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Negotiating Values: Dealing with the Goncourt in Contemporary French Fiction

Abstract

In the XIXth century-literary field, as Pierre Bourdieu stressed in his sociological study *The Rules of Art*, the writer's influence on the production of value and recognition concerning his own work was limited: "The producer of the *value of the work of art* is not the artist but the field of production as a universe of belief which produces the value of the work of art as a *fetish* by producing the belief in the creative power of the artist." (Bourdieu 1996 [1992]: 229, emphasis in the original) Since the middle of the XXth century, literature and fiction became closely linked to the so-called Cultural Industry (Adorno/Horkheimer 1947: 144-198) and the "society of the spectacle" (Debord 1967) dominated by the media. Hence, new currencies of economic, cultural and symbolic value came into being. Not only the publishing industry has fundamentally changed,¹ the author himself seems to turn into a player of the literary market, a marketing expert, an entrepreneur and public person. What is more, the literary market as a value-producing-machine and part of what Bourdieu called the "universe of belief" becomes itself an topic of fiction.

In French Fiction above all, the literary award as an important means of consecration is turned into a literary *sujet*. Thus, my contribution aims at analysing how French writers use genuine literary and rhetoric means to reveal the ambivalent systems of valorisation inside of the cultural sector, and particularly those of the book market. Their novels often deal with the contradictory processes of creating belief by literary awards and its effects as, for instance, being a "proof" of identity for an eminent author (Heinich 1999). The writer himself becomes involved in the discursive production, negotiation and transformation of cultural, economic and symbolic capital which is not only related to his own position inside of the literary field, but also to strategic decisions of his colleagues. Curiously, in order to establish a distinction, most writers criticize the market as a business sphere being foreign to art (according to Bourdieu's dualist structure of the literary field). They recreate the myth of the real artist outside of all industrializing circles just to engage anew with the same criticized market—on a symbolical level—underlining the role of the Parisian cosmos as "hub of the editorial world." Thus, it is in their own interest as writers to reaffirm the belief in the global prestige of French literature.

Faut-il avoir un avis sur le Goncourt? L'indignation est aussi ridicule que la louange. Le Goncourt *fait* partie du paysage français, au même titre que la *relève* de la Garde républicaine ou que le défilé du 14 juillet. (Angelo Rinaldi, *Académie française*, 2002)

1 Introduction

In order to reflect upon the value of literature, or to be more precise, upon the negotiation of its value, focusing on French literature turns out to be especially suitable, as its identity is based on an historical construct of cultural exceptionalism and the idea that a prestigious literature shaped the character of a *nation littéraire* (Ferguson 1991). The persistence of this ideological model has been brought out by Porra (2008) with reference to Casanova's book *The World Republic of Letters* (2004 [1999]) in which the French literary scholar proposes in fact a transnational

¹ Concerning the editorial situation in France, see the pertinent work of Bertrand Legendre, especially Legendre (2007).

approach to literature designing a worldwide literary space, but suggests nonetheless that France has to be considered a centre of this world republic and Paris, therefore, the "central bank" and capital city of world literature:

Paris is not only the capital of the literary world. It is also, as a result, the gateway to the 'world market of intellectual goods', as Goethe put it; the chief place of consecration in the world of literature. Consecration in Paris is indispensable for authors from all dominated literary spaces: translations, critical studies, tributes, and commentaries represent so many judgements and verdicts that confer value upon a text that until now has remained outside world literary space or otherwise gone unnoticed within. [...] The belief in the *power* of the capital of the arts is so strong that not only do artists throughout the world unreservedly accept the preeminence of Paris; owing to the extraordinary concentration of intellectual talent there that follows from this belief, Paris has become the place where books can be—submitted to critical judgement and transmuted—denationalized and their authors made universal. By virtue of its status as the central bank of literature, to revert to the terms employed earlier, Paris is able to create literary value and extend terms of credit everywhere in the world. (Casanova 2004: 127, emphasis in the original)

