Minor Measures: The Plebeian Aesthetics of World Literature in the Twentieth Century

by

Firat Oruc

Literature Program
Duke University

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Kenneth J. Surin

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Program in
Literature in the Graduate School
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2010
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Focusing on a diverse set of creative work from Europe, East and South Asia, the Americas, Middle East, and Africa, *Minor Measures* investigates modalities of world writing through modernist, postcolonial and contemporary transnational literatures in the intertwined moments of imperialism, developmentalism and globalism. It studies the category of world literature as a heterogeneous set of narrative-cognitive forms and comparative modes of gauging from a particular positionality the world-systemic pressures on individual and collective bodies. To this end, *Minor Measures* focuses on the dynamic and increasingly central role of geoliterary imagination in fashioning a secular hermeneutic that maps the relationships and overlaps between the local and the global, here and there, past and present, self and other. Moreover, it highlights the capacities of the literary aesthetics in configuring local subjectivities, affiliations and histories in relation to the abstract cartographic totality of global modernity. Shuttling back and forth between the two poles, literature as world writing refers to the unconscious framework of representing the contingencies of the lived experience of economically, racially, and geographically differentiated subjects from metropolitan, (post)colonial and diasporic positions.
Sevgili Eşim Nur'a...
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Preface

I-

The rainladen trees of the avenue evoked in him, as always, memories of the girls and women in the plays of Gerhart Hauptmann...[A]s he passed the sloblands of Fairview he would think of the cloistral silverveined prose of Newman...[A]s he walked along the North Strand Road, glancing idly at the windows of the provision shops, he would recall the dark humor of Guido Cavalcanti...as he went by Baird’s stonecutting works in Talbot Place the spirit of Ibsen would blow him like a keen wind, a spirit of wayward boyish beauty....His mind, when wearied of its search for the essence of beauty amid the spectral words of Aristotle or Aquinas, turned often for its pleasure to the dainty songs of the Elizabethans.¹

World literature haunts. It is a spectral guest that comes from some distant point in time and space. It walks with us and offers us imaginative and cognitive forms of relating ourselves to our own familiar environment. It is through The Count of Monte Cristo’s spirit of adventure that Stephen constructs his cognitive mapping of Dublin. By imagining Dublin through Marseilles, he is able to chart “a skeleton map of the city.” The Count of Monte Cristo gives Stephen the courage to leave the city center and encounter in the customhouse “the rumbling strangeness of the life suggested to him by the bulks of the merchandise stocked along the walls.”² It comes as the mediator that facilitates Stephen’s existential engagement with material and spiritual life in colonial Dublin.

II-

² Ibid., 66.
In Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, we find *The World’s Classics*—the “Omnipotence-other’ [*Tout-puissance-autre*] of world literature”[^3]—in the local barbershop run by Walcott’s father. The collection presents itself as a gift (of reading) to young Derek coming from the other as a gesture of “unconditional hospitality which opens us to it before any condition, any rule, any norm, any concept, any genre, any generic and genealogical belonging.”[^4] In Homer’s and Dante’s texts Derek builds his dwelling. The host-guest relationship is blurred to the extent that no claim of authority can be made.

III-

The narrator of Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* browses the book titles in Mostafa Saeed’s library:


The insanity of world literature? Is Mostafa Sa’eed’s library a reflection of the mind of the assimilated colonial, a condition for which the Iranian intellectual Jalal Al-e-Ahmad coined the word *gharbzadegi* (“Westoxification”)? This is far from being the case. His

[^4]: Ibid., 48.
story strongly suggests that Mostafa Sa’eed’s entrance into the maze of foreign books is due to his visceral engagement with the question of postcolonial (Arab) identity.

Thus is the uncanny life of world literature, invoked through these three instances that hint at the plebeian aesthetics of world literature as the mediator between us, modern mass-subjects of the everyday Dasein, and the ways of the world that we inhabit.
1 World Writing

There was a picture of the earth on the first page of his geography: a big ball in the middle of the clouds....He opened the geography to study the lesson; but he could not learn the names of the places in America. Still they were all different places that had those different names. They were all in different countries and the countries in continents and the continents were in the world and the world was in the universe.

He turned to the flyleaf of the geography and read what he had written there: himself, his name and where he was:

Stephen Dedalus/ Class of Elements/ Clongowes Wood College/ Sallins/ County Kildare/ Ireland/ Europe/ The World/ The Universe.

James Joyce has for long been credited for the novelistic invention of the time of modernity, crystallizing empty homogenous time in one “ordinary day” of 16 June 1904. Joyce’s temporal invention seems to have preoccupied us so strongly that we have yet to pay adequate attention to his invention of plebeian cartography by introducing an elementary school child who tries to make sense of his place in the world through concentric spatial categories. In Stephen the child we find the prototypical form of our subjectivity in the twentieth-century and beyond, which in this study I define as the plebeian being-in-the-world: a mode of existence under the duress of a world-as-order. The fact that Stephen’s name appears on top of the list should not be interpreted as the individual’s privilege over the world. The imperative of cognitive mapping and positional imagination comes with its own challenges, especially when we consider the

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disproportional relationship between the modern subject and the modern world. “It was very big to think about everything and everywhere. Only God could do that.” The mass-subjects of the twentieth-century were far from claiming any godlike characteristics. Yet the world chased them. In another colony, in the Dutch Java, Stephen’s close contemporary Minke would express the weight of this challenge in the form of an invocation:

Ya Allah, in truth, the trials and tests You have made me undergo have been too great for someone as young as me. My situation has forced me to grapple with questions that should not yet be my concern. Give the strength to face every trial and test You confront me with, just as You have done with others before me. Minke’s invocation is a brief moment of relief from burning questions hovering over his mind: nationhood, colonialism, land reform, development, and many other questions pertaining to the sheer fact of living in the Dutch East Indies. “Big” issues are now a constant molesting presence in young Minke’s life. If in Java Minke seeks strength through invocations, in Ireland Stephen does so through epiphanic revelations—the cries of greeting “the advent of life” on the secular plane between the indifferent heaven and the earth, trying “to fly by those nets” of such pressing questions as nationhood, colonialism, filiation, religion, sexuality, language and aesthetics.

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2 Ibid., 16.
4 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 172; 203. Stephen’s reflections on the question of aesthetics are a case in point: “It wounded him to think that he would never be but a shy guest at the feast of world’s culture and that the monkish learning, in terms of which he was striving to forge out an esthetic
The twentieth-century would witness other versions of the Joycean map drawn in other classrooms of the world from different perspectives of positionality. The first example comes from Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood* (1977):

Standing in a classroom in front of those children released something in Karega....He was concerned that the children knew no world outside Ilmorog; they thought of Kenya as a city or a large village somewhere outside Ilmorog. How could he enlarge their consciousness so that they could see themselves, Ilmorog and Kenya, as part of a larger whole, a larger territory containing the history of the African people and their struggles?...He made them sing: I live in Ilmorog Division which is in Chiri District; Chiri which is in the Republic of Kenya; Kenya which is part of East Africa; East Africa which is part of Africa; Africa which is the land of African peoples; Africa from where other African people were scattered to other corners of the world. *They sang it, but it seemed too abstract.*

It is not difficult to imagine why these school children, very much like Stephen, are perplexed by the abstract nature of this cartographic exercise. Nevertheless this increasingly abstract totality imposes itself as the framework in which the mass-subjects of the twentieth-century have imagined their worldliness and affiliations under the “the need to attach themselves to a cultural matrix.” In both Ngugi and Fanon, this need expresses the modern reality of identity formation through trans-territorial mediations. As (neo)colonial modernity renders the earthly local the weakest link in the chain, these concentric mediations serve also as protective shields against what Martin Heidegger called “concealment.” This tactics of imagination purposefully diffuses or multiplies the

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levels of subjective belonging and attachment to counteract effacement in the politico-economic and geographical category of the world.

The next version of the Joycean map comes from India:

This narrative is of young schoolchildren in the forties and the fifties who wrote as they were taught that their country was independent, who wrote in their schoolbooks their names and their school, and then Calcutta, and then India, and then Asia, and then the World. What did they know about Asia? But they looked at the map.7

In Gayatri Spivak’s description, this act of affective mapping invokes “a cartographic position, without identity.” At first glance, the narrative above (as with the examples from Joyce and Ngugi) might seem to convey a naïve (the childish in-itself) perspective: school children inscribing their names under cartographic markers of which they are ignorant. But it is this very naïveté that might be the clue for a subaltern (plebeian) political unconscious of self-situating vis-à-vis world-systemic configurations, deliberations, pressures, and molestations—the point of departure for what Edward Said introduced as secular criticism that is predicated on the transition of the individual consciousness from being “a mere child of the culture” to “a historical and social actor in it,” even though I remain doubtful if it is entirely possible for the individual consciousness to become “very much aware of the collective whole, context, or situation in which it finds itself.”8 At any rate, the plebeian vocation and secular hermeneutics of

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self-reflection in the modern world takes place in the dialectical force-field of the feeling of taking-part (Teilnehmungsgefühl) and the power of being able to impart oneself (mitteilen). “In spite of ourselves,” writes Edouard Glissant, “a sort of ‘consciousness of consciousness’ opens us up and turns each of us into a disconcerted actor in the poetics of Relation.”

In my argument, modern world literature offers a set of narrative forms, practices and devices to represent individual and collective subjects actively gauging the shifting valences of their local everyday being-in-the-world in regard to distant yet pressuring political, social, and economic realities. World literature defines a comparative aesthetics that organizes the relationships and overlaps between the local and the global, here and there, past and present, self and other. It names a creative mode of bringing the world home but also situating the home in the larger world. In doing so, it shuttles back and forth in both directions. To this end, in this study I examine how literature situates local subjectivities and histories within the larger structures of global modernity and in turn generates vernacular modes of mapping and measuring the world. Following Erich Auerbach Mimesis, I argue that by the twentieth century we reach a climactic point in the history of forms where literature effectively emerges as a force-field of exploring multiple dimensions of modern plebeian life and its aesthetics.

1.1 Literature and the Posthistorical Existence

In literary studies, however, there has been a strong tendency to draw the trajectory of the twentieth-century literature, on the one hand, as the master narrative of the destruction of traditional cultures and the leveling of the non-modern, and on the other, as the symbolic form of absorbing the violence that modernization and imperialism have caused on earth. Yet this perspective operates through certain teleological assumptions; for in each successive historical stage, it already “knows” the end in the form of the tragic victory of the capitalist modernity. In that regard, the mode of reading world literature as an archeology of lost worlds, historical remnants and archaic marvels, despite its temptingly sympathetic tone, remains within the aforementioned teleological framework. In that framework, world literature functions merely as the designated dumping area for whatever is left from the vanished life-worlds, the mourning house of the violently and tragically destroyed social forms and practices, or the cultural pocket of a heterogeneous and different universe whose anachronisms could be dramatized only in fiction.

In that Kojèvean perspective, the world and its inhabitants can no longer catch up with, or move along, the overpowering flow of history. Even though, in my argument, the flooding of the entire globe by the flow of history creates fertile grounds for new plebeian beginnings, self-determinations, and projections of new ends to history itself, to
Kojève, all this appeared merely as symptoms of “suicidal snobbery.”10 The independence or demands for self-determination of colonized territories were only a negligible part of “the elimination of the numerous more or less anachronistic sequels to [Europe’s] pre-revolutionary past” in the almost complete process of “bringing the backward civilizations of the peripheral provinces into line with the most advanced (real or virtual) European historical positions.”11 Even though Kojève thought that this would be the completion of the historical global dialectic, his distant contemporary Takeuchi Yoshimi (who apparently did not read or know Kojève’s lectures) already begun to develop the dialectic of what Kojève called posthistorical existence. Takeuchi perceptively followed Kojève’s narrative of “European self-realization [as] the flux of higher culture into lower cultures, the assimilation of such lower cultures, or the natural

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10 To the charge of suicidalism of non-Western societies, the narrator of the Japanese novelist Soseki Natsume’s *Kokoro* gives an anticipatory response in 1914 by way of reflections on the young Japanese idealist K’s decision to end his life: “In those days, such phrases as “the age of awakening” and “the new life” had not yet come into fashion. But you must not think that K’s inability to discard his old ways and begin his life anew due to his lack of modern concepts. You must understand that to K, his own past seemed too sacred a thing to be thrown away like a suit of clothes.” Soseki Natsume, *Kokoro*, trans. Edwin McClellan (South Bend, Ind.: Regnery Gateway, 1979), 218. The same would hold true for other “Japanese snobberies—the Noh theater, the ceremony of tea, and the art of bouquets of flowers” that Kojève dismissed as “completely empty of all “human” content in the “historical” sense.” Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 162. For Karatani Kojin, Soseki Natsume occupied “the unstable position of one who finds himself ‘between’ East and West,” seeking refuge in neither pole of the opposition: a position different from Pan-Asianism of Okakura Tenshin, whose *The Ideal of East* aimed to attack the Hegelian dialectic by counterposing the philosophy of Advaita (non-dualism). But this non-dualism still followed the dualist logic of Occident versus Orient. Karatani Kojin, Origins of Modern Japanese Literature (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 44.

adjustment of the gaps between historical stages.” But, he added, no sooner the European movement of self-realization became complete than “the internal contradictions that prompted Europe to its self-expansion came to be recognized.”

It is not only Europe’s contradictions (which, of course, culminate in the Thirty Years War of the twentieth century) that are exposed. Also the Orient, whose resistance against Europeanization initially contributes to the completion of world history, throws its irreducible and irrepressible heterogeneities to the flat space and empty time of universal modernity.

Nonetheless, the Kojèvean vision of modernity as the slaughterhouse of all premodern cultures, traditions, literatures and ways of life has certainly remained dominant one in the twentieth-century literary imagination. This perspective has precluded the fact that the so-called triumph lay not in the vanishing of the so-called premodern but in the suppression, containment, or in Lu Xun’s remarkable phrase, the “murder,” of the forces and claims of the present on earth. As the modern “surged forward and multiplied itself like bacteria throughout the world” and history grasped even the “tiny plot of land called Choson,” culminating in the end of Yi Dynasty in the

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12 The supposition of Europe’s complete self-realization is another matter. For a contemporary critique, see Etienne Balibar, We, the People of Europe?: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).
14 Pramoedya Ananta Toer, This Earth of Mankind, 18. From Minke’s defamiliarizing perspective, modernization meant an end to the monopoly of the elephant and the rhinoceros over power!
Korean peninsula (1392-1910) and modernization, following the logic of Fordism, rapidly produced ready-made (redimeidu) lives,\(^\text{15}\) new emergent social forces, political agencies, plebeian subjectivities, and self-determination demands arose across the world, with a new set of questions on the social scene—in the case of the Korean youth, questions of education, literacy, agricultural production, employment, the political hold of the landlords (the yangban) over the common people (sangnom), anticolonialism and certainly, mass mobilization, all of which required the critical practice of what Lu Xun called “self-dissections.” In the work of the Korean novelist Ch’ae Man-shik, the image of “the modern age as chaos” of the destabilization of the old order is expressed, to a great satirical effect, through the perspective of members of the conservative class such as Master Yun: “Are we not in Korea? Is this a Western country? Is that why everything is turning topsy-turvy?” But Master Yun’s perplexed situation results from his grandson’s decision to join the socialists, “a bunch of gangsters who’ll bring ruin to the world!”—not so much from technological modernization, for instance.\(^\text{16}\)

Moving now to the turn of the twentieth century European modernist narratives (those of the British Empire, in particular), at first glance it is true that they mostly


\(^{16}\) Ch’ae Man-shik, Peace Under Heaven [1938], (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 23; 241. See also his other work, My Innocent Uncle [1934], trans. Bruce Fulton and Ju-Chan Fulton (Seoul: Jimooondang Publishing Company, 2002). For a similar strategic use of the conservative class as narrative persona see Lu Xun, Diary of a Madman and Other Stories [1918-1922], trans. William A. Lyell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990).
operated under the assumption of “the end of history”/”the future of the West” paradigm, that their various formal techniques were meant to compromise the Kojèvean post-historical existence and that they had shortcomings in measuring accurately the seismic movements of their world and time. From this perspective, these narratives either drew new energies from the peripheries (Africa, Asia, South America, and so on) to bring home some cultural and aesthetic vitality or they set out to “primitive” geographies to escape the depressing and dehumanizing dictatorship of capitalism in every sphere of life, often times finding the primitive itself on the verge of tragic demise by forces of capitalism and colonialism. But I would argue that in reading modernist narratives exclusively as instances of escape or of destroyed life-worlds across the globe or of primitive sublime, we might still run the risk of implicitly accepting the teleological triumphalism of capitalist modernity.17

If we were to revisit Joseph Conrad’s Lord Jim (1900)—arguably the most compelling European narrative of its kind—from this point of view, we would mark other geopolitical strategies of containment than the modernist romance, which Fredric Jameson describes as Jim’s wish-fulfilling quest for the opposite number of the Weberian

17 For a rich number of specific accounts of the disjuncture between the late metropolitan feeling of Weltschmerz and anti-colonial internationalist stirrings, see Laura Doyle and Laura A. Winkiel, eds. Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Elleke Boehmer, Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920: Resistance in Interaction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Leela Gandhi, Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin de Siecle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship (Duke University Press, 2006); and Dohra Ahmad, Landscapes of Hope: Anti-Colonial Utopianism in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
value-free rational capitalist activity and reification in “the organic immanence of the
religion of precapitalist societies.” To this effect, Conrad throws Jim (and himself) into
the ground of comparison of the imperial culture, drifting away from the prosaic
everyday of metropolitan modernity to a situation as essentially external, distanced,
incommensurable, dark and disorienting to him.18 This perspective of distance and
comparative ground nourishes the various narrative techniques, strategies and
impressionistic imagination of the Conradian narrative.

Still, we can register these modernist sensibilities as symptoms, or projections of a
deeper geopolitical unconscious in Lord Jim. To be sure, the Weberian value-activity
matrix and the Hegelian “tragedy” of modernization of the world have been influential
tropes of modernity. Yet we also have to look at the politics of the device in Lord Jim to
identify the ideology embedded in this entire set of modern/premodern, value/non-
value, reason/faith, individual heroism/group action, goal orientation/Submission as
dualisms of the comparative ground in the age of imperialism.19 That Conrad’s romance

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19 For Jed Esty, what lies at core is the modernist perception of “the dissonance between hypermodernization in the metropolitan core and underdevelopment in the colonial periphery.” According to Esty, “the political contradiction between the imperial ethos of development and the facts of colonial underdevelopment” gives rise to “antidevelopmental fictions set in underdeveloped zones.” Out of this perceived binary, we still have to reflect on the following question: antidevelopmental fictions at the
was a failed quest for synthesizing these dualisms and thereby inventing an imaginative
way out of the reified world of Western capitalism does not automatically secure us
from the ideological orbit of these dualisms. As I argued earlier, they express a
framework of transference and repression of the active fermentation of new historical
agencies on the horizons of the colonial world. In the context of *Lord Jim*, the pilgrims
aboard *Patusan* are simply represented as the community of the premodern column of
the binary and seem to be the most suitable group from among other colonial
alternatives such as Indian emigrants to South Africa or a group of families of overseas
Chinese. What this binary essentially obscures at the geopolitical unconscious level is
the rise by the late nineteenth century of modernist pan-Islamism, the anticolonial
demands in India, and the revolutionary transformations in China. Here is the well-
known passage in which Jim observes the pilgrims coming aboard:

They streamed aboard over three gangways, they streamed in urged by faith and the hope of
paradise, they streamed in with a continuous tramp and shuffle of bare feet, without a word, a
murmur, or a look back…Eight hundred men and women with faith and hopes, with affections and
memories, they had collected there, coming from north and south and from the outskirts of the East,
after treading the jungle paths, descending the rivers, coasting in praus along the shallows, crossing
in small canoes from island to island, passing through suffering, meeting strange sights, beset by
strange fears, upheld by one desire….At the call of an idea they had left their forests, their clearings,
the protection of their rulers, their prosperity, their poverty, the surroundings of their youth and the
graves of their fathers. They came covered with dust, with sweat, with grime, with rags—the strong
men at the head of family parties, the lean old men pressing forward without hope of return; young
boys with fearless eyes glancing curiously, shy little girls with tumbled long hair; the timid women
muffled up and clasping to their breasts, wrapped in loose ends of soiled head-cloths, their sleeping
babies, the unconscious pilgrims of an exacting belief.

