Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, Hugo Meltzl, and the Scandinavian New World

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Abstract: The aim of this essay is to investigate the role Scandinavia and its scholarship network may play in the understanding of world literature as envisioned by Hugo Meltzl in *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*. To that effect, my analysis focuses on Rasmus Bjørn Anderson (1846-1936), a Norwegian-American member of the journal's editorial board. Theoretically, this essay builds on Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann's concept of "histoire croisée," as well as Shu-mei Shih's conceptualization of "technologies of recognition." I dwell primarily on Anderson's contributions in the area of Scandinavian studies, which focused on Norse mythology and literature, especially his most important works, *America Not Discovered by Columbus* and *Norse Mythology or the Religion of Our Forefathers.* They reveal Anderson's framing of Scandinavian literature and culture, as well as his "anti-Romance" approach over and against the backdrop of late-nineteenth-century Norwegian immigration to the United States. In the context of *Acta Comparationis,* Anderson's case points to the journal as a platform for achieving recognition in the word literary system of the time and to the system's global yet selective network.

Keywords: *Acta Comparationis*, Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, Scandinavian studies, Norwegian-American identity, Norse mythology, Anti-Romance, histoire croisée, technologies of recognition

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Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum was the world's first journal of comparative literature, published, originally twice per month, between 1877 and 1888 in Cluj/ Kolozsvár/Klausenburg and edited by Hugo von Meltzl and Sámuel Brassai. A polyglot journal focusing on literature, folklore, mythology, and translations, among other things, it brought together more than 120 collaborators from around the world.[1] The roster of members of the editorial board indicates that a global network of contributors shaped the landscape of ideas displayed in the journal. Within this network, Scandinavia was represented by several influential figures, including Vilhelm Thomsen (Denmark, Copenhagen), Christian Knud Frederik Molbech (Denmark, Copenhagen), Victor Emanuel Öman (Sweden, Örebro), Steingrímur Thorsteinsson (Reykjavik, Iceland), and Rasmus Bjørn Anderson (Norway / USA, Madison, WI). Two pivotal questions arise regarding the impact of their contributions to *Acta Comparationis*: What significance did membership in the editorial board hold for the contributors themselves and how did the journal benefit from their involvement? This essay centers on Rasmus Bjørn Anderson because of his Norwegian-American profile, which places him at the crossroads between European and American literary worlds. In what follows, I focus on Anderson's interest in Norse mythology and literature and on how these areas are reflected by his contributions to *Acta Comparationis*.

A key aspect that emerges from Anderson's presence in the journal as a Scandinavian studies scholar is tied to his efforts to promote the centrality of Scandinavian literature and culture, as well as to his openly expressed "anti-Romance" approach to comparative studies. I will explore these issues by looking at two of his most important books mentioned in *Acta Comparationis: America Not Discovered by Columbus* and *Norse Mythology or the Religion of our Forefathers*.[2]

1. Horst Fassel, "'Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum': Prima revistă de literatură universală din lume," *Philologica Jassyensia* 20, no. 2 (2014): 155–159.

2. Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, *America Not Discovered by Columbus* (Illinois: S. C. Griggs & company, 1874); Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, *Norse Mythology or the Religion of Our Forefathers, Containing All the Myths of the Eddas, Systematized and Interpreted. With an Introduction, Vocabulary and Index by R. B. Anderson* (Illinois: S. C. Griggs and company; Trübner & co., 1875).

I argue that Anderson worked to upset the literary world's hierarchy, one in which Scandinavian literature was meant to hold a central place. To that end, he aimed to decenter the focus away from Romance literary tradition (French, Italian, Spanish), as well as from the literature of Classical Antiquity (Greek and Latin), and to turn attention instead toward the Anglo-Saxon world, with a focus on German and Scandinavian traditions. While comparative literature has traditionally been tied to the French world, as Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* demonstrates, recent scholarship has identified the German world as an equally strong counterpart.[3] This is particularly relevant for the Scadinavian literary system, which has traditionally been connected to German as the late-nineteenth-century international reception of the most influential Scandinavian writers like Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson demonstrates it.[4] In this vein, works like Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem's *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama* articulate a counter-narrative regarding the world impact of German and Germanic literary output, which account dismantles Casanova's French-centered approach. Anderson's scholarly work on Scandinavian studies is an example of the tensions between the Romance model, dominated by French and Italian, and the rising English and U. S. model in the field of comparative literature during the second half of the nineteenth century. The global network of contributors to *Acta Comparationis* highlights such tensions, with authors from the German-speaking world creating a counterpoint to French, Italian, or Spanish authors.

