CHAPTER 4

Franz Sternbald in the New World: Johann Moritz Rugendas and travelling painter narratives from Latin America

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Introduction

In his 2008 novel *Salvatierra* [*The Missing Year of Juan Salvatierra*], the Argentinian author Pedro Mairal (b. 1970) relates a complex encounter between South American art and European audiences. The eponymous Argentinian villager creates an epic painting over sixty years, completing one scroll per year. After he dies, his sons want it preserved and exhibited. It is officially declared a part of provincial heritage, but the local Cultural Affairs department won't fund the project. A Dutch cultural foundation sends employees first to digitize, then to buy the scrolls for its Amsterdam museum, but the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Commission refuses permission to export them. The brothers decide to smuggle them across the river to Uruguay and export from there. But this plan is foiled. The plot of land where the brothers store the scrolls in a shed catches the eye of a local supermarket owner who wants to expand his business. When the brothers refuse to sell the land, he has the shed burned down. Salvatierra's entire work, save one roll, is destroyed. Years later, one of the sons visits the Amsterdam museum where the surviving scroll is now on display; as is the complete work, albeit in new form. A moving projection of the digitized paintings runs along a corridor, where amazed visitors take it in.

In Mairal's telling, cultural exchange repeatedly flounders. Salvatierra's painting exists against the backdrop of Argentina's chequered road to postcolonial democracy, within a global art market that favours former European colonizers. The export ban defends local cultural heritage from foreign appropriation, implicitly recalling (and resisting anew) the Dutch colonial presence in South America. The cultural foundation's plan to curate 'una colección de arte latinoamericano' [a collection of Latin American art], which absorbs the specificities of Salvatierra's life under a homogenizing label, smacks of European market trends or even exoticization.[1] And yet, in the Dutch museum the work unites an international audience in contemplation. Salvatierra's son shares in this positive experience even though the Dutch foundation has grossly underpaid the family. The artwork momentarily transcends its own implication in political and financial power plays. Given the context, the sudden union of a multi-cultural audience in silent appreciation is strikingly idealistic. But the concept of national art is undermined too, not least because the thuggish supermarket owner has the Cultural Affairs department in his pocket and has evidently instructed them not to fund the brothers' venture, so that they will have to sell their land to proceed. The politics of cultural heritage cannot escape the bottom line. In any case, the scrolls depict not only Argentinian land, but scenes from family holidays in Uruguay. The work's inspiration is bi-national. More strikingly, the young Salvatierra first learned his art from a travelling German painter.

[1] Pedro Mairal, *Salvatierra* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 2008) p. 39; *The Missing Year of Juan Salvatierra*, trans. by Nick Caistor (New York: New Vessel Press, 2013), p. 31.

I have opened this chapter with *Salvatierra* for several reasons. First, it centres on the contested ownership of landscape painting, a genre popularized during the Romantic era when literary authors likewise portrayed the market appropriation of this highly subjective artform. In the contexts of empire and postcolonialism, this becomes a discussion about ownership of the landscape itself. Second, it traces the complex, monetized relationship between a former European colonizer and the culture of a country in which it had no direct imperial power. For a novel depicting imperial hangovers, *Salvatierra*'s omission of Spain in favour of the Dutch and, to a lesser degree, German stake in Argentinian art is striking. Third, it describes the acquisition of Latin American art for a European audience, but from an Argentinian perspective, so that European curiosity about the region comes under the lens.

I will consider these themes via two Spanish American novels about the German Romantic travelling painter, Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802-1858): Argentinian author César Aira's *Un episodio en la vida del pintor viajero* [*An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter*] (2000) and Chilean author Carlos Franz's *Si te vieras con mis ojos* [*If you saw yourself through my eyes*] (2015). Like his mentor Alexander von Humboldt, Rugendas was a cultural mediator of Latin America for European audiences. Unlike Humboldt, he is long forgotten in Germany. But he remains the major representative of German Romantic painting in Latin America, where he spent much of his adult life. A 2010 exhibition booklet published by the Brazilian Cultural Centre claims that he 'needs no introduction'[2]. Paintings auctioned by Christie's in 2017 come with a caveat: they are 'part of the national heritage of Chile and cannot be exported permanently' – a twist to Mairal's story of export bans, for now the European artist is guarded within the Chilean canon.[3] Rugendas's fictional afterlife represents a construction of German Romanticism divergent from the canonical German one, in which Caspar David Friedrich reigns supreme. The novels also revive travelling painter narratives, a common sub-genre of German Romantic prose fiction, but relocate the usual German-Italian poles of the painter's formative journey. In Ludwig Tieck's 1798 novel, the eponymous Franz Sternbald seeks his artistic apotheosis in Rome; Rugendas's holy grail is the Argentinian pampas. But in the 1830s context of recently independent postcolonial Latin American nations, the German painter's functionalization of the landscape as exotic muse cannot transcend geo-political power structures. Romantic *Bildung* becomes implicated in colonial-era viewing practices. And yet, as this chapter shows, this gaze is reversed, for Rugendas now becomes the object of curiosity. On the global market, the German origins of a nineteenth-century image of Latin America now give way to Latin American accounts of German Romantic painting.

Johann Moritz Rugendas and Travelling Painter Narratives

In European accounts of Romanticism, Rugendas barely exists. Conversely, Brazilian history books are illustrated with his work, a specialist in Mexican culture describes him as the pioneer of Latin American landscape art, and he is a major figure of Chilean art history.[4] Spanning several genres, his work documents the life of newly independent South American

[2] Boris N. Komissarov, 'Langsdorff: Committed to Brazil, Forever/ Langsdorff: Com o Brasil, para sempre', in *Expedição Langsdorff* (Rio de Janiero: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2010), pp. 14-35 (p. 22).
[3] https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6122831 [accessed 02.07.21]

nations. The writer, political activist, and later President of Argentina Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888) named Rugendas and Humboldt as the two Europeans who had best depicted the Americas.[5] But a gulf separates the instant recognition of Humboldt in Germany from widespread ignorance of Rugendas. This may be because Humboldt is credited with bringing Latin America to Europe, whereas Rugendas has largely been recognized in his adopted homelands for shaping their own postcolonial self-image; notably he was an early chronicler of the life and legends of the indigenous Mapuche in Chile and Argentina.[6]

In 1822, Rugendas joined a scientific expedition to Brazil, led by the German-born naturalist and Russian diplomat Georg von Langsdorff (1774-1852), as illustrator. He stayed at Langsdorff's extensive farming estate and witnessed slavery, which he later presented critically in his depictions of Brazil.[7] He broke with Langsdorff, but remained in Brazil until 1825 before travelling to Paris. There he met and impressed Humboldt, who encouraged him to publish his illustrations as *Voyage Pittoresque dans le Brésil* [*Picturesque Voyage to Brazil*] (1827-35). This made Rugendas's name in Europe. Subsequently he returned to South America, this time without official funding, travelling to Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Bolivia and once more Brazil between 1831 and 1846. His vast oeuvre encompasses images of plants, animals, genre- and landscape-painting including depictions of slavery and indigenous cultures, and portraiture. His ambition was to illustrate the world discovered by Columbus and stimulate further artistic interest in the region, thus leading to a comprehensive portrayal by his successors.[8]

Rugendas was a Romantic in two traditions: steeped in German aesthetics yet influenced by Latin American Romanticism, which was emerging at the time of his second journey. Caspar David Friedrich was a major influence, and Rugendas also employed established compositional techniques from the European picturesque mode.[9] Recalling Friedrich's famous works *Wanderer above a Sea of Fog* (1818) and *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen* (1818), Lucile Magnin shows how Rugendas deploys a similar aesthetic strategy in his depiction of Mexican landscapes. Figures with their backs to the viewer look out at all-encompassing environments, prompting the viewer to enter a similarly contemplative mode and share this

[4] See Komissarov, p. 22 and Efrén Ortiz Domínguez, *Johann Moritz Rugendas: Memorias de un artista apasionado* (Bogotá: Luna Libros, 2013). 'Memoria Chilena' [Chilean Memory], a digital project curated by the National Library of Chile, names Rugendas as the most significant German Romantic painter to visit the country in the nineteenth century. See 'Un viajero romántico. Juan Mauricio Rugendas (1802-1858)' < http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-668.html#presentacion > [accessed 16.08.2021].