Fiction”, in *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, eds. Richard Begam and Michael
‘Look at dese cattle,’ said the German skipper to his new chief mate.20

The obvious point of attack in this passage in our multicultural/post-Orientalist age would be the German skipper’s denigrating remark about the pilgrim community. One could add the portrayal of their wretched appearance. But there is something that our contemporary sensitivities do not quite capture here. This is the active participation of these pilgrims from the peripheries of the Islamicate world in the reinvented imaginary of an anti-colonial Islamic polity called the ummah. As an unbound series, the idea of the ummah was reformulated by high modernist Islam of the turn of the twentieth century as a response to both imperialism and traditional sultanates. In that context, the annual pilgrimage came to express not a simple blind affirmation in faith (or a zealot “hope of paradise”) but an incarnation of that abstract political body stretching, at least at the imaginative level, from the Balkans to the Malay Archipelago. The passage above, therefore, could as well serve as a yardstick to measure the strength of the streams flowing from the Malaysian isles to this new unbound series of the ummah.

But we are ultimately left with the scandal of the Conradian “plot.” As Jameson observes, “Jim’s crisis requires him to have put lives in danger”21—those lives who are portrayed as entirely unaware of the plot into which they are inserted, not even more aware of it than the “screw-pile lighthouse, planted by unbelievers on a treacherous

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shoal, [which] seemed to wink at [the pilgrim ship] its eye of flame, as if in derision of her errand of faith.”\textsuperscript{22} It is almost as if faith makes the pilgrims \textit{naturally} blind and passive to the course of events potentially leading to their demise. To invoke Kojève again, they are represented in a mood of suicidal fatalism.

This representation, however, offers a convenient ground for Jim’s pseudo-sublime, described in the novel as follows:

He stood on the starboard side of the bridge, as far as he could get from the struggle for the boat, which went on with the agitation of madness and \textit{the stealthiness of a conspiracy}. The two Malays had meantime remained holding to the wheel. \textit{Just picture to yourselves the actors} in that, thank God! unique, episode of the sea, four beside themselves with fierce and secret exertions, and three looking on in complete immobility, above the awnings covering the \textit{profound ignorance of hundreds of human beings}, \textit{with their weariness, with their dreams, with their hopes, arrested, held by an invisible hand on the brink of annihilation}.\textsuperscript{23}

Marlow is convinced that Jim experiences great aesthetic ecstasy at this moment of the possible annihilation of the pilgrims. He does not even pay attention to them—not even “one single glance.” Being “a gifted poor devil with the faculty of swift and forestalling vision,” he takes pleasure in the idea of “the suspended menace discovered in the midst of the most perfect security.”\textsuperscript{24} But Conrad’s vision of sublime can no longer afford the comfortably detached zone of the earlier Kantian paradigm—not in the new geopolitical situation of the imperial age. In Natalie Melas’s astute observation, Conrad’s sublime

\textsuperscript{22} Joseph Conrad, \textit{Lord Jim}, 12.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 70 (emphasis added).
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 70.
becomes “the sublime incomprehensibility of catastrophic turns.” The specter of Patna, I would argue, haunts our times in the many ships filled with the dispossessed and disenfranchised immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees who are abandoned and left to vanish in the middle of the Mediterranean.

In the second part of the novel, which is considered as the episode of Jim’s heroic redemption and sacrifice, we have another instance of the sublime, now generated not through a tragic sense but rather through a euphoric one. Jim appears on top of a historic hill, dominating “the forest, the secular gloom, the old mankind” on behalf of “races that never grow old [and] that have emerged from the gloom.” On “the conquered ground for the soles of his feet,” Jim once again is imagined as incommensurable, even pretentiously isolated in the solitude of his achievement, with “nothing within sight to compare him with.” The idea of civilizing mission and colonial modernization seems to be so taken for granted that the modernist doubts, ambiguities, yearnings that arise around the imperial romance are now articulated in terms of a lost sense of scale to appreciate individual action. But this is not really an issue for Jim or Marlow (or Conrad) to worry about. Patusan, like Patna, is only external and incidental, the name for “a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon”:

27 Ibid., 197.
'I don’t suppose any of you had ever heard of Patusan?' Marlow resumed, after a silence occupied in the careful lighting of a cigar. 'It does not matter; there’s many a heavenly body in the lot crowding upon us of a night that mankind had never heard of, it being outside the sphere of its activities and of no earthly importance to anybody but to the astronomers who are paid to talk learnedly about its composition, weight, path—the irregularities of its conduct, the aberrations of its light—a sort of scientific scandal-mongering. Thus with Patusan.'

If only Marlow realized that his introduction of Patusan to his audience is a sort of literary scandal-mongering! One might at first glance ascribe the insignificance of Patusan to being simply a fictional setting for Jim’s heroic mission; but it really invokes colonialism’s deep idea of empty space. For the sake of an aesthetics of redemption, it renders Patusan a metonymic tabula rasa for a vast section of the earth that lived through and survived a long history of colonialism. The reason for constructing Patusan as “of no earthly importance” is primarily because Jim is re-created in the second part of the novel as having “left his earthly failings behind him.” The Conradian scandal is unworlding a human habitat (strategically reduced to an island) so that it matches (or, compares to) Jim’s act of redemption. Jim’s heroism in Patusan is ultimately the prerequisite of imperialist ethics of returning home.

As for Jim’s ambition for a new city-state in Patusan as a miniature work of imagination, strikingly enough, in his essay on “The Future of Constantinople,” which he wrote in 1912 at the height of the Balkan Wars, Conrad envisions a similar political future for today’s Istanbul, too. As “the fit object of Europe’s care,” for Conrad,

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28 Ibid., 158 (emphasis added).
Constantinople had to be “under the joint guarantee of all the Powers” governed by a
patrician as the executive head. Interesting to note, Conrad does not limit himself to mere
fancy here, even though he employs in an unusual context his well-known trope of
“darkness” in commenting on the significance of Constantinople for European history:
“Constantinople is too great, too illustrious to be the capital of the Bulgarian kingdom,
but fit to be the “commemorative monument” of “the only luminous spot through
nearly five centuries of European night” (224). Even so, he is careful enough to make
first-hand geopolitical calculations that would make his ideal vision for the city possible:
“From its geographical position the Powers could easily give effective protection to that
small municipal state. This plan, of course, implied free Dardanelles…and neutralised
Bosphorous” (223; emphasis added). In these lines from Conrad’s essay, we have the
echoes of a seasoned British diplomat contriving a political map on the table. Even
though Conrad would respond to this criticism as “a pretty heavy charge to bring
against a man conscious of being guilty of no worse crime than a little imagination,”
(223) in retrospect, we are at a better position to assess the political tolls of this little
imaginative indulgence.

But this extended critique of Lord Jim should not be taken as dismissing it as yet
another Eurocentric narrative of imperialism. For at the heart of almost all Kojèvean

30 In reality, the British Empire failed to fulfill both goals, which, nevertheless, cost over a million casualties
in the Gallipoli War of 1915.
narratives of the twentieth-century (including other works of English modernism such as D.H. Lawrence’s *The Plumed Serpent* and its negative portraits of the common people as “blank figures,” their nationalism as monkey business and their democracy as “mob authority,” and their indigenous populations as victims)\(^{31}\) is the spectral presence of plebeian agencies who perpetually refashion their being in the world not in enclaves of pre-modernity but rather by asserting themselves into the flow of the objectivist history and operational logic of capital to implode this flow and logic, interrupt its totalizing thrusts, expose its *failure* in mediating the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the world’s times and spaces and, insist on the extent to which their pasts is the absent cause of narrative representation.\(^{32}\) This mode of reading twentieth-century narratives should be also accompanied by rethinking of the methods and problems of studying the category of world literature. The following section will present a framework (albeit incomplete) for approaching this question.

### 1.2 Agency in the World Literary Space

The category of world literature has made a powerful return at the turn of the twenty-first century. Similar to the historical conditions of the emergence of *Weltliteratur* in the nineteenth century, the intensification of contemporary global processes, with all

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their promises and contradictions, made it necessary to revisit the relationship between literature and the world. The cumulative effects of colonialism, modernization, and globalization have established a complex web of interrelations among multiple different national and regional cultures such that questions concerning national literatures open rather quickly onto those of world literature.

Yet in spite of the important interventions of the new scholarship in comparative, area and cultural studies, world literature is still confined to the limits of the question of adequate geographic representation in literary canons and curricula in U.S. universities. This framework of analysis seeks the globality, transnationality and comparativity of literature in the creation of world literature canons along temporal, spatial and thematic permutations. This perspective is valuable in terms of the pedagogy of world literature and negotiating its disciplinary status in the academia, yet it should be recognized at this limit. For globality in literary studies cannot be achieved simply by a linear organization of texts from different parts of the world. This could at best be the first step.

The argument above brings us to the important question of agency in the study of world literature—a question that has not been adequately addressed yet. The models that conceive world literature as a systemic construct have opened up new venues of analysis and offered fresh ways of thinking about “literature as a world.” Yet the

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construction of agency and participation in world literature in these models—Franco Moretti’s system of symbolic hegemony and compromise and Pascale Casanova’s system of literary capital and consecration as the most compelling ones—remains problematic, to the extent that they do not address the ways in which individual or collective subjects put the narrative category of world literature to use as the hermeneutics of being-in-the-world.

Franco Moretti’s center-periphery model aims to expose the unequal structures, the “development of underdevelopment,” in the world literary field and to “recognize in the geographical variation and dispersal of forms the power of the center over the enormous periphery.”34 Correlated to the hegemony of the center is the periphery’s compromise. For Moretti, it is compromise that informs the law of evolution in the world literary space. “In cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means: almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe),” he writes, “the modern novel first arises...as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials.”35 Yet in his theorization of the foreign-local (or, center-periphery) encounter in terms of compromise (a concept which somehow guides his entire ouvre on modern literature), Moretti invariably uses negative terms to describe the cases when compromise predictably does not work in accordance with the presumed

mandates of the foreign center: the peripheral end-product is unstable and suffers from faultlines and cracks in the form, always at the brink of losing control of the plot and being “thrown off balance.” Only “in those rare instances when the impossible programme succeeds,” can one hail “genuine formal revolutions.”\textsuperscript{36} Moretti rightly points at the issue of linguistic competence in the study of world literature to analyze the narrator’s voice as the key variable. Even so, in Moretti’s model narrative agency is doomed to a Promethean struggle, perpetually oscillating between the foreign hegemonic form and the raw local content to survive. The recognition of symbolic hegemony and its geoliterary impositions is certainly a laudable one; but as long as we do not equally recognize the non-negligible performance of the periphery, we will fall short of the comparative historical morphology that Moretti aspires to.

Questioning the systems approach does not automatically entail going back to the idiographic study of literature that emphasizes the unrepeatable and exceptional text of close reading. Yet the rich focus, as in Moretti’s case, on the large mass of facts and “regular novelty” rather than the exceptional events of literature, on the hidden tempo and internal systematicity of world literature and the deliberate metamorphoses of texts to spatial elements (maps), dots (graphs) and morphemes (trees)—which are artificially abstracted from the narrative flow to arrive “with a little luck” at something “more than

\textsuperscript{*} Ibid., 59 (emphasis added).
the sum of their parts”—should not efface the question of agency in the world literary space. In fact, Moretti himself offers us a brilliant example of the creative mutations of literary production in relation to specific socio-cultural conditions in his analysis of the travel of free indirect style across more than a century in its multiple manifestations as first person singular reflective consciousness in England (Austen), third person singular non-reflective consciousness in Paris (Flaubert), second person singular dialogism in Russia (Dostoyevsky), first person plural of the working class in France (Zola), third person plural chorus of the peasantry in Sicily (Giovanni Verga), first person singular unconscious in Dublin (Joyce) and the first-third singular of military dictators in Latin America (Augusto Roa Bastos).

As for the question of compromise, the Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz’s concept of “misplacedness,” or catechresis would be revealing here. In Schwarz’s conceptualization, the disparity between local reality and the metropolitan (“imported”) literary form ceases to be a mere literary defect and becomes “a constructive principle of the narrative itself,” the autochthonous “form-giving content of the Latin American postcolonial social formation.” In Schwarz’s ingenious reversal, that is, the seeming disparity between foreign forms and social contents and the unsuitability of the

38 Ibid., 81-90.
European form are taken in as components of the content itself. This is not a straightforward absorption. The reversal, the productive misplacing, of misplacedness, offers us a method through which we could escape the aporias of the law of compromise, as it is legislated on the basis of the symbolic interests and hegemony of the foreign form. This would invite an alternative model of situational comparativism that would bring to light the contingencies of “global strife in the production of textuality” and the production of autochthonous discourses that also “come across as transcultural, with implications that resonate well beyond their individual locations.”

In that regard, the portrayal of modern world literature as the total sum of local solutions to the formal problems confronted in the process of adapting Western narrative structures and tropes of modernity is inadequate, unless these solutions, whether they are legislated under the law of compromise or the law of sedimentation, are also recognized as literary contingencies of worlding, that is, the act of unearthing all available cultural matter—traditions, narrative systems and conventions, symbolic forms, topologies, morphologies and genres. As classical formalists such as Shklovsky

40 For an example of the reformulation of the foreign form-local material disparity in the Turkish context, see Jale Parla, “The Object of Comparison,” Comparative Literature Studies 41, no. 1 (2004): 116-25.
42 Rey Chow, The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 84. The recent scholarship of “the new area studies,” much more up-to-date in its critical energies than the secondary resources on which Moretti relies in developing his theory of world literature as “distant reading,” offers a promising framework for the alternative model of analysis.
have shown, form construction is not a linear and predestined process. It progresses along a broken, uneven and “crooked road” to explore framing devices for content. This recognition would lead us to search for alternatives to the systemic and distributive structure of “developmental database” that regulates the circulation and evolution of literary forms as in the example of Wai Chee Dimock’s proposal of a territorially and chronologically refracted planetary generic database that envisions a more dynamic agency of world literature in the probabilistic registers of “stackability, switchability, and scalability” and the “accidental match” between languages and human populations across the globe.

While Moretti focuses on the variations of the (hegemonic) inadaptability of the foreign metropolitan form in its voyage out, Pascale Casanova analyzes the “rare” (shall we say “the fittest”?) instances of successful revolutions in the periphery by reversing the direction of the itinerary from dominated zones to centers of metropolitan consecration. Casanova follows the Braudelian longue durée to explain the global consolidation of the literary world system in three major revolutions. The first one is the vernacular revolution of the 15th and 16th centuries that accompanies the emergence of

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the absolutist regimes in West Europe. Out of this historical conjuncture, the French language emerges as the first vernacular to free itself from the hold of the political and the national that it initially legitimizes. As a result, French gains comparative advantage vis-à-vis other emergent vernaculars, including English, in the primitive accumulation of literariness. French is endowed with the prestige of enjoying the largest volume of accumulated literary capital, but more importantly, it introduces the idea of “literature-world” in which the power dynamics of fictive imagination, freed from political constraints, are now “bound to obey no other law than the law of literature” (37).

This foundational revolution is followed by the philological-lexigraphic revolution of the late 18th and 19th centuries, which leads to the invention of popular national literatures through the accumulation and collection of tales, legends, and many other folk themes, and the subsequent process of literarization (littérisation), that Casanova defines as the “alchemical process [of] transmuting popular cultural and linguistic forms …into cultural and literary gold” (226). The third revolution is in effect the intensification on a global scale of the second one within the historic context of national self-determination and decolonization movements of the twentieth-century. This third moment too brings its own operations of literarization now devoted to transforming oral-folk forms and practices into national literatures. The second and third revolutions introduce the counter-law of uneven development of the world literary
space. The consequence is a global literary system coordinated along the dualism of autonomy and dependence:

International literary space has come to be structured, and lastingly so, according to the age and volume of its constituent literary resources and the relative autonomy enjoyed by each national space. World literary space is now organized in terms of the opposition between, on the one hand, an autonomous pole composed of those spaces that are most endowed in literary resources, which serves as a model and a recourse for writers claiming a position of independence in newly formed spaces...; and, on the other, a heteronomous pole composed of relatively deprived literary spaces at early stages of development that are dependent on political—typically national—authorities. (108)

Casanova replaces Moretti’s law of compromise with the law of autonomy, which she conceptualizes differently from other theorizations by Paul de Man, Theodor Adorno, Russian formalists and (post)structuralists. Autonomy, from Casanova’s perspective, serves as the international law that structures the world literary space—”the Greenwich meridian time”—the logic, in other words, of the search to enter the literary present. Autonomous refers to the nonnational, nonpolitical criteria of literary legitimacy:

The ultimate step in the liberation of writing and writers consists in affirming the autonomous use of a purely literary language, one that submits to none of the laws or even orthographic correctness (which, of course, are imposed by states) and that refuses to yield to the usual requirements of intelligibility associated with the most elementary forms of communication, remaining loyal only to the conditions dictated by literary creation itself. (345)

In this account the autonomy of a text is measured as disproportional to its dependence on linguistic, political and national determinations. Therefore, while Joyce emerges as the standard measure of literary modernity through his series of breaks with “the imperatives of linear narrative, immediate readability, and grammaticality,” his equally
revolutionary successor, Beckett, breaks completely with “the very idea of a common language” to herald “the first truly autonomous literary revolution” (347).

Yet although Casanova aims conscientiously to rectify the fallacy of metropolitan universalism that has been part of the ideology of world literature by emphasizing the various forms of hierarchies, inequalities, dominations, and symbolic violence embedded in literary economy of world literature, her conclusions follow the path of a peculiarly French notion of literature and ultimately take the intermediary, legislative, panoptic and centripetal agency of Paris over the modern world literary space for granted. Here literariness is tied to the power, prestige, and volume of linguistic and literary capital of a language as well as to “the number of cosmopolitan intermediaries—publishers, editors, critics, and especially translators—who assure the circulation of texts into the language or out of it” (21). From their Parisian center, these intermediaries pose as the legislators of the World Republic of Letters. They mediate the global circulation of forms, serve as the system of literary timekeeping, and last but not least, bestow upon all the writers of the periphery literary emancipation. Paris, as the capital of denationalized literature, is positioned as the location of power “to create literary value and extend terms of credit everywhere in the world” (127).

Despite Casanova’s important contribution to the study of world literature, her reduction in the last analysis of all these complex processes to an estimation of “the relative aesthetic distance from the center” as well as an inescapable desire for being
consecrated by Paris is highly problematic. Joyce’s or Faulkner’s “peripheral” manipulations, linguistic solutions and formal innovations that offered a narrative model for authors of the global South, for instance, are measured by their success in denationalizing, that is, securing Parisian consecration for the literatures from which they emerge. “The provincials” bring about revolutions in the centers of the literary world “by inventing complex strategies that profoundly alter the universe of literary possibilities” (177), yet Casanova, due to her teleology of consecration, does not really discuss to any extent the much more complex dimensions and autochthonous implications of these innovative literary strategies and solutions. One strong indication of this is Casanova’s heavy reliance on anecdotes from writers of the periphery in which they express their discontent with the limits of their national culture and their strong desire to make it to the center. First of all, these expressions of discontent are almost a peculiar genre of their own: auto-critique has always been a strong mode of theorizing the national situation in the global South. Moreover, these self-critiques do not come from a monolithic source; they are instead grounded in competing cultural projects for the nation. But in Casanova they are automatically read as “signs of the tragic impasse in which national writers find themselves caught up as a result of this inexorable attachment to their nation.” The attachment to the nation and the predicament of defending its cultural claims are configured as the Promethean burden on the shoulders of the writers of the periphery, confining them to the “unhappy” conditions of the
prison-house of their language (186). In the hierarchically and unequally constructed world literary space, one cannot expect these writers to be happy (whatever this term entails); but the trajectory of peripheral writers from the tragedy and melancholia of domination to the catharsis and euphoria of consecration does not offer much help in debunking the ideology of world literature, except for showing how “the ethnocentrism and blindness” (259) of the center disabled metropolitan critics to adequately appreciate the sufferings of peripheral writers in their precarious way to recognition. 46 It is not, moreover, clear why choosing exile in Paris would lead to autonomy—especially given the stark absence in Casanova of Paris’s neutral position in the Cold War geoculture, which made it a convenient location for many world writers who, on the one hand, did not want to subscribe to the Soviet cultural policy of social realism or the agenda of national governing elite, and who, on the other hand, were equally dissatisfied with being cultural handmaids to the North Atlantic front. 47

46 This ethnocentrism itself might be one of the reasons of France’s own retreat in contemporary times into “a hexagonal ghetto,” despite the special memory it would hold for the twentieth-century world republic of letters. Eric Hobsbawm, Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 336-37.