In this respect, the "technologies of recognition" discussed by Shu-Mei Shih and the concept of "histoire croisée" advanced by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann offer a framework for analyzing Anderson's contributions as a Scandinavian studies scholar in *Acta Comparationis*.[5] On the one hand, Anderson's efforts to promote the Scandinavian model and the Norwegians' presence in America align with the above-mentioned "technologies of recognition" which are "mechanisms in the discursive (un)conscious – with bearings on social and cultural (mis) understandings – that produce 'the West' as the agent of recognition and 'the rest' as the object of recognition, in representation".[6] On the other hand, "histoire croisée" which is based on the principle of "intersection" and works with "a variety of directions and multiple effects," is useful for examining Anderson's contribution to the journal's global scholarly infrastructure.[7] In the context of Anderson's anti-Romance position, "histoire croisée" provides a helpful lens to read his efforts to decenter, if not to reverse, world-literary hierarchies by asserting the centrality and influence of Scandinavian culture and literature with respect to other major cultures and literary traditions. For instance, "histoire croisée" comes in handy when describing the exchanges enabled by *Acta Comparationis* between scholars like Tommaso Cannizzaro and Rasmus B. Anderson.

The tensions at stake in Anderson's Scandinavian-oriented approach to literary studies invite a theoretical reflection on the relationship between coloniality and nationalism. The recognition Anderson sought for Scandinavian literature and culture is part of the broader context of Norwegian immigration to the American lands, which relied on what Orm Øverland describes as "homemaking mythology."[8] At least two strands of this mythology, with an obvious national-romantic imprint, can be connected to Anderson's work: "The Norwegians were the true discoverers of America" and "The Union was saved by Norwegian immigrants."[9] The latter is tied to the context of the American Civil War and the abolition of slavery. Along these lines, Hustvedt notes that "The Civil War had also strengthened the position of the Norwegians. They could look with pride upon the Fifteenth Wisconsin Regiment, a Scandinavian unit, and its leader, Colonel Hans Christian Heg. His death in the battle of Chickamauga provided them with their first hero on American soil."[10] Both Anderson's autobiography and the works of historians like Lloyd Hustvedt, Arlow William Andersen, and Odd S. Lovoll indicate that his position was anti-slavery, especially since he was a supporter of his mentor Claus Lauritz Clausen, chaplain in the above-mentioned regiment.[11] Further on, Anderson's stance on slavery did not seem to interfere with his colonial discourse on the

3. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

4. Narve Fulsås and Tore Rem, *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

5. Shu-Mei Shih, "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition," *PMLA* 119, no. 1 (2004): 16–30; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 45, no. 1 (2006): 30–50.

6. Shih, "Global Literature," 17.

7. Werner and Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison," 37.

8. Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870–1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 150.

9. Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds*, 150.

10. Lloyd Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson: Pioneer Scholar* (Northfield: Hustvedt, 1966), 41.

11. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 40–51; Arlow William Andersen, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand: The Norwegian-American Press and Public Affairs, 1847–1872* (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1953), 61–62; Odd S. Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 107–115.

discovery of the New World by the Vikings as replacement for the traditional colonial narrative of America being discovered by Columbus. This perspective suggests that the anti-slavery fight was a very strong tool to advocate for the Norwegians' contribution to the development of the American society in light of their sacrifice in the Civil War.[12] In other words, although the topic of slavery and colonialism are intertwined, Anderson does not seem to consider his anti-slavery position as being in contradiction with his colonial perspective on Leif Eriksson as the Scandinavian Columbus.[13] His objective is to seek recognition for the Norwegian minority in the United States, a minority that did not belong to the indigenous population but was not necessarily seen as fully white either. As Øverland comments on Anderson's intricate politics,

> "A Norwegian-American homemaking mythology was initially created as a direct and personal response to what was perceived as Anglo-American exclusivity and lack of respect for – indeed, a lack of awareness of – the significant contributions by Norwegians to Western civilization. Moreover, this mythology did not simply argue for the whiteness of Norwegians, which had been questioned. It responded more specifically to the racial theories that placed Anglo-Saxondom, rather than a more general whiteness, at the apex of the human family of races by demonstrating the close historical racial ties between Anglo-Americans and Norwegian Americans."[14]

Thus, Anderson's ambivalent position mirrors the in-betweenness of the Norwegian-American community in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. Meltzl must have found himself in a similar position, advocating for the legitimacy of Hungarian literature within the literary system of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was marked by the dominance of the German tradition. The similarity of stances taken by Meltzl and Anderson with respect to Hungarian and Norwegian literatures indicates how *Acta Comparationis* must have served as a meeting point for projects bound by the same need to achieve recognition and legitimacy for "minor" literary cultures.