[5] See Jason Wilson, 'Humboldt in the Cono Sur of South America: writing, genre, and the temptations of going native', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 15:1 (2011), 27-38 (p. 30).

[6] See Komissarov, p. 22 and Pablo Diener, *Johann Moritz Rugendas: Bilder aus Mexiko. Bildband und Katalog zur Ausstellung in der Universitätsbibliothek Augsburg*, ed. by Rudolf Frankenberger and Thomas M. Scheerer (Augsburg: Wißner, 1993), p. 11.

[7] See Robert W. Slenes, 'Overdrawn from Life: Abolitionist Argument and Ethnographic Authority in the Brazilian "Artistic Travels" of J.M. Rugendas, 1827-35', *Portuguese Studies*, 22:1 (2006), 55-80, and Slenes, 'African Abrahams, Lucretias and Men of Sorrows: Allegory and Allusion in the Brazilian Anti-slavery Lithographs (1827-1835) of Johann Moritz Rugendas', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 23:2 (2002), 147-168.

[8] Rugendas stated this aim in a letter to Humboldt, quoted in Diener, *Johann Moritz Rugendas: Bilder aus Mexiko*, p. 88.

[9] Lucile Magnin, 'Les peintures de paysages de Johann Moritz Rugendas: un exemple de transferts artistiques entre Europe et Amérique latine au XIXe siècle', *Artl@s Bulletin*, 5:1 (2016), 24-37.

immersion in nature.[10] Rugendas presents foreign settings in a European Romantic style, but these settings in turn inspire experimentation with bold colour and so advance this style.[11] His work represents a mutually influential encounter between German Romanticism and Latin America, not least because his Mexican and Chilean landscapes were subsequently celebrated as part of national iconographies.[12] Rugendas's engagement with local life also typifies the Romantic-era interest in cultural anthropology that emerged from Johann Gottfried von Herder's ethnography and the travel writing of Georg Forster, Adelbert von Chamisso and Humboldt.[13] As well as vast mountains and observers looking out to sea, he documented Indian raids, the *tapadas limeñas* [veiled Peruvian women], and such objects of everyday life as the massive oxen-drawn carts that transported people and goods across the pampas.[14] The narrative poem 'La Cautiva' [The Captive Woman] (1837) by Argentina's first Romantic poet, Esteban Echeverría (1805-51), inspired Rugendas's representations of women captured in Indian raids; in turn, these paintings illustrated a later edition of the same work.[15] Images influenced by Argentina's burgeoning Romantic nationalism are subsequently inscribed into it in a process of two-way cultural transfer.

Rugendas is the perfect subject for a transnational study of painter narratives. His fictional revival recalls the itinerant painters of the German Romantic literary canon, but moves their typical trajectory beyond Europe to reveal how Romantic aesthetics and popular culture intersect with ethnography in a global market for images of the New World. Painters took centre stage at the literary-theoretical inauguration of German Romanticism, and Rugendas shares the aspirations and dilemmas of his fictional forefathers. Among others, Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773-98), Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853), E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), Joseph Görres (1776-1848), Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811), and Adam Müller (1779-1829) explore the modern painter's difficulties.[16]

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[10] Ibid., p. 30.
[11] Ibid., p. 28.
[12] Ibid., p. 36.
[13] See for example Harry Liebersohn, 'Discovering Indigenous Nobility: Tocqueville, Chamisso, and Romantic Travel Writing', *The American Historical Review*, 99:3 (1994), 746-66 and Gerald Broce, 'Herder and Ethnography' *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 22 (1986), 150-70.
[14] For a discussion of Rugendas' depictions of Peruvian women, see Ottmar Ette, *ReiseSchreiben. Potsdamer Vorlesungen zur Reiseliteratur* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2020) pp. 556-61. Aira focuses on the carts, and an example can be seen in Rugendas's painting *Gauchos Resting in the Pampas* (1846): see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gauchos_resting_in_the_pampas_by_Rugendas.jpg [accessed 18 August 2021].
[15] See Christopher Conway, 'Gender Iconoclasm and Aesthetics in Esteban Echeverría's *La cautiva* and the Captivity Paintings of Juan Manuel Blanes', *Decimonónica: Journal of Nineteenth Century Hispanic Cultural Production*, 12:1 (2015), 116-33 (p. 125) and Ottmar Ette, 'Blitzartige Einsichten. César Aira auf den Spuren von Johann Moritz Rugendas', in César Aira, *Humboldts Schatten*, trans. by Matthias Strobel (Zurich: Nagel & Kimche, 2003), pp. 99-123 (pp. 118-19). Aira's 1981 novel, *Ema, la Cautiva* [*Ema, the Captive*], deals with a similar theme.
[16] Examples include Friedrich Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* (1799) and his advice to modern painters in 'Aufforderung an die Maler der jetzigen Zeit' [A Demand for Artists of our Time], which concluded his 'Gemäldebeschreibungen aus Paris und den Niederlanden in den Jahren 1802-04' [Descriptions of Painting from Paris and the Netherlands in the Years 1802-04] (1803-05); Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's collection of essays and reflections entitled *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* [*Heartfelt Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar*] (1797); Ludwig Tieck's novel *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* [*Franz Sternbald's Wanderings*] (1798); E.T.A. Hoffmann's novel *Die Elixiere des Teufels* [*The Devil's Elixirs*] (1815) and stories 'Die Jesuiterkirche in G' [The Jesuit

These are: the crisis of the epigone; the frustrated desire to render spiritual inspiration in material form; and the tension between the sanctity of art and its degradation on a popular market that pays the artist's keep. The first and third of these are the most significant for positioning Franz's and Aira's novels. The following will summarize the main features of Romantic writing about painters, before returning to Rugendas.

