industry, technology and commerce, or purely aesthetic, as in art. The third domain and intellectual home-base of his philology was the vast residual category of Jewish literature, a treasure scattered over countless archives, written in all the world's languages, soon to be recovered and subjected, by Zunz and Co, to academic scrutiny.<sup>24</sup> Under the regime of *Kritik und Interpretation* the rabbinic Ashkenazi school tradition, the triad of *chumash* (Pentateuch with commentary), Talmud and Zohar, was to be fragmented, reframed in European terms and embedded in the universal library of humankind.

### 3 Transnational or multinational? Zunz on inclusive totality

In his 1886 obituary of Zunz, philosopher and *Völkerpsychologe* Heymann Steinthal observed that Zunz's methodology, though shaped by the textual hermeneutics of Ast, Böckh and Grimm, had been quite philosophical ("durchaus philosophisch"). As a result, Steinthal wrote, the early Wissenschaft stood out in its effort to "philosophically grasp a totality in one inclusive view."<sup>25</sup> For our purpose the reference to "inclusive totality" deserves closer consideration. Steinthal had a point when suggesting that the philosophical substance of Zunz's philology had been considerable. We have just seen how Zunz, in his 1818 debut, tried to feed Jewish knowledge into one overarching, universal knowledge order. Later he would claim that unlocking Jewish literature was "nunmehr eine Aufgabe der Philosophie, der Geschichte und der Moral" ("now a task for philosophy, history, and morality").<sup>26</sup> The rehabilitation of the hitherto neglected Jewish corpus, in other words, was a complex task, fuelled by moral obligation and relying on the combined powers of diachronic research and metaphysical abstraction. According to later Jewish scholars, especially those of the Zionist persuasion, this deliberate integration of philosophy and history, of the universal and the particular, and thus in a sense of Europe and the Jewish cause, reeked of spineless assimilationism.<sup>27</sup> Others

<sup>24</sup> Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur*, 16–21.

<sup>25</sup> "[D]as philosophische Ergreifen eines Ganzen, im Zusammenschauenden Blick." Steinthal, "Leopold Zunz. Ein Nachruf." For Zunz's classical training, see Veltri, "Alttertumswissenschaft und Wissenschaft des Judentums." For the political motivation of Zunz's work, see Schorsch, *Leopold Zunz*.

<sup>26</sup> Zunz, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> See most famously Scholem, "Mi-tokh hirhurim 'al chokhmat yisrael."



preferred to read it as the source of the apologetic ‘Jewish contribution’ topos.<sup>28</sup> For Zunz, however, working in the margins of the 1820s German academy and society, it was the obvious—methodological as well as political—choice to make.

To begin with, Zunz’s interpretation of philology owed much to contemporary German Romantic nationalism, even if it remained, at best, a partial and selective appropriation. According to Joep Leerssen, Romantic nationalism is best described as a dual, poetical-cum-political paradigm, built around (1) the cultivation of national languages and literatures; (2) the identification of collective, ideal-typical ‘folk’ properties (the famous *Volksgeist*); and (3) the alignment of state interest with those abstract national characteristics.<sup>29</sup> It is easy to see when it was opportune for a pre-emancipation Jewish scholar like Zunz to follow the Romantic paradigm, and when it was better to stick to more universalistic notions. His focus on the historical unity of Jewish culture as an expression of the Jewish psyche was run-of-the-mill Romantic nationalism and a useful tool for articulating Jewish selfhood. Less romantically inspired were his insistence on Jewish multilingualism and his conspicuous, almost tangible indifference towards Jewish national statehood. In its place, he postulated a polyglot, porous and synergetic Jewish literature, a spiritual Jewish presence that was geographically ubiquitous yet was always to be found at the heart of human intellectual activity.