In her commendable book, Casanova takes up with Bourdieu's model and introduces it into a global literary map. But, as part of Bourdieu's thinking, she retains the opposition between symbolic and economic value emphasizing anew the difference between high art and the commodity scheme. Thus she justifies the independent positioning of the Parisian scene as a driving force for worldwide literary production and consecration by referring to the particular history of France, that is to say its early political centralisation in combination with equally centralized hegemonic linguistic and cultural policies. However, as Porra (2008: 230) underlines in Bourdieusian terms, it is merely a question of a "belief system that replicates and legitimates itself," which remains problematic, as it "has been structurally reproducing itself repeatedly for hundreds of years and strengthening itself discursively in such a way that a belief in it ('croyance') comes into being" (*ibid.*, my translation). The resulting value of French literature linked to the cultural capital of a *République mondiale* consequently unfolds itself with the help of an ideologically biased and incessantly renewed auto-referential discourse. It is a given in literary scholarship that Casanova's insistence on the French-Parisian defining power of global literary modernity is an exaggeration contributing itself to the creation of cultural value.² Focusing on the important function of literary awards as means of consecration, I want to show in which way this legitimacy, and more precisely the belief in it can be produced and reproduced. In addition, not only literary scholars such as Casanova participate in this process, but also the literary authors themselves. Following the reasoning of Bourdieu, the question concerning the value of artistic works can initially be answered in terms of a complex process. The value of an artistic work does not 'preside' in itself, nor is it bestowed on it or guaranteed by its producer. Rather, the value of the literary work of art is created by the specific relations between the actors within the literary fields and its complex mechanism of consecration. The resulting consecration hereby—which according to the French sociologist is the recognition of the work of art as such in a society at a certain time—is an important factor that increases its value. In such a manner, literary prizes firstly contribute in a decisive way to the prestige of an author, and—delayed in time—to the commercial exploitability of her or his *œuvre*. More recently, another sociologist of literature, James English, has emphasized in his pertinent study

² About this specific point, see James F. English (2013) who traces the line of thought from Bourdieu to Casanova.

The Economy of Prestige (2005) that the 20th century became the era of cultural awards accompanied by an important shift concerning their decisive function inside of the "economy of cultural prestige:"

The rise of prizes over the past century, and especially their feverish proliferation in recent decades, is widely seen as one of the more glaring symptoms of a consumer society run rampant, a society that can conceive of artistic achievement only in terms of stardom and success, and that is fast replacing a rich and varied cultural world with a shallow and homogeneous McCulture based on the model of network TV. Prizes, from this vantage point, are not a celebration but a contamination of the most precious aspects of art. (English 2005: 2f.)

In spite of the restricted value attributed to the awards—which seems to allude directly to Bourdieu's two-mindedness regarding high literary practice as the opposite of economic value—James English can also find positive effects in the proliferation inasmuch the awards allow to negotiate and "intraconvert" various kinds of capital:

[...] owing to the fact that they are the single best instrument for negotiating transactions between cultural and economic, cultural and social, or cultural and political capital—which is to say that they are our most effective institutional agents of *capital intraconversion*. (English 2005: 10)

In other words, the attributed value is not defined once and for all, but is convertible, and the author can intervene and participate actively in the process of negotiating values. For this reason, taking up Bourdieu's theses, we can stress the production of value inside the literary field as a universe of beliefs, before, in a second step, enquiring about the mechanisms of exploitation with the help of a literary award or, more precisely, an award as literary motif or even the driving force of a novel's plot.³ Against this backdrop, the following discussion will focus on the French literary prizes and the current debate on their symbolic decline/upturn related to their economic success or failure, figuring regularly in the category "Economie & entreprise" of *Le monde*.⁴

As a result of unilateral commercialisation, as the sociologist Sylvie Ducas (2013) bemoans, a *bestseller* industry, in which an award ceremony does no longer appear to be a venerable ritual, but an increasingly degrading procedure for the author, has evolved. Thus, the author's function is reversed: the ideal is no longer represented by the award-winning writer who was chosen from among numerous authors. On the contrary, the independence of the mechanisms of public consecration and the withdrawal from the so-called 'decadent' milieu is considered to be a desirable objective.