Anderson's biography, the topics he engaged with as a scholar, and his contribution to *Acta Comparationis* speak to his fight for recognition of the Norwegian community and of the centrality of the Scandinavian literary tradition, as well as to the ideological tensions in his approach as a late nineteenth-century comparatist. Born in Albion, Wisconsin, on January 12, 1846, to Norwegian parents from Vikedal, a town on the West Coast of Norway, Anderson graduated in 1866 from Luther College (Decorah, Iowa), a seminary established in 1861 by Norwegian immigrants.[15] He is most renowned for founding the first department of Scandinavian Studies in the United States at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where he taught during the period 1869–1883.[16] Anderson's contribution to *Acta Comparationis* is part of a broader landscape, which connects his original works, translations, and critical introductions to three main topics: Scandinavian mythology, folklore, and literature; Norwegian immigration to America; folklore and mythology of other cultures. His book *Norse Mythology, or the Religion of Our Forefathers*, the collection of fairytales *Julegave: Et Udvalg af Eventyr og Fortællinger*, as well as translations and edited works of sagas and *The Younger Edda* (1879) testify to Anderson's efforts to disseminate Scandinavian mythology, folklore, and literature.[17] In addition, Anderson made a strong contribution to the American reception of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, whose American lecture tour he managed in 1880 and 1881.[18] He appears as the official translator of Bjørnson's prose and poetry works although the actual translator was Annie Aubertine Woodward.[19]

Anderson's interest in Norwegian immigration to the United States comes across in writings like *The First Chapter of Norwegian Immigration (1821–1840): Its Causes and Result.*[20] Alongside his works specifically concerned with this

12. Øverland, *Immigrant Minds*, 150.

13. Leif Eriksson was a Norse explorer renowned for discovering the region of Vinland on the North-American coast around year 1000 according to the saga of Erik the Red and the saga of the Greenlanders.

14. Øverland, *Immigrant Minds*, 149.

15. Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, *Life Story of Rasmus B. Anderson* (1915), 2; Consul Willshire Butterfield, *Literary and Biographical Sketch of Prof. Rasmus B. Anderson* (University Press Co., 1879), 1; Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 23–40.

16. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 89–122; Sanda Tomescu Baciu, "Nordisches in der Zeitschrift 'Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum,'" in *Hugo Meltzl und die Anfänge der Komparatistik* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 93; Butterfield, *Literary and Biographical Sketch*, 2.

17. Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, *Julegave: et udvalg af eventyr og fortällinger* ("Amerika's" Forlag, 1872); Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, *Viking Tales of the North: The Sagas of Thorstein, Viking's Son, and Fridthjof the Bold.* (S. C. Griggs and company, 1877); Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, The *Younger Edda: Also Called Snorre's Edda, or the Prose Edda* (Scott, Foresman, 1879).

18. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910) was one of the most influential Norwegian writers of the second half of the nineteenth century and the winner of the Nobel prize for literature in 1903; Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 163–172; Arthur C. Paulson, "Bjørnson and the Norwegian-Americans, 1880–81," *Studies and Records (Norwegian-American Historical Association)* 5 (1930): 84–109.

19. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 360.

20. Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, *The First Chapter of Norwegian Immigration, (1821–1840): Its Causes and Results.*

topic, his other literary, translational, and critical endeavors related to Norse literature and mythology aimed to build a sense of identity and legitimacy for the Norwegian community living in the United States at the time. Finally, curiosity about the folklore and mythology of other cultures, such as German, English, Finnish, and Australian, is displayed sporadically in Anderson's works.[21]

Anderson's name appears in issues published between 1877 to 1879 and is associated with either references to his works and information about lectures he held or with actual contributions to the journal. On the one hand, the journal mentions in the "Bibliographie" section two books written by Anderson: "*Anderson R. B*. Norse Mythologie or the Religion of our Forefathers, containing all the Myths of the Eddas, systematized interpreted with an Introduction, Vocabulary und Index. Second Ed. – Chicago, Griggs et Co. London, Trübner, 1877. 473. – Mit einem Titelbild J. Stuart's Zeichnung: 'Thor fighting the Giants.' – (H. Longfellow gewidmet.);[22] "*Anderson Rasmus*. Amerika not discovered by Columbus. An historical sketch of the Discovery of Amerika by the Norsemen in the tenth century. With an Appendix on the historical, linguistic, literary and scientific value of the Scandinavian languages. New and improved edition. Chicago, Griggs & Co. London, Trübner & Co. 1877. 8°120."[23]

On the other hand, the actual contributions that Anderson published in the journal are:

- *Tegner's "Fridthjof's Saga" in America*, an account on the aforementioned saga;[24]

- *The Bridal Party on the Hardanger-Fjord by Andreas Munch*, which is a translation of the poem from Norwegian into English with an introduction by Anderson;[25]

- *The Kalewala*, an essay on the Finnish national epic;[26]

- *A Scandinavian national song. Our Land, our Land, our native Land,* a translation of a poem by the Finnish Johan Ludwig Runeberg and Finland's national anthem today, with an introduction by Anderson;[27]

- *Scandinavian national song by Carl Pong, translated from the Danish*;[28]

- An English translation of the ballad "The Black Wodas" published both in the journal as part of a contribution by Meltzl and in a separate booklet edition the same year.[29]

These scattered references and contributions point to comparative literature, translation studies, and Scandinavian studies as Anderson's main topics of interest within the context of *Acta Comparationis*. Each one of the above-mentioned six contributions deserves further exploration. They reflect Anderson's concern with the worldwide circulation of texts and with the recognition of Scandinavian national-romantic literature. However, since Anderson was primarily interested in Scandinavian studies, more specifically in Norse mythology and literature, this portrait approaches his contribution to *Acta Comparationis* from the perspective of his scholarly work in this field.