In German Romantic writing, painters persistently question their ability to surpass, or even equal, their predecessors. As the movement develops, these are increasingly landscape painters, tentatively emerging from the shadows of Northern and Italian Renaissance masters to find a new aesthetic mode for a post-Kantian experience of subjectivity.[17] The apprentices in Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* [*Franz Sternbald's Wanderings*] (1798) and Hoffmann's 'Die Jesuiterkirche in G' [The Jesuit Church in G] (1816) want to break away from their respective mentors Albrecht Dürer and Jacob Philipp Hackert, but struggle to develop a distinctive style. Generally, modern painters are understood as latecomers, partly because their training involves copying the masters, but also because they lack the divine inspiration attributed to the Renaissance greats. Friedrich Schlegel, whose novel *Lucinde* (1799) portrays a love affair between two avant-garde painters, believed that artists should seek new inspiration of a force comparable to Renaissance-era religious devotion, but doubted he would ever see a modern Leonardo or Dürer.[18] Meanwhile Kleist sympathizes with painters who copy the masters for years, when their task is 'nicht ein Anderer, sondern ihr selbst zu sein' [not to be another, but to be oneself.][19] But the weight of expectation is overwhelming, even as a growing faction, notably the Nazarenes of the early nineteenth century, promoted spiritual appreciation of art over technical criticism. This is the central theme of Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's and Ludwig Tieck's *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* [*Heartfelt Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar*] (1797). In Tieck's novelistic follow-up, Dürer believes his pupil Sternbald may surpass him and voices Romanticism's promise, 'Sachen darzustellen […] auf eine Art, von der wir jetzt nicht einmal eine Vorstellung haben' [to represent things […] in a way we cannot even imagine yet.][20] Yet Sternbald's confidence wavers, and the pressure to live up to the greats continues into late Romanticism. Hoffmann's psychologically unstable painter Berthold spends hours copying Raphael and Corregio, but his efforts lack 'alles Leben des Originals' [all the life of the original.][21]

Church in G] (1816) and 'Der Artushof' [Artus Court] (1816); Joseph Görres's 'Aphorismen über die Kunst' [Aphorisms on Art] (1804); Adam Müller's essay 'Etwas über Landschaftsmalerei' [Reflections on Landscape Painting] (1808); and Heinrich von Kleist's 'Brief eines jungen Dichters an einen jungen Maler' [Letter from a Young Poet to a Young Painter] (1810) .

[17] See Brad Prager, *Aesthetic Vision and German Romanticism. Writing Images* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), pp. 34-65.

[18] Friedrich Schlegel, 'Aufforderung an die Maler der jetzigen Zeit', in Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, ed. by Wolfdietrich Rasch (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1964), pp. 584-86 (p. 584).

[19] Heinrich von Kleist, 'Brief eines jungen Dichters an einen jungen Maler', in *Bibliothek der Kunstliteratur*, ed. by Gottfried Boehm and Norbert Miller, 4 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1992-95), IV: *Romantische Kunstlehre*, ed. by Friedmar Apel (1992), pp. 172-3 (p. 173), my translation.

[20] Ludwig Tieck, *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen*, in Tieck, *Werke in vier Banden*, ed. by Marianne Thalmann, 4 vols (Munich: Winkler, 1963-66), I (1963), pp. 699-986 (p. 777), my translation.

[21] E.T.A. Hoffmann, 'Die Jesuiterkirche in G', in Hoffmann, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Wulf Segebrecht and Hartmut Steinecke, 6 vols (Deutsche Klassiker Verlag: Frankfurt am Main: 1985-2004), III (1985), pp. 110-40 (p. 125), my translation.

A rare happy landscape artist is Schlegel's (importantly, unschooled) painter Lucinde. She eschews technical correctness for receptivity to feeling, inviting her audience to share a unifying spirit. Lucinde 'trieb die Malerei nicht wie ein Gewerbe oder eine Kunst, sondern bloß aus Lust und Liebe' [pursued painting, not as a trade or as an art, but simply for the love of it.][22] But freedom from the pressure of the market (painting as trade) and from longstanding standards of composition and technique (painting as art) is beyond the reach of Lucinde's fellow Romantics.

Painting's suspension between trade and revered artform traps the Romantic artist. Failing to recapture his predecessors' greatness, he sinks further yet in his own estimation when, in an age of declining patronage, he must subordinate creativity to the market. Following a stint as a portrait artist, Dorothea Schlegel's protagonist Florentin complains, 'es war mir nach und nach ein gar schlechter Spaß geworden, Gesichter aller Art für bare Bezahlung zu konterfeien' [Gradually I began to feel it was a bad business, to paint every kind of face for money.][23] This means of material survival detracts from more fulfilling engagement with the natural world. Sternbald takes similar commissions to fund his journey, and it goes worse for Hoffmann's spiritually broken painter Berthold. Once a seriously ambitious man, torn between historical and landscape painting, he ends up being paid to paint church walls. Neither individual artists, nor art itself can be protected from consumer demands, as Wackenroder laments, 'Bildersäle werden betrachtet als Jahrmärkte' [galleries are treated like fairs.][24]

Responding to this threat, a sub-field of prose fiction emerged, which Todd Kontje has named 'professional Romanticism'.[25] Such fiction undercuts its own insistence on art's autonomy, and stages the encounter between artist and market as the impetus for a new form of highly self-aware narration. It achieves this not only by presenting the artist's dependence on benefactors or contracts, but by appealing to the market for popular literature even as it masks such overtures with a high-flown rhetoric of aesthetic freedom. Sternbald admirably refuses businessmen's offers of long-term financial security. But he is bound to the business world anyway. If he wants to be a successful painter, he must emulate Dürer's bourgeois work-ethic, and sell his work to buyers motivated chiefly by its collectability, not its intrinsic worth.[26] If he wants to abandon this middle-class world for a more adventurous lifestyle, he needs uninspiring commissions to fund it.[27] As Kontje argues, Sternbald's position as a committed Romantic artist is upheld, but his necessary concession to capitalism is echoed, more knowingly, by the writer of this implausible novel, in which unlikely plot twists are fodder for an audience raised on popular fiction.[28] The most critically aware writing absorbs

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[22] Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde*, in Schlegel, *Dichtungen und Aufsätze*, ed. by Wolfdietrich Rasch (Munich: Carl Hanser,1984), pp. 9-111 (pp. 66-67), my translation.
[23] Dorothea Schlegel, *Florentin*, ed. by Liliane Weissberg (Frankfurt am Main and Berlin: Ullstein, 1986), p. 78, my translation.

[24] Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*, in Wackenroder, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*. *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Silvio Vietta and Richard Littlejohns, 2 vols (Heidelberg: Winter, 1991), II, pp. 51-145 (p.106), my translation.
[25] Todd Kontje, 'Professional Romanticism: Ludwig Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen*', *Monatshefte*, 82:4 (1990), 435-51.
[26] Ibid., pp. 439-40.
[27] Ibid., pp. 442-3.
[28] Ibid., pp. 444-45.

and questions this encounter at the level of narration, as I discuss below with relation to Aira's novel and its Romantic mode. The key point for now is that while the life story of a painter is a common plot, this narrative type is subverted from Romanticism's inception.

Rugendas's story is ripe for a Romantic treatment. Given his birth into a family of artists, the pressure of past masters may have been particularly acute. During his training he copied works by his famous great-grandfather, the military genre painter Georg Philipp Rugendas (1666-1742). He later became interested in breaking away from established styles, an impulse sharpened by the Italian journey he undertook in 1828-29 between his two Latin American voyages. According to Pablo Diener, Rugendas was drawn to Rome less by its weighty tradition than by the promise of meeting other contemporary artists. William Turner and Carl Blechen were there at the same time, and Rugendas was influenced by their development of the oil sketch. He went on to produce oil sketches in South America, moving away from the conventional academic principles of landscape painting.[29]

This suspension between tradition and innovation takes on a global dimension when Humboldt enters the story. By the time of Rugendas's second trip, the now famous Humboldt was an elected member of learned scientific and philosophical societies across Europe and in North America. The basis for this was his scientific discovery of the Americas, but Humboldt also promoted artistic depictions of the region, encouraging younger artists to illustrate the South American continent.[30] Humboldt purchased some of Rugendas's works and secured buyers for others, and Rugendas benefited from the connection. Ottmar Ette claims that above all, Rugendas travelled to Latin America as Humboldt's pupil.[31] Using the Romantic painter narrative as an analogy, we can cast Humboldt as the past master of the Americas. This relation is not quite akin to that between the Renaissance masters and modern painters, but a similar anxiety of influence marks it, especially as Humboldt had become the standard-bearer for authentic representations of South America in Europe, which influenced landscape artists.[32] Rugendas's deliberate deviation from Humboldt's route – he ignored his mentor's advice to stick to the tropics and avoid the moderate zones of Chile and Argentina – is a central theme in Aira's narrative, and both Franz and Aira focus on Rugendas's flight from Humboldt's shadow.