The reversal of the author's function has consequences. In Olivier Delorme's novel *Comment je n'ai pas eu le Goncourt* (2009), the protagonist reacts to the mediation and the industrialisation of literature experienced first-hand by taking refuge from the Parisian literary scene. The novel describes the absurdities of the aspiration to win a book prize—and thus of the literary scene as a whole—in which literature

³ Dozo/Lacroix (2012) offer an intriguing study of one of the first French novels about this topic, Renée Dunan, *Le Prix Lacomyne* (1924), and include an interesting corpus of literary texts in this field to which we can add a recent example: Yann Queffélec's *Naissance d'un Goncourt* (*Birth of a Goncourt*, 2018). In contrast to most of the mentioned novels, the author received the Goncourt award in 1978 and dedicates this autobiographical text to his profound friendship with the famous senior editor Françoise Verny.

⁴ A report in *Le monde* (issue of October 28th 2017, p. 4), for instance, is titled "En nombre de ventes, un Goncourt vaut dix Médicis" and announces the veritable winner in sales numbers: the specific category of the *Goncourt des lycéens*.

is nothing more than a necessary side effect of the industrial commercialisation and the marketing of books and in which the hierarchy between cultural and economic capital has been reversed. From the point of view of his protagonist and first person-narrator, a writer in his mid-fifties nominated against all odds for the famous *prix Goncourt*, Delorme appears to criticize the capitalist ('non-artistic') machinery of value realization linked to the annual ritual of nomination and ceremony which transforms the celebrated author into a brand, thus alienating her or him from the process of creation.

However, as I want to argue, even such an explicit and decidedly critical positioning in relation to the nomination for the Goncourt as presented by Delorme's novel – who has never been nominated himself – does not contradict the logic of the field. Delorme refers to the well-established anti-Goncourt-discourse in order to profit in his own way from the mechanism of belief he is criticizing. On the textual level, he denounces the economization of the cultural sphere and the award 'industry', but due to his entertaining insight into the excesses and cultural struggles in the sector of the "capital of the arts," (Casanova 2004: 127) Delorme as an author inscribes himself into exactly this world republic of letters. Despite and because of his criticism, he contributes once again to the production of cultural value. Therefore, unveiling through literary strategies the downside of the economically driven award system, he confirms again the remaining force of this universe of belief. In addition, he can make a profit of it: According to my thesis, his satire offers another contribution to the self-referential discourse of the universalizing power of the French literary scene, so that Delorme, however indirectly, is complicit with the centralistic and universalistic value model propagated there.

2 The production of belief

In the eponymous chapter of his sociological reflection on the arts *The Rules of Art*, Pierre Bourdieu describes the way in which the value of a work of art is created – namely by a "production of belief" in its value. In this sense, a literary work does not turn into such on behalf of the author, but only through the recognition which is given to it by the logic of the literary field:

The producer of the value of the work of art is not the artist but the field of production as a universe of belief which produces the value of the work of art as a fetish by producing the belief in the creative power of the artist." (Bourdieu 1995: 229)

Therefore, literature as value is not the result of the author's creativity, but it is a consequence of the belief in the "charismatic ideology of 'creation'" (Bourdieu 1995: 167) which is based on the mechanisms of the field. As Bourdieu emphasizes, it is only this thought,

which directs the gaze towards the apparent producer – painter, composer, writer – and prevents us asking who has created this 'creator' and the magic power of transubstantiation with which this 'creator' is endowed. (ibid.)