For this purpose, I consider the two books for which Anderson is best known, both of which were also his first to be mentioned in the body of the journal, in two issues published in 1877: *America Not Discovered by Columbus* and *Norse Mythology or the Religion of our Forefathers*. These books explore interconnected topics regarding the Scandinavian legacy and its relevance in the United States. They directly relate to the position as "Professor of Scandinavian Languages" offered to Anderson in 1875 at University of Wisconsin.[30] I examine the main perspectives advanced in these publications and their relevance in the context of *Acta Comparationis*. In this respect, Anderson's focus on Scandinavian culture and literature, as well as his anti-Romance approach reveal different technologies of recognition and the entangled histories that shape the role of *Acta Comparationis* as a global scholarly network at the end of nineteenth century.

America Not Discovered by Columbus, first published in 1874, tells the story of the discovery of America by Norsemen and focuses on Leif Eriksson's tenth-century exploits. Anderson dismisses the dominant narrative of

21. Viktor, Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology* (S. Sonnenschein & co, 1889); Sir Thomas Malory, *The Arthurian Tales: The Greatest of Romances Which Recount the Noble and Valorous Deeds of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* (Norrœna Society, 1905); *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum,* XXXI, June 1878, 9–12; Carl Lumholtz, *Among Cannibals; an Account of Four Years' Travels in Australia and of Camp Life with the Aborigines of Queensland* (C. Scribner's sons, 1889).

22. "Bibliographie", *Acta Comparationis* 10 (1877): 215.

23. "Bibliographie", *Acta Comparationis* 14 (1877): 295.

24. Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, "Tegnér's 'Fridthofs Saga' in America," *Acta Comparationis* 21 (1878): 425–428.

25. Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, "The Bridal Party on the Hardanger-Fjord by Andreas Munch," *Acta Comparationis* 24 (1878): 489–492.

26. Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, "The Kalewala," *Acta Comparationis* 31 (1878): 9–12.

27. Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, "A Scandinavian National Song. *Our Land, our Land, our native Land*". *Acta Comparationis* 36 (1878): 120–122

28. Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, "Scadinavian National Song by Carl Pong," *Acta Comparationis* 44 (1878): 67–68.

29. Hugo Meltzl. "The Black Wodas," *Acta Comparationis* 51 (1879): 11–15.

30. Einar I. Haugen, *A Critique and a Bibliography of the Writings of Rasmus B. Anderson. Wisconsin Magazine of History*. Vol. 20. (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1937), 259; Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 100, 316.

Columbus' "discovery" in late fifteenth century, claiming instead that the Spanish explorer actually knew about America before setting sail.[31] It is not so much the validity of the theory and its historical details that draw my attention here, in the context of Anderson's engagement with *Acta Comparationis*, as the reasons behind Anderson's interest in the topic and the critical reception of the book, which reveals issues of scholarly credibility and partisanship. The ideological position of Anderson aligns with his anti-Romance attitude and the colonial narrative of America discovered by the Viking explorer Leif Eriksson in the Middle Ages. This ends up de-centering the Romance-world primacy and replacing it with its Northern counterpart in order to strengthen the belonging claims of Scandinavians in America. Eventually, colonizing discourse, matched by nationalism, becomes a recognition strategy employed by Anderson to empower Norwegian-American identity and overall pursue the book's three main objectives. These are: serve as promotional material for the Leif Ericson monument campaign started by Anderson and Ole Bull the year before; make known the Norse discoveries of America; play down the figure of Columbus, thereby removing some of the traditional glory given to Latin countries.[32]

It is obvious, though, that the scholarly credibility of *America Not Discovered by Columbus* remains questionable. The author himself admits that he "freely made use of such material as he considered valuable, from the works of Torfæns, C.C. Rafn, J.T. Smit, N.L. Beamish, G. Gravier, B.F. De Costa, A. Davis, William and Mary Howitt, R.M. Ballantyne, P.A. Munch, R. Keyser."[33] All authors mentioned by Anderson had written books on the topic, so he was not original in that respect. C. W. Butterfield points that "this book has been received with marked attention at home and abroad," and it enjoyed a positive reception from American readers.[34] Einar I. Haugen acknowledges the popularity of the author and his book, despite the latter's lack of originality. *America*, he writes, "claimed no originality, and it was by no means the first account in English, but somehow its arresting title and the bold assertive style of its contents reached the general public and fixed him in the popular mind as the great hero of a neglected cause. Eight editions and three translations bear evidence to its popular appeal."[35] Eventually, the work was translated into German and Danish. Yet critics from Denmark, Norway, and Germany were highly critical of the book, not only because it lacked scholarly value but also because of its apparent "propaganda and fanaticism."[36] Øverland observes the positive American reception and the cold European reception, noting that "Anderson was making a homemaking argument that could not possibly be appreciated in Christiania, as Oslo then was named. He was demonstrating that Norwegians were indeed 'white folks.'"[37] Moreover, as Hustvedt indicates, the critics of the time did not hesitate to "dismiss the book as either an advertisement of Mr. Anderson or of the proposed monument" for Leif Eriksson.[38]