47 In the age of high modernism, Ezra Pound described the locational convenience of Paris in his characteristically conspiratorial language as “The Paris plot.” “The city that plays for this glory,” wrote Pound “will have to plot, deliberately have to plot, for the gathering in of great artists.” Elsewhere, in an even more reductive gesture, Pound would link Paris’s centrality to the relative affordability of good bread and wine for the émigré artists. (Ezra Pound, Literary Essays [New York: New Directions, 1968], 220-22.) For an account of the formation of a “novelists’ international” as a form of “subaltern modernism,” a third path away from of the aesthetic binaries of the Cold War, see Michael Denning, “The Novelists’ International,” in The Novel, vol. 1, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 703-725.
Casanova’s location of the source of the inequalities of the literature-world in “the original dependence of literature on the nation” (39) and her measurement of the literary anachronisms, temporal lags and uneven developments of a particular national literary field in terms of its distance to the literary Greenwich meridian time are considerably reductive. Literature of course is written in a national language (no matter how the latter is to be manipulated by the former). This in itself is not responsible for the emergence of an unequal literary system (as much as the practice of agricultural production, for instance, is not responsible for the economic inequalities imposed by global capitalism). Situations of uneven development, moreover, have specific histories and almost never begin with the issue of metropolitan consecration in mind. As Stathis Gourgouris remarks,

To evaluate a case of uneven development requires that the measure and scale of evaluation be integral to that society... It is to evaluate an internal condition, an act that turns one’s attention to each society’s particular history of contending forms and allows insight (incomplete though it always is) into the history of each society’s overdeterminations—a history that can neither be predicted nor teleologically justified nor fully explained. The condition of uneven development describes by definition a contentious area in which no singular mode or subject can ever be constituted fully, an arena of social antagonism.48

What Casanova’s work in effect reveals is the strong hold of the ideology of world literature and the discourses built around it. The ideology of world literature has

48 Stathis Gourgouris, Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 69-70. On the dynamic of the core-periphery, Gourgouris adds: “The core/periphery model is itself continuously moving about, realigning its components, redrawing its boundaries. Indeed, it has become internal to every society on the globe, no matter how its performance is assessed on the ‘development’ scale” (167).
certainly created an influential form of symbolic hegemony that one can trace in the critical approaches developed outside the center as well. The conventional literary histories of Arabic literature, for instance, are a case in point. In these histories, literary periodization and pace of development in Arabic language is imagined to reflect “the same, or nearly the same, order of development of the main European movements: first, neo-Classicism, then Romanticism, Symbolism, Surrealism, and later on in the fifties, neo-Realism,” only that everything had to achieved in “a kind of race,” where all these periods had to be “compressed into a few decades.” Even then, the foreign poetic currents are neither assimilated properly by the native poets nor are channeled correctly to “a reading public completely out of touch with the more sophisticated arguments and theorizations of art.” The agenda of modern Arabic literature is constructed through “an instinctive attempt to transcend the centuries of stagnation,” “the need for a modernized outlook free of medieval tendencies,” a call for “liberating (itlaq)” literature from the shackles traditional forms and conventions and an aspiration “to create a universal, humanistic Arabic poetry.” The false measures of the ideology of world literature condemn the Arab literary field to an eternal status of failure, perpetually suffering from

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decrepitude (inhitat) and stagnation (jamud) vis-à-vis progress (taqaddum) and civilization (tamaddun). Exposing this ideology in its both metropolitan and peripheral manifestations should be a constant task in global literary studies—as long as we do not equate world literature with its ideologies.

More importantly, while we recognize and critique the hegemonic presence of the world-system of literature, we should simultaneously search for the anti-systemic undercurrents and histories of world writing upon which the system has maintained its parasitic life with transnational, transcultural and translational care for the gravitational force and “full of movement of languages and peoples still in historical sedimentation at the bottom.” This is precisely the ground of the plebeian aesthetics of world literature where flow and exchange of forms takes place, diverse cultural materials—”the shipwreck fragments” (Derek Walcott)—are put to synthetic creative use. It is also the point of departure for the study of world literature as detour (Eduard Glissant) to the complex processes of repetition, rewriting, bricolage and translation as the very devices of literary production beyond the exportation and imposition of paradigms—to also the

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unavoidable discontinuities, disjunctures, twists and even distortions as tactics of counteracting concealment.

The twentieth century has generated an unprecedented intensity of migration of bodies as well as texts. Referring simultaneously to the mode, form and content of world literature, migration stands out as the indispensable essence of world literature as a macro model of intersecting textual itineraries that are at a certain indeterminate and open-ended translational distance to their point of origin as well as destination.

To be sure, the opening up of the literary has entailed internal and external forms of symbolic violence that generated hierarchical scales and unequal distribution of cultural capital. As Nicholas Brown points out, twentieth-century world literature did not “spring spontaneously from a host of freely developed cultural equals but rather represent[ed] the exploitation of geographic and cultural diversity by a limited ensemble of economic and cultural forms.”53 But Brown’s account tends to downsize the political horizon of the twentieth-century literature when it claims that in the last instance its interpretive possibilities are framed by “the forms imposed by global capitalism,” which Brown describes as “the content of literature itself.”54

My contention here is that the impositions of capitalism as frame of reference would be better conceptualized rather as the first instance in response to which local

54 Ibid., 7; 12.
literary zones and cultural situations generate their own formal and representational problems and solutions. If capitalist totality constitutes a necessary fiction in a globalized world, in our discussion here, this totality (à la Fredric Jameson’s recent reformulation of the form-content dialectic) corresponds to the “the content of the content”—that is, the socio-historical as ‘the thing-in-itself’—in which world literature exists. Yet “the content of the content” is only the preliminary layer in Jameson’s reconstitution of the form-content binary in a four-term set of positions. On the opposite side stands “the form of the form,” which refers to the enclave of pure forms of negating being-in-the world from which various formalisms sought to generate “literature as resistant and transgressive qualities that are mapped onto the non-communicability.” The way to overcome the content-form dualism becomes possible by crisscrossing the terms. Applied to the study of world literature, this crisscrossing would enable simultaneous focus on “the content of the form”—the representational modes of processing content into narrative—and on “the form of the content”—undeletable traces and marks of the historical and social that haunt the form. It is through this shuttling back and forth between the limits of a specific historical situation and its contradictions and the possibilities for figuration or representation that literature strives to explore anti-systemic enclaves, imagine other worlds, seek utopian horizons and create world-

images against global reification. Capitalism, symbolically speaking, destroyed the Great Wall of China, but this at the same time led to new secular possibilities of imagining beginnings. In fact, Lu Xun and other modernists had already uttered “A curse on this wonderful Great Wall!” The decoding of overcoded life-worlds of premodernity also enabled the conditions of possibility of “recoding of secular reality” on a global scale.

In order for categories of analysis such as capital and modernity to have a particular effect, we must reconstitute them in the contingencies of lived cultural and social forms. Literature as world writing refers to the modes of representing these contingencies.

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2 The Grounds of World Literature

We need to think out our concrete reality and point out its specific features, because this is the only way we will discover what we have in common with every other area of the globe, detect the real links, and arrive at what, someday, truly will be a general theory of world literature.

—Roberto Fernández Retamar, “Caliban Revisited”

Literary modernity, world literature and literature as a distinct mode of writing enter the discursive field simultaneously in the beginnings of the nineteenth century, as Western Europe reaches the peak of its revolutionary and exploitative energies to “create a world after its own image.”¹ In the decades following the French Revolution, the modern sense of literature takes shape along a bifurcated path as (a) a cultural instrument through which nation-states aimed to nurture and consolidate a sense of nationhood among the masses, and (b) a self-referential, monadic form of writing sealed off from other discourses. In the modernization and reform projects of the states, literature was regarded as a key depository of the national spirit, common taste, cultural prestige and homogenous identity. This instrumentalized literature generates its opposite pole in “autonomous” literature, which claims to invest in language, without turning itself into a discourse, without paying any homage to the past or the political authority. While relegating its representational privileges of ordering the world to other

discourses (of bureaucracy, science, journalism, etc.), this conception of literature discovers its *raison d’être* in pure time, pure language, pure world and pure work. This bifurcation created a foundational dualism between universal literature and local/national literatures, which excluded (if not deliberately repressed) a third way of conceptualizing the formation of modern literature in relation to the rise of mass-subjectivity, or plebeianism, and a new secular aesthetics of existing in a global and plural world, in which the early form of *Weltliteratur* invested its creative energies. The category of world literature emerges as a mode of negotiating, contesting and at some utopian level, completely abolishing this systemic dualism that would also be expressed in the binary of high versus low literature.\(^2\)

### 2.1 How Did Literature Appear in the World?

There is a common consensus that the semantic field of literature goes through a fundamental architectonic transformation with modernity. The pre-modern, the modern and in our times, post-modern meaning of literature are three different categories in terms of defining the TimeSpace of literary production. While each of these three moments deserves close scrutiny, this section will focus primarily on the modern manifestations of literature in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth-century literary criticism, the autonomization of literature (primarily in Western Europe) has become the

dominant explanation of the modern configuration of literature.\(^3\) In this section I revisit this approach to emphasize the extent to which it has disregarded the alternative program of Weltliteratur.

The main premise of the modern appearance of literature as an autonomous field is that literature emerges a mode of writing (écriture) on its own right following the law of differentiation that governs the bourgeois cultural modernity. As a result, literature “devotes itself exclusively to the search of its own identity” in an ideally organic form of “perfect closure upon itself.”\(^4\) Michel Foucault describes the emergence of the new form of writing—“the appearance of literature as such”—as follows:

From the Romantic revolt…to the Mallarméan discovery of the word in its impotent power, it becomes clear what the function of literature was, in the nineteenth century, in relation to the modern mode of being of language. . . . Literature becomes progressively more differentiated from the discourse of ideas, and encloses itself within a radical intransitivity;... it breaks with the whole definition of genres as forms adapted to an order of representations, and becomes merely a manifestation of a language which has no other law than that of arming in opposition to all other forms of discourse its own precipitous existence; and so there is nothing for it to do but to curve back in a perpetual return upon itself, as if its discourse could have no other content than the expression of its own form; it addresses itself to itself as a writing subjectivity.\(^5\)

Literature, in Foucault’s account, describes an imaginative zone in opposition to the world and a monadic form of self-referentiality. As it loses its representational privileges

\(^3\) What happened in the rest of the world was going to be the preoccupation of area studies which followed the master narrative of the formation of national literatures through reinvention of folk traditions.


of ordering the world, literature unfolds upon itself to divert the pressures of this incapacity and the gloom of a prosaic world for which it can no longer function as a category of knowledge. Now as a presumably autonomous field, literature has to discover its capacities of reproducing its genericity, its “history-engendering powers,” in distinctively new and self-referential works.\(^6\)

This perpetual imperative of novelty for which literature is expected to spend all its generative energies to sustain its autonomy also constitutes its modernity. The latter enables the literary to stand as pure fragment or autonomous entity by freeing it from any homage to the past. Under the new paradigm, to use Paul de Man’s famous statement, “the appeal of modernity haunts all literature.”\(^7\) Modernity becomes literature’s sign of privilege and singularity. The literary absolute, in de Man’s description, is specifically expressed as the consciousness of \textit{représentation du présent}, no matter how ambivalent the temporal structure of the combination of repetitive and instantaneous patterns that generates this very representation in the first place:

The continuous appeal of modernity, the desire to break out of literature toward the reality of the moment, prevails and, in its turn, folding back upon itself engenders the repetition and the continuation of literature. Thus, modernity, which is fundamentally a falling away from literature and a rejection of history, also acts as the principle that gives literature duration and historical existence.\(^8\)

\(^7\) Ibid., 250.
\(^8\) Ibid., 264.
Yet in de Man’s otherwise profound account we miss an adequate contextualization of
this triangular relationship between literature, history and modernity. To be sure, in his
invocation of Nietzsche, de Man hints at the complications of the German situation as
one of the primary battlegrounds of the trio in Europe. Even so, rather than seeing this
collision as the prototypical manifestation of a fundamental problematic that sooner or
later preoccupies all national literatures on a certain scale of intensity, de Man
establishes the framework of this initial case of uneven development in the modern
literary field in terms of affects, predicaments and moods of textual consciousness,
concluding that the unsolvable paradoxes of literary modernity have “no real escape
out”. The trope of literature as incessantly oscillating between history and modernity,
however, holds back an appropriate appreciation of the new secular imaginative
potentials released from this very oscillation itself.

There is another significant point to make in regard to the narrative of the
autonomization of literature that we have briefly outlined above, which has to do with
the specific historical demarcations embedded in this narrative. As Rey Chow astutely

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9 Ibid., 249. At the turn-of-the-twentieth century, Joseph Conrad would express this sentiment as “a dreadful
doubt [that] hangs over the whole achievement of literature.” Joseph Conrad, Last Essays (London: J.M. Dent
& Sons 1926), 65.

10 For some of the studies that focus on this capacity of literature, see Gil Anidjar, “Literary History and
Hebrew Modernity,” in his Semites: Race, Religion, Literature (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 67-
83; Harry D. Harootunian, Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Gregory Jusdanis, Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture:
Inventing National Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Lloyd Pratt, Archives of
American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania
Press, 2009).
observes, there is a fundamental dilemma embedded in Foucault’s otherwise incisive historical portrayal: “is the ‘appearance of literature about the emergence of a unique, local phenomenon, or is it about a timeless generality ‘literature as such’”\textsuperscript{11} Taking the first option as the more accurate one—without, of course, ignoring the long-lasting hegemonic temptation of the second—we will proceed here with Pierre Bourdieu’s historico-sociological account of the formation of literary modernity in the nineteenth-century Western Europe. In Bourdieu’s account, the rule of autonomy and “the constitution of the literary field as a world apart” are originally introduced by “the inflow of a substantial population of young people without fortunes,” who position themselves in opposition to the bourgeois culture.\textsuperscript{12} These plebeian artists coming from the \textit{pays} embrace the slogan of “art for art’s sake,” because what Bourdieu describes as the anti-economic economy of pure art enables them to resist the conventional demands and forms of the hegemonic bourgeoisie and to succeed in a symbolic revolution in the literary field. Autonomy, as the specific construction of literariness in language, serves as the measure of the independence of the literary field—now a plebeianized zone—from the field of power. As we will discuss in greater detail, in the twentieth century, the


migratory displacement along the rural-urban axis would expand to include its transnational component along the colonial-metropolitan axis. A new wave of immigrant writers, artists and thinkers encounter in an estranged way with other traditions in an equally defamiliarizing metropolitan environment. The medium and form of practice offer “the only community available” to them.\textsuperscript{13} As Neil Larsen points out, “for a ‘world’ that could mobilize, destroy and re-invent entire nations in the course of months or weeks now no longer paused to seek its universal forms of reflection in particular national histories and experiences, only aesthetic forms, shorn of culture—montage, \textit{ostranenje}, didactic formulas, style itself—could keep pace.”\textsuperscript{14} And yet, contrary to the ideology of aesthetic autonomy that measured literariness in terms of the text’s distance from the world, these aesthetic practices show the world’s increasingly immediate presence in individual lives. Modern literary practices represent this immediacy—even when they claim to escape from it. To put it somewhat paradoxically, aesthetic mediation emerges as an imaginative form of coping with this immediacy.

The emergence of world literature, therefore, cannot be thought apart from the formation of global modernity/coloniality, for the latter has not only shaped the two components of the former—that is, the world and literature—but also necessitated an

\textsuperscript{13} Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{The Rules of Art}, 45.
indispensable link between the two. Modernity seals the qualitative transformation of the earth into a geographically defined and historically interpreted globe proper.

Mikhail Bakhtin reconstructs the eighteenth-century sense of this new momentum as follows:

As little as three centuries ago, the “entire world” was a unique symbol that could not be adequately represented by any model, by any map or globe. In this symbol the “entire world” was a small and detached patch of the terrestrial space and an equally small and severed segment of real time. Everything else vanished in the fog, became mixed up and interwoven with other worlds—separate, ideal, fantastic, and utopian worlds. The otherworldly and fantastic not only filled in the gaps of that impoverished reality, and rounded out that patch of reality into a mythological whole; the otherworldly also disorganized and bled this present reality.\(^{15}\)

The epochal quality of modernity (Neuzeit) lies in the filling of space—the worlding of the earth as an emerging whole. While the twenty-first century defenders of Europe’s globalizing function such as Zygmunt Bauman describe this process as “an incessant activity of drawing the world, fragment by fragment, out of the serene yet somnolent inertia of zuhanden and transplanting it into a uniquely human realm of vorhanden,”\(^{16}\) in the beginning of the twentieth century Joseph Conrad would suggest another récit of modernity as a shift from “fabulous geography” to “geography militant,” which “did


not seem to be to accept the idea that there was much more water than land on this
globe.”

On one level, Bakhtin’s account can be seen as an all too familiar figuration of
modernity that one finds in a cohort of other European discourses spanning from
Weber’s “disenchantment of the world” to Heidegger’s “the age of the world picture.” It
is even possible to make the case that narratives of modernity have an underlying myth
structure in the way they organize temporal signs and codes, which would call for a
morphological analysis—one ironically similar to Vladimir Propp’s inquiry into Russian
folk tales. At any rate, the motivation of the device in narratives of modernity is to
provide, in Talal Asad’s words, “a fictional grounding” for the legitimacy of the modern
age (Neuzeit), which Hans Blumenberg has shown to be resolutely insistent on its
temporal distinctiveness.

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17 Joseph Conrad, *Last Essays*, 6-8. The great Conradian dream and self-assigned duty “to correct and bring
up to date the charts” and “to complete the picture of the earth” is already a fait accompli in Conrad’s own
age of imperialism. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow (here as Conrad’s alter-ego) laments the filling of the earth
with “rivers and lakes and names” and the vanishing of “blank spots” on the world map of his boyhood: “It
had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery—a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It
had become a place of darkness.” Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University

18 Indeed, Fredric Jameson has outlined an extensive inventory of defining the modern depending on the use
of one or more of the following devices: tenses (future, future anterior, perfective past), shifters (empty
vehicles of deixis or reference to the context of enunciation), cycles (visions of history as series of perpetual
breaks and beginnings), typologies (holistic attention to an epoch), tropes (prioritization of the rewriting
operation over historical analysis), affects (structure of feelings generated through the break and period
dialectic) or symptoms (the conceptualization of modernity as the signs of a buried narrative). Fredric

19 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press,
2003), 53.
Despite this deeply alluring idea of a universal and synchronic epochal unity, Goethe and others had to come to terms with this paradigmatic change in the semantic field of “the entire world.” In 1886, Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, the Irish-New Zealand scholar and the first to use the concept of “comparative literature” in the English language, makes the same case that modern civilization brought “the local and the central, the popular and the cultured, life of each European country and the general actions of the entire world face to face.” Due to these multiple contact zones, argued Posnett, “habits of comparison have arisen such as never before.”

Around the same time, in India, Rabindranath Tagore, envisioned world literature, preferring this designation to Posnett’s comparative literature, as a creative field which enabled “human extension” to the outside world through departure from “refuge in the fortress of linguistic exclusiveness to the language of human habitations.”