Finally, the "artist who makes the work is himself made [...] by the whole ensemble of those who help to 'discover' him and to consecrate him as an artist who is 'known' and recognized [...]." (ibid.) Consequently, the value of literature and art does not lie with the individual, but with institutions and means of consecration including the important belief created by literary award.

The agents mentioned above act in a literary field which has, as Bourdieu suggests, emerged in the course of the nineteenth century due to its growing independence from other social fields. Concerning its patterns of creation of value, the literary

field is split into two sections: on the one hand, there exists the subfield of restricted production (subfield of High Art), in which writers such as Baudelaire and Flaubert receive literary prestige, because they are recognized by other authors or consecrated by prestigious institutions. On the other hand, in the heteronomous subfield of mass production (of Popular and Industrial Art), the material exploitation inside of a highly mediated mass market is considered to be a success. According to the model introduced by Bourdieu, the two subfields are mutually exclusive. This conviction, which has been questioned and abandoned in critical works for a long time, seem to persist until today in more or less subliminal ways. It also reappears in literary texts and novels and is represented, for instance, by literary characters or fictitious author-figures who believe that there exists an opposition between marketable and "aesthetically valuable" literature. Considering the complex interdependence between economic and medial as well as literary processes of the creation of value, this distinction, however, becomes obsolete, as I want to illustrate using the example of a tradition of literary texts and pamphlets that criticize the French Goncourt and the award industry. Delorme's novel demonstrates that an author's claim to autonomy does not necessarily come into conflict with her or his aspiration for public attention. Rather, the author delineates in how far the amusing representation of his protagonist and his fabulous adventures with publishers, press agents, readers, writers and his fellow nominees inside of the Parisian literary floor can generate the attention of the real public, even though an amplification by the mass media and the consecration from within the same literary field remain largely absent.

3 The debatable value of a literary award: From appreciation to "degradation"

It is not a coincidence that current criticism on the topic of literary prizes, especially on the decline of its cultural value, has repeatedly referred to the Prix Goncourt, the most important French literary award that still enjoys a prestigious reputation at an international level. By reason of a testamentary decree of the brothers Jules and Edmond de Goncourt,⁵ the award is given away by the *Académie Goncourt* since 1903 as an award for the best narrative novels written in French—currently in six different categories. The jury consists of ten members (the Goncourt academicians), writers, critics, journalists, and representatives of the literary scene, none of which may be a member of the prestigious *Académie française*. They meet every month for lunch in the famous Parisian restaurant *Drouant* bringing together literature and food as emblems of France's cultural identity. The prizewinner's are announced on a regular basis in November. The ceremony is the most famous literary event of the year and follows the *rentrée littéraire*. That means the nomination process already starts in September and ensures high sales figures of the award-winning books, so that the publishers already take into account the expected high sales as a part of the coverage of their program. The efforts to win the award are considered to be a part of their own business area and correspondingly need to be intensively developed.⁶ In her study *La littérature, à quel(s) prix? Histoire des prix littéraires* (2013),⁷ the French literary sociologist Sylvie Ducas criticizes the unstoppable economization

⁵ On the dynamic history of the Goncourt prize from its origins, see the essays in Ashley (2004).

⁶ This year's shift of the announcement from the 10th to the 30th November, due to the pandemic situation and the closed bookshops, gives evidence of the commercial character of the award.

⁷ The literature at what price? History of the literary prizes (my translation).

of the French literary awards in general and refers to the vocabulary linked to industrial capitalism in order to describe the publishers as 'machines' which 'produce' authors. A reversal of the relationship between the writer and the publisher is said to be the consequence, with the former being torn between the requirements of her or his literary work and those of self-marketing. With the awarding of prizes, indispensable for the public attention and the eventually resulting book sales, the successful author (*le grand écrivain*)⁸ being fully dependent on the networking of the publisher and linked to certain cartels is nothing but a distorted picture, a pure caricature (Ducas 2010: 157) of herself or himself. Accordingly, Ducas also talks about a new kind of the "dead author" as a consequence of a book industry where serious commitment associated with literary aesthetic is deliberately and fundamentally destroyed. However, she does not see the way out of this situation in abolishing the awards, but rather in renewing and returning to a literary ethos: "comment restaurer un engagement littéraire qui permettrait de sortir l'écrivain de la fabrique et de réinventer aussi l'auteur hors d'elle." (Ducas 2010: 161)⁹