Since an important part of the criticism revolved around the partisan, propagandistic claims the book, I proceed by examining them closely. On the one hand, the book makes clear its aim to promote Scandinavian studies to the American audience: "the object of this sketch has been to present a readable and truthful narrative of the Norse discovery of America, to create some interest in the people, the literature, and the early institutions of Norway, especially in Iceland."[39] But, aside from these general statements, Anderson's focus on the Scandinavian legacy in *America Not Discovered by Columbus* displays a colonial approach which relates to his advocacy for the building of a monument for Leif Eriksson in Wisconsin, a project which he only mentions in the concluding remarks: "Let us remember Leif Erikson, the first white man who planted his feet on American soil! (...) Let us erect a monument to Leif Erikson worthy of the man and the cause; and while the knowledge of this discovery of America lay for a long time hid in the unstudied literature of Iceland, let us take this lesson, that 'truth crushed to earth will rise again'."[40] Anderson's "advertising" strategies were connected to his future appointment as professor of Scandinavian studies, and they surely served this institutional purpose, as the author himself acknowledges: "My little book, 'America Not Discovered by Columbus', served to strengthen me in my position in the state university. I then determined to make my next effort in the line of Scandinavian mythology, thinking this was a subject that would appeal, both to scholars and to the general reader."[41] However, this strategy weakened the impact of the book for

31. Anderson, *America Not Discovered*, 65–73.
32. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 311.
33. Anderson, *America Not Discovered*, v.
34. Butterfield, *Literary and Biographical Sketch*, 4.
35. Haugen, *A Critique and a Bibliography*, 259.
36. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 316.
37. Øverland, *Immigrant Minds*, 155.
38. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 315.
39. Anderson, *America Not Discovered*, vi.
40. Anderson, *America Not Discovered*, 74
41. Anderson, *Life Story*, 213.

some of his readers.

On the other hand, the focus on the Norse legacy in *America Not Discovered by Columbus* is part of a wider landscape in which Anderson sought a double recognition for the impact of the Scandinavian culture and history; that is, not only on American soil and for the sake of the Norwegian community living there, but also in Europe, whose Norse heritage he tried to support.[42] This pairs with a clear anti-Romance attitude, with Anderson dismissing the Roman/Latin legacy of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. By criticizing Columbus as a representative of the Romance heritage and Latinity exported to the New World, and highlighting instead Leif Eriksson as the true discoverer of America, Anderson promoted a different cultural hierarchy, still framed by a colonial narrative. To reiterate, his perspective entailed shifting the world cultural center toward Northern Europe, and German-English cultures, and dismissing to a great extent the pivotal legacy of cultures such as the French, Spanish, Italian, Belgian, Greek, and Russian. It should be noted that these examples also point to the legacy of the older empires of the Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and implicitly, to the processes of colonization that took place in both Europe and in the New World. In this respect, Anderson presents us with a particular case of Eurocentrism, in which America is seen as inherently European, more specifically, Scandinavian, thus turning Northern Europe into the cradle of European civilization:

> "Until recently it has generally been supposed that America was wholly unknown to European nations previous to the time of Columbus, but investigations by learned men have made it certain, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the Europeans did have knowledge of this country long before the time of Columbus, and it has even been claimed, on quite plausible grounds, that some of the nations living here at the time of Columbus' discovery of this continent were descendants of Europeans."[43]

When Anderson highlights that "the early literature of Iceland is now fast becoming recognized as equal to that of ancient Greece and Rome," it becomes clear that his concern with the matter of (in)equality in world literature is part of the same anti-Romance campaign, paired with the attempt to bring Scandinavia to the forefront.[44] While belittling Romance cultures, Anderson turns to German and English cultures and tries to assert their hegemonic position while also seeking recognition for the Scandinavian legacy and its impact on the Germanic, British, and American worlds.

> "Germany and England, and I would like to add America, are now beginning to realize how much valuable material is to be found in these sources for elucidating the history and institutions of other contemporary nations; and especially do the early Sagas of the North throw much important light on the character of English and German institutions during the Middle Ages. The English and Germans are translating the Sagas as fast as they can."[45]

Finally, bolstering Scandinavia's historical presence and role in Europe was part of Anderson's attempts to strengthen his own scholarly profile in the United States. As member of a family of Norwegian immigrants, he sought to legitimize the Scandinavian community he belonged to in the New World.

Anderson's next book, *Norse Mythology or the Religion of our Forefathers,* reasserts the anti-Romance, pro-Scandinavia outlook of *America Not Discovered by Columbus* and strenghtens the author's relationship to *Acta Comparationis*. Divided into two parts, the new book is an account of Norse mythology and religion. The introduction and the first section focus on general considerations on Norse mythology, including comparisons with Greek and Roman mythology, whereas the second part examines in detail actual myths and legends. However, as Hustvedt indicates,

> "more than eighty per cent of the volume is a literal translation of the second edition of *Nordisk mythologi* by N.M. Petersen, at one time professor of Northern Languages at the University of Copenhagen. The remaining pages consist of digests from Bishop Grundtvig's writings on Romanism and of quotations from Longfellow, President Bascom, P.A. Munch, and Thomas Carlyle."[46]

The American reception of the book "spelled out an unqualified triumph" because it presented "a new and fascinating subject for Americans."[47] Butterfield also ascertained the book's success in Europe: "Few books have

42. Anderson, *America Not Discovered*, 25–26.
43. Anderson, *America Not Discovered*, 16.
44. Anderson, *America Not Discovered*, 33.
45. Anderson, *America Not Discovered*, 18.
46. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 317.
47. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 321–322.

been more extensively or more generously noticed by the press of America. In Europe, its reception has been equally cordial; – English, French, German, and Scandinavian journals gave it, and are still giving (...) favorable notices."[48] However, the European (Danish) reception was clearly negative, with critics who considered Anderson "a dilettante and labelled his work unscholarly and naïve."[49]

The propagandistic spirit of the previous book remains active here, with the "partisan spirit" taking an anti-Romance stand: "Because Anderson had attempted to elevate the Teutons at the expense of Rome and Greece, a reviewer in the British *Morning Post* found nothing of value in *Norse Mythology*."[50] Anderson is similarly concerned with achieving recognition from his German and English counterparts:

> "Although many of the ideas set forth in this work may seem new to American readers, yet they are by no means wholly original. Many of them have for many years been successfully advocated in Scandinavian countries, and to some extent, also, in Germany and England. Our aim has not at present been so much to make original investigations, as—that which is far more needed and to the purpose—to give the fruits of the labors performed in the North, and call the attention of the American public earnestly to the wealth stored up in the Eddas and Sagas of Iceland. No one can doubt the correctness of our position in this matter, when he reflects that we are now drawing near the close of the nineteenth century, and have not yet had a complete Norse mythology in the English language, while the number of Greek and Roman mythologies is legion."[51]

Although Anderson reinforced his anti-Romance stance, his second book was translated into both French and Italian.[52] Moreover, according to Anderson himself, it was through *Acta Comparationis* that he had met his Italian translator Tommasso Cannizzaro, from Messina, which attests to the journal's role in stimulating scholarly and literary entanglements.[53] Cannizzaro was also a member of the journal's editorial board and published a book about Anderson and Nordic literature in America.[54] The relationship between Anderson and Cannizzaro is illustrative of the reception of Scandinavian literature in Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century. Cannizzaro's interest in Norse mythology and literature participates in a broader narrative concerned with "the influence of Northern European Romanticism on the works of some Sicilian authors of the early nineteenth century."[55] His activity as translator of excerpts from *Edda* seems clearly influenced by the contact with Anderson[56] during a period when the Italian world was gaining greater insight into the Scandinavian world, from the literature of the Old Norse to Henrik Ibsen:

> "This is the first time that the Voluspa is presented to the Italians; we hope that they will appreciate our modest attempt which aims to stimulate the study not only of the Eddic poems almost unknown in Italy but also of the entire Icelandic and Scandinavian literature, so rich and varied and which occupies a very important place in the universal history of literature and civilization. [...] We are thanking the patient reader who has followed us up to this point, let us stop to listen to the prophetic words of the old Sibyl of the North." (My translation)[57]

Moreover, Cannizzaro himself is representative of the world literature project envisioned by Meltzl and *Acta Comparationis*, his volume of translations published under the title *Fiori d'oltralpe* in 1893 revealing a diverse landscape of literatures, which acknowledges both Romance and Anglo-Saxon traditions, alongside "minor" traditions and even dialectal literatures.[58]

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48. Butterfield, *Literary and Biographical Sketch*, 5.

49. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 322.

50. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 321.

51. Anderson, *Norse Mythology*, 10–11.

52. Rasmus Bjørn Anderson, *Mythologie scandinave: Légendes des eddas.* Tr. Jules Leclercq (Paris, 1886).

53. Anderson, *Life Story*, 324.

54. Anderson, *Life Story*, 324; Tommaso Cannizzaro, *Degli Scandinavi e dell'Edda antica* (Messina: Tipografia D'Amico, 1908); Tommaso Cannizzaro, *Rasmus B. Anderson: la letteratura nordica in America* (Messina: Tipografia Rizzotti, 1908).

55. Daniela Bombara, "'Brume Nordiche' Sullo Stretto. Le Radici Settentrionali Del Romanticismo Siciliano," in *Italianistica Debreceniensis: A Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetem Olasz Tanszéke Es Az Olasz Felvilágosodás És Romantika Kutatóközpont Évkönyve* 26 (2020): 28.

56. Bombara, "Brume Nordiche," p. 44–45.

57. "È la prima volta che la Voluspa si presenta agl'Italiani; vogliamo sperare che essi ci sappiano grado del nostro modesto tentativo che mira a destare lo studio non soltanto dei poemi eddici quasi sconosciuti in Italia ma eziando della intera letteratura islandese e scandinava così ricca e varia e che occu-pa un posto assai importante nella storia universale della letteratura e della civiltà. [...] Ringraziando il paziente lettore che ci ha seguiti fin qui, fermiamoci ad ascoltare le profetiche parole della vecchia Sibilla del settentrione." Tommaso Cannizzaro, *Degli Scandinavi*, 39.

58. Tommaso Cannizzaro, *Fiori d'oltralpe saggio di traduzioni poetiche* (Messina: Tip. T. Cannizzaro, 1893).

The French and Italian translations of Anderson's book indicate the author's ambivalent attitude toward the world of Romance studies, stemming from his own search for recognition within Europe's major cultures and scholarly traditions. That is, while Anderson was renowned for "his propensity for mixing propaganda with scholarship and his anti-Romanism," he did not dismiss the recognition he could receive from Romance cultures.[59] In addition, the relationship between Anderson and Cannizzaro highlights the role of *Acta Comparationis* as a network connecting scholars across cultures and social-political spaces. For this reason, the concept of "histoire croisée" remains relevant to describe the interaction between Anderson and Cannizzaro as "a multiplicity of possible viewpoints and the divergences resulting from languages, terminologies, categorizations and conceptualizations, traditions, and disciplinary usages."[60] In this case, the contact between Norwegian and Italian cultures enabled by *Acta Comparationis* challenges the traditional preeminence of the Romance world in favor of Scandinavia and opens up the possibility of hierarchy reversals in the literary world-systems.

By looking closer at how Anderson's employs various "technologies of recognition," it becomes clear that his discourse in both books on the return to the past of the Eddas and sagas of the Viking era works as a form of allegory characterized, in Shih's words, by a "temporal gap between the literal and the allegorical meaning of a text."[61] It also reveals how, Shih writes, "allegory places in the past the paragon of virtue of what which has been lost in the present."[62] The two volumes focusing on the Viking legacy indicate that, since "allegory is only one kind of meaning-producing form, and it is also but one of the hermeneutical codes we can bring to the reading of texts," we can read Anderson's efforts as a Scandinavian studies scholar as a political gesture tied to his search for legitimacy in favor of the Norwegian diaspora in North America.[63]

Anderson's work points at the dangers of "culturalization of ethnicity, history, politics, and nation" in global multiculturalism.[64] His effort to prove Norwegians' legitimate presence in the United States, based on the historical influence of Vikings in America, reveals how "nationalisms become cultures."[65] In other words, Norwegian/Scandinavian nationalism, transplanted on American soil, functions as a set of cultural traits, "an agreed repertory of images and styles," connected to the imagery of Old Norse literature found in the Eddas and sagas.[66] This "set ot recognizable traits" mainly connected to the Viking era only confirms the minority status of the Norwegians in America and it proves how "each nation is supposed to represent one reified culture (...) just as each ethnic minority community in the metropole constitutes one reified culture in an official multiculturalism."[67] "Fetishizing the national" in this approach does not seem to contradict the recognition mechanism of "the exceptional particular" paired with allegory, where Anderson chooses Leif Erikson as an alternative to Columbus as discoverer of America.[68] The explorer of the sagas becomes not only a counterpoint to the Romance colonialism but also an allegorical figure meant to grant Norwegians the same status as the Americans. As Shih argues, "[b]elated sameness is seen as a proof of the universal validity of the self, the precedent, or the majority."[69] Anderson relies on the image of Leif Eriksson to demonstrate sameness in the relationship between Norwegians and Americans. In this respect, both difference and sameness work as "re-cognizable categories under the regime of recognition and as value-producing construct serviceable to dominant universals."[70] Anderson can thus be seen as searching for universal sameness within the nationalist, colonialist mechanisms responsible for the imbalance between the major and the minor: the Norwegians deserve the same status as the Americans, since the latter are indebted to the Vikings for the very existence of their culture and society. Moreover, Anderson's anti-Romance attitude can be connected both to his support of the inclusion of Norse literature in the selective world literary system designed by Meltzl and to his attempt to assert the sameness if not the superiority, of the Anglo-Saxon cultural and literary legacy over the Romance one.