This new sensibility also required the recognition that (a) modernity, as a temporal category, was also predicated on the spatial and material transformation of the world through capital, labor, war, commerce, exploitation, production, and so on; (b) geography, space, positionality, and, as obsolete as it may now sound, cultural climate

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disrupt the temporal organization of the literary along the history-modernity binary and force representation to assume spatial value. The “Ortgebunden, the place-bound nature of literary forms” becomes an active force in literary production with a steady pace toward cartographic abstraction. It is therefore not a coincidence that Goethe who made the first call for Weltliteratur was also the first to reflect on Lokalität and that The Communist Manifesto, the second important invocation of world literature in the nineteenth century, correlates the latter with the spatial expansion of capital. The conditions of possibility of Weltliteratur, therefore, hinge upon the global flows of modernity (Weltverkehr) and the accompanying “violence with which all cultural traditions have been violently opened up into world history.”

To reiterate, in its origins, Weltliteratur was never a mere proposal of universal cosmopolitan literature, even though it was subsequently liquidated into the “great masterpieces” tradition of liberal arts. By the same token, we should also mark the paradigmatic difference between Weltliteratur and littérature universel. Looking at its specifically German context, we can establish the following features of the original program of Weltliteratur: First, it was about establishing channels of transmission and

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translation between the emergent literature of a politically fragmented Germany
(Kleinstaaterei) and the hegemonic Romance/Latin line within Europe.\(^{24}\) It claimed a
mediating (Spiegelung, or “mirroring”) role between Bildung and belles-lettres. Second, it
was an extension of the Herderian demand that each national literature be accepted as
legitimate on its own terms and that “historical and geographical relativity” be
recognized by all parties.\(^{25}\) The diversification and relativization of the literary field
simultaneously necessitates a network of transnational circuits for which Goethe
famously coins the term Weltliteratur.\(^{26}\) Third, the latter derived considerable impulse
from the rise of comparative philology—the peculiarly German contribution to
European sciences. Goethe’s West-östlicher Divan (1819) can be seen as the literary
crystallization of this phenomenon. To be sure, as Edward Said’s Orientalism has shown,
comparative philology would increasingly fail to save itself from being metamorphosed
into a Eurocentric and Orientalist discipline; yet this should not obscure the fact that
comparative philology inevitably pushed post-Enlightenment Europe to explore contact

\(^{24}\) As late as 1944, in his assessments on the classic in On Poetry and Poets (London: Faber and Faber, 1957),
T.S. Eliot would insist on Goethe’s provinciality vis-à-vis the mainstream Latin tradition. In 1926 and 1927,
moreover, The Criterion, published several polemical essays on Germany’s position in relation to the West
around a perceived resurgence of “Asiaticism” in German cultural life—a convenient code word for the
simultaneous influence of Russian communism, Jewish urban avant-garde and Eastern mysticism.

\(^{25}\) Antoine Compagnon, Literature, Theory, and Common Sense (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press,
2004), 17-8.

\(^{26}\) For further elaborations on Goethe’s conceptualization, see Stefan Hoesel-Uhlig, “Changing Fields,” in
Debating World Literature, ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004); David Damrosch, What Is
Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).
zones with other cultures. Reinhart Koselleck portrays the original impulse and its
demise as follows: “The geographical opening up of the globe brought to light various
but coexisting cultural levels which were, through the process of synchronous
comparison, then ordered diachronically.” Secular coevalness, in other words, was to be
displaced by a temporal hierarchy of world cultures—the geographical “alongside” to
be rewritten as historical “before-and-after.”27

We cannot dwell in greater detail on the multiple factors that rendered world
literature a dysfunctional category in much of the twentieth century. This might even be
a less urgent task than the more challenging one of reconstructing the global genealogy
of world literature out of multiple literary histories in which the name may not even be
mentioned yet has a spectral presence. This section aimed to show that literature’s
modern appearance is rooted in the global consciousness of multiplicity of cultural and
aesthetic traditions, the social mobility (the migration factor) that modernity has made
possible and the increasing need for making sense of the entire world from particular
subject-positions. Whereas, the theories that defined the peculiar feature of modern
literature as being autonomous, i.e. a subjective mode of writing freed from homage to
the world as such, and hence universal, have actually transformed the bourgeois mode
of writing (“writing degree zero”) into an aesthetic ideology. Yet even the notion of

autonomous literature could be shown to have plebeian-migrant origins. Equally important, the bourgeois écriture itself originally flourishes as a vernacular mode, aimed to counteract the stylistic presumptions of French classicism.\footnote{For a fuller account, see Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang), 1977.} Moreover, modern subjectionhood cannot be limited to the figure of the bourgeois subject exclusively nor can modern literature be considered as the symptomatic expression of the bourgeois life-world. The following section continues the attempt at constructing a genealogy of world literature, focusing this time on its relationship with mass-subjectivity.

2.2 *Mass Print and Mass-Subjectivity*

The category of world literature acquires empirical reality with the rise of modern plebeianism, or mass-subjectivity, which, in turn, is reinforced by a parallel rise in mass-print. The print revolution triggers an architectonic shift from a world of rare books (a world that would serve as the setting of many postmodern historical novels such as Amin Maalouf’s *Balthasar’s Odyssey*) to one of everyday, ordinary books.\footnote{For a now classical account of the print revolution, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (London: Verso, 1991). For an alternative narrative, see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983).} Following the French Revolution, there emerged at least three competing orientations along the mass-subjectivity and mass-print axis: the bureaucratic invention of national
literatures, the bourgeois alternative of republic of letters and the plebeian literary sphere.

The bureaucratic model was implemented by centralized nation-states of the post-ancien régimes. Mass-printed books were recuperated as the means for crafting an integral national pedagogy to nurture the masses in the formation of national subjechthood and affiliation. Between 1789 and 1848 in particular, not only in Western Europe but also in places where old empires were reforming and adjusting their multicultural and multilingual polities in line with the new political form and the incorporating pressures of capitalist world-economy (such as Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Japan), states took up Bildung as a way to accommodate the masses within the nation form and to thereby eliminate the threats they posed against the social and cultural establishment. Bildung was configured as “a balance between the constraints of modern socialization and its benefits” and a compromised way “to keep history at a safe distance, separating the destiny of the individual from the great collective waves of the nineteenth century.”

This was accompanied by subscription to a selective version of national literature, oftentimes at the expense of elimination long traditions of heteroglossia. In the process, “national literatures” emerged as the institutional means of the codification of the nation’s récit and foreigners’ access point to it.

The second orientation, which Jürgen Habermas has theorized, was the formation of the class model of the bourgeois literary public sphere through autonomous enclaves and in a relative independence from political authority.31 This formation was based on the class consciousness of the educated strata toward protecting their realm against the encroachments of state-run cultural and literary curriculum:

In the face of the unending flood of didactic, educational, and instructive writings circulated by state, literary, theological, pedagogic, and economic authorities in the name of Enlightenment, there was—as Kant insisted—only one way out: by taking Enlightenment itself in one’s hand. The new slogan for doing so was Bildung. The path of vulgar Enlightenment, from above down or from outside in, should be, as it were, turned around: from inside out, in order to produce the conditions in which the self might realize its potential in society through self-actualization and precisely through Bildung.32

Print culture and its rational-critical exchange and transmission through journals, literary gatherings and—even though not mentioned by Habermas—translation across the public sphere were seen as an alternative path, where an autonomous and cosmopolitan (and fair in judgment and taste) “world republic of letters” was positioned as “the go-between link between state and society,” as the aesthetic mediator between the private and the public by keeping them at the right distance to one another, and also as the coordinator of “the traffic in [cultural] commodities and news.”33

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33 Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, 177; 15.
Yet in the process, this configuration does not follow its due course and gradually disintegrates, or in Habermas’s own coinage, is relegated to an “unfinished” status. Along with that, the Weltbildung ideal of the bourgeois public sphere—like its socio-political expression in the concept of communicative action and formal democracy—is either disfigured in the hands of modernists and their false programs or remain subdued under the commands of culture industry and mass media.34

As much as one might empathize with the laments of the great tradition of European cultural criticism, certain foundational and internal contradictions remain deeply embedded in the idea of an autonomous aesthetic zone as a way of facing the challenges of global plebeianization, itself perpetuated by capitalism’s systemic colonization of the everyday lifeworld. In certain crucial passages in Habermas’s own work, one can observe the extent to which the world republic of letters of the bourgeois public sphere was never conceived free of the economic sphere and also the degree to which it was becoming increasingly difficult to draw the line between aura and agora, culture and capital (the last pair to be eventually amalgamated by Pierre Bourdieu as “cultural capital”).

At first glance, Habermas wants us to think that the exclusion of the plebeians was a necessary aesthetic measure to guard the literary against their non-literary—or,  

more strikingly, illiterate—character that posed a threat to the proper public use of reason and rational-critical exchange among the educated stratum. But then he presents us the following historical data that during that time “more than half of the population lived on the margins of subsistence. The masses were not only largely illiterate but also so pauperized that they could not even pay for literature.”\textsuperscript{35} Therefore, the world republic of letters, as a specific class category, from the outset did mandate economic preconditions—no matter how diligently or pretentiously, these preconditions were to be kept external to the so-called “non-economic economy” of the literary field.\textsuperscript{36}

In fact, Habermas himself acknowledges the absence in his study of the plebeian public sphere. The latter, he writes, “was suppressed in the historical process”:

In the stage of the French Revolution associated with Robespierre \textit{for just one moment}, a public sphere stripped of its literary garb began to function—its subject was no longer the ‘educated strata’ but the uneducated ‘people.’ Yet even this plebeian public sphere…remains oriented toward the intentions of the bourgeois public sphere.”\textsuperscript{37}

To his credit, Habermas is careful not to equate the figure of the plebeian with the caricaturized faces of totalitarian or dictatorial regimes. Yet he hastily shuts down the plebeian undercurrent and its subsequent spectral incarnations, which I regard as the third orientation along the mass-subjectivity and mass-print axis.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35}Jürgen Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere}, 37-8.
\textsuperscript{37}Jürgen Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere}, xviii.
\textsuperscript{38}In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, Trotsky wrote: “For tens of millions of people for the first time in history to master reading and writing and arithmetic, is in itself a new cultural fact of great importance.”
For especially after 1848, “the propertyless and uneducated masses who, without fulfilling the conditions for admissions to the public sphere, nonetheless made their entry into it,” and in their barbarous ways caused “the disorganization of the public sphere” by collapsing the observed boundaries between the political and the aesthetic, the literary and the non-literary, the public and the private, fiction and report, and so on. As a result of the inevitable invitation of the masses into history, a “vast republican army of anonymous trampers” appears on the horizon. It is not a coincidence that The Communist Manifesto, published in 1848, envisions the collapse of the boundaries surrounding of national literatures and the rise of a world literature out of the debris of this collapse. At this climactic point, “the Bildung-fever” reaches a record high and begins to energize new aesthetic agencies that migrate from marginal spheres and express their anti-systemic demands of self-determination through nascent social and cultural movements.

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39 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 177.


42 The term “Bildung-fever” belongs to the German novelist and poet Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff. Koselleck also mentions that the Groesenbibliothek für deutsche Klassiker (The Penny Library of German Classics) was marketed under the slogan of “Bildung macht frei.” Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 189; 195. As another historical account, see Martyn Lyons, “New Readers in the Nineteenth Century: Women, Children, Workers,” in *A History of Reading in the West*, eds. Guglielmo Cavallo, Roger Chartier and Lydia G. Cochrane (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 313-344.
The world-systemic crisis of 1898-1918 that Lenin has famously called the age of high imperialism, exposes the widening polarity between urban centers and rural provinces, industry and agriculture, and high-finance economy and subsistence economy.43 The ensuing intensity of migration on a global scale, the increasing dependency of high finance capitalism on territorial occupation, the impersonalization of the state and bureaucratic apparatuses, the breaking-down of production processes into alienating segments and the ensuing tension felt between Beruf (vocation) and Erlebnis (personal experience)—all this strip the bourgeois public sphere and its literary-cultural field of its protective structures. It is almost as if the debris and toll of the three successive ages of revolution, capital and empire—to use Eric Hobsbawm’s chronology—which culminate in the vanishing of old regimes, the liquidation of non-capitalist modes of production and the expansion of European territorial hegemony across the world, weigh too heavy on the world. In the post-World War II years the Japanese intellectual Takeuchi Yoshimi explains the aftermath of this world-systemic dissolution at the turn of the twentieth-century in another tripartite transformation: the contradictions of capital lead to the negation of capital in the Russian Revolution, the limits of the nineteenth-century European industrialization are displaced by the Fordist

revolution in the New World and imperialist rivalries give rise to anti-Western resistance.\textsuperscript{44}

At the turn of the twentieth century, the spatial expansion of capitalism through imperialist policies impacts the nineteenth-century positions of literature as well. Even though the new conjuncture strips them of their content, they continue to survive in the form of ideology. First, autonomous literature cannot protect its domain against the commands of culture industry and mass media, on the one hand, and the demands of newcomers, usually of immigrants from rural and colonial origins, who redefined the very idea of literary autonomy as a collective medium of the experience of their spatial displacement. Yet it is preserved in the ideology of modernism. Second, language reform and vernacularization, as part of the modernization of the old regimes under centralized bureaucracy and the prerequisite to be incorporated into the geoculture of the world-system, are continued by the top-down programs of the nationalist elite that treated the rural-urban axis of the national space as a replica of the center-periphery or metropolitan-colonial polarity at the global level. This second vector is constituted in the developmentalist ideology. Third, coeval comparativity, which acknowledged the multiplicity of societies, cultures in their own spatial and temporal development, is reduced to a positivist evolutionary scale. As an extension of this first reduction that

originated in the West, in other parts of the world, comparison had instances of
degeneration into a geopolitics of local destiny which unleashed an unwarranted wave
of wiping out the other through which the collective self defined its position within the
global matrix. Thus, comparativity is configured as mode of hierarchization. In literary
scholarship, modernism, developmentalism, and comparatism have been extensively
criticized—and rightly so. But in empirical terms we cannot begin to analyze the
twentieth-century world literature by simply transcending these terms.

The formational basis of modern world literature, I therefore argue, needs to be
sought in the global plebeianization at large—a process that dissolves all former
subjectivities, as they are reconstituted in the broadened social basis of modern culture
and are inflected by national, class, racial and geopolitical situations. Fictive
imagination, as a mode of representing “new orderings [and] possible worlds” increasingly assumes a geoliterary mode or orientation in unprecedented scale. In this
new configuration, literary vocation is manifested in gauging what we might call world-
pressures on modern subjects, nations, or situations. As a result, the definition of fictive
imagination shifts from the subjective power of human perception (as theorized by the

45 Of course, situations, as articulations of a particular locale/nation, are oftentimes in competition with each
other and therefore demand alternate explanations.
46 Timothy J. Reiss, Against Autonomy: Global Dialectics of Cultural Exchange (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford
University Press, 2002), 165.
nineteenth century Romantics such as Coleridge) to the faculty of assessing the seismic
tremors of globality on individual as well as political bodies.47

While recognizing the violence of capitalism in the transformation of all cultural
traditions, we should also be attuned to plebeian modes of world-imagination that were
still configured around modernity, development and comparison yet in ways different
from their ideological manifestations. The modern creates the ground for new social and
cultural formations as well as self-determinations. From this perspective, while
comparative thinking brings an engagement with the historical aporias and
contingencies of this ground, vernacularization appears as the necessary linguistic
reorientation for representing the speech patterns of the coexisting social groups in
urban spaces, and more importantly, for surviving cultural and linguistic extinction.
Therefore, instead of reading world literature as the canon of vanished lifeworlds and
traditions, we should pay close attention to the remarkable dynamism of the literary
recodings and figurations of modern secular existence and the search for new
measurement devices to gauge from a specific geopolitical positionality the multivalent

47 T.E. Hulme would describe this literary eidaesthetic shift in terms of abandoning “metaphors of flight” in
favor of a worldly recognition of the “finitude of man” and his being “mixed up with earth.” T. E. Hulme,
The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994), 62. It is important to note that this
transition occurs at the challenging moment of “the weakening of…the reliability of Imagination itself,
which it must [now] seek to strengthen and to reinstate artificially by way of ingenious architectonic
dimensions of the existential conditions of dwelling in modernity. The next three sections focus on these coordinates of world literature.

### 2.3 The Geopolitical-Comparative Field and Positional Measurement

Beginning with the twentieth-century modernisms, the widening-of-the-world and shrinking-of-the-globe dialectic is mediated in literature through the multivalent reflections of consciousness. Yet these representations, as Erich Auerbach witnessed, were less “a mirror of the decline of [the] world” than comparative explorations of the “economic and cultural leveling process” that accompanied the intermingling of societies.\(^48\) The new conjuncture, remarked Auerbach, “sharpened awareness of the differences in ways of life and attitudes, and mobilized the interests and forms of existence which the new changes either furthered or threatened. In all parts of the world crises of adjustment arose; they increased in number and coalesced.”\(^49\) This imperative of adjustment, as we shall later observe in greater detail, played a fundamental role in the formation of the twentieth-century world literature. Virtually each national literary tradition took up the challenging task of devising symbolic measurement tools and comparative apparatuses to chart its own temporal as well as spatial coordinates kaleidoscopically. In the process, all literatures of the world lose the comfort zone of self-

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\(^49\) Ibid., 554. (emphasis added)
referentiality. In the twentieth-century world literature, internal evolution or interiority becomes vulnerable to external interruptions, estrangement and distance.

In Japan, the poet and critic Hagiwara Sakutarō argued that what the Japanese needed in the cultural field was a “surveyed map” to substitute for “malfunctioning compasses” and to recuperate the Japanese “sense of direction” in the modern world.\(^{50}\) In Latin America, various shades of modernismo called for abandoning “the European scale” which led not only to cultural dependency and literary backwardness but also “a loss of a sense of measure.”\(^{51}\) Even the Latin American literati sympathetic to the gravitational force of Paris or Barcelona had to devise accurate apparatuses to measure the distance between the modern life here and the one over there.\(^{52}\) In China, Lu Xun would call for “bold fighters who will charge clean through traditional ideas and devices.”\(^{53}\) In Greece, disillusioned with the derivative aesthetics of “national renaissance” that relied on romantic representations of the soul, soil and history of the nation, modernists such as George Seferis invested in the demotic and autochthonous topography of Hellenicity, or Ellinikotita. Topothetisis, as a mode of measurement, was geared towards recovering the foundational logos by unearthing nostos amid

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archeological ruins and bringing the national *topos* into alignment with *cosmos*, or contemporaneity.\textsuperscript{54} Finally, in the Anglophone world, modernists such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound embarked on formal images of “gauging nicely” the position and proportion of the “new and strange objects in the whole of the vast panorama” of industrial modernity.\textsuperscript{55} While Eliot proposed the concept of objective correlative as a mode of organizing “an asset of objects, a situation, a chain of events,” focused on the invention of “steam-gauges” and “registering instruments” for “testing the language and its adaptability to certain modes.”\textsuperscript{56} World literature in the twentieth century names the creative efforts to generate specific measurement devices to gauge the multiple dimensions of modernity from a particular positionality (in constant shuttling between affiliation to and criticism of it).

It is important to note here that positional measurement, as one of the grounds of modern world literature, necessarily operates in the geopolitical-comparative field and generates globally dispersed aesthetic hermeneutics of grasping the world that is now defined as a spatial, cartographic abstraction, or in Heideggerian terms, a “picture.”\textsuperscript{57} As the globalizing processes of modernity intrude upon everyday practices of individual


lives, comparison emerges as “an inevitable and even unconscious perspective.”

Comparison functions as a mode of gauging and the proximity as well as the distance between here and there, now and then, self and other, situation and system, example and paradigm. From this perspective, it entails existential claims that are “shaped by changing historical situations, as immediate responses to particular passions and recognitions of the age, as well as political and mythological formulations of deep-seated convictions that are themselves crystallizations of historical experiences and anxieties.”