This negative assessment presented by Ducas is heavily influenced by Bourdieu's model of a literary field divided into two subfields, in which the symbolic capital and the economic capital of mass-produced literature mutually exclude each other. These currencies and their relation, however, do change in the precise moment in which the literary award does no longer consecrate the author and his work, but is perceived as a downright "humiliation," so that the writer must literally fear to be nominated.¹⁰

Olivier Delorme's satirical novel *The way how I was not awarded the Goncourt* (2009) also as well focuses on the award ceremony of the Goncourt in order to shed light on the French literary scene. However, in stark contrast to its prestigious historic origin, the prize is here no longer linked to any sort of cultural distinction. On the contrary, the first-person narrator who is nominated for the Prix Goncourt is forced to realize that his authorship is being used by others, indeed 'desecrated'. Nevertheless, he fulfils the wish of his publisher and enters into competition with the fellow nominees, his colleagues, the most famous writers of the French Republic of Letters. Thus, he himself becomes a pawn in his publisher's game. He himself and his relations with the media and the members of the jury determine the award procedure. The narrator realizes that his own nomination cannot be attributed to the aesthetic quality of his work, but to the move from his small provincial publisher to a renowned Parisian publishing house. As if he were a 'commodity', the narrator-author is sent into the race for the Goncourt by Monsieur Sordel, the director of the publishing house, in charge of determining the author's presentation at the different book fairs, the French *salons du livre*. Moreover, the author is at all times professionally accompanied by the most important employee of the publishing house: the chief press officer.

Without any great difficulty, one can decipher "Brasailon," the name of the publishing house, as Flammarion, and "Monsieur Sordel" referring to its former director Raphaël Sorin. In a provocative essay, the journalist and writer Guy Konopnicki

⁸ Dominique Noguez (2000) offers a description of the "great author" as a specifically French model and develops his future role(s) in a culturally globalized world.

⁹ "[...] how to recover a true literary commitment which authorizes the writer to leave the factory and to reinvent the author outside of it" (my translation).

¹⁰ In his novel *Le Truoc-nog* (2003, read the title as palindrome: "Gon-court"), Iegor Gran tells an entertaining story about a young, independent author for whom the possibility of a nomination and the status as "gouncourable" turns out to be a real nightmare.

who published one of his books with Flammarion, characterizes Sorin as a pure businessman: "Plutôt que de pousser chaque roman vers les prix, de persévérer jusqu'au succès, Raphaël Sorin, alors éditeur chez Flammarion, préférerait vendre une fois pour toutes, un auteur." (Konopnicki 2004: 60f.)¹¹

Various similarities between the narrator and Delorme contribute to the fact that the reader can easily detect Delorme's satire of the French literary scene as a key text. The narrator not only lists Delorme's novels among his own ones but also refers to his personal publishing house H&O, which has in fact published the actual book the reader has in its own hands. Consequently, the fiction begins with the narrator's switch to Flammarion (alias Brasailon) and at this point, Delorme (re-) invents himself as an author worthy of receiving the Prix Goncourt, in this way inscribing himself in a specific sphere of values. At the same time, however, the narrator demonstrates a strong disdain towards the milieu and the media and appears to be the antithesis of all the despised authors appearing here. In contrast, Delorme's author-narrator is striving to finally become an author completely independent of the consecrations of the Goncourt, in fact, one who prefers returning to an isolated island—as remote as possible from Paris—in order to do what a real writer should be doing: Composing his books instead of appearing at book fairs and libraries and giving interviews to journalists. He is even surprised by his own nomination and feels the need to underline his literary autonomy:

Bien sûr, dès mon premier roman, j'ai été certain qu'il valait largement n'importe lequel des dix derniers Goncourt. Mais jamais je n'avais pensé que cela pourrait m'arriver, à moi. Quand j'étais chez H&O [...] la question ne se posait pas. Et puis on n'écrit pas pour avoir le Goncourt. En tout cas pas moi. Moi, j'ai toujours écrit après un choc, une rencontre, une colère. (Delorme 2009: 16)¹²

By accident (respectively thanks to his new publisher), the narrator enters the sphere of the Goncourt and subsequently describes the corrupt practices connected to the award. Prizes are usually awarded to the authors of influential publishers. His own publisher, H&O, is displayed as the antithesis and is located on the outside of the "bent deal." (Konopnicki 2004)¹³

There are various celebrities appearing in Delorme's novel who belong to the circle of writers who are compatible with the media and the market – for example Frédéric Beigbeder, who can easily be detected behind the pseudonym Flavien Régbeyzel, and whose characteristics as a media star are recognizable without difficulty. Delorme's novel comes to a crucial turning point, when Régbeyzel is suddenly killed, such as two other nominees, under mysterious circumstances. It seems no accident that the crimes happen in the final spurt of the award ceremony. The narrator – still alive – suspects that they might be linked to the Goncourt procedure.

With the murder plot, a suspension scheme is established and the satirical novel turns into a detective novel. We can even trace a direct line to Pierre Gamarra's *The murderer is awarded the Goncourt* (1963), the story of an assassin who is both a

¹¹ "Rather than to push every novel to the awards, to persevere until success happens, Raphaël Sorin, former editor of Flammarion, preferred to sell an author for good and all." (my translation)

¹² "Of course, from my first novel on, I was sure that it was worth more than any of the ten last Goncourt awards. However, I had never thought that it really could happen to me, of all people. When I was at H&O [...] it was no question about it. Anyway, you are not writing to be awarded with the Goncourt. Not me by all means. As far as I'm concerned, I wrote always after a shock, a coincidence, a fury" (my translation).

¹³ The title of Konopnicki's book, *Prix littéraires: La grande magouille*, associates the literary prizes, its selection and awarding, with a dubious practice, a 'bent deal.'

wanted criminal and the (missing) writer of a novel which tells the same crime: the assassination of a book seller in provincial France —and to which the Goncourt is awarded. Gamarra's earlier novel is narrated by the police reporter José Robin who does not only produce the newspaper's front page headline "The murderer is awarded the Goncourt," but also solves the case and finally identifies the killer as his colleague, the literary critic Monsieur d'Argens. Like Delorme's novel, Gamarra's plot emphasizes the importance of media coverage and attention.

Another interesting and coinciding detail is the central figure of an unknown author running – to the surprise of all – for the famous Goncourt. Moreover, in both novels, it is a crime connected to the Goncourt which draws attention and helps marketing the author – the one inside and the other outside the text.

Finally, the author-narrator in Delorme's novel is not even sure if the murders are committed by one of his enthusiastic readers who wants to eliminate some nominees in order to play the Goncourt award into the hands of his favourite writer. It seems not unlikely, because the narrator —in contrast to the killed renowned colleagues—appeared without any chance to win the prize. In the end, the assassinations of three nominees turn out to be a mere coincidence. They are not committed by an overzealous and criminal reader who wanted to eliminate the competitors of his favourite writer. The evocation of a contrast with the narrator-author, however, is fulfilled. He appears to be the underprivileged author figure who is not compatible with the media, who remains in close personal contact with his readers, and who considers the literary scene to be a great evil. In this way, Delorme seems to have substantiated the traditional ethos of the literary author which Ducas discussed and demanded in her critique.

At the same time— and this brings me back to my central thesis, which differentiates from Ducas's point of view— it is obvious that Delorme's satire does in fact not aim at providing a critical analysis of the award industry. In fact, he does not even call it into question. On the contrary, he is obviously trying to develop his own *branding* as a 'serious' and 'autonomous' author, especially regarding the particular context and logic of literary consecration and desecration, to which he continues to subscribe. The value which he obtains by referring to the Goncourt in this way does not consist in the self-appreciation as a potential laureate—the award industry does no longer offer a sufficient cultural prestige for this—but results from the attention for his book that was generated thematically as well as within the framework of satire and persiflage. The story about an author-narrator who is not awarded the Goncourt turns out to be a tale on failure *and* success, as Simonis (2018: 91) puts it.¹⁴ With aesthetic means, Delorme carries forward the boulevardesque stagings inside of the literary scene: he satisfies the voyeurism of the reader, he takes up current issues, he satirizes celebrities, and he takes over elements that are well-known from popular genres such as the crime thriller.

Thus, Delorme's novel continues a long tradition of literary texts and pamphlets beginning with Julien Gracq's famous polemic *La littérature à l'estomac* (1950),¹⁵ which have not only criticized the Prix Goncourt, but also attracted new public attention towards it. This is not always to the detriment of the critical authors: Gracq is awarded the Prix Goncourt in 1951, one year after the publication of his pamphlet, even though he refuses to accept it. In 2003, at the award's centenary, the

¹⁴ "Die Erzählung über das glückende Scheitern erzeugt hier vielmehr einen Text, eine literarische Kommunikation, die in der Welt der Literatur mit durchaus guten Aussichten auf Erfolg zielt".

¹⁵ *Literature of the stomach.*

Prix Goncourt is awarded to Jacques-Pierre Amette (*La Maîtresse de Brecht/The mistress of Brecht*), who mainly works as a literary critic and who had previously criticized the Parisian literary scene in his novel *Ma vie, son œuvre* (2001). Being rewarded by the jury of the Goncourt, the most fervent critic is consecrated. Whatever Delorme and other authors are speculating on, talking about the Goncourt award and negotiating its values helps them to be recognized as active members of a prestigious *nation littéraire*. In any case, Delorme's and other satirical novels dealing with literary prizes and cultural industry are and will remain part of the very value system which they are criticizing in their texts.

4 Conclusion

In Delorme's novel, as well as in the Goncourt-fictions by Gamarra, Gran and many others, the symbolic and the economic capital (in terms of Bourdieu) form a successful combination, as the bashing directed at the Goncourt allows for the creation of a critically distanced and autonomous author role, while at the same time establishing an inverted relation to the mechanisms of the Parisian literary scene. Therefore, Delorme especially (in the same way as his narrator) does not only present himself as a critic of this cultural-industrial cosmos, but also as an insider and a member of a prestigious 'family.' His glimpse behind the (rather mafia-like) scenes denounces the moral decline of the entire milieu, but simultaneously strengthens the belief in an indispensable literary reference. French literary production still serves as a global yardstick, with the Parisian literary scene being the executive authority of its universalistic function.

It is not paradoxical that authors like Delorme, novelists and pamphleteers who criticize the award industry, produce a renewed attention to it and stabilize its symbolic values inside of the literary field as a universe of belief. Since they ostentatiously discredit the symbolic capital of prestigious awards as the Goncourt, they reaffirm nevertheless the belief in the (lost) prestige of French literature. They are recovering the myth of a cultural preference, of Paris as the best place of consecration, as the old and new capital of world literature. Writers who parody, like Delorme, the French award industry share (with Bourdieu, Casanova and others)¹⁶ the idea of a literary modernity as struggle against the commodification (and Americanization) of literature in a relatively autonomous field of literature.¹⁷

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¹⁶ On their "dark vision of art under the 'tyranny of the market,'" see English (2013: 375).

¹⁷ I presented a first version of my paper at the conference "Fort what it's worth. Challenging and negotiating value in literature and in economic theory" in 2017 at the University of Mannheim.

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