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If we think about the connection between literature and nature, we can imagine language rising within ourselves and between each other like a certain kind of forest, a landscape that is at the same time dense and spacious. But if we compare language to a forest, it is not hard to speak of literature as the abundance of species in that forest. A remarkable literary work is like an unique specimen, sending out shoots that are the thoughts and meanings propagated by the gaze enthusiastic readers.

Considering an image like this, I find I am met with a challenge: what is the power of a mental image to influence our everyday interaction? At first glance it seems that the statement, 'literature is the biodiversity of language' is primarily a linguistic question, which necessarily has no direct and implications in the world. But on the other hand it is rather hard to fathom a person who does not use language, someone who could communicate without linguistic tools.

I have always liked the thought by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, that a conversation, even a dispute, might be conducted by means of a dance. It is interesting to think about a culture where the different parties of a conversation do not fight, but instead dance. What would happen? In a dance there are other important factors beside the result; there is also the process. As well as the effectiveness of thoughts, we would be interested in their style and refinement. In a dance the parties would have to find points of contact, it would be necessary to establish a common space. Lakoff and Johnson assume that in a culture like this people would not only view arguments differently, they would also in fact argue in a different way. It might be that from our perspective we would be hard put to see any argument in a dance at all. Maybe, in a linguistic sense, dancing would necessarily mean a different structure of language, where verbs would be much more important than nouns?

This is related to the idea by Ludwig Wittgenstein that the limits of our language determine the limits of our world. For example, we can think about science, which needs workable metaphors as much as literature does. If we look at the most central expressions of quantum mechanics or astrophysics, it is not hard to see how they are at the same time both linguistically sound and factually inaccurate. The expression 'black hole' means a place which in fact is the total opposite of a hole, really a 'non-hole' -- an incredibly dense locality of space (we can think of its density as infinite). The expression 'big bang' can also create false images, as it was not an extremely loud explosion in some point in space, but rather an explosion of space itself. Contradicting expressions like those point us to the fact that the universe is always more complex than our language with which we describe that complexity.

In my mind one of the biggest social problems is the expanding refusal to acknowledge how complex reality really is. The decline of natural biodiversity is only a part of the bigger issue. More and more people are looking for stories that describe the complex world in a simplified way. It is an efficient solution -- one can simply refuse the complicated state of things by subscribing to a simple solution. In politics it might mean fear of certain interest groups or the belief that limiting the rights of certain people could solve far-reaching, complicated problems. In medicine it might mean the conviction that certain medications, for example vaccines, are the root of all evil. When the world gets ever more complicated, people look for simple stories. However, the fact is that richness of species is not only a trait of nature, it is found in all of reality, both in the physical universe and human interaction. The universe is an 'inexhaustible unity' -- as Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts it.

If the world indeed is an inexhaustible unity, inside that unity, what unifies us humans? Like Richard Rorty I believe that we no longer can find one great story that could unify all humankind as a seamless whole, even though every story describing the world attempts to generalise and proffer its own interpretation as the truth, the one perspective as a solution that fits all. According to Rorty the only thing that unifies people is the ability to suffer. He does not mean physical pain but instead the mental anguish resulting from the ability to demean and be demeaned. What every one of us can do is to decrease the causes and amount of suffering: to stay away from demeaning others.

To decrease suffering does not only require discretion in connecting truth and interpretation to each other. It does not only require recognition of the complexity of the world -- the willingness to acknowledge that change is the only constant, that there is nothing that remains except the relentless change in things, organisms, relationships. All of us are unique in two ways: none of us is duplicated in any other, and none of us is duplicated in reality. The most important thing to fathom is that the only unifying fact between people is the constant repetition of uniqueness, the richness of species that concerns every individual and flourishes within every individual. Each of us has experienced something that has not been experienced by anyone else, and that makes every one of us equally precious.

It is marvellous if literature can further the richness of language so that language can better reflect the richness of reality. If we imagine literature as the richness of species in language, we'll do well to remember that literature works best when the stories it offers can reflect the richness of people and other organisms, and also the nature and universe which they comprise. The layered structure of both the social and natural reality. Literature means the possibility to express the circle of life present in the richness of the world, the inexhaustible dance of relationships which makes up everything there is.