Rugendas might also be described as a 'professional Romantic' profiting from well-placed connections. The first journey, which made his name, came about after the Bavarian naturalist Baron Karwinsky introduced him to Langsdorff.[33] At Langsdorff's Brazilian estate

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[29] See Diener, pp. 25-8.

[30] Humboldt had a major influence on the formation of the Mission Artistique Française / Missão Artística Francesa, a group of artists and architects who travelled to Brazil in 1816 with the aim of establishing a new school of art under the auspices of the Royal Court of Portugal. See Ana Lucia Araujo, 'Les Représentations De L'Esclavage Dans Les Gravures Des Relations Voyage Pittoresque Et Historique Au Brésil De Jean-Baptiste Debret Et Deux Années Au Brésil De François-Auguste Biard', *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 30:59 (2005), 161-83 (p. 181, n. 7)

[31] Ette, *ReiseSchreiben*, p. 556.

[32] Chunglin Kwa states that Humboldt invented a 'programme in painting' which arose from his observations in South America. See Kwa, 'Humboldt's Invention of the Natural Landscape', *The European Legacy*, 10:2 (2005), 149-62 p. 158.

[33] Gertrud Richert, 'Johann Moritz Rugendas. Ein deutscher Maler aus der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts in Ibero-Amerika', *Ibero-amerikanisches Archiv*, 16:3/4 (1942/43), 67-94 (p. 72).

he met prominent French artists including Jean-Baptiste Debret (1768-1848) and Nicolas-Antoine Taunay (1755-1830), who had travelled to Brazil as part of the Mission artistique française on Humboldt's recommendation.[34] Their Parisian contacts helped Rugendas when he returned to Europe.[35] Humboldt arranged letters of recommendation for Rugendas's second journey to the Americas, made connections for him with the Prussian Royal House, and negotiated the monarchy's purchase of his Mexican paintings.[36] Furthermore, Rugendas was enterprising and well networked within the pre-existing German community in Mexico, for example via the German-American Mining Association.[37] He developed a longstanding friendship with Christian Sartorius (1796-1872), a keen amateur naturalist who managed a Mexican silver mine and later set up a sugar plantation. Sartorius forged contacts between Rugendas and leading businessmen, and his own 1852 study *Mexiko and die Mexikaner* [*Mexico and the Mexicans*] was illustrated by Rugendas.[38] Far from being a lone Romantic wanderer, Rugendas associated himself with a transnational network of European emigrants and travellers who produced knowledge about the Americas, and in some cases its profitability, for circulation back home.

The economy of art shapes the transmission of Latin American images to Europe. With no official patron, Rugendas shares the travelling painter's material concerns. Like Sternbald and Florentin, he took commissions for portraits. In Franz's novel this recalls the Romantic painter who yearns to connect meaningfully with the landscape but lives from less aesthetically fulfilling pursuits: Rugendas considers portraits the most banal side of his art.[39] Moving beyond personal dilemmas, the 'professional Romantic' now takes his position in a global market. Fears about the commodification of art are additionally burdened by neo-colonialism. In Aira's work, Rugendas worries that his images are too easy to reproduce. This anxiety follows the commercial success of *Voyage Pittoresque dans le Brésil*, a work so popular that its illustrations 'habían sido usados para la fabricación de papeles murales y hasta para iluminar vajilla de porcelana de la manufactura de Sèvres' [had been printed on wallpaper and even used to decorate Sèvres china.][40] In the wake of Humboldt, a taste for exotic Latin America absorbs Rugendas's work. As Mary Louise Pratt has shown, the continent itself was commercialized by the 'capitalist vanguard' of European visitors who followed after Humboldt, having identified the region's potential for profitable exploitation following the Spanish Empire's decline.[41] Although not an expansionist himself, Rugendas produced his work in the context of European designs on the continent, and in Franz's telling,

[34] Richert, p. 77; see also note 30, above.
[35] Diener, p. 22.
[36] Diener, pp. 29-30.
[37] Richert, p. 83.
[38] Richert, p. 83 and p. 84, and Diener, p. 51 and p. 54.
[39] Carlos Franz, *Si te vieras con mis ojos* (Barcelona: Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial, 2016), pp. 43-4. In the German translation: Carlos Franz, *Das Quartett der Liebenden*, trans. by Lutz Kliche (Frankfurt am Main, Vienna, and Zurich: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 2019), p. 48. There is no English translation as yet. In subsequent notes I will reference the Spanish original, followed by the corresponding page numbers in the German translation.
[40] César Aira, *Un episodio en la vida del pintor viajero* (Barcelona: Mondadori, 2005), p. 20; *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter*, trans. by Chris Andrews in Aira, *Three Novels* (London: Penguin, 2018), pp. 141-230 (p. 154). In subsequent notes I will reference the original, followed by the English translation in square brackets.
[41] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 146.

the effects are clear even among Spanish-born or Creole buyers who want only ‘el arte colonial’ [colonial-era art.][42]

Carlos Franz*, Si te vieras con mis ojos*

Franz’s melodramatic romance recalls nineteenth-century potboilers, with passions, rivalries, and cliffhangers aplenty. Rooted in an historic love affair and mixing sensationalism with sentiment, the novel targets a popular audience. Publicity for the German translation plays to these strengths, but also overtly places the translated novel in the category of world literature. Two points can be drawn from this, to be discussed in further detail below. First, the forgotten Rugendas is returned to a German readership as a Romantic-era figure of global significance; second, a Chilean author matches a particularly German conception of Latin American writing as world literature, and is marketed accordingly.

The story goes as follows. Rugendas arrives in the Chilean port Valparaíso in 1834. He immediately meets the forthright salonnière Carmen Lisperguer, based on the real-life Carmen Arriagada (1807-88), who is at the docks to collect an order of recent books from Europe. After some false starts they begin an affair, meeting regularly as Carmen sits for a portrait. Descriptions of their tireless lovemaking abound. Meanwhile a rival emerges in addition to Carmen’s husband: the young Charles Darwin arrives on the *Beagle*. Thus begins the battle of art and science, via a competition for Carmen’s affections. At its climax, Carmen disappears with Darwin, and Rugendas sets off in hot pursuit, with Carmen’s husband along for the ride. The guilty parties are discovered, too late to stop their copulation amidst the lush vegetation of a floating island in Tagua Tagua Lake. The husband dismisses Darwin, who obligingly disappears again, this time on a journey of scientific enquiry. But a vengeful Rugendas hunts Darwin down, pausing en route to indulge in a bit of the Romantic sublime and paint the Aconcagua mountain. Catching up with Darwin, Rugendas points his gun, but is interrupted by a well-timed earthquake during which he instinctively saves his rival’s life. Here the novel’s crass distinction between scientific and artistic dispositions is epitomized: while Darwin times the earthquake’s duration precisely with a chronometer, Rugendas experiences the subsequent avalanche as orgasmic, both at mortal risk all the while. The pair shelter in a cave but get snowed in; handily, Rugendas discovers the perfectly preserved body of a sacrificed child and puts it in a broth to deliver them from starvation. The plot then de-escalates. A rescue party led by Carmen’s forbearing husband arrives. It transpires that Rugendas is Carmen’s only real love, so he enters a ménage-à-trois in which he is tasked with providing her husband’s ostensible heir. Appalled by the waning of their passion in this domestic setting, Rugendas and Carmen decide to abscond, only for Carmen to change her mind lest their love crumble in the face of its own fulfilment. Rugendas returns to Europe and Carmen stays in Chile, becoming his faithful correspondent.

This is a lavishly embroidered history. The real Rugendas did have an affair with Arriagada, and her letters to him have been published.[43] Additionally, the novel provides some sense of 1830s Chilean intellectual life from a female perspective. Arriagada was an active figure in

[42] Franz, p. 348 [*Das Quartett der Liebenden*, p. 444].
[43] Carmen Arriagada, *Cartas de una mujer apasionada*, ed. by Oscar Pinochet de la Barra (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1989); see also Sergio Vergara Quiroz (ed.), *Cartas de mujeres en Chile*, 1630-1885 (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello 1987), pp. 207-12.

cultural life. Committed to republicanism as a principle, but ambivalent about the emerging national culture of the immediate post-independence years, she tempered her national self-identification with a lively interest in European literature.[44] Franz's Carmen is so keen to read her imported books that she goes to the port herself to pick them up, and at one point she reads Balzac's recently-published story, 'Le Chef'd'œuvre inconnu' [The Unknown Masterpiece] (1831). This intertext, a story of a frustrated portrait artist searching for the feminine ideal, ironizes Rugendas's ethnographic paintings of all the women with whom, the novel suggests, he has conducted love affairs. But it is also a period detail: in the transmission of European Romanticism to Latin America, French culture took a significant role, as Carol Tully shows in her chapter in this volume. Various details from Rugendas's life, including his family history, relationship with Humboldt, and the subjects of his paintings, are also duly included. But fiction trumps fact. While Darwin did arrive in Chile during Rugendas's stay, they never met, and his affair with Carmen is entirely imagined.[45]

Darwin's presence, however, represents a figure conspicuous by his absence. Humboldt never appears, yet haunts the action from the start, when Rugendas's ship takes a specific route to avoid the dangerous Humboldt Current.[46] Rugendas reads this as an omen following Humboldt's advice not to travel to Chile. Indeed Humboldt casts a long shadow, such that the mere mention of their association, first by Carmen and later by Darwin, makes Rugendas bristle.[47] The narrator overlooks Humboldt's Romantic conception of the natural world and portrays him as the scientist who would trammel Rugendas's creativity because he is interested only in dissecting nature.[48] Humboldt's drive to unite various fields of science and culture is reduced to a pedantic urge to explain everything and thus strip nature's beauty of its inexplicable essence. This telling exacerbates the science/art divide, and Darwin's primary function is to stand in for Humboldt, embodying all Rugendas's resentments.

Darwin's second function is to promote the German-Chilean relations from a bilateral to a world scale, connecting Rugendas to a global network of literary, scientific, and artistic interests. At one point, Rugendas and Darwin share the stage in a public debate. For the reader, Rugendas's stock rises by association with an historical global celebrity. If Darwin is the wide-eyed visitor to Rugendas's experienced traveller in 1834, his reputation and impact today far outstrip the artist's. This relation is similar to that between Rugendas and Humboldt. Darwin knows of Rugendas before he meets him, but only because he has seen his work illustrating an English translation of Humboldt's writings about the Americas.[49] A contemporary novel thus restates Rugendas's significance two centuries on by associating him with men who still affect the way we think today. Humboldt is the best-known German

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[44] See Sarah C. Chambers, 'Letters and Salons: Women Reading and Writing the Nation', in *Beyond Imagined Communities: Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, ed. by Sara Castro-Klarén and John Charles Chasteen (Washington D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) pp. 54-83.

[45] Constanza Hola, 'La apasionada mujer por la cual perdieron la cabeza y se enfrentaron literariamente Charles Darwin y el pintor Rugendas' (interview with Carlos Franz), https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-38720806 [accessed 20 July 2021].

[46] Franz, pp. 16-17 [pp. 11-12].

[47] Franz, p. 64 and p. 91 [p. 76 and pp. 107-08].

[48] Franz, p. 17, p. 94, and p. 217 [pp. 12-13, pp.112-13, and p. 274].

[49] Franz, p. 91 [p. 107]. Humboldt commissioned drawings from Rugendas to illustrate his work (see Diener, pp. 22-4).

traveller to the Americas; this association highlights an extra-imperial relationship in which Rugendas exerted cultural influence. But the association with the British Darwin elevates Rugendas to a rung he has not historically occupied: a figure of global cultural history. A German painter long forgotten in his homeland becomes a key character in a work of Latin American fiction charting global connections in the nineteenth century.

Such connections suggest a character of potentially world significance. Rebecca Braun's definition of a 'world author' arises from granular examination of how such authors' 'experiences of fame and agency pass through multiple cultural locations'.[50] World authorship is rooted in social relations. Braun maps the multiple connections between authors, their markets, and the literary industry, revealing the world author's carefully managed network. Authorial celebrity is channelled through prominent 'nodes' on a 'map of relations'.[51] These nodes may be individuals significant enough to attract a number of otherwise unrelated audiences, for example popular and specialist audiences within and beyond the individual's home country. As these figures achieve world celebrity, 'ever more cultural and economic initiatives that mark out the contemporary moment are routed through [them]', for example, publishers, the media, or indeed other authors seek to capitalize on their brand.[52] Meanwhile, association with such individuals can raise another author's status from national to international. I would like re-apply this definition of the 'world author', to consider how an attempt could be made to create a 'world character'. A literary character might be placed in a global network by authors, translators, or publishers keen to tap into the persistent trend of 'world literature'.

Franz connects Rugendas to two major 'nodes': Humboldt and Darwin. As noted above, the historic Rugendas profited enormously from his association with Humboldt, which brought his work to the attention of the Prussian monarchy and, as suggested in Franz's novel, to a scientific community beyond Germany. Darwin, meanwhile, has been a key name cited in recent efforts to restore Humboldt's fame, which had waned outside Germany and Latin America. Historian Andrea Wulf's bestselling Humboldt biography, *The Invention of Nature* (2015), which won the Royal Society Science Book Prize, was sold to its vast readership with a promise to introduce them to the woefully forgotten German Darwin. A review in the *National Geographic* states that Humboldt used to be 'as famous as Darwin or Goethe', and a 2016 interview for BBC's current affairs programme *Newsnight* paired Wulf with the popular TV scientist Brian Cox to promote her argument that 'Darwin was standing on the shoulders of Humboldt'.[53] Darwin functions as a node through which Humboldt passes as his name is revived globally. A similar strategy guides the marketing of *Das Quartett der Liebenden* [*The Love Quadrangle*], that is, Lutz Kliche's German translation of Franz's *Si te vieras con mis ojos*. The publisher links Rugendas to several figures with transnational appeal.

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[50] Rebecca Braun, 'The world author in us all: conceptualising fame and agency in the global literary market', *Celebrity Studies*, 7:4 (2016), 457-77 (p. 458).
[51] Ibid., p. 459.
[52] Ibid., p. 462.
[53] Simon Worral, 'Why is the Man who predicted climate change forgotten?', *National Geographic*, 13 September 2015 <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/article/150913-humboldt-south-america-nature-book-talk-simon-worrall-andrea-wulf-darwin-orinoco> [accessed 20 July 2021]; 'Brian Cox and Andrea Wulf on the Scientist who inspired Darwin – BBC Newsnight', 20 September 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8d5b6_MmHo> [accessed 20 July 2021].

Within the novel, the 'nodes' on Rugendas's 'map' speak to a Latin American readership relatively likely to be aware of him already. Secondary nodes appear alongside the two scientists. Carmen Arriagada was a multilingual reader and early Chilean republican whose husband, the novel states, knew the hero of Latin American independence, Símon Bolívar.[54] Meanwhile Darwin explicitly echoes Sarmiento when he states 'Humboldt con su relato y usted con sus dibujos, señor Rugendas, encendieron mi imaginación' [Humboldt with his account and you, Rugendas, with your drawings, sparked my imagination.][55] Sarmiento's coinage, 'Humboldt with pen and Rugendas with pencil are the two Europeans who have most vividly described America', is behind this statement.[56] The character Rugendas succeeds within a network of influential political and scientific actors who shaped the cultural identity of Latin American nations. Hence his worthiness of a name among contemporary readers in the Hispanic world. When Rugendas's image returns home in translation, however, it requires an additional network if German readers are to recognize him as globally significant. This network emerges at the para- and extra-textual levels as Rugendas is introduced to the German market.

Published in the series 'Weltlese: Lesereisen ins Unbekannte' [World Reading: Reading Travels into the Unknown], *Das Quartett der Liebenden* is available to members of the Büchergilde Gutenberg, a co-operative German bookclub and independent publisher that aims to create a community of readers, authors, and all those involved in book production.[57] The Büchergilde has a strong line in German and English classics, but also promotes lesser-known, emerging, and foreign writers. 'Weltlese' speaks to this endeavour. The series is edited by Ilija Trojanow (b. 1965), a multiple-prize-winning Bulgarian-German author who gained plaudits for his 2006 novel *Der Weltensammler* [*The Collector of Worlds*], about the British explorer Sir Richard Burton. Trojanow was born in Bulgaria but, aged six, fled with his family to Germany. He grew up in Kenya, and subsequently lived in India, South Africa, Germany and Austria.[58] Trojanow was a successful author and travel writer before his novel about nineteenth-century exploration propelled him to stardom; this sudden accession to major fame echoes the trajectory of his near-contemporary Daniel Kehlmann (b. 1975), whose novel about Alexander von Humboldt, *Die Vermessung der Welt* [*Measuring the World*] (2005), brought him celebrity overnight.[59] As Carrie Smith-Prei and Julian Preece argue, Trojanow has been co-opted to represent an idealized version of a liberal, global Germany for the twenty-first century.[60] Trojanow has extensive experience of non-European cultures and has translated African literature into German. In *Der Weltensammler* he memorializes the polyglot Burton, who passed as an Arab to make a forbidden pilgrimage to

[54] Franz, p. 175 [p. 222].
[55] Franz, p. 93 [p. 110], my translation.
[56] D.F. Sarmiento, *Viajes. Europa. Africa. América* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1961), p. 40. Quoted in Wilson, 'Humboldt in the Cono Sur', p. 30.
[57] <https://www.buechergilde.de/die-idee.html> [accessed 20 August 2021].
[58] Carrie Smith-Prei, 'Ilija Trojanow and the Cosmopolitical Public Intellectual', in *Crossing Central Europe: Continuities and Transformations, 1900 and 2000*, ed. by Helga Mitterbauer and Carrie Smith-Prei (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), pp. 251-73 (p. 251).
[59] Braun, p. 460.
[60] Smith-Prei, pp. 251-52 and Julian Preece, 'Ilija Trojanow, *Der Weltensammler*: Separate Bodies, or: An Account of Intercultural Failure', in *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Lyn Marven and Stuart Taberner (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 119-32 (p. 119).

Mecca and reported back to fascinated European readers. On the back dustjacket flap of *Das Quartett der Liebenden*, Trojanow's name appears before the author's – oddly, because editors are rarely mentioned in the marketing of fiction. Here he is conflated with his most famous creation: Trojanow is a 'Schriftsteller, leidenschaftlicher Leser und "Weltensammler"' [writer, passionate reader and "collector of worlds"]. A traveller and great literary explorer, Trojanow is the ideal mediator between distant lands and a German readership with cosmopolitan tastes. Franz's Rugendas is legitimized as a world figure via intra- and extra-textual connections to the giants of nineteenth-century global exploration. Moreover, the prominently-placed dustjacket reference to *Der Weltensammler* implicitly promotes *Das Quartett der Liebenden* as a potential sensation. Although the protagonist is a German who pioneered a new type of landscape painting in the New World, he is at best an historical footnote in Germany today. It takes the association with a multi-lingual, Bulgarian-born travel writer and a British explorer to give him the market value of a global German.

A further name on the dustjacket justifies the German-Latin American story's place in 'Weltlese'. The Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa provides the promotional review quotation, a fitting tribute since Franz's novel won the Mario Vargas Llosa Biennial Novel Prize. Promotion via a more illustrious author is a typical market strategy, but here Vargas Llosa seems to legitimize a particular idea about Latin America which appeals to a German audience. Gesine Müller has examined the reception of Latin American literature in Germany, focussing on the major publisher Suhrkamp.[61] She argues that during the most successful phase of Suhrkamp's Latin American programme, the publisher's selection criteria corresponded to a European-defined conception of world literature. According to this, Latin American fiction became world literature by meeting two requirements: assimilating European and international traditions to enhance familiar literary forms with exotic appeal; and thematizing the search for Latin American identity in an era of great political unrest.[62] Within both categories the use of pre-modern mythology and folk tradition is important. This is how Latin America brings the (non-European) 'world' to 'literature', the latter being understood as a European tradition to be adorned with, but not essentially changed by, its encounter with difference. The Latin American novels that best succeed in Germany, Müller argues, combine highly exoticizing representations of difference with writing styles established in Europe.[63] Vargas Llosa, Suhrkamp's star of the Latin American programme, achieved this for his German audience.[64] His praise for Franz's novel appeals to this tradition in German reception, and plays on the vogue for novels set in the Age of Exploration following Kehlmann's and Trojanow's successes:

> Dieses Buch liest sich leicht und mit Genuss und auch mit gewisser Melancholie, erinnert es doch an eine Zeit, als ganz Lateinamerika selbst einer dieser Romane voller großer Leidenschaften und gefährlicher Abenteuer zu sein schien.[65]

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[61] Gesine Müller, 'Literaturen der Amerikas und ihre Rezeption in Deutschland. Weltliteratur als globales Verflechtungsprinzip', in *Verlag Macht Weltliteratur: Lateinamerikanisch-deutsche Kulturtransfers zwischen internationalem Literaturbetrieb und Übersetzungspolitik*, ed by. Gesine Müller (Berlin: Walter Frey, 2014), pp. 17-32.
[62] Ibid., pp. 123-24.
[63] Ibid., p. 124.
[64] Ibid., p. 124.
[65] Dustjacket, *Das Quartett der Liebenden*, my translation.

> [This is a book for enjoyment and pleasure, and yet with a certain melancholy it recalls a time when the whole of Latin America itself seemed like one of these novels: full of grand passions and dangerous adventures.]

Latin America is a novel for German exploration, and Rugendas wins his place as mediator alongside Humboldt, Darwin, Trojanow, and Vargas Llosa. Notably, however, his encounters with real difference in the novel are brief: Carmen is Chilean, but turns to European literature for intellectual stimulation, while the three major male players – Rugendas, Darwin, and Carmen's husband - are Europeans. The requisite traces of premodern culture are supplied by the Inca child sacrifice with her gifts of corn, quinoa and chilli peppers, all of which end up in the soup; by the hallucinogenic vilca, a South American plant which Rugendas and Darwin take as snuff; and by Carmen's sexual fantasies about being taken captive by indigenous men. All of these become part of the Europeans' adventures, and Carmen's imagined Indian raid recalls historic paintings by Rugendas, for example *El rapto de la cautiva* [*The Abduction of the Captive*] (1845) and *El regreso de la cautiva* [*The Return of the Captive*] (1848), so that Vargas Llosa's romantically dangerous continent is ultimately contained by the European visitors who represent it. One final fact confirms Rugendas's promotional value as a world character. The novel's translation into German was funded by the cultural affairs division of Chile's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A government department responsible for 'disseminating, promoting and enhancing [the] artistic-cultural presence of Chile in the world' helps return a figure from Chile's cultural heritage to his German homeland.[66] The mediation of Rugendas's encounter with South America, reimagined from a Chilean perspective then returned to German in translation, tells us more than the novel itself about the complexities of cultural interactions, reception histories, and how contemporary audiences imagine Romantic Germany's role in the postcolonial Americas.

César Aira*, Un episodio en la vida del pintor viajero*

Un episodio en la vida del pintor viajero has been translated into German twice, and other languages including Dutch, French, Italian, Lithuanian, and English. It has attracted a fair degree of scholarly attention. This single novel was the subject of an interdisciplinary conference at the Université de Franche Comté, and its first German translation has an afterword by international Humboldt expert Ottmar Ette.[67] The title of this translation, *Humboldts Schatten* [*Humboldt's Shadow*], appeals to pre-existing knowledge about Rugendas' mentor and perhaps aims to awaken more interest among a German-speaking audience than a direct translation of the original might, so that it precedes the above-discussed marketing strategies for Franz's work. Moreover, this title also places Rugendas's dilemma up front, highlighting the Romantic artist's anxiety of influence.

Another connection to the Romantic tradition, and the main focus of my reading, is Aira's experimentation with form. Although Aira presents daring travel through the mountains, encounters with natives, and high drama, he rejects the premises of adventure fiction and experiments with narrative possibilities to overturn genre-based expectations. This gives his

[66] <https://minrel.gob.cl/minrel/foreign-policy/cultural-affairs-division> [accessed 20 August 2021].
[67] Nella Arambasin (ed.), *Aira en reseau: Rencontre transdisciplinaire autor du roman de l'écrivain argentin César Aira*, Un episodio en la vida del pinto viajero (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2005); Ottmar Ette, 'Blitzartige Einsichten. César Aira auf den Spuren von Johann Moritz Rugendas', in César Aira, *Humboldts Schatten*, trans. by Matthias Strobel (Zurich: Nagel & Kimche, 2003), pp. 99-123.

work an affinity to avant-garde Romantic novels such as Schlegel's *Lucinde* or Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1800-02), which blend genres, blur temporal norms, and subordinate plot to an aesthetics of fragmentation.[68] *Un episodio en la vida del pintor viajero* is part documentary fiction, part absurdist fantasy, and has a shifting narratorial voice: an historian introducing his subject becomes a limited third-person narrator focalized through his protagonist. The novel also contains aesthetic questions about representation, another trait shared with Romantic works which promote the act of artistic creation as a subject of art itself, as Anthony Phelan's chapter in this volume decisively demonstrates. This seemingly high-brow theorizing connects to real material concerns and to the power imbalance between postcolonial nations and consumers of their image. Like the innovators of 'professional Romanticism', Aira subverts the structure of the novel to highlight its subject's commercialization, and to overturn readers' expectations of adventure narratives. The experimental mode of German Romanticism, and its focus on representation as a subject, become tools to disrupt the reader's acquiescence in popular market strategies. The novel thus reflects critically on the transmission of an exotic Latin American image that retains its appeal today.

The plot centres on Rugendas's creative crossroads during his first journey to Argentina. As a landscape artist, Humboldt's protégé follows his master's principle of the physiognomy of nature, according to which the essential character of a landscape is grasped when its many features are apprehended as a unified whole. But Rugendas is keen to come out from Humboldt's shadow, as the German translation has it. Thus his journey to Argentina. Humboldt had cautioned him to stick to the tropics, where he developed his concept of the physiognomy of nature. Humboldt hoped this idea would influence landscape painting. The tropics' lush vegetation provides a rich range of features, inspiring the artist's holistic representation of the region's natural character. For Humboldt, Rugendas was the man to fulfil this artistic project.[69] The journey to Argentina, and particularly to the desolate pampas, represents a rejection of Humboldt's hopes, but new hope for Rugendas: here, the radical flatness might help him to 'encontrar el reverso del su arte' [discover the other side of his art] and compel him to 'crear un nuevo procedimiento' [invent a new procedure.][70] With its monotonous plains and dearth of flora, the character of the pampas is a mystery that Humboldtian physiognomy cannot solve, for it gives away no features. It poses a challenge to the Romantic representation of nature, interrupting the trajectory of Romantic landscape painting as Humboldt envisaged it. The real Rugendas spent relatively little time in Argentina compared to Mexico and Chile. But this interlude disrupts the circuit connecting Humboldt, travelling painters, and European consumers, because Rugendas intends to deviate from a type of representation that was increasingly marketable in the wake of Humboldt's achievements.[71] Argentina, or the pampas, is itself a kind of 'episode', a stubborn blip that resists a Romantic system.

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[68] See for example Anthony Phelan, 'Prose fiction of the German Romantics', in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. by Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 41-65 (pp. 42-49).
[69] See Diener, pp. 22-4 and Ette, 'Blitzartige Einsichten', pp. 103-04.
[70] Aira, p. 12 and p. 34. [p.147 and p. 166].
[71] Aira's novel emphasizes that Humboldt created a market for the painters who followed him (pp. 13-14 [p.148]).

The titular ‘episode’, however, relates to a riding accident and its consequences. Departing Chile with the younger painter Robert Krause and local guides, Rugendas crosses the Andes and begins a journey to Buenos Aires across the pampas. This journey is never completed, because the party becomes disoriented in the interminably flat landscape. When Rugendas rides out in the face of an approaching storm to get his bearings, he is struck twice by lightning. This corresponds to an historic incident, when Rugendas was thrown by his horse after it took fright at a lightning bolt. Aira recreates this as an episode that not only changes Rugendas’s life but challenges the very principles on which that life has been based, and by extension, the principles of Romantic landscape art and the European-constructed image of Latin America. For the accident changes Rugendas’ perception, as well as the ability of others to perceive him. When he is dragged along behind his horse, the skin is ripped off his face and a nerve exposed; this nerve reconnects randomly to a node in the frontal lobe so that he suffers debilitating migraines and requires large doses of morphine that alter his vision. To this misfortune, Aira adds a more fantastical invention. After the accident, Rugendas can no longer control his own face. Its parts move autonomously and constantly, its expressions bearing no relation to his thoughts or feelings. Having flirted with rejecting Humboldt’s principle, he now embodies that urge: his face’s nonstop movements scupper any effort to ascertain his character. Physiognomy is no longer a tool for reading spirit or essence. Aira’s greatest coup is to return agency to the objectified landscape. For the flatness of the plains makes Rugendas vulnerable to the lightning strike that turns him into a walking rejection of the physiognomic method.[72] The pampas powerfully transforms the artist himself into an incomprehensible artwork. As for his own creations, Rugendas now works obsessively between nervous attacks. During his recovery period, his long-cherished desire to witness, and draw, an Indian raid is fulfilled. Despite his condition he insists on following the raid. The novel ends with Rugendas penetrating the attackers’ camp at night, sketching the men as they feast after the day’s activity. In an obvious reversal of the colonial gaze, the men stare in wonder at his ever-shifting face.

Seemingly a trite ending: the observer becomes the observed, the civilized European the monstrous curiosity. But the sophistication of Aira’s story lies not in this well-worn postcolonial trope at the level of content, but in how it is transferred to the reader’s encounter with the text. The reader’s curiosity is trained on Rugendas, whose bizarre experience trumps the mundanity of the raid. Such raids, as the text reminds us, are repeated regularly. They are also ten a penny in adventure fiction of the frontier. The Romantic painter, meanwhile, is defamiliarized. His psychic distress, intense pain, and unheard-of condition, make him the exotic subject – in a manner recalling the cruel narrative exposure of the mentally unwell painter Berthold in ‘Die Jesuiterkirche in G’, Hoffmann’s critique of voyeurism as a market strategy.[73] But Rugendas’s impossible story can never be told in its totality, just as the alien South American landscape can never be fully absorbed by the physiognomic principle. Conversely, the physiognomic principle itself is adopted at the narrative level in order to encourage the reader to ‘see’ differently; to value the fragment as part of a whole, even if that whole can never be grasped from one perspective. Any effort to understand Rugendas’s story definitively will fail, but this ‘episode’ becomes an element in a broader history of colonial-

[72] See also Brett Levinson, ‘Procedures for Drawing the Event of the Indians: On Aira's *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter*’, *The New Centennial Review*, 14:1 (2014), 47-70 (p. 51).
[73] See Birgit Röder, *A Study of the Major Novellas of E.T.A. Hoffmann* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), p. 80.

era encounters, including the encounter between travelling painters and the European market. The physiognomic principle, frustrated as a viewing tool by the pampas and Rugendas's new face, is nonetheless repurposed as a narrative tool.[74]

Anne McConnell puts her finger on this, identifying artistic procedure as Aira's main subject. Considering the physiognomic principle as a form of '*bricolage*, since the observed facts require assemblage in order to compose a landscape', McConnell reveals landscape painting's analogous relation to the writing of the text.[75] The clue comes when Rugendas writes to various acquaintances and family members, but tells a different version of his story in each letter. For McConnell this is 'a sort of written landscape, where the different letters, if pieced together, compose a broader system'.[76] Aira relates this letter-writing to the global transmission of texts. Rugendas has a range of widely-spaced correspondents worldwide, because he intuits that universal understanding is impossible, as is any definitive account.[77] What is produced in one part of the world will be read differently in another, but versions and fragments gesture towards the greater truth that even the writer cannot fully communicate. Ottmar Ette bolsters the metaphorical connection between text and painting when he notes that the moment Rugendas's life is changed, so is the life of the narrative.[78] The lightning strike alters the speed of the story: some moments are now lightning-quick, like Rugendas's speedy oil sketches of the sudden raids.[79] After this point any pretension to documentary fiction is given up, and readers are left with a bricolage, to re-use McConnell's term. Sudden action is interspersed with aesthetic reflection, the narrative is focalized alternately through Rugendas and Krause's perceptions of him, and it ultimately takes in even the perceptions of the indigenous men. For Ette, this fragmented structure obliquely instructs us how to approach the vast history of the clash between cultures, which Rugendas tries to grasp in his frenzied sketches of the raid, themselves fragmentary pieces.[80] We must learn to reconstruct whole histories from a perspective of alienation and uncertainty, a mode of understanding that allows for gaps, and accounts for different views and viewing strategies.

Aira's story begins as documentary: birth dates, family history, professional influences. It promises the life of the man. By pulling away this firm narrative ground, Aira suggests we appraise our urge to understand the world through coherent stories.[81] His subject is narrative itself, and the never-ending search for comprehension. Aira thus joins the best of the Romantic literary tradition. Schlegel's *Lucinde*, the life story of the painter Julius, is nothing of the sort, for, as Julius realizes, his life can be reconstructed only through various narrative modes and broken fragments that add up to a kaleidoscopic image.[82] Similarly, Hoffmann's

[74] This argument is advanced by Ottmar Ette and Anne McConnell. See Anne McConnell, 'How to Compose a Landscape: Reflections on Procedure in César Aira's *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter*', *Latin American Literary Review*, 48:95 (2001), 67-74, and Ette, 'Blitzartige Einsichten.'
[75] McConnell, p. 68.
[76] Ibid., p. 70.
[77] Aira, p. 59-60 [p. 188].
[78] Ette, p. 110.
[79] Ette, pp. 117-18.
[80] Ette, p. 121.
[81] McConnell writes that Aira 'train[s] our gaze on the tools and processes that mediate our experience of the world and our documentation of what we observe' (p. 68).
[82] See Joanna Neilly, 'German Romanticism as Translational World Literature: Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde* and Andrés Neuman's *El viajero del siglo*', *Modern Languages Open*, 2018:1, article 24, 1-

‘Die Jesuiterkirche in G’ has three different narrators and no trustworthy version of the painter’s life. But Aira’s relationship to German Romanticism is double-edged. His adoption of a fragmented narrative form akin to Humboldt’s principle of landscape painting also criticizes that very tradition. We get no holistic picture or essential character. The novel answers neither the Romantic nor the market demand for a definitive image of Latin America. Documentary swerves into fiction, but Rugendas’s life does not become an adventure novel in Franz’s mode. If ‘professional Romanticism’ ironizes its own market complicity, Aira’s text does the same for postcolonial fiction operating within a global market that still thrives on stock images and stories of transformative encounters. Aira negotiates the complex postcolonial relationship between Latin America and the Germans who participated in its nineteenth-century rediscovery. The novel represents a newly-independent nation through the perspective of a German travelling painter who partly lived off the European vogue for the exotic and who remains a major figure in Latin American cultural history today. This painter, Humboldt’s right-hand-man in the mediation of an entire continent, is transformed by Aira into unrepresentability itself. The aesthetic mirroring of Rugendas’s face in the fragmented narrative, meanwhile, is a strike against his smooth assimilation into a history of German encounters with the New World. It is the Romantic form of Aira’s novel that provides the critical thrust: fragmentation, fantastical interventions and an unresolved plot collectively undermine readerly expectations. Aira criticizes the very market to which Franz appeals.

Conclusion

Latin America emerges as a site of renewal for the German Romantic artist seeking fresh inspiration. Once aestheticized, however, it is subsumed by the same market the artist hoped to escape. Rugendas’s professional life mirrors the entanglement of art and economics as it played out on a transnational scale in the aftermath of Latin American independence. His success was helped by association with men who profited from a European curiosity about Latin America, and who were not innocent of imperial associations or neo-colonial impulses, for example the slave-owner Langsdorff who opened his estate to artists inspired by Humboldt, or the mine-owner Sartorius who conducted his Mexican research on the side of more lucrative enterprises. ‘Professional Romanticism’ takes on a global dimension, and the moral stakes go beyond the artist’s personal development, because the foreign landscape is now re-appropriated as both muse and exotic product. In the contemporary literary landscape, the product is ‘world literature’. At a time when Humboldt’s rediscovery of the Americas is itself being rediscovered in bestselling works, Rugendas’s transnational connections and encounters amount to a thrilling adventure for an audience accustomed to narratives of exploration. Franz’s novel, and the marketing of its German version, capitalize on this demand. Aira dismantles it via formal experimentation in the Romantic mode, suggesting that no definitive version of the Americas can be produced, less still understood, by external observers. Professional Romanticism continues unabated and rises to position itself on a world stage, but its knowing narrative style can check its excesses.

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18 (pp. 7-12).