This combination of eclectic method and transnational (or rather, multinational) politics is perhaps best exemplified by the following passage from Zunz’s 1845 essay collection *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*:

Eine solche von der Weltgeschichte anerkannte historische Besonderheit sind die Juden nach Volkstum und Bekenntnis ein Ganzes, dessen Richtungen von einheitlichen, mit ihren Wurzeln in das tiefste Alterthum hineinragenden, Gesetzen gelenkt werden, und dessen geistige Erzeugnisse, bereits über zwei Jahrtausende, eine Lebensfaser unzerreißbar durchzieht. Dies ist die Berechtigung zur Existenz, die Begründung der Eigenthümlichkeit einer jüdischen Literatur. Aber sie ist auch aufs Innigste mit der Cultur der Alten, dem Ursprung und Fortgang des Christentums, der wissenschaftlichen Tätigkeit des Mittelalters verflochten, und indem sie in die geistigen Richtungen von Vor- und Mitwelt eingreift, Kämpfe und Leiden teilend, wird sie zugleich eine Ergänzung der allgemeinen Literatur; aber mit eigenem Organismus, der nach allgemeinen Gesetzen erkannt, das Allgemeine wiederum erkennen hilft. Ist die Totalität der geistigen Betriebsamkeit ein Meer, so ist einer von den Strömen, welche jenem das Wasser zuführen, eben die jüdische Literatur.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See the essays in Cohen, *The Jewish Contribution to Civilization*.

<sup>29</sup> Leerssen, “Notes towards a Definition of Romantic Nationalism.”

<sup>30</sup> Zunz, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, 2. “Such a historical peculiarity, recognised by world history, are the Jews, a unity according to their ethnicity and confession, whose directions are guided by unified laws whose roots reach into the deepest antiquity, and through whose spiritual products, for over two millennia, an unbreakable fiber of life has run. This is the justification for the existence, the foundation of the uniqueness of Jewish literature. But it is also intimately entwined with the culture of the ancients, the origin and progress of Christendom, the scholarly endeavour of the Middle Ages, and by intervening in the spiritual directions of the vorwelt and the mitwelt, sharing struggles and sufferings, it becomes at the same time a supplement to general literature; but with its own organism, which, recognised in general laws, in turn helps to recognise the general. If the totality of spiritual activity is a sea, then one of the streams that feeds it is precisely Jewish literature.”

At first sight this passage may look a trifle long-winded, but when slowly read it reveals that Zunz had carefully chosen his words. He started with an implicit polemic by speaking not of Judaism but of *the Jews* as a historically attested group (rather than theologically contested faith), bound by one religion and one cultural habitus, necessarily diverse but subject to an uninterrupted set of ancient, uniform laws. This singular continuity, he argued in good Romantic fashion, explained the existence of a *jüdische Literatur* and its distinctive properties—an important step towards Jewish *Selbstbewußtsein* and its gentile recognition, which in 1845 Berlin were still awaiting consummation, as we shall soon see.

Simultaneously, however, the organic body of Jewish literature was presented by Zunz as a *littérature croisée*, a corpus deeply entwined with the life and lore of other nations, regardless of time, place, creed, and language. Zunz's specification of this entangled dynamic was charged with political innuendo: yes, the literature of the Jews should be accepted as an authentic system in-its-own-right, but no, it should not be viewed in ghettoesque isolation, as had been the rule so far. Together with the world's other literatures, Jewish literature co-constituted *die allgemeine Literatur*, the 'genus' or entirety of all literatures. Accordingly, it should be understood in general terms and, by the same token, be recognized as indispensable for a proper understanding of that all-embracing, generic ensemble. The closing sea-and-rivers metaphor once more underlined the circular interdependence of the whole and its parts, intimating that there simply ("eben") was no Europe—be it cultural or political—without a Jewish component.

Zunz's programmatic statement, though unequivocal in its emancipatory zeal, has invited as many readings as there are modern scholars. In 2010 Andreas Kilcher wrote an astute intra-Jewish, normative interpretation, in which he exposed the *Wissenschaft* as a uniquely liberal episode on an otherwise insular Jewish timeline. In his reconstruction of the 'invention of Jewish literature,' the *Wissenschaft* represented an open, multilingual library flanked by the closed Hebrew bookshelves of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) on the one hand, and Zionism on the other.<sup>31</sup> Closely identifying the *Wissenschaft's* cosmopolitan *Kulturpolitik* with its multilingual *Sprachpolitik*, Kilcher (rightly) characterized the *Wissenschaft's* concept of Jewish literature as eminently transcultural, diasporic, and extra-territorial, i.e. as transcending the 'introverted' parameters of the pre-modern Jewish corporate nation and of modern Zionist Romanticism. The same equation of *Kulturpolitik* with *Sprachpolitik*, however, kept him from doing full justice to the nature of that diasporic transculturality as conceived by Zunz and his nineteenth-century colleagues.<sup>32</sup>

Analogous to the role of language in translation, Kilcher (wrongly, I would say this time) imagined Zunz's multilingual Jewish literature as *mediating between* languages and cultures,<sup>33</sup> occupying a middle space where it could freely merge alterity and similarity, the particular and the universal, into "one hybrid complexity."<sup>34</sup> In choosing this hybrid, polyglot course, he argued, the

<sup>31</sup> Kilcher, "Die Sprachen der Literatur."

<sup>32</sup> For Kilcher's discussion of Zunz 1845, see *ibid.*, 277–79.

<sup>33</sup> "[I]hre Stellung *zwischen* Sprachen und Kulturen;" *ibid.*, 279 (italics mine).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

Wissenschaft started as a corrective of the Haskalah's normative Hebrew programme. By the end of the century, however, it had become the frayed transnational thesis to which Zionism could oppose its vital, Hebrew-national antithesis.<sup>35</sup> The Wissenschaft as an intellectual haven, a cosmopolitan beacon in a Jewish history riddled by particularism—Kilcher's paean to nineteenth-century Jewish *Sprachkosmopolitismus* yields an apt, relevant, and inspiring portrait of the political implications of our academic choices. It does, however, say little about Zunz's immediate political concerns or about the philosophical, Hegelian artillery he mobilized to tackle those concerns.

I have no doubt that Zunz would have been chuffed to be called a champion of diasporic universalism against Zionist territorialism (which, having died in 1886, he did not live to see). In 1845, however, he was fighting an altogether different battle: that for Jewish, but above all gentile recognition, *Anerkennung* in Hegel's idealist vocabulary, of the Jewish cultural and civic presence in Europe, past and present.<sup>36</sup> For this essentially philological project, the one form of recognition that really counted was of course academic recognition. Twice (in 1845 and in 1848), Zunz petitioned the Prussian ministry of education and religious affairs to establish a chair in Jewish *Geschichte und Literatur* at the Berlin university. And twice the ministry, in close consultation with the university's philosophy department, rejected the request, on the ironic grounds that an academic chair would confirm rather than temper Jewish difference and would undermine the process of Jewish assimilation.<sup>37</sup>

And so Zunz's task was to square the circle of Jewish difference and human resemblance. In the passage quoted above he did so (*pace* Kilcher) not by stressing the Jews' exceptional transnationalism, but by pointing at the one thing which Jewish literature ("einer von den Strömen", "one of the currents") had in common with all national literatures: its being a part of the transcendent "sea of literature." Its positive role within the totality of world literature was thus by no means unique but common routine. In close collaboration ("aufs Innigste [...] verflochten") with the ancient Greeks and Romans, with early and later Christianity, with medieval thinkers and translators, Jewish literature had contributed to general literature, shaping the system just as it had been shaped by it. In teaming up with these other branches it was not so much *transnational* as *multinational*, its capacity for self-effacing synergy ("Kämpfe und Leiden teilend", "sharing struggle and suffering") being facilitated by the Jews' multilingualism. "I am an American, Chicago-born" – how Zunz would have relished the famous opening line of Saul Bellow's *Adventures of Augie March*, published in 1953. In the title of his own reflections *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, the adjective Jewish likewise had been omitted. German, American, Citizen: for Zunz, writing towards the end of the German *Vormärz*, multi-nationalization was the true destination of the modern Jew.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 279 and 286 respectively.

<sup>36</sup> For Hegel's ideology of *Anerkennung* (recognition), see Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* and the broader contextualization in Honneth, *Anerkennung*.

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse*, 82, and the literature listed there in n. 16.

In viewing Jewish literature as part of an all-absorbing whole, Zunz obviously (and effectively) capitalized on Hegel's concept of *Totalität*. Hegel had conceived of totality as a simple, undivided unity that represented absolute, unconditional Truth with a capital T. In one paradoxical movement, this supreme unity did not only obliterate its constituent parts, it also preserved them, though not in their original, independent form. We find this dialectical dynamic reflected in Zunz's above sketch of Jewish literature as a dependent as well as formative part of general literature ("der nach allgemeinen Gesetzen erkannt, das Allgemeine wiederum erkennen hilft", "which, recognised in general laws, in turn helps to recognise the general") and most explicitly in the concluding sea-and-rivers line. There we recognize the moment of *Aufhebung* or sublation, a decisive moment in Hegel's dialectical process, when the original thing or concept, having been met and negated by its opposite, is simultaneously cancelled *and* preserved (reflecting the dual meaning of the German *aufgehoben*) by being subsumed into a new, transformative synthesis.<sup>38</sup>

River (thesis) meets other rivers (antithesis) and dissolves into a sea which, for all its vastness, cannot subsist without them (synthesis). For Hegel, such totality was the abstract moment in which the individual found its true realization as part of a cohesive system that transcended the unity-multiplicity problem. For Zunz and his coevals it became a concrete paradigm for articulating Jewish relevance in an essentially gentile world. Integrated, interconnected and formative, that was how they envisaged the Jews' role in European society, both as a culture and as a polity. Or, as lawyer and fellow-*Wissenschaftler* Eduard Gans (1798–1839) had phrased it a few years earlier: "Aufgehen ist nicht untergehen, [...] noch kann das ganze Judenthum sich auflösen [...] es soll [...] fortleben, wie der Strom fortlebt in dem Ocean."<sup>39</sup>

Seas and rivers, oceans and currents: in their joint preference for water-imagery over biological metaphor, Zunz and Gans seem to have been less interested in hybridity, mutuality, oppositionality and other buzzwords than in the easy flow of cultural exchange. Hailing diversity over difference,<sup>40</sup> they spurned the idea of a separate, liminal Third Space in favour of Hegel's inclusive totality. Relying on the latter's synthetic dialectic to neutralize historical hierarchies, they conjured up a transcultural dynamic in which no civilization remained untouched. Anticipating Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation they, too, expressed a belief in the transformative dialectic of cultures in contact.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, in doing so they seem (*pace* Kilcher) to have continued rather than interrupted maskilic thoughts on the nature of Jewish-European interconnectedness.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Hegel introduced "*Aufhebung*" in various contexts, e.g., *Phänomenologie* § 113 and *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* vol. 1 § 95.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Norbert Waszek, "Hegel, Mendelssohn, Spinoza," 196. "To merge is not to be submerged, [...] nor can the whole Judaism disappear [...] it must [...] continue to exist, just as the stream continues to exist in the ocean."

<sup>40</sup> Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences."

<sup>41</sup> For the importance of Ortiz's definition, see Danigno, "Transcultural Literature," 3–4.

<sup>42</sup> Likewise invoking Ortiz, Andrea Schatz has signalled similar notions (*viz.* the diasporic lack of interest in pure origins; the identification of Jewish tradition as partly authentic, partly adaptive; and the idea of cultural interaction as a non-linear process that affects all parties) in Isaac Euchel's *Iggerot Meshullam ben*

Should we dismiss Zunz's political strategy as irredeemably apologetic, nation state-based and Eurocentric? Or did nineteenth-century Jewish cosmopolitanism (perforce) amount to little more than taking the world as it was, warts and all, and bend it to the Jewish cause? Whatever our answer to these questions ("well, yes and no" I guess would do in either case), the invention of Jewish literature by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* invites us to consider the quirks of world literature from a historical non-privileged minority perspective. In this section, we have reviewed how Leopold Zunz tried to wriggle Jewish literature into the European continuum by appealing to the dialectic of totality; how he put that dialectic at the service of a hitherto discounted culture; and how he hoped to solve the problem of political exclusion by stressing equality over similarity and by putting dialectical reciprocity above organic integrity. In the following section, we will briefly analyse how the early *Wissenschaft* reflected on the thorny issue of 'beauty and the Jews.' In the age of Romantic philology, with its veneration of national language and literature, how should the artistic quality of multinational, synergetic Jewish literature be measured?

#### 4 Aesthetics in a world of strangers

Traditionally, Jews and Judaism have been credited with a die-hard aniconism that was believed to preclude all artistic expressions. Prohibiting figurative representations, the biblical Second Commandment (Exodus 20:3) seemed to predispose them towards the divine word, the law and, if we are to believe Kant, morality.<sup>43</sup> In line with the abiding Rabbinism cliché, this exclusionist bias was not limited to the visual arts. In nineteenth-century histories of literature, too, post-biblical Jewish literature was hardly noticed and, if mentioned, was qualified as imitative and therefore negligible.<sup>44</sup> Richard Wagner's condemnation of Jewish musical mannerism as the result of an unfortunate limbo between Jewish (lost) and German (unattainable) nationality was extreme, but by no means unique.<sup>45</sup> In the wake of Herder, the divinely sourced poetry of the Old Testament Hebrews could count on a due measure of appreciation.<sup>46</sup> When speaking of Jewish diasporic literature, however, beauty and artistic pleasure did not come into the equation.

In *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur*, young Zunz had failed to raise the topic, not to skirt a potential problem, but because (a) he was interested in integration, not competition; (b) it did not match his broad definition of culture as a combination of written texts and everyday life, and (c) its treatment belonged in

*Uriah ba-Eshemo'i*, published in serial form in the Berlin periodical *Ha-Me'assef* in 1789–1790. Schatz, "Kleider auf Reisen."

<sup>43</sup> The classic study of Jewish aniconism is Bland, *The Artless Jew*. See esp. chapter one, "Modern Denials and Affirmations of Jewish Art: German Origins and Themes," 13–40.

<sup>44</sup> Gossens, "Jüdische Literatur' in *Weltliteraturgeschichte*."

<sup>45</sup> In *Das Judentum in der Musik*. The first version was published under the pseudonym K. Freigedank in the 1850 September issue of the influential *Leipziger Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. The second, separate edition of 1869 was published under Wagner's own name. For a contextualization of his argumentation, see Dempsey-Garratt, "Mendelssohn's 'Untergang'."

<sup>46</sup> Gossens, "Jüdische Literatur in *Weltliteraturgeschichte*," 488–90.

a different context anyway. For Zunz, as we have seen, a discussion of beauty would have fallen under the second heading of his knowledge order, the domain where humankind appropriated nature and attempted its beautification.<sup>47</sup> It was this definition of art as the *human* inclination to beautify matter ("die Verschönerung der Stoffe") that pushed aesthetics out of the reconstruction of *national* culture and explains the Wissenschaft's life-long neglect of 'Jewish art.'<sup>48</sup> For Zunz, art and beauty belonged to the world, not to the nation. But if, for the sake of the argument, we imagine Zunz trying to capture the aesthetic quality of Jewish literature vis-à-vis the Western tradition, how might he have gone about?

In a volume celebrating fifty years of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, the official organ of the American Society for Aesthetics, Richard Shusterman explored the possibility of an aesthetic internationalism that transcended national philosophical traditions. The society's nationality, he argued, was obviously peripheral to its aims: we were dealing here "not [with] a society for American aesthetics, but a society for aesthetics that happens to be American."<sup>49</sup> Still, its predominantly American membership and ties with various government agencies seemed to predispose it towards American schools of philosophy. And that, Shusterman concluded, was not in the interest of non-US artistic and aesthetic traditions.

In the course of his analysis, he reviewed three kinds of aesthetic internationalism, each with its—more and less subtle—pros and cons. First, he noted, there was the historically tested model of cultural imperialism, which rested on the dominance of one master-tradition grounded in one master-language. Obliterating all foreign competition, it aimed at a homogenization of artistic values, working towards a 'global' standard that was perceived as rational and superior. Against this aggressive monistic model, Shusterman pitted a dialogical, pluralistic alternative. Pursuing a strategy of benign collaboration and respectful accommodation of difference, this second, multicultural model strove to preserve the integrity of all traditions involved, regardless of their place in the global pecking order. For those to whom this synthetic effort sounded too much like a naïve compromise, there was always the third, more radical way, which dismissed the very idea of difference as irrelevant to philosophy as a discipline that was devoted to dispensing universal judgements. Following this line of thought, the aesthetic experience was part of human nature, therefore its philosophical interpretation automatically carried universal weight. Postponing his definitive verdict on models one and two, Shusterman instantly rejected this third variant, exposing the belief in an ahistorical human essence as a relic from Enlightenment essentialism and stressing that even innate reason nowadays was considered historically contingent.<sup>50</sup>

For Zunz, who expressed an absolute belief in the powers of philosophy, universalism still reigned supreme when he wrote *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur*. Following Von Humboldt in *Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftliche Anstalten in Berlin* (1809/10), he subordinated both academic

<sup>47</sup> Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur*, 20–21, and see above, 6.

<sup>48</sup> See Zwiep, "The Wissenschaft des Judentums and the Visual."

<sup>49</sup> Shusterman, "Aesthetics between Nationalism and Internationalism," 157.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

scholarship and state politics to the universal rule of reason.<sup>51</sup> In his later work, he seems to have relied on the dialectical combination of all three of Shusterman's scenarios (unification through collaboration under the aegis of philosophy), witness the passage from *Zur Geschichte und Literatur* quoted and discussed above. To be sure, in Zunz's version the Totality of Literature would ultimately sublimate (i.e., crunch) even the most armoured Western classic. So no, that Western classic would not emerge unscathed from its respectful encounter with other, 'minor' literatures. And yet, in zooming in on the Jewish entanglement with European history, Zunz remained conspicuously loyal to the Eurocentric master narrative as developed in Hegel's *Geschichtsphilosophie*.<sup>52</sup>

He did, however, make one important proviso. Pagan Hellenism and imperialistic Christianity, he warned, though certainly *literary* catalysts of sorts, had also proven hostile, not to say harmful, to the *actual*, historical Jewish people and its traditions. This could not be said, he continued, of the medieval Arabs, whose open mindset and syncretistic policy had made them the ultimate brokers between Jewish and European civilization.<sup>53</sup> Here we find Zunz repeating a recent (and tremendously influential) Jewish topos, later dubbed 'the Sephardi mystique,' which held that the medieval Jews and Arabs had taken joint custody of the Greek legacy, together saving Western (read: universal) science and scholarship for Latin posterity.<sup>54</sup> It was in this meeting of oriental and occidental languages and literatures that we find the key to a Jewish 'multinational' aesthetics—but not, I should add, in the writings of Leopold Zunz. Throughout his work the master remained more interested in ridding Jewish philology of its own snobbish blind spots, first and foremost its neglect of Ashkenazi culture and traditional synagogue poetry. Others, however, were fascinated by the alleged Jewish-Muslim symbiosis, especially on Iberian soil, where it had spawned a brand of Jewish poetry that could compete with the cream of Western literature.

In 1837, yeshiva drop-out and travelling scholar Leopold Dukes (1810–1891) had started the construction work on a pantheon of post-biblical, 'New-Hebrew' poets. Embracing history's potential as "the headstone of the past," he set out to save from oblivion a tradition which "at times had been able to keep up with modern-language poetry."<sup>55</sup> His *Ehrensäulen und Denksteine* offered a first exploration of Jewish poetry and poetics from the closure of the Talmud to Solomon Levinsohn's recent *Melitzat Yesburun* (The Poetics of Israel, 1816). The result was

<sup>51</sup> "Und über alle diese Räume der Wissenschaft, über den ganzen Tümmelplatz menschlicher Thätigkeit herrscht mit ausschließender Majestät die Philosophie;" Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> See also Waszek, "Hegel, Mendelssohn, Spinoza," 196 and 212, n. 40.

<sup>53</sup> Zunz, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, 4–5; for a discussion, see Zwiép, "'Judenthum,' 'Griechenthum' and 'Christenthum,'" 12–14.

<sup>54</sup> The term was coined by Schorsch in his classic "The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy." Belated follow-ups are Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic*, and Schapkow, *Role Model and Countermodel*. More recently the study of paradigmatic Arabic cultural brokerage was complemented by studies on the Jewish use of "civilized" Islam to de-orientalize Judaism; see esp. Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*; Efron, "From *Mitteleuropa* to the Middle East"; Heschel, "German Jewish Scholarship on Islam as a Tool for De-Orientalizing Judaism."

<sup>55</sup> Dukes, *Ehrensäulen und Denksteine*, iii–iv. Schorsch, *Leopold Zunz*, 196–98, briefly mentions Dukes alongside rabbi Michael Sachs (1808–1864), whose *Die religiöse Poesie der Juden in Spanien* (1845) addressed a more general audience.

a typical *mêlée* of bio-bibliographical data, recapitulations of books and chapters, Hebrew originals, German translations and learned footnotes, never exhaustive but always enough to grasp the gist of the Jewish poetical tradition.<sup>56</sup> Two medieval authors were singled out for closer scrutiny: the Andalusian Neoplatonist poet Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021/2–1057/8) and, especially, poet and translator Judah al-Charizi (d. 1225). The latter had included a critical review of Hebrew poets and their work in his *Book of Tachkemoni* and may well have served as an indigenous precedent for Dukes's own work.

Ibn Gabirol and al-Charizi, each in his own way, embodied the confluence of Greek spirit, Arabic poetics, Hebrew language and Jewish genius that defined the chimeric beauty of medieval Sephardi poetry.<sup>57</sup> Dukes illustrated this composite aesthetic with a canonical scene (his words) from *Musre ha-Philosophim* (The Ethics of the Philosophers), al-Charizi's Hebrew translation of Hunayn ibn Ishâq's *Kitâb Âdâb al-Falâsifa*. In the passage, four wise men, representing four great but bygone civilizations, gather in the halls of an obscure gentile king to exchange poetic best practices. "Proportion and matching content," the Greek expert kicks off in response to the king's—deceptively simple—question as to "what constitutes poetics?" "To know when to stop and when to expand," his Persian colleague adds. "A clearly outlined topic with corresponding allegory," the Indian scholar puts forward. "Brevity," the Roman sage cautions, "for people abhor verbosity."<sup>58</sup>

If anything, this brief schematic anecdote suggests that Dukes, like Zunz and Gans in the previous section, was not interested in *métissage* and cultural hybridity, but in literature as a dialogical (but unanimous) project with a long global history. Its formal *Gestalt* was patently Apollonian, its *Stoff* tacitly agreed-upon by all, the conversation decidedly international and the raconteur, incidentally, a near-forgotten Iberian Jew, writing in pure biblical Hebrew with perhaps a hint of Arabic syntax. In celebrating sober proportionality, Dukes's reconstruction of medieval Jewish poetics owes much to Johann Winckelmann's dream of the "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" of ancient Greek sculpture.<sup>59</sup> Simultaneously, however, by relocating that dream to a thirteenth-century Hebrew translation of a nine-century Arabic text, Dukes managed to ease the absolute "tyranny of Greece" and, no less importantly, to prepare German classicism for the advent of Jewish literature.<sup>60</sup> Exit Rabbanism, enter Jewish humanism!

## 5 Final remarks

In terms of mobility and belonging, Leopold Zunz and Leopold Dukes represent two different models of nineteenth-century Jewish cosmopolitanism. Born in Detmold (as Yom Tov Lippmann) and educated in Wolfenbüttel, Zunz spend the

<sup>56</sup> "[D]ie Idee zu gewinnen und den innersten Kern herbeizuschaffen;" Dukes, *Ehrensäulen und Denksteine*, v–vi.

<sup>57</sup> For a revision of this cliché, drawing attention to the Iberian Christian and Eastern Mediterranean contexts, see Drory, "Literary Contacts and Where to Find Them."

<sup>58</sup> Dukes, *Ehrensäulen und Denksteine*, 51–52.

<sup>59</sup> Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung and Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*.

<sup>60</sup> Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany*.



rest of his life in Berlin, using his training as a classicist to plug the Jewish cultural heritage into the project of “merging the treasures of foreign and German art and science into a single, historical whole, to be stored, in the all-absorbing German language, in the heart of Europe.”<sup>61</sup> Born in Bratislava and educated in the Talmudic academy of Moses ‘Chatam’ Sofer, the restless Dukes travelled the cities of Europe, rummaging in the libraries of Munich, Tübingen, Hanover, Hamburg, Paris, Leipzig, Oxford, London and Vienna in search of Jewish texts to add to that international treasure house.

More important than their geographical differences, however, was their shared position as political strangers and institutional outsiders to that ‘global’ endeavour. In this paper, we have watched them try to turn the tables and write Jewish culture into the grand project that was modern Europe. We have monitored their strategy and unravelled their rhetoric when they tried to dispel the image of Rabbinism and replace it by a mature habitus that would qualify the Jews for civic equality, for “Recht und Freiheit statt Rechte und Freiheiten” as Zunz wrote in 1832.<sup>62</sup> Theirs was a course of intellectual action, not reflection, and we know that, when making an omelette, you tend to break a lot more eggs than when you quietly sit savouring the result. The collateral damage of the Wissenschaft’s “translation act”<sup>63</sup> was indeed considerable. In trying to refute the bigotries of gentile scholarship, Zunz *cum suis* often reinforced those biases.<sup>64</sup> And in stressing the supplementary nature of Jewish culture, they did indeed sow the seeds for an apologetic contribution narrative. Also, in neglecting pure origins in favour of synergy and collaboration, they offered a weak definition of Judaism, thus inadvertently turning the adjective ‘Jewish’ into a floating signifier until this very day.<sup>65</sup> And finally, although their insistence on Jewish multinationalism downplays the monopoly of the nation state, it simultaneously affirms the nation’s centrality as a marker of cultural identity.

It is one thing to reflect on world literature from a privileged Western perspective; it is quite another to try to hitch on to it from a non-privileged minority position. One lesson the Wissenschaft’s example has taught me, is that there can be no such thing as inclusivity without dialectical give, take, loss, and gain. If we wish to adopt a truly global outlook, we must transcend the comfort of our own station in life and give up ourselves in terms of time, place, class and creed. In fact, if we want literature to be genuinely inclusive, we should perhaps relinquish

<sup>61</sup> “[A]lle Schätze fremder Wissenschaft und Kunst mit seinen eignen zugleich in seiner Sprache gleichsam zu einem großen, geschichtlichen Ganzen zu vereinigen, das im Mittelpunkt und Herzen von Europa verwahrt werde.” Schleiermacher, “Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens,” 69.

<sup>62</sup> Zunz, *Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, 32.

<sup>63</sup> For this characterization, see Schorsch, *From Text to Context*, 151–75 (the chapter on “Wissenschaft Values”).

<sup>64</sup> The superiority of Andalusian Hebrew poetry, for example, had already been signalled in Eichhorn’s *Geschichte der Literatur*, 667; see Gossens, “Jüdische Literatur,” 490.

<sup>65</sup> As Michael Meyer aptly observed in his scenic portrait of Leopold Zunz, the first, “nostalgic” generation of “modern Jews” still cherished concrete memories of their pre-modern Jewish childhood; in Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew*, 144–82. In the subsequent era of integration, assimilation and secularisation, this social memory made way for cultural memory. As a result, Jewish culture lost its unequivocal, embodied referent.

the idea of inclusivity altogether, with its implications of includer and included, its tacit criteria, easy reckonings, and new exclusions. The totality of literature, we learn from Leopold Zunz, is not the sum of its parts; it is an altogether different, autonomous yet contingent entity. A nameless sea that drinks the torrents, as Anacreon once wrote, only to give new, ultimate meaning to those that surrender to its sublative powers.

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