In his encounter with *Acta Comparationis,* Anderson's focus on Norse literature and culture touches on the impact of the Scandinavian culture — if not in global context, at least in American context — and invites further

59. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 309.
60. Werner and Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison," 32.
61. Shih, "Global Literature," 21.
62. Shih, "Global Literature," 21.
63. Shih, "Global Literature," 21.
64. Shih, "Global Literature," 22.
65. Shih, "Global Literature," 22.
66. Shih, "Global Literature," 23.
67. Shih, "Global Literature," 23.
68. Shih, "Global Literature," 26.
69. Shih, "Global Literature," 25.
70. Shih, "Global Literature," 27.

reflection on hierarchy and inequality in world literature. The recognition of the impact of minor Scandinavian cultures on the American culture that Anderson sought is part of a narrative that challenges the Westcentric/Eurocentric approach on culture. Therefore, Anderson's desire to participate in the scholarly endeavors of *Acta Comparationis* can be aligned with his search for European recognition – particularly Danish, English, and German – in relation to his pioneering work on Scandinavian tradition and presence in America. That is, he sought acknowledgment from countries with the highest authority in Scandinavian studies. By this token, Anderson becomes a promoter of a Eurocentrism with a Scandinavian tint, as Denmark, Sweden, and Germany dominated Nordic studies in the late nineteenth century, when Norway was not an independent country yet.

In his attempt to replace the Latin colonization stamp of America with a Scandinavian stamp and forge a strong Norwegian-American identity, Anderson meets Meltzl halfway, as the latter also sought legitimacy for the Hungarian identity within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Both scholars shared common views on comparative literature. In this respect, the nationalist project does not seem to contradict the global project undertaken by *Acta Comparationis* but rather supports it by implicitly endorsing an an elitist principle that entailed the recognition and inclusion of only ten literatures in the world-literary society. Meltzl's decaglottist overview seems to indicate that national literatures are valid as long as one's own literature is among the few selected; on his end, Anderson's insistence on Scandinavia as the cradle of European and American civilization is not meant to replace American with Norwegian identity, but to position the latter as the source of the former, thus putting Norwegians and Americans on equal footing.

Since the reception of Anderson's two books was largely negative among the European scholars of Scandinavian studies from Germany and Denmark, how should his connection with *Acta Comparationis* be interpeted? Anderson was clearly following two paths of recognition: one related to the Scandinavian legacy in the United States and the other related to his own academic efforts to promote Scandinavian scholarship in the United States and Europe. Therefore, I argue that Anderson was interested in pursuing a collaboration with *Acta Comparationis* to gain European recognition by becoming part of a large, global network of scholars. Meltzl's journal held and could grant considerable cultural capital in Europe and offer scholarly consecration. In addition, Meltzl's interest in Icelandic language and literature — which belonged *to Acta*'s list of the "ten modern literatures in Europe with truly world-literary characteristics" — surely encouraged Anderson.[71] The latter's Norwegian-American position within the context of late nineteenth-century comparatism made him seek recognition for Norse literature within an inherently Eurocentric literary system marked by the "tendency toward generalization and 'omnipotent definitions.'"[72] The contact with *Acta Comparationis* and Meltzl's decaglottism serves Anderson's ambitions to make Scandinavian (Norse) literature part of an acknowledged world literary system. However, the negative reception of his books seems to be one of the reasons why "Anderson soon turned his back on Europe" and why his actual contributions to *Acta Comparationis* most likely did not extend beyond 1879.[73]

The presence of Anderson in the global collaborative infrastructure of *Acta Comparationis* highlights the journal's contrasting attitude in dealing with the asymmetries of the literary world. His Norwegian-American standpoint connects to the larger Eurocentric vision displayed in *Acta Comparationis,* which granted recognition only to a small set of national literatures. Depending on the contributor, this selective approach took different shapes. In Anderson's case, it connected the American and Norwegian cultures to the English, German, and Danish cultures, thereby moving the world-literary center of gravity towards Northern Europe. However, Anderson did not shy away from seeking recognition among his French and Italian counterparts, despite maintaining an anti-Romance stance. Finally, Anderson's case as a Scandinavian scholar focusing on Norse literature demonstrates once again that not everyone was admitted to the global network. While *Acta Comparationis* sought to establish itself by welcoming as many contributors as possible from various locations around the world, the contributors themselves used the journal as a platform to achieve recognition for themselves and for the cultures and literatures they represented. Thus, Anderson's work proves that *Acta Comparationis* functioned as a strong meeting point between East and West, center and periphery, Europe and the world at the end of the nineteenth century.

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71. "gerade **zehn** moderne Litteraturen mit wahrhaft weltlitterarischen Erscheinungen in Europa giebt." (*Acta Comparationis*, XXIV, February 1878, 494).

72. Shih, "Global Literature," 19.

73. Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson*, 322.

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