In the powerful example of the Black comparatism of the interwar period, C.L.R. James and other Black intellectuals of the time precisely resist the effacement of the black people’s agency and presence in the historical progression of modernity. Enframing the black experience as being only “subject to” this history, James argued, was another way of disregarding modernity’s debt to the black people—in W.E.B. Du Bois’s vivid language, the “dark colonial shadow” that “every great European empire walks.”

Before C.L.R. James’s vision of Black self-determination as a “self-generated and independent motion” towards “an integrated humanity,” Alain Locke, in his landmark

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anthology of the Harlem Renaissance, *The New Negro*, situated the Harlem Renaissance as “coexistensive with global strivings for self-determination and national cultural expression.” Pushing for the implementation of the Wilsonian principles at home, Locke invited a comparison between the Black situation in the US and other “nascent movements of folk-expression and self-determination which are playing a creative part today... in India, in China, in Egypt, Ireland, Bohemia, Palestine and Mexico.” In the global forces and motives of self-determination, Locke saw a source of inspiration for a new African-American collectivity and presented the cultural production of the Harlem Renaissance as its aesthetic exploration.

As the spatial unit of literary representation increasingly expands towards the world, the protagonists of the twentieth-century novels—from Virginia Woolf’s Jacob and James Joyce’s Stephen to Yokomitsu Riichi’s Sanki and Rabindranath Tagore’s Bimala—find themselves spending their cognitive-mapping energies on exploring the coordinates of their worldly existence under the pressing tension of the question of “situational representation” vis-à-vis a “vaster and properly unrepresentable totality.” This new conjuncture inevitably required different modes of measurement than those of

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the nineteenth century novel as the latter were predominantly based on the distance of the province from the center, dealing with the uneven processes of “national streamlining.” The geopolitical unconscious generates the immediate and self-reflexive awareness of living in an interdependent world with others and the sense of positionality that sets them in motion to explore comparative modes of self-determination and “to anchor their identities in the midst of historical flows.” World literature as the spectral network of print and writing and as the differential and active medium of multiple historical determinations, autochthonous exigencies, cultural conditions of enunciation, regimes of affiliation and spatial contingencies enables consciousness to step outside and imagine new collective forms of being-in-the-world in the global comparative field.

2.4 The Demotic Turn

If global plebeianization mandated positional measurement as the geopolitical gesture of world literature, the radical expansion of civil society under capitalism led to the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and low cultures and in many parts of the world gave rise to demotic orientation as the groundwork for the linguistic adjustment required to gauging the existential conditions of modern plebeian life. As we

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saw in our earlier discussion of the mass-subjectivity and mass-print axis, the issue of vernacularization and demoticism generated multiple forms of competing language politics of literary production.

In the top-down cultural programs of the power elite, vernacularization meant simplifying the language from any traditional traces of “play” and ambivalence, creating a telegrammatic and bureaucratically functional style and, often times, violently “cleansing” the language from “foreign elements.” As Semah Selim shows in her study of the Egyptian peasant novel, the Egyptian nationalist discourse strictly policed any linguistic and cultural deviation from the national language. In that context, demoticism resulted in “dismantling the linguistic hybridity” of common speech by creating a rigidly standardized vernacular.68 Language standardization was seen as an integral component of the quantification, reproduction, monumentalization and education of the nation. Timothy Mitchell’s Foucauldian account in Colonising Egypt shows how nations were not only imagined through the map, the census, and the museum but also forced by the army, the school, and disciplines. In the Egyptian case (by no means an exception) the formation of print culture, which in Benedict Anderson’s account plays a revolutionary role in the vernacularization of languages and the loosening of cultural

strata, is tied to “the means to restore and secure political authority.” The plebeian potentials of vernacularization gradually vanish under linguistic engineering and standardization orchestrated by the state apparatuses. The elimination of linguistic play and difference—in the Derridean sense—of Arabic and its subjection to the new institution of textual authority is accompanied by the telegrammatic style of bureaucratic communication, journalism and pedagogic literature.

A comparable instance of a top-down program to control the dynamics of vernacularization occurred in Latin America. As the Uruguayan critic Ángel Rama has shown in his *The Lettered City*, with modernization and independent nation-states, the lettered city (whose genealogy consisted of long history of hegemony over writing and “the order of signs”) repositions itself to undertake language reform in a way to control “the entire sphere of acceptable linguistic expression” in the face of new social groups immigrating to the cities from the countryside that aspired for upward mobility through education, on the one hand, and the large peasant and indigenous hinterland, on the other. By taking command of the direction of linguistic plebeianization and changing its natural watercourse, the *letrados* (“men of letters,” who oftentimes also had bureaucratic positions in the state apparatus) constructed national literatures and

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national histories as disciplinary mechanisms of the symbolic order of the nation. The outcome strikingly resonated with what happened in Egypt during the same time:

The proliferation of the written word permitted the letrados to discipline the countryside, imposing homogeneity and social hygiene, and into the emerging concept of literature were incorporated many materials extraneous to the educated elite’s earlier concept of belles lettres. Literature absorbed the multiple contributions of traditional rural culture and articulated them with other elements into a discourse on the definition, formation, and collective values of the nation.71

On the other hand, in certain strands of modernism, the vernacular meant the means for a linguistic formalism “to reclaim, redeem, transform, and transfigure the koiné of a capitalist daily life into an Ur-speech” through which the modern subject would recuperate a lost sense of authenticity.72 Modernist demoticism sought the creation of a linguistic Utopia of a purified language “a recreation of its deeper communal or collective function, a purging of everything instrumental or commercial in it.”73 Indeed the idea of common speech can be traced in a great number of modernist poetics developed in the twentieth century. We can even argue that common speech is the envisioned point of destination in many of the modernist programs. Describing every poetic revolution as “a return to common speech,” T.S. Eliot went as further as formulating this insight into a poetic law: “the law that poetry must not stray too far from the ordinary everyday language which we use and hear.” “Whether poetry is accentual or syllabic, rhymed or rhymeless, formal or free,” argued Eliot “it cannot

71 Ibid., 66.
afford to lose its contact with the changing language of common intercourse.”

Elsewhere, Eliot would describe the modernist conjuncture in the English language as “a revolution in the philological sense of the term.” In Eliot, the common speech not only governed the structure, the rhythm, the sound, the idiom of poetry but also was the prerequisite of achieving the social utopia of an organic society in modern times, “a society as those which produced the Greek chorus, the Elizabethan lyric, and the Troubadour canzone.” It was the modernist poet’s task to take stock of the potentialities of common language in the construction of a national culture and facilitate access to it. The modernist turn to the vernacular meant to uncover the primordial history of the complete overlap between what W.B Yeats called “the speech of the people that delighted in rhythmical animation, in idiom, in images, in words full of far-off suggestion” and “the art of the coteries”—his obsolete term for what we now call the avant-garde—through its residual traces in the present. In a powerful echo from the other end of Europe, George Seferis, the main theoretician of modernist poetics in Greek and a strong advocate of demotic language, would equate the reception of a modernist

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26 Ibid., 189.
28 To prove the validity of his argument, Yeats invited his Irish audience to do the following: “Go down into the street... take with you Ben Jonson’s ‘Beauty like sorrow dwelleth everywhere,’ and find out how utterly its enchantment depends on an association of beauty with sorrow which written tradition has from the unwritten.” W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), 7.
work to the communal reception of a legend or a fairy tale. Nevertheless, as it is well-documented now, formalist demoticism that saw in common speech the core of resistance to instrumentalization of culture ultimately amounted to an aesthetic ideology of modernism.

But beyond the two positions we outlined above—that is, the top-down programs of language standardization and the modernist discourses of demoticism—we still have another global momentum of vernacularization that invests in language innovation and reform, the subaltern history of which is so little-known that even the world historian Eric Hobsbawm has to present it a single paragraph only:

For most artists in the non-Western world the basic problem was...how... to turn spoken vernaculars into flexible and comprehensive literary idioms for the contemporary world, as the Bengalis had done since the mid-nineteenth century in India. How were men (perhaps, in these new days, even women) to write poetry in Urdu, instead of the classical Persian hitherto obligatory for such purposes; in Turkish instead of in the classical Arabic [more accurately, the Ottoman language] which Atatürk’s revolution threw into the dustbin of history with the fez and the woman’s veil? What, in countries of ancient cultures, were they to do with or about their traditions; arts which, however attractive, did not belong to the twentieth century? To abandon the past was revolutionary enough to make the Western revolt of one phase of modernity against another appear irrelevant or even incomprehensible....For most of the creative talents of the non-European world who were neither confined within their traditions nor simple Westernizers, the major task seemed to be to discover, to lift the veil from, and to represent the contemporary reality of their peoples.

In this “grassroots,” or plebeian variant of the demotic orientation, we find a counter-hegemonic insurrectional effort of surviving cultural and linguistic extinction

“for purposes of national and cultural self-strengthening.” As cultural and political hegemony of the West was acutely felt all over the world, the demotic, all the way from Asia to South America, was embraced as the means for reimagining the social collective and for claiming its presence in the geopolitical aesthetic of the world-system. Lu Xun expressed in the following way the increasing pressures of the hegemonic geoculture on almost the entire cultures and languages of the rest of the world.

Let us think which are the nations today that are silent. Can we hear the voice of the Egyptian people? Can we hear the Annamese or the Koreans? Is there any voice raised in India but that of Tagore? There are only two paths open to us. One is to cling to our classical language and die; the other is to cast that language aside and live.”

The institution of the vernacular mode of literary and cultural production becomes an urgent matter of survival. Lu Xun first attacked the nationalist position to represent “the national essence” in the classical language. The nationalist position ultimately amounted to ramming “a dead language down people’s throats” and the perpetuation of the traditional taboo on translation. In a second move, Lu Xun declared the Chinese adoption of such mottos as “art for art’s sake,” or “art for humanity” as universalistic pretensions. Thirdly, he maintained equal distanced to the literature of the proletariat, which he defined as the “literature of complaints, poverty and suffering.” The practitioners of the proletarian literature from Lu Xun’s perspective were simply “using

83 Ibid., 44. See also the following essays in this volume: “The Classics and the Vernacular” 246-8; “Silent China” 328-33.
slogans to show their modernity.” In the example of Lu Xun’s debunking of the nationalist, universalist and social realist positions, we find a demotic aesthetics of world literature that invests in the innovative and experimental capacities of the vernacular through translation from other languages. Vernacularization through translation is imagined as a form of global solidarity and a necessary measure against the homogenization of linguistic ecology and the petrifaction of a wide range of languages and literary traditions (from Arabic and Persian to Chinese and Japanese) in the hands of Orientalism—as in the case of the colonial Bengal, where vernacular modernity embodied “on the one hand, unprecedented leaps of technique and of the imagination in literature, and, on the other, issues of social and religious reform, of nationalism, education and the mother tongue.” The symbolic attacks of the new fiction (where, the British oppressor does not occupy the center of representation) would be directed against feudalism or the native elite of the colonial world; that is, the conservative fractions of the society resisting new class formations, social and spatial

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84 Lu Xun, Selected Works, vol.3, 28. Elsewhere, Lu Xun quotes the following lines from a play by a member of the Creation Society to make his case: “Prostitute: I no longer dread the darkness. / Thief: Let us revolt!” (89).
mobility and new forms of mediation between history and contemporaneity, memory and change, identity and difference.

Equally important, vernacularization, rather than conveying a unifying and homogenizing idea of national community, was conceived as the linguistic medium of social diversity. In Japan, Hagiwara Sakutarō would label classical Japanese as belonging to time of “a closed and isolated Japan” not suitable to “bring out fresh impressions of the New Japan.”\footnote{Hagiwara Sakutarō, \textit{Principles of Poetry}, 153.} Even though Hagiwara at one point lapses into an elegiac tone by describing modern Japanese poets as “the unfortunate victims of this chaotic transitional period in Japanese culture,” he could see no other option but searching for a “new national language” as the only possible foundation of a modern literature.\footnote{Ibid., 154-55.} To this end, the \textit{Genbun-itchi} movement and the subsequent abolition of \textit{kanji}, the figurative structure of which put itself before the concrete object-world, appeared as the necessary prerequisite for the level of transparency needed to “enter” the multiple life-worlds which now coexisted in the cities.\footnote{Kojo Karatani, \textit{Origins of Modern Japanese Literature} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 61. The difference between colloquial and classical idioms was as different as “two historical stages of a given language.” Masao Miyoshi, \textit{Accomplices of Silence} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 27.} In Latin America, we observe a similar situation in which progressive modernists attacked the “ancient rhetoric” as the great impediment in the consolidation of a new national common
sense. In Russia, Trotsky hailed the new word and syntax formations by the Russian Futurists such as Khlebnikov as the philological praxis of “feeling for the world” that was coming to existence with the revolution. All these examples from diverse geographies tell us the following: the global demotic turn opened up new vistas of enunciating the modern secular everyday in new vocabularies and morphologies, of writing to the world about one’s worldly habitat in a fresh and innovative way and of establishing cross-cultural communication in the world literary space.

### 2.5 Worlding Tradition

In the meantime, the global wave of vernacularization creates a new textual economy that forces practically all traditions to reinvent, rearrange or abolish themselves. In what follows, I examine four specific cases of engagement with tradition, each of which produces its own aesthetic program as a response to a combined set of inherited literary and extra-literary issues: in the English situation, incorporation into the Latin tradition by way of resuscitating the native line in the English province (T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound); in the Irish case, a geopoetic vision of Celtic orature as the new nomadic energy needed for the resuscitation old Europe and beyond (W.B. Yeats); in the postcolonial Arab world a call for abolishing the hegemonic poetics of orality that

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hindered creativity and freedom from the power structure (Adonis); and in the case of Négritude a strategy of neologism and detour to unearth what colonialism rendered absent in “the void of an imposed nonhistory” (Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire).

T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, each on his own path, were preoccupied with the possibility of reestablishing in modern times the missing link between the English native line with the legacy of imperium romanum, which they envisioned as a transcendental, yet organic point of reference of authority. In that regard, the entire problematic of tradition in Eliot and Pound should be reinterpreted in spatial terms, rather than in the conventional temporal framework. They believed that modern Britain not only was culturally disconnected with the “Eastern capital” but also fell under the spell of industrialism and imperialism. By virtue of their “postcolonial” immigrant status in England, as “those who had come back from the edges of [British] Empire,” they

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imagined themselves in a better position to see “the effect of the central decay” in the metropolis.\(^\text{95}\)

For Eliot, reconnection with tradition was the precursory step toward the restoration of “the [lost] sense of form and form-combination.” The restored model would teach the moderns the ways “to digest and express new groups of objects, new feelings, new aspects” of the political, social and economic determinants of their times in totalized aesthetic expressions.\(^\text{96}\) In order to achieve this task, argued Eliot, English poetry had to recover from centuries-long dissociation of sensibility and provinciality in the sense of being disconnected from both the Latin mainstream and the native tradition of the Elizabethan age. The Elizabethans, argued Eliot, were able to find the point of equilibrium between the Latin and the vernacular, where the energies of the center actually reinforced (rather than cancelled) “the native element in literature.”\(^\text{97}\)

As for the post-Miltonic attempts of incorporation under the rubric of “latinization,” Pound argued that these were simply flawed and superficial, because not only did they overlook the linguistic-historic shift from inflected Latin to uninflected vulgars such as English and the differences in “systems of measurement” but also fell

\(^{95}\) Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 228. Elsewhere in *Guide to Kulchur*, Pound performs his testimonial role as follows: “Let me set it down as a matter of record, in case this book lasts fifty years, that men of my generation in the occident have witnessed the belly-flop or collapse of a number of kingdoms and empires, all of them rotten. Among putridities it is difficult to make a just estimate” (81).


short of discovering creative solutions to “the struggle between native and foreign elements.” 98 In his typically harsh tone, Pound stated that except for the *Seafarer*, the *Beowulf*, and a few Anglo-Saxon fragments, English literature was always dependent on “the natural spreading ripple that moves from the civilized Mediterranean centre out through the half-civilized and into the barbarous peoples.” For Pound, tradition in the twentieth century meant a symbolically valuable cargo from the capital—plus some unexpected luxury items from the Orient—transported to the shores of the English “marginalians” (Pound’s term) through the aesthetic vessels of modernism.

While Eliot and Pound portrayed the English situation toward centripetal gravity of the Latin tradition, Yeats situated the Irish tradition as an antagonistic centrifugal force to mainstream Europe. In Ireland, the program of the Celtic modernist revival in Yeats’ poetics was to reinvent for “the people of Young Ireland” the collective memory of oral tradition, the living “Irishry,” despite its powerful eclipse by the long history of British colonial presence. 99 “In Ireland today,” wrote Yeats, “the old world that sang and listened is, it may be for the last time in Europe, face to face with the world that reads and writes.” 100 The Celtic element, which Yeats calls the great tapestry behind all Irish history, notwithstanding the Roman Church’s decisive ecclesiastical victory in the twelfth century, continues its existence as the repressed other of metropolitan Europe.

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99 W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 11. Further citations are given in text.
While the organized clans resisted a centralized Church organization ("they could accept the monk but not the bishop" [514]), the absence of abstraction in Gaelic was not conducive to adapting European Baroque and Rococo.\textsuperscript{101} In Yeats’ narrative, all these mytho-historical factors endowed the Irish periphery with \textit{gemeinschaftliche} energies, ever-active image-producing resources and an exceptional leverage for secretly dropping its intoxicating elixir of aesthetic "excess" to the turgid waters of the main river of European literature.

For Yeats, the Irish tradition had a \textit{world-literary} significance. As an integral component of "the Far West" that also comprised the Scandinavian (Ibsen) and Teutonic (Wagner) tributary systems that feed the European delta, the Irish tradition was the fresh source of a cultural rejuvenation, if not revolution, in the post-Balzacian deadlock of Europe. Using the analogy of the Oedipal riddle, Yeats’s drew mainstream Europe in the image of an old body that lost its internal energies and cohesion, or—to use the medieval Arab historian Ibn Khaldun’s useful term for this context—\textit{asabiyyah}; that is, a “barbaric,” yet at the same time fresh and potent, force. The reference to Ibn Khaldun’s \textit{asabiyyah} here is certainly not far-fetched or anachronistic, for it is precisely around the connotations of this term that Yeats described the goal of the modernist perspective on tradition in Ireland: “to forge in Ireland a new sword on our old traditional anvil for that

\textsuperscript{101} The weakness of \textit{religio}, in turn, prolongs the hold of mythology on the Irish imagination. Along the sides of “Ireland’s sacred mountains,” claimed Yeats “the peasant still sees enchanted fires and the divinities which have not faded from the belief” (114).
great battle that must in the end re-establish the old, confident, joyous world” (249). In Yeats’s nomadology, therefore, the Irish poetic machine would give Europe the cultural energy, cohesion and “technical sincerity” it needed (236). It should, therefore, not come as surprise that Yeats would define Irish lyric poetry’s perpetual energies of innovation and revolution as an “Asiatic habit” (226). This is also what motivated Yeats to study Asian literary forms such as the Noh plays of Japan. In the rhythmic intensity of the Noh drama, Yeats found the contrapuntal echoes from the architectonic movements of the Celtic imagination in deep time.

Yeats envisioned a planetary role for the Gaelic tradition, rather than a strictly national one. Reflecting the “synthetic vision” of postromantic internationalism that emerged as a response to imperialism’s “world-destruction,” Yeats also positioned Ireland as the ideal location for the cross-fertilization of East and West (432-3).102

However limited it may now seem, Yeats’ modernist program of the revival of Irish oral tradition promised the re-creation of “the ancient arts, the arts as they were understood in Judea, in India, in Scandinavia, in Greece and Rome, and, as they were understood when they moved a whole people and not a few people who have grown up in a leisured class” (206). The Celtic revival expressed a future-oriented horticultural task that would prepare Ireland for the prospective wedding of “the spirit of man” with “the soil of the world” (210).

While in Yeats, the oral tradition was charged with a planetary mission, in Adonis, the main theoretician of Arab modernism, orality stood as a heavy burden that had to be discharged from its hegemonic presence in the Arab cultural life. Adonis embarked on a new Arab poetics, against the background of the 1948 nakbah, the “disaster” of the loss of Palestine, which put virtually all the postcolonial future visions and aspirations of the Arab world at bay in a bitter awakening to the present. In Edward Said’s intense account, “the year and the processes which [the nakbah] culminated represent an explosion...a monumental enigma, an existential mutation for which Arab history was unprepared.” In Said’s narrative, the nakbah was the irruptive event that marks the Arab present.103

103Edward Said, Reflections on Exile and Other Essays, 46.
This new situation, or *mihna* (ordeal), forced the postcolonial generation of Arab modernists such as Adonis to look for the causes of *nakbah* not in external forces and colonial history but in the traditional structures of Arab culture themselves.\(^{104}\) To question the contemporary situation required the questioning the historical trajectory of Arab existence. Adonis’s poetic persona, “Mihyar the Damascene,” arrives at the scene with his “pagan sword” to shake a society which has become “passive toward its destiny.”\(^{105}\)

Adonis identified “the problematic of poetic modernity (*hadatha*) in Arab society” as “indicative of a general cultural crisis.”\(^{106}\) Arab poetic tradition, argued Adonis, served as an ideological apparatus under the colossal power structure of the political society.\(^{107}\) To demonstrate the deep genealogy of this subservient tradition, Adonis goes back to the inaugural moment of Arab poetry, the *Jahiliyyah*, which is commonly translated as the Pre-Islamic era of the Arabs. This translation, however, is not sufficiently accurate. For, as opposed to what its English equivalent suggests, the term does not merely refer to a chronological period. Rather, it describes an epistemological


paradigm, even something that encompasses the “structure of feelings” of the pre-
Koranic Arab life, which is governed by orality rather than writing (*al-kitabah*). The
“revelation” of the Koran is simultaneously the last expression of the Arab *pensée sauvage*
(Claude Levi-Strauss’s “thought grown in the wild”) and the foundational step towards
an irrevocable textual momentum in Arab history. Adonis believed that the
phonocentric framework of the *Jahiliyyah* poetry (in the sense that it was “sung,”
“heard,” “uttered,” “recited,” “memorized,” and “listened to”) was transferred almost
without any modification to the era of writing in Arab history, with the main difference
that the conventions of singing and recitation were now fixed into a stable and
structured meter and verse system (13-4). Thus the post-Islamic Arab discourse was
codified through the practices of oral poetry of the *Jahiliyyah*.

As the rise of the Arab-Islamic empire in the seventh century brings the Arabs
into contact with other cultures, Arabic language and poetry is gradually assimilated
into the Arab *imperium*. The intermixing of the Arabs with other nations (the *ajam*, or
“those who could not speak Arabic) reinforced the criteria of pre-Islamic poetry as a
means for securing Arab identity and difference. The Arab claim for cultural superiority
vis-à-vis non-Arabs and the rising concerns about protecting the Koran against
solecisms and corruptions and ensuring its correct recitation reinforced the performative

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modalities of oral poetry and gave them an afterlife at a time when Arabs were making their way to writing. As a consequence, the oral tradition was maintained as “the Arab method” (usul al-arab) par excellence and suppressed the development of a writing aesthetics. Any deviation from orality came to be considered as “a betrayal of identity” (35).

The political power structure perpetually cancelled the transition to the aesthetic of writing, which it deemed as a threat to its hegemony over society and culture. It saw its interests in “the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and...against difference in general.”

It vested the guarantee of its logico-metaphysical truth in the perpetuation of the oral tradition and re-enactments of the past. For Adonis, the beginning point of Arab modernity is the deconstruction of this tradition through an aesthetics of writing that will disclose the truth of the Arab structures of feeling in the flow of creativity and change, as opposed to the logocentric orthodoxy. The official past is merely a history of the repression of transformative writing as heresy.

As for Négritude, here tradition exists in a prosthetic form because of the colonial violence that prevented Africa and its many diasporas from establishing a continuum with their history. Négritude poets aimed to create an imaginative tradition of the Black

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Atlantic as a unifying historico-geographical term in order to restore, in Aimé Césaire’s words, “the double continuity that [was] broken by colonialism.”\textsuperscript{110} It comprised the poetic exploration of “the Negro situation”\textsuperscript{111} in a comprehensive project of bringing all the vectors of the Black Atlantic (the Middle Passage, the insurrectionary past of Haiti, the Harlem Renaissance, and so on) on a synchronic register. In its orientation of self-determination, Négritude was not about a systematic essentialization of tradition, for, to put it simply, there was no such an essential tradition at hand in the first place.

This very absence was the main thrust behind Négritude’s creation of a prosthetic tradition through neologisms and techniques of surrealism, not by restoring a semantic field of language, culture and identity, but by giving them “a turn.”\textsuperscript{112} This tradition was incarnated in the comprehension of “life forces” in the concrete image. Rather than through a language in the conventional sense, tradition found its expressions in the rhythmic counterpoints and planetary counter-shocks (“the shock of


the stars, of the sun, the plant, the animal, the shock of the round globe, of the rain, of
the light, of numbers, the shock of life, the shock of death”) against the determinisms of
colonial history.113 By necessity, it could be approached only through intuition, for it laid
beyond the visible world and conveniences of language. It is this distant image (l’image
distante) that Césaire and other Négritude poets strived to capture and give birth to “a
new sentiment of life.”114

Négritude poetics created tradition as the necessary compass for the Black
collective to coordinate its situation in the world and to generate an “exterior” form of
solidarity across time and space for energizing “the [African] body social, whose
aptitude for resistance and vocation [was] undermined by the colonial shock.”115 But
rather than being a case of a museum-like presentation of the past, tradition in
Négritude is created only to be transcended, if not completely overthrown—a dialectical
process that Sartre described as an act of “tearing Blackness out…in order to offer it to
the world,” of exploding the Black present to light up its path to Universal History.116

113 Aimé Césaire, “Calling the Magician”, in Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Carribean, ed. Michael
Richardson (London Verso, 1941), 119-120.
114 Aimé Césaire, “Poetry and Knowledge,” in Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Carribean, ed. Michael
Richardson (London: Verso, 1945), 27; Suzanne Césaire, “Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilizations,”
in Refusal of the Shadow, ed. Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1941), 86.
Press, 1965), 78.
University Press, 1988), 298; 325. See also A. James Arnold. Modernism and Negritude : The Poetry and Poetics of
Aimé Césaire (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), for a fuller historical portrayal of
Negritude’s simultaneous turn toward the world and self-renewal.
For after all, its invention was forced by the colonial logic which posited the existence of a long history of tradition and civilization as one of the prerequisites of independence and self-determination. In that regard, tradition was a forced apologia, which anti-colonial movements of the time almost out of desperation had to present.

This chapter by no means exhausts the formational coordinates of world literature. Yet it proposes several important historical sites from which we can begin to appreciate the category of world literature as the unconscious framework of asking questions about and exploring answers to the modern meaning of the literary aesthetic, mass-subjectivity in the prosaic world of print, the triangular relationship of positionality, comparativity and globality and forms of reinventing language, culture and tradition. From these historical-discursive sites, we will now move to fictive sites of modernism, postcolonialism and contemporary globalism to examine the question of how the world is imagined in literature from the urban loci of modernisms to the lieu, or native lands, of decolonization and finally to the global transnational space. Without analyzing the world in literature, we will not be able to appreciate fully the vital need of the category of world literature.
3 Global Plebeianization and the Modernist Fiction

The masters of the Mediterranean are fellaheen today.
—James Joyce, Ulysses

We are like a dish of loose sand.
—Lu Xun, Selected Works

Examining a global sampler of modernist novels (by authors ranging from Virginia Woolf, E.M Forster and D.H. Lawrence to Yokomitsu Riichi, Lu Xun, Rabindranath Tagore and Claude McKay) as narratives of space in a shifting world order, this chapter invites a situational approach to modernisms’ engagement with the cultural and political discourses and the historico-political contingencies of global/colonial modernity. From this perspective, modernism appears as the name for slippages between modernity and modernization, nationalism and westernization, cosmopolitanism and anti-imperialism, individualism and collectivism, bourgeois and proletarian culture in a historical context that cannot be defined in discrete units such as nation states but rather in “a complex field of relationships or threads of material that connect and multiply in space-time and can be surveyed from specific sites.”¹

The chapter moreover interrogates the assumption that the only “true” subject of modernity is the one who lives in the metropolitan center and therefore in the position

of knowing or at least *imagining* its coordinates. The twentieth-century world modernisms generated various modes of measuring globality within the geopolitical framework of imperialism, patriotism, and war as well as new “technologies of the self” and new solutions to the problems of identity and society.\(^2\) The older framework of “international modernism” thus becomes inadequate now in the way it blocks our attention from the modernist thinking about boundaries and affiliations.\(^3\)

While capitalist processes dissolve the experience of the everyday collective as a synthetic unity in the present, they also prepare the ground for the ordinary individual to enter the indeterminate zone of otherness and cohabitation with a new geographical consciousness and geopolitical inquisitiveness. In many modernist novels, the technique of interior monologue functions as an unregulated index of making sense of the condition of everyday existence under the pressures of the social institutions, objects, routines practices and structures of modernity; stream of consciousness serves as a mechanism of processing global stimuli and a cognitive tool to organize them; and the trope of strolling the urban space in a single day takes us over a larger and more multifarious section of the globe than the immediate local space. The geopolitical penetrates into the everyday of individuals who constantly shuttle between the


\(^3\) For a rich collection of essays that call for the reconfiguration of the older framework into a vast spatial field of “geomodernisms,” see Laura Doyle and Laura A. Winkiel, *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
pressures of “world affairs” received from a distance and their local routine. Mrs. Dalloway, for instance, cannot separate her thinking of roses and Armenians at once.\(^4\) In *Ulysses*, amidst “whiffs of ginger, teadust, biscuitmush” of a bar, Simon Dedalus bets against his pal Larry O’Rourke that “the Russians [would] only be an eight o’clock breakfast for the Japanese,” referring to the imminent Russo-Japanese War.\(^5\) In Tagore’s *The Home and the World*, the geopolitical slips through the purdah and penetrates forcefully into private conversations. The main protagonists of the novel—Bimala, Nikhil, and Sandip—discuss the worldwide imperialist grabs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “Is not the history of every country,” asks Bimala passionately, “whether England, France, Germany, or Russia, the history of stealing for the sake of one’s own country?” Her liberal reformist husband Nikhil objects to the validity of the question, claiming that they will eventually have to answer for their wrongdoings, given that “their history is not yet ended.” To Nikhil’s analysis, Sandip the nationalist agitator replies in the vocabulary of *resentissment*: “Let us first fill our country’s coffers with stolen goods and then take centuries, like these other countries, to answer for them, if we must. But I ask you, where do you find this ‘answering’ in history?”\(^6\) As much as these three instances are fictional constructs, they nevertheless show us literature’s increasing sensitivity by the beginning of the twentieth century to what goes on in the world in an

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immediate way that would arguably not be imaginable in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In addition, even though in classical modernist studies serial anonymity and interchangeability are conventionally expressed in terms of affective charges generated by the loss of representational reality and subjectivity and the modern individual’s escape from a depressing and hostile world, the templates of modernist representational practices, such as dissonance and estrangement, are woven deep into the everyday plebeian life. The so-called inward turn and subjectivization of reality in modernism must instead be read as “allegorical of the transformation of the world itself” and a literary mode of measuring at a distance the pressing demands of this transformation at the psychic level.7

3.1 Unthinking Ideologies of Modernism

Whether modernism responded to these demands in a progressive and emancipatory manner will, of course, continue to preoccupy us as much as it did earlier critics such as Lukács, who attacked modernisms’ transcendental allegories for seeing history “only in its stations of its corruption” and apprehending the reality of modernity as a nightmare impossible to wake up from.8 For Lukács, modernism embodied not only

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the self-destruction of art, literature and aesthetics but also the apocalyptic vision of a
global disintegration which did not contribute to the revolutionary energies of history
and class consciousness. Lukács’s assessments reflect the high expectations of the
political vanguard that the cultural and literary avant-garde should ultimately vanish or
be absorbed into revolution. Before Lukács, Leon Trotsky too pursued a parallel
argument vis-à-vis the modernist programs in Russia, Futurism in particular, placing
Futurism in “the creation of a new culture on a large historical scale” as a transitory
supplement to the revolution conceived as the will “to change the foundations of
everyday life.”

The transformation of the original European trajectory of modernism
synchronically with the inauguration of the Cold War into a mainstream convenience of
the “Free bloc” countries would intensify these original criticisms. As early as 1956, both
Theodor Adorno and Ronald Barthes declared the death of bourgeois modernism.

“After the European catastrophe,” wrote Adorno, “the Surrealist shocks lost their
force.” The profane illumination and revolutionary intoxication of surrealism now

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10 Theodor Adorno, “Looking Back on Surrealism,” in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 87. In *Aesthetic Theory*, his last work, Adorno reiterated the same point as his point of departure for his overtures on modern art and literature: “The sea of the formerly inconceivable, on which around 1910 revolutionary art movements set out, did not bestow the promised happiness of adventure. Instead, the process that was unleashed consumed the categories in the name of that for which it was undertaken.” Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1.
amounted to mere pornographic gratification. Barthes followed a parallel path and argued that the once deconditioning powers of modernist practices were “in fact another cathartic phenomenon, a kind of vaccine intended to inject a little subjectivity, a little freedom under the crust of bourgeois values.”11 A few decades later, Jürgen Habermas dismissed Western modernisms as pseudo-negative programs that not only caused collateral damage to the containers of the cultural sphere of modernity and their communicative content but also enabled neoconservatives to reduce the failures of societal modernization and the dissolution of the communicative infrastructure of everyday life to the penetration of a hedonistic, asocial, narcissistic, introverted modernist culture into the fabric of advanced industrial societies.12 Andreas Huyssen reiterated Habermas’s argument about the neoconservative co-optation more explicitly as a project in the Kohl-Thatcher-Reagan era of reinstating “a domesticated version of modernism as the only worthwhile truth of the 20th-century culture.”13 David Harvey, moreover, linked the de-politicization of modernism to the stabilization of the international system after 1945. Modernism, argued Harvey, “was full enough of alienation and anxiety, and expressive enough of violent fragmentation and creative destruction (all which were supremely appropriate to the nuclear age) to be used as a

marvelous exemplar of US commitment to liberty of expression, rugged individualism and creative freedom.” In his reflections on the early Marxist debates on German Expressionism, Fredric Jameson would call for the displacement of the now-defunct modernism with “a new realism to resist the power of reification in consumer society and to reinvent the violent renewal of perception in a world through a new aesthetic that nevertheless would no longer be thematized in the conventional modernistic terms of desacralized or dehumanizing reason, of mass society, and the industrial city or technology in general, but rather as a function of the reifying structure of late capitalism.” Finally, in a parallel move to Jameson’s, Perry Anderson would criticize the modernist programs for ultimately failing to “break with the order of capital” and to create a genuine socialist culture which would include “a far greater variety of concurrent styles and practices than had ever existed before: a diversity founded on the far greater plurality and complexity of possible ways of living that any free community of equals, no longer divided by class, race or gender, would create.” In retrospect, it is important to note at this juncture that each of these critiques, which were articulated against the background of the political struggles and contingencies of the Cold War era, attacked to a large extent the ideology of modernism, not the modernist practices

themselves. Moreover, they were aimed to save modernism, as the first manifestation of a global (or, “International”) aesthetics, from the hands of the enemy.

The ideologies of modernism, as they emerge along the North Atlantic axis following World War II, reconstitute the earlier discourse of Kulturkritik into a hermeneutics of learning to dwell in the brave new world of twentieth-century modernity. Reducing the autonomization and differentiation of the spheres of the material and the spiritual (re)production into the civilization versus culture binary, Kulturkritik defined the autonomy of the cultural-literary field in terms of a withdrawal from “the corrupting traces of a totalitarian disorder which embraces all areas of existence.”17 This withdrawal, as Herbert Marcuse observed, was aimed to secure the aesthetic and cultural spheres against the encroachment of “the entire sphere of material reproduction as essentially tainted with the blemish of poverty, severity, and injustice.”18

In the discourse of Kulturkritik, the twentieth-century global conjuncture was conceptualized as an irrevocable instance of dystopic world-reduction (where the world oftentimes actually meant the West) around the now all-too-familiar motifs of historical

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decay, existential anguish, civilizational disintegration, social fragmentation, linguistic failure, and subjective alienation.¹⁹

These early perspectives are further solidified in the formation of the U.S. brand ideology of modernism into a vocational path to “lead the young person to be at home, and in control of, the modern world.” Modernist works were consecrated as “the only right objects of contemplation” for the modern young Werthers.²⁰ Lionel Trilling’s syllabus for proper education in modernism began with Frazer’s The Golden Bough to provide the student of modernism with the required mythistorical depth in the myths and stories of resurrection that had lost much of their hold upon a secularized world. Next came Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals and Blake’s poetry. From the twentieth-century texts, which included Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents, Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and Mann’s Death in Venice, the student of modernity would learn to develop a “heroic response” to the challenging “contradictions” and “pains” of civilization.²²

During the same period, Irving Howe concluded that modernism was a rejection of the aesthetic order and “the claims of the world.” Howe accepted Lukács’s charge that

¹⁹ In F.R. Leavis’s account, the modern world represented a chaotic world in which “the traditions are bankrupt, the cultures uprooted and withering, and the advance of civilization seem to mean death to distinction of spirit and fineness of living.” F.R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), 205.
²¹ Ibid., 6.
²² Ibid., 17.
modernism was a blockage, if not an end, to history. But in the process, he ingeniously changed the terms of the equation whereby history was now the sluggish, static and imperious “locomotive stalled in the inescapable present” and modernism “the agent of a life-enhancing turmoil.” With this cancellation of history, the only engine to animate life was modernism.

Finally, Marshall Berman, as probably the last ideologue of the ideology of modernism, would attempt to turn modernism on its head by reformulating “the theme of nihilism [and] insatiable destruction” as “the theme of permanent revolution, infinite development, perpetual creation and renewal in every sphere of life.”

A genuine modernist culture, Berman argued, was the productive, creative, and most importantly, developmental form of dwelling in the space between these two thematic poles under the incessantly propelling drives and pressures of capitalist economy. The authentic moderns were those of the advanced industrial countries who confronted heroically the tension—no matter how tragic it may be—between socio-economic development and self-development. “In the world’s more advanced industrial countries,” wrote Berman, “development has followed more authentically Faustian forms.” In these countries, “all individuals, groups and communities are under constant relentless pressure to reconstruct themselves; if they stop to rest, to be what they are, they will be swept

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away.” 25 As for “the lives of millions of people who are living through the trauma of modernization thousands of miles away” in the underdeveloped rest of the world, they either have to sign the Faustian contract and let the modernist spirit flourish in the public sphere or perish as victims of a backward “theater of cruelty and absurdity” that is bound to end in devastation rather than catharsis.26 We cannot dwell too much on critiquing Berman’s text here, yet we should point at its resonance with the current moment of Empire and its theorization by the neo-conservative ideology, the lineage of which strikingly goes back to the Cold War ideology of modernism: permanent revolution, now, through military intervention in the name of bringing democracy, freedom and prosperity to the wretched of the earth, who suffered more than enough under the pseudo-Fausts of the Third World. It is not a coincidence that Berman’s investment in the modernist expressions of Latin American magical realism, the dissident wall posters in Peking and Shanghai and the electronic rock music of the Plastic People of Prague as manifestations of critical thought and free imagination could find uncanny echoes in George W. Bush’s praise of Orhan Pamuk’s experimental novels as a bridge between East and West at the 2004 NATO summit in Istanbul, where he

25 Ibid., 78.
26 Ibid., 76.
spoke for the U.S. commitment to restore the “birthright freedom” of the Middle Eastern nations.27

From this digression into the afterlives of modernism, we now need to go back to its historical conjuncture, to the global momentum prior to its cooptation into the triumphant discourse of the North Atlantic bloc as well as its geocultural cancellation by the rise of irredentist militarism in the counter-hegemonic semi-periphery (Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union). Even if we accept their death on the threshold of opening new horizons, twentieth-century modernisms will probably always retain a special privilege in the formation of the world literary space for their key role in the transformation of the original notion of Weltliteratur into the historical possibility for the first time of a literature that was global in scope as well as strongly informed by specific temporal demarcations and spatial coordinates.

27 Orhan Pamuk was quick to express his discontent and to distance his work from being implicated in an apology for the occupation in Iraq. Nonetheless, the idea of modernist literature as a sign of protest against political oppression has been remarkably strong among the “dissidents” of the Third World. The most recent and relevant example in the current context is the Iranian exile Azar Nafisi, director of the Dialogue Project at the Foreign Policy Institute of Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies, and author of Reading Lolita in Tehran (New York: Random House, 2003). Her students in Iran, she writes in her memoir, “had a genuine curiosity, a real thirst for the works of great writers, those condemned to obscure shadows by both the regime and the revolutionary intellectuals, most of their books banned and forbidden. Unlike in pre-revolutionary times, now the “non-Revolutionary writers,” the bearers of the canon, were the ones celebrated by the young: James, Nabokov, Woolf, Bellow, Austen and Joyce were revered names, emissaries of the forbidden world....In one sense the desire for beauty, the instinctive urge to struggle with the “wrong shape of things,” to borrow from Vadim, the narrator of Nabokov’s last novel, Look at the Harlequins!, drove many from various ideological poles to what we generally label as culture. This was one domain where ideology played a relatively small part....I wonder if you can imagine us” (39). When Hamid Dabashi dismissed Nafisi’s book as serving neocolonialism, Robert Fulford of The National Post counter-attacked by labeling Dabashi as a “Stalinist,” trying to “convert culture in politics.”
3.2 The Browns of the Earth

It was a century ago that Virginia Woolf made her famous statement that “on or about December, 1910, human character changed.” Woolf’s seemingly hyperbolic declaration aimed to mark the transformed anthropology of modern life and the related need for new literary forms of representation. One of the indicators of this change, Woolf claimed, was the shift in the reading public’s response to a classic such as the Agamemnon. Now the sympathies of many readers lay entirely with Clytemnestra. Woolf highlighted the difference in the status of the Victorian cook and her Georgian counterpart as another indicator. While the former “lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable,” the latter was “a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing-room, now to borrow the Daily Herald, now to ask advice about a hat” (194). The increase in social mobility, moreover, puts an end to the age of loyal servants: “No more of the maid who would come when she is fifteen and stay till she is eighty” (197-8).

In retrospect, we might feel somewhat distanced to Woolf’s optimistic investment in the new social fermentation, yet the examples she chooses to demonstrate that the turn-of-the-twentieth-century indeed marked a fundamental shift in everyday life would not lose anything from their strength. Here, in the figure of the cook, we

observe the extent to which the plebeian individual gains an irrevocable visibility in the social spectrum. In three decades, this time in Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1941), the history of British Empire and English literature would be the subject-matter of a village pageant. Woolf’s last novel has been conventionally read as reflecting the gloom and pessimism of the war. Yet this disillusionment by civilization’s regression into barbarism is supplemented by the interpolated carnivalesque episodes of the pageant through which ordinary individuals take initiative to intervene in narrating the nation in a subversive manner, as in the case of representing “the great wall of civilization” as a stage backdrop made out of “orts, scraps [and] fragments.”

But there is the flipside of the coin: the plebeian emergence in the social sphere takes place in midst of the colonization of the lifeworld (the shared space of the symbolic reproduction of society and material life) by high finance imperialist capitalism. In the train journey from Richmond to Waterloo, the brief dialogue between “Mrs. Brown,” and the young businessman “Mr. Smith” reveals the rapid disappearance of the former plebeian habitats. Mrs. Brown is about to sell her property to Mr. Smith who is thinking of starting a golf club there. In a somewhat disingenuous gesture, Mr. Smith expresses his surprise at the “changes they [the young entrepreneurs] are making in this

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part of the world” (197). In another train journey that takes place in E. M. Forster’s
*Howards End* (1910), Mrs. Munt is perplexed when she arrives at the station. “Into which
country will it lead,” she asks herself, “England or Suburbia?” 31 Of local life and
personal intercourse, there exists almost nothing. The destruction-construction processes
of capitalist economy drastically alter the social fabric, space and human psyche.

In 1916, Rabindranath Tagore would express a similar sentiment regarding the
interment of “the real Bengal” by colonial Calcutta. Tagore depicted the latter as a
machine-animal “spreading its iron claws and nails” to eradicate the former. 32 The
forces of time were defeating those of place. In his 1911 *Journey to the East*, Le Corbusier
would leave the shores of the Bosporus as “the advent of modernity” appeared on the
horizon to unleash “the hideous disaster, the catastrophe that will inevitably ruin
Stamboul.” 33 In *The Waves* (1931), Woolf would draw the portrait of London as
surrounded by gasometers and factory chimneys. 34

In the face of this new situation, former literary conventions too, are dissolved.
“Signs of this,” wrote Woolf, “are everywhere apparent. Grammar is violated; syntax
disintegrated” (210). Now the most crucial task of literature was to express and set Mrs.
Brown as the plebeian figure “in her high relations to the world” (209). In a striking

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temporal parallel, in China, Lu Xun, for whom human nature changed on or around May 4, 1919, would make a similar call for daring to gaze directly at everyday individual experience. Here we are confronted with one of the fundamental narrative problems of the twentieth-century literature: how to represent the worldliness of modern plebeian life, how, in order words, to measure the relations of the Browns to the world?

In the new literature of commoners, the protagonist was no longer the bourgeois subject but “a nomad wandering the desert, a mystic staring at the sky, a debauchee in the slums of San Francisco, a soldier heading a revolution, a pariah howling with skepticism and solitude” (253). Evoking de Certeau’s performatives of everyday life and Deleuze’s nomadology, Woolf formulated the new literature as deviation into the unexplored and unknown jungle of social intersubjectivity. As opposed to the earlier social forms in which each class or collective “herded together” with “its own traditions; its own manners; its own speech; its own dress; its own occupation—tethered and stationary…grazing within its own hedges,” the mobilizing impulses of the imperialist age creates a global situation in which individuals cannot be “fast anchored where [they] are” (165-6).

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35 Lu Xun, Selected Works, vol. 2, trans. Xianyi Yang and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980), 203. This is the moment to remind ourselves that Virginia Woolf’s date has numerous competitors. For D.H. Lawrence, for instance, the old world ends in 1915 (Kangaroo [London: Heinemann, 1955], 220). In contemporary scholarship too, Michael North’s Reading 1922, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time and Jean-Michel Rabaté’s 1913: The Cradle of Modernism establish their date in strong resonance with the very modernist situation they deal with.
The “monstrous, hybrid, unmanageable” (218) lives of unfettered plebeians demand narrative modes of their own. While E.M. Forster (and on a different register, Joseph Conrad) see “romance” as having the representational capacity for managing the unmanageable life, for Woolf neither the life-harmonizing force of Elizabethan drama nor the fine fabric of the lyric is “fitted to contain” the complex matrix of the twentieth-century any more than “a rose leaf to cover the rugged immensity of a rock” (219). In order for modernist écriture to fit to its task, it should not only “take the mould of that queer conglomeration of incongruous things” but also, more radically, cannibalize at once the poetic, the dramatic and the prosaic forms (224). In Woolf’s anticipation, “the democratic art of prose [of] the common and the complex” (226) is predicated on this aesthetic devouring. This cannibalistic subsumption of forms is an indispensable requirement in order for the authors of the modern “to write the common speech of their own kind,…to be down on the ground with the mass of human kind” (176).

The modernist vocation, moreover, has to be fulfilled amidst “the smashing and the crashing” of the lifeworld of the plebeians in the allegorical figure of Mrs. Brown by forces of modernization: “we hear all around us, in poems and novels and biographies, even in newspaper articles and essays, the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction” (210). In a paradoxical way, the visibility of the mass-subject becomes

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36 E. M. Forster, Howards End, 112-13. We find a similar sentiment in Claude McKay’s Banjo (New York: Harper, 1929), where life in the docks of Marseilles is described as “a barbarous international romance” (69).
contingent upon being stripped of her lifeworld. Modernization, by “sweeping away of an old world in violence and pain,” creates in the vacuum of transition an indeterminate yet fully potential ground for building a new meaning of being-in-the-world. Woolf asks the first readers of modernist fiction not to expect “a complete and satisfactory presentment” of the new situation, and to rather “tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure” (212) that is engrained in these narratives as the aftereffects—Nachträglichkeiten—of wandering through demolition sites. On or about December 1910, human nature changed, because its habitus was destroyed.

Therefore, what is commonly called the crisis of representation has very much to do with the difficulties of the modernist writer working through the debris of the former property of Mrs. Brown which is destroyed for the sake of another spatial configuration. But instead of referring to the conventional modernization paradigm here, it would be more accurate to contextualize Woolf’s parable in terms of an early version of “third-worldification”—that Fredric Jameson has defined as a characteristics of the postmodern First World—, an anticipation of the “shrinking” of the British Empire—that Jed Esty evokes as the preoccupation of late modernism—or gentrification and uneven development—that David Harvey and Neil Smith have theorized as constitutive of

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capital flows.\textsuperscript{38} We should in tandem note that uneven development, or discrepant modernization, appears as a global fact. In Woolf’s \textit{Jacob’s Room}, for instance, Greece strikes Jacob as being replete with panoramas of “the most incongruous assortment,” trays of kitsch jewelry standing next to the sculptures of the antiquity, flock of sheep grazing around the Acropolis, trams and donkeys fighting over right-of-way.\textsuperscript{39}

Forster’s \textit{Howards End} too, is replete with instances that confirm Woolf’s presentation above. The English countryside is presented as a set of anachronistic enclaves that the narrator glimpses through before their complete demise. The forces of development and modernization surround these enclaves completely:

Howards End, Oniton, the Purbeck Downs, the Oderberge, were all survivals, and the melting-pot was being prepared for them. Logically, they had no right to be alive. One’s hope was in the weakness of logic. Were they possibly the earth beating time?...[Helen] pointed over the meadow—over eight or nine meadows, but at the end of them was a red rust.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{38} For a recent revisit to the relationship between the combined and uneven development context of global imperialism and modernism, see Patrick Williams, “Simultaneous Uncontemporaneities: Theorising Modernism and Empire,” in \textit{Modernism and Empire}, eds. Nigel Rigby and Howard J. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

\textsuperscript{39} Virginia Woolf, \textit{Jacob’s Room}, 250-51; 234. These “mundane” details are symptoms of a deeper condition of uneven development at the aesthetic, political and technological levels. See Perry Anderson, “Modernity and Revolution,” in \textit{A Zone of Engagement} (London: Verso, 1992) and Raymond Williams, \textit{The Politics of Modernism} (London: Verso, 1996) as two inaugural studies on this problematic. For the specific case of uneven development in Japan, see Harry D. Harootunian, \textit{History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Harootunian shows how capitalist law of motion inevitably mandated the uneven development of certain social layers and spaces vis-à-vis others, as in the example of the urban-rural contradiction or in the discrepant coexistence of the older and newer modes and forces of production. The literary dimension of this condition in the Japanese context is the emergence of the \textit{shishōsetsu}, or the “I” novel as “a hybrid form developed in the twentieth-century Japan to convey the experience of living in a time of rapid transformation and still retaining elements of an older literary tradition” (151).

\textsuperscript{40} E.M. Forster, \textit{Howards End}, 358.
As this passage reveals, the earth, the soil, the countryside and nature make an appearance in modernist novel in the vanishing horizon. They are invoked as still tableaux before their incorporation into the field of economic and social modernization.

In the opening pages of D.H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*, as another example, the Brangwen family’s agricultural life on the Marsh Farm is remembered as a distant childhood memory, taking place in the cyclical time:

“They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels, the rain sucked up in the daytime, nakedness that comes under the wind in autumn, showing the birds’ nests no longer worth hiding. Their life and interrelations were such; feeling the pulse and body of the soil, that opened to their furrow for the grain, and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire, lying hard and unresponsive when the crops were to be shorn away.”

This idyllic myth of an inner rhythm of production and reproduction foregrounds the interpenetration of natural forces. It evokes the lost memory of “a credible common world” in which the national essence is embedded. In tandem, it also explains the anti-imperialist thrust in the modernist regionalism which represents imperialism as a process even destroying the fabric of England itself. The Imperial, “the super-yeoman,” in E.M. Forster’s words, takes over the earth’s inheritance in order to destroy it, turning

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41 D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, 2. Another example from Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*: “No words can exaggerate the importance of Dods Hill. It was the earth; the world against the sky; the horizon of how many glances can best be computed by those who have lived all their lives in the same village, only leaving it once to fight in the Crimea, like old George Garfit, leaning over his garden gate smoking his pipe. The progress of the sun was measured by it; the tint of the day lay against it to be judged” (20-1).

it into a heap of gray ashes.\textsuperscript{43} In their quest for supposedly pre-capitalist local enclaves—a practice reminiscent of the Latin American tradition of \textit{costumbrismo}, which draws ideal portraits of the indigenous cultures at the point of their annihilation—English modernists such as D.H. Lawrence imagined a gateway out the destructive encroachment of imperialist capitalism without yet aligning themselves with urban, and increasingly global, anti-systemic constituencies and their “prevented future.”\textsuperscript{44}

In retrospect, it would be fair to claim that many modernists drifted away from the present world toward the memory of the past or the incarnation of the earth. Lawrence’s \textit{The Rainbow} follows precisely this trajectory: it begins with the memory of the earth in the passage quoted above and ends again with this memory—but now as a futuristic utopia in the face of a corrupted present world. In the final passage of the novel, Ursula glances at the rainbow and envisions a new earthly architecture that comes into existence under the over-arching heaven and that sweeps away “the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories.”\textsuperscript{45} The earthly architecture embodies the truth of human existence. In several instances in her novels, Virginia Woolf digs even deeper, so to speak, to excavate the archaeology and pre-history of the English landscape: in

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\textsuperscript{43} E.M. Forster, \textit{Howards End}, 342.\\
\textsuperscript{44} Ernst Bloch, \textit{Heritage of Our Times}, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 110. Bloch explained this problematic as the contemporaneous contradiction. Progressive classes aspire to leave obsolete modes of production and social forms and yet the objective conditions of the present do not support them to move forward.\\
\textsuperscript{45} D.H. Lawrence, \textit{The Rainbow}, 496.
\end{flushleft}
Mrs. Dalloway (1925) the moment of imagining England’s ancient shape without any boundaries, “as the Romans saw it,” and in Between the Acts as “an ersatz Amazonian landscape” with “rhododendrons in the Strand; and mammoths in Piccadily.”46 Woolf’s outlines of the natural history of the land invoke the spatial presence of the past in the present, the coexistence of different historical epochs within the same spatiality of urban London, and most significantly, the memory of the sheer existence of the “pre-worlded” earth.

Even so, the modernists had to acknowledge, as E.M. Forster did, that the earth loses its status as a source of literary and aesthetic production, at least until the next swinging of the pendulum from the modernized metropolis back to the habitats imagined as not affected by capitalism—a quest interestingly manifested in our times in the postmodern and postcolonial literary imaginations of planetarity. “The Earth as an artistic cult has had its day,” writes the narrator of Howards End, “and the literature of the near future will probably ignore the country and seek inspiration from the town”:

Those who care for the earth with sincerity may wait long ere the pendulum swings back to her again. Certainly London fascinates. One visualizes it as a tract of quivering grey, intelligent without purpose, and excitable without love; as a spirit that has altered before it can be chronicled; as a heart that certainly beats, but with no pulsation of humanity....A friend explains himself: the earth is explicable—from her we came, and we must return to her. But who can explain Westminster Bridge Road or Liverpool Street in the morning—the city inhaling—or the same thoroughfares in the evening—the city exhaling her exhausted air?47

In the metropolis, a new nomadic civilization is born which transforms human nature and interpersonal relations completely, to the extent that it is no longer possible for the earth to offer any help. Instead of Lawrence’s vision of a new architecture of the earth, there is an emerging metropolitan architecture—“the architecture of hurry” and its language, composed of “clipped words, formless sentences, potted expressions of approval or disgust” and uttered by men and women lacking in quality. It is a social architecture, a “civilization of luggage,” that does not allow taking root in a fixed place, as the modern transformation of space along migration axes leads to increase in mobility on a world scale.

But it would be inaccurate the end the story of the plebeian here. For the figure of the plebeian does not vanish from the scene. To use young Lukács’s famous formulation in The Theory of the Novel, she is now in the state of “transcendental homelessness” (transzendentale Obdachlosigkeit), her soul dispossessed of its shelter. Around the same time as Woolf is preoccupied with Mrs. Brown’s fate and D.H. Lawrence’s characters such as Ursula are burdened with the “numbing responsibility of living an undiscovered life in the obscurity and pathlessness to take a direction,” in China, Lu Xun invokes Ibsen’s Nora to talk about the acute challenges of “wak[ing] up from a dream” to find no

48 Foster invests his hope in “Love” as the mood (Stimmung) to manage the stress of the new situation of imperial cosmopolitanism.
49 E.M. Forster, Howards End, 115.
50 Ibid., 158.
way out. “What happens,” asks Lu Xun, “after Nora leaves home?” In India, Rabindranath Tagore records the erosion of the *purdah* (veil, screen, or curtain) of the “*sanatan* [eternal] home-dwellers.” Finally, in Turkey, the poet Yahya Kemal, experiencing the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the modern Turkish Republic, mourns the vanishing of “our heavenly dome” (*kendi gök kubbemiz*).

Yet the condition of unshelteredness and vulnerability, of being pushed to the Hegelian prosaic world of modernity performs its dialectic and the plebeian grasps, in Woolf’s words, “the new sense of human being” (158). The cunning of the present releases “the sudden slip of masses held in position for ages” (157), which in turn generates an unprecedented seismic force in the architectonics of secular life. The young leave home without any anticipation of return and migrate to the cities—in Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*, from Cornwal to London and beyond, in Joyce’s *A Portrait*, from Clongowes to Dublin, in Yokomitsu Riichi’s *Shanghai* (1928), from a village in Japan to semi-colonial Shanghai, in Natsume Soseki’s *Kokoro* (1914) and in Jun’ichirō Tanizaki’s *Naomi* (1924), from rural provinces to Tokyo and in Claude McKay’s *Banjo* (1930), from Africa and the Caribbean to Marseilles. The voyage-out puts each of these characters at odds with the provincialism of their parents and the ways of their home community. No longer in a genuine position of returning home, they have to find the meaning of their

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worldly existence in the untotalizable and interchangeable serialities that stretched “beyond the threshold of [their] bounded life.”

3.3 The Plebeian Series

This section will focus on the representation of seriality as the logic of modern plebeianism. Seriality expresses the degree of massification of the modern social ensembles, rather than individual molecularity per se. Its logic is premised upon the interpenetration of individual praxis and the external object-world and social inert structures. Seriality as the basic form of modern social existence constructs individual identities outside themselves. As “the form of common-being-outside-oneself-in-the-other,” seriality externalizes subjectivity by throwing it into an objectively unknown relation with the external world. It will be virtually impossible to find a single classical theory of modernity that does not engage with this new social phenomenon one way or another. Nevertheless, in these accounts, seriality is conceptualized variously in terms of atomization, anomie, alienation and isolation. In the adaptation of these sociological

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35 The famous scene of the break-down of the Queen’s car in *Mrs. Dalloway*, invokes a similar moment in that the car unites the Londoners who are watching the incident. The car is gone, but it leaves “a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors’ shop on both sides of Bond Street. For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way. Choosing a pair of gloves—should they be to the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey?—ladies stopped, when the sentence was finished something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration...for in all the hat shops and tailors’ shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire” (15).

accounts by literary criticism, the condition of seriality has typically been described as the loss of subjectivity and representational reality.

As an abstract and formal ensemble, the series refers to the objectification of the social world either in the direction of capitalist reification or class consciousness. Both reification (bad) and consciousness (good) highlight the “imputed” (zugerechnet) and “molested” character of subjective existence and coordinate the modern plebeian series only through “formal partial laws” and “objective ignorance” of the total. While reification shapes the series through the “phantom objectivity” of the commodity structure, class consciousness implies (at first glance, paradoxically) “a class-conditioned unconsciousness of one’s own socio-historical and economic condition.”57 In either case, individuals are objectively ignorant of the limits of the social ensemble. Totalization is a cognitive form of dealing with this objective ignorance. In fiction, this manifests itself in the mutual determination of “the contingent world and the problematic individual”:

On the one hand, the scope of the world is limited by the scope of the hero’s possible experiences and its mass is organized by the orientation of his development towards finding the meaning of life in self-recognition; on the other hand, the discreetly heterogeneous mass of isolated persons, nonsensuous structures and meaningless events receives a unified articulation by the relating of each separate element to the central character and the problem symbolized by the story of his life.58

58 Georg Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, 78; 81. Later on Lukács will repudiate his early assessments in his famous 1967 Preface to History and Class Consciousness. Nevertheless, one can still gauge the extent to which the early stance of Lukács has a modernist/avant-garde spirit that he subsequently attacked. On his involvement in the international magazine Communist in the midst “the glaring contradictions” of the age of high modernism, Lukács writes the following: “Our magazine strove to propagate a messianic sectarianism by working out the most radical methods on every issue, and by proclaiming a total break with every institution and mode of life stemming from the bourgeois world. This would help to foster an undistorted
In order for this cognitive operation to function at the narrative level, individuals have to de-personalize and reproduce themselves in this unknown unity. Therefore, instead of being preoccupied with affects of alienation and anomie and their modern inflection as inwardness, we need to reinterpret the representation of these affects in modernist fiction against the grain.

In *A Portrait of the Artist*, James Joyce expresses the manifestation of seriality in aesthetic terms as the dialectical synthesis of the lyrical and the epical in the dramatic form. While the lyrical form refers to the immediate relation of the self to self and the epical form to the mediated relation of the self to the self and others, the dramatic form presents the self in the immediate relation to others: “The personality at first a cry or cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak.”

A few years later, the Japanese poet-critic Junzaburo Nishiwaki would express the Joycean insight as “the extinction of the world class consciousness in the vanguard, in the Communists parties and in the Communist youth organizations.” But in the Preface, we observe that Lukács’s radical proposal of non-participation in bourgeois parliaments would enter into conflict with Lenin’s party tactics. “This was beginning of a change in my views.” One can only speculate on what course the twentieth century might have taken if revolutionary internationalist messianism did not have to give way to tactical exigencies, to urgent decisions on “the next link in the chain.” This is also a significant question for our study here, for this political decision, though not adequately acknowledged in the debates on world literature, remains to be the most crucial factor in the shape literature took in the twentieth century.

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of moi” and the merger of the self with the world.

Depersonalization, another probable name for what I prefer to call plebeianization, is not an outcome of introverted closure, it is the necessary step of subjective shrinking, of shedding one’s attachments, in order to be in interaction with others in exterior time and space. In Virginia Woolf’s *To the Light House* (1927), Mrs. Ramsay expresses this viewpoint as the spectral presence of the external world in the interior:

> To everybody there was always this sense of unlimited resources, she supposed; one after another, she, Lily, Augustus Carmichael, must feel our apparitions....Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by. Her horizon seemed to her limitless. There were all the places she had not seen; the Indian plains; she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome....Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity.

One might look critically at Mrs. Ramsay’s reflections for their strong flavor of euphoria and ecstasy of transcendence. Nevertheless, this typically modernist excess should not lead us to overlooking the echoes in modernist novels such as *To the Light House* of “a submerged desire for collectivity, the hope that bracketing the individual would somehow, *via negativa*, allow a new collectivity to emerge.” At least at the level of imagination, this desire for stepping outside one’s self recognizes the spatial and temporal multiplicity of the world and its inhabitants. Equally important, it invokes the

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consciousness of the serial mode of existence that links individuals along an apparitional linearity.

To be sure, it will be wrong to claim that modernist representations of depersonalization are affirmative of plebeian seriality as a form of civic life. The sudden pressure of urban stimuli is expressed most dramatically in Natsume’s *Kokoro* in the anxieties of college students such as Sensei and K: “We were like wild beasts captured in the mountains, that hug each other and stare angrily from their cage at the world outside. We feared Tokyo and the people in it.” In *Kokoro*, K’s tragic strategy of coping with this pressure is to increase his psychological stamina through an ascetic attitude toward external stimuli. He tests his endurance by exposing himself to the constant repetition of stimuli, with the expectation that it will increase his resistance toward them. But achieving total insensitivity to the pressures of the external stimuli brings about his end in the act of suicide. “That it might eventually destroy him,” concludes the narrator, “never entered his head.”

In the case of D.H. Lawrence too, there is a will to take the logic of seriality to its radical extreme, where subjects are devoid of any human content. In *The Rainbow*, both Ursula and Skrebensky gaze at the public sphere through the eyes of a wild animal (or,

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64 Ibid., 177. In *Modern Epic* (London Verso, 1996), Franco Moretti invokes another comparative case in *Ulysses*. Here escaping from the great burden of the stimuli of the moments of “world-openness” becomes possible by accommodating them as everyday banal commonplaces. Whether this strategies “close everything [and] shrink the world” is another question (162-63).
at least imagining the position as one). The animal gaze, perhaps naturally, does not
ascribe any signification to signs of social status that middle-class individuals think of as
differentiating elements:

The people as they moved or sat were only dummies exposed. She [Ursula] could see, beneath their
pale, wooden pretence of composure and civic purposefulness, the dark stream that contained
them all. They were like little paper ships in their motion....And all their talk and all their behavior
was sham, they were dressed-up creatures. She was reminded of the Invisible Man, who was a
piece of darkness made visible only by his clothes. During the next weeks, all the time she went
about in the same dark richness, her eyes dilated and shining like the eyes of a wild animal, a
curious half-smile which seemed to be gibing at the civic pretence of all the human life about her.65

Ursula’s gaze, even though radical in its shedding individuals off their social markers
and appearance, exposes the serial anonymity embedded in the civic performances of
individuals. In another instance, Skrebensky perceives the buildings, vehicles and
people in the street as horrifying, cold, rigid and “specter-like,” thereby depicting the
public sphere as an inauthentic and kaleidoscopic unreality.66 While not joining
Lawrence’s search for some primordial authenticity of being and his resentment of
reduplication through others, we nonetheless find the most compelling representations
of the modern plebeian series, which is experienced in the everyday social routine and
within the global matrix of imperialism, in his and other modernists’ work, no matter
how threatening this presence might seemed to their authors.

65 D. H. Lawrence, The Rainbow, 448.
66 Ibid., 457. In Conrad’s case, the streets of the colonial city are described in similar terms as “full of jumbled
114.
The quest for a vitalistic authenticity outside seriality is not, moreover, the only modernist response. Woolf’s representational engagement with seriality stands almost diametrically opposite to that of D.H. Lawrence. In *The Waves*, Bernard’s reflections on the train journey offer a different picture than Ursula’s. The train, as a means of public transportation, is an empowering object in Bernard’s case. As one of its passengers, he is part of the train, represented as a speedy missile “hurled at the city.” Under the “splendid unanimity” conferred by the train journey, Bernard contemplates, “we are enlarged and solemnized and brushed into uniformity as with the grey wing of some enormous goose.” Bernard’s anxiety, different from Ursula’s, is the break-up of the series formed through the train journey. He does not want “the connection which has bound [the unanimous passengers] together sitting opposite each other all night long to be broken.” For at the moment of leaving the train, the community of passengers is dissolved, which not only creates rush, confusion and hurry but also awakens the passengers to “the burden of individual life.” For Bernard, leaving the “omnipresent, general life” of the series is like weaning a child from the breast.\(^67\)

We have so far focused on the immediate and localized manifestations of seriality within the urban matrix and on the extent to which modernist writing, as one of

\(^67\) Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, 70-1. In *Shanghai*, there is a similar scene in which the simultaneous movement of “the wheels of the vehicles and the wave of humanity” at the change of the traffic light generates a social energy through which subjects and objects blur into “a single, pure pale blue current.” Yokomitsu Riichi, *Shanghai*, trans. Dennis C. Washburn (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2001), 44.
the major modes of the twentieth-century world literature, is preoccupied with the problematic of representing this social form through which the mass-subject and the external world is interrelated. But in addition to its direct or bound manifestations, the modern logic of seriality has another significant layer: “indirect” (Jean-Paul Sartre) or “unbound” (Benedict Anderson) series. Indirect series are indeterminate, dispersed, mediated and constituted by an absent or distant causality. In Sartre, the most remarkable example of an indirect series is the Great Fear of 1789, when peasant revolts, without being aware of one another, erupt in five different regions of French countryside in five different waves within a structure of alterity in relation to Paris as “the mediating third.” Rather than “arising from synthetic unification of the citizens into a nation, imposing its representations on everyone as an integral part of the whole”, the Great Fear of 1789, which follows the storming of Bastille, is instigated by distant rumors of a conspiracy by aristocrats who allegedly hired bandits to attack the countryside. This suddenly creates a feeling of unconscious solidarity among the peasantry who felt that what could happen to other peasants could happen here to them. Rather than being an outcome of pre-mediated collectivity, the revolts depended instead on the sense of

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68 Of course, Sartre’s dialectics of the social ensembles and Anderson’s theory of identity and belonging have different contexts; yet both are essentially preoccupied with the question of how collectivities come into existence.
alterity toward the aristocrats and the brigands and the felt interchangeability with other peasants.\

In the twentieth-century, indirect seriality becomes the norm of everyday life; and it is particularly in modernist fiction that we find its initial representations. The relationship of the black laborers at the port of Marseilles to the 1929 Great Depression in Claude McKay’s *Banjo* is a case in point. Unaware of what exactly happened at the higher level of politics and economy in the context of the worldwide Great Depression, each worker suddenly finds it difficult to pay for his meals.\

In Yokomitsu’s *Shanghai*, Kōya, who works as a broker for a lumber company based in Singapore, has to postpone his marriage plans as a result of a chain of events resulting from Britain’s repayment of war debts to the United States, which eventually cause the Singapore market to crash.\

In Tagore’s *The Home and the World*, Bimala’s narrative of the eruption and reception of the *Swadeshi* movement is a powerful example of the increasing presence of the indirect series as the social form of modern plebeian life. The *Swadeshi* takes shape with “no distinct vision” on the part of the participants. It comes suddenly with “no gradual slope

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69 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, vol. 1, 165ff. The other two examples that Sartre elaborates on are the Chinese deforestation, which results in loss of the deforested land to floods, and the Spanish Empire’s import of gold and silver from its New World colonies, which leads to the unintended consequence—or, “counter-finality”—of waves of inflation across Europe. For an extensive discussion of Sartre’s theory of the ensembles in relation to his other work, see Thomas R. Flynn, “Sartre and the Poetics of History,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. Christina Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 213-260.

70 Claude McKay, *Banjo*, 222.

71 Yokomitsu Riichi, *Shanghai*, 36.
connecting the past with the present.” It is imagined in the image of a flood that breaks down the walls of the home and sweeps its inhabitants before it regardless of their fears and anxieties as to what would happen. The individuals respond to “a voice from the far horizon,” whose meaning is not comprehended clearly. The moment re-creates the colonized Bengal out of a heap of lifeless and barren ashes. With the Swadeshi, the impossible becomes possible: the colonized Bengalis who are described in the novel as a “collection of looseness” acquire spontaneous coherence as a collective ensemble of self-determination (at least for a particular duration). Even though in Bimala’s imagination, the Swadeshi, as an event that mobilizes the colonized, appears as a providential gift from “some drunken god,” in its historical manifestation the Swadeshi is the end-product of indirect seriality mediated through the colonial presence of Britain in Bengal. In fact, in the imperialist matrix of the twentieth century, indirect series become much more pertinent than direct, yet limited, series: this is the case for metropolitan and colonial situations alike.

The long-distance character of indirect series acquires great relevance, for it generates the quotidian practices of worlding, images and models through which individuals imagine, position and coordinate their being in the world. Instead of fixed territorial attachments, unbound seriality privileges individual and collective

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73 Ibid., 90.
participation in “the world-in-motion” and sets a new grammar of representation and semantic shifts that operate through plasticity, placibility, replacibility, and comparativity.  

In my view, modernist writing must be rooted in this transformation. For the “vast rhizomal network” of the unbound series as “globe-stretching and nation-linking mechanisms” necessitated the formal need for modernist techniques such as the Eisenteinian montage and the displacement of the synchronic structure of the realist novels which played a central role in the origins of nationalism. Capitalist modernity in the age of imperialism generates not only multiple shifts in axis of otherness but also spatial disjunction and relativity that give rise to new problems of representation and also unleashes various forms of modernist experimentations. For serial existence assumes unbounded extensions outside the immediate daily life and routines. This is the case not only for the metropolitan centers of imperialism but also in colonial or

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24 In The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World (London Verso, 1998), Benedict Anderson brings up a number of compelling examples from colonial Asia. The Javanese folk-expression balik bocono (“the world-turned-upside-down”), which has cosmic connotation, is now used for talking about the republican revolutions that took place around World War I in different parts of the world. In Thailand, sakdina, a term which refers to the traditional monarch-centered status-system in Siam turns into the equivalent term of “feudal.” Finally, we have the fascinating outcome of working the iconographics of the traditional shadow-play and the vernacularized Merchant of Venice together. Here the figure of Shylock stands at the intersection of universal series such as money lenders, doting fathers, and obsessive misers, on the one hand, and “grounded in the experience of colonial life,” on the other (30-35).

25 Benedict Anderson, Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination (London Verso, 2005), 4-5. In Woolf’s Jacob’s Room, the other primary synchronizer of the national space in empty homogenous time, i.e. the newspaper, turns into a violent tool “pressed nightly over the brain and heart of the world,” spreading “vociferation from all parts of England simultaneously” (164).

peripheral cities as well. Harry Harootunian gives us a concise account of this global panorama as follows:

Everydayness, as it was formed in the great metropolitan centers like Tokyo/Yokohama, Shanghai, Calcutta, and Rio de Janerio, included relations that stretched far beyond the borders and experience of a singular locale, reaching a new kind of unboundedness, in which space was increasingly torn away from place by fostering relations between ‘absent’ others….The experience of everydayness was revealed as ‘phantasmagoric’, inasmuch as the locale—place—was penetrated and shaped by practices and knowledge distant and distinct from those received from an immediate history and culture.77

Global connectivity and modes of “sensitization,” that is, being impacted by what is happening elsewhere in the world, shapes everyday serial existence and practices.78 Yet it would be misleading to read the global unbound series in exclusively positive terms as a genuinely universal form around which “alternative modernities” from different parts of the world are constellated. For modernist representations of the unbound series are intricately correlated with the commodity chains and financial circulations of imperialist capitalism. They highlight the unequal structures of capitalism and the extent to which geopolitics begins to define the meaning of living in the modern world.

In Claude McKay’s *Banjo*, a novel that focuses on the life of the international black proletarians in the port of Marseilles in the 1930s, the national origins of the laborers almost identically replicate the commercial goods and raw materials arriving at the docks. The commodity flows (rice from India, rubber from the Congo, tea from

China, brown sugar from Cuba, bananas from Guinea, and so on) share the same trajectory of immigrant-workers to the port. Equally important, these commodities arriving at their European point of destination metonymically represent the globally dispersed proletarian chain: the many bodies that carry the burden of these goods successively from one point to another “under the whip [and] the terror” until they reach their consumers.79

Another example comes from Yokomitsu’s Shanghai. The novel offers vivid close-ups of the carnivalesque energies of “the teeming crowds of all nationalities” in the International Settlement in semicolonial Shanghai. But the bigger picture is not one of a cosmopolitan free market economy spread across the globe. For the stark presence of the “warships from many nations [that] expressed the aims of their homelands by spreading out batteries of guns poised and linked together like a fortress” hangs over Shanghai.80 The young protagonist Sanki’s impressions of the panorama are very much reminiscent of a Conradian narrative:

79 Claude McKay, Banjo, 67.
80 Yokomitsu Riichi, Shanghai, 79. We should note here the striking resemblance between Sanki’s impressions and Tagore’s portrayal of Rangoon, Burma on his way to Japan1916. From a distance, Tagore sees the big refineries of kerosene oil along the banks of Rangoon, surrounded with crowds of ships with flags of different nations and rows of piers that “cling to Burma’s body like so many hideous iron leeches.” “The city,” writes Tagore, “has not sprung from the soil like a tree, but has come floating on the current of time like a foam. It did not seem to matter where in the world it happened to be.” Rangoon has only cartographic existence with no referent on the ground. It is not only the ancient cities to which T.S. Eliot alludes to in The Waste Land, colonial cities too, invoke a sense of unreality. RabindranathTagore, Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology, 104.
People who had their livelihoods taken from them in their native countries had gathered here and were creating an independent state unique in the world. Another way to look at it was that each respective race of people made their living here as suckers on the tentacles of a giant octopus, pulling in a huge amount of wealth for their home countries. Thus with the exception of the Russians, even people who were idle, unemployed, or simply aimless could be thought of as an expression of patriotism simply by their presence in Shanghai.\textsuperscript{81}

The everyday life in the semi-colony, moreover, cannot be divested from the moment-by-moment expansion and contraction of financial transactions that the narrator regards as “the wellspring of activity between West and East.”\textsuperscript{82} What connects East and West in the age of imperialism are the trading margins of financial brokers. The world cotton market acts as the abstract and distant mediator of the multivalent activities in the International Settlement zone:

Copper coins flowed out from the seaport to the provinces. Silver coins in the seaport began to disappear. Brokers’ carriages raced between Japanese and British banks. The gold market soared in response to copper and silver. Sanki’s pen grew weary with calculating the conversion of British pounds....Next to him sat a Portuguese typist who was preparing a report on the Manchester market. On the bulletin board was a note that the American cotton market was up because of storms. The raw cotton market in Liverpool was being propped up by the Bombay futures market. The smaller speculators’ markets of Kutchakhandi and Tejimandi were in turn supporting Bombay. The main responsibility of Sanki’s division is to track the fluctuations in these two smaller Indian markets to determine whether they should purchase raw cotton.... Thus small markets such as Kutchakhandi and Tejimandi, which were usually overlooked, were a hidden whirlwind that could wreak havoc sometimes on the worldwide cotton market.\textsuperscript{83}

The sensory experience of the complex matrix of national subjectivities, global capital, and imperialist rivalries is charted through the force and motions of the cotton as commodity. Erratic commodity flows and the rapid currency exchange between banks

\textsuperscript{81} Yokomitsu Riichi, \textit{Shanghai}, 44.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{83} Yokomitsu Riichi, \textit{Shanghai}, 77. In \textit{The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), Shu-mei Shi makes the case that “the threat of global capitalism is used to justify Japanese economic exploitation as a form of protection” (28-9).
in the business district of Shanghai generate a global force-field that not only coordinates different localities within the world-economy but also functions as the objective totality in which individuals experience unbound seriality at the cognitive level.

Equally important, Sanki is constantly preoccupied with calculating all the possible permutations and tensions of the geopolitical field of “the huge vortex of Asia” through “a map folded up inside his head.”84 One political question follows another: the likelihood of Japan’s becoming the ruler of Asia, the impact of the Russian revolution in Asia and the rise of communist movements as major contenders in anti-imperialism, the possibility of Indian independence as the first step to overturn the British hegemony in Asia, the fall of laissez-faire and the rise of Marxism, the prospect of strategic alliance between the Chinese workers in cotton mills and the Japanese military forces, the imminence of “the age of the proletariat” in China, the destiny of races in the world-system, and so on. The ordeal of folding up the huge Asian vortex into his head, like W.B. Yeats’s troubles in envisioning the dimensions of the widening gyre of a collapsed world order, is further exacerbated by the fragile architectonics of the geopolitical and the vulnerability of pan-Asianism which aimed to unite the Asian nations to fight back Western imperialism. In the context of semicolonial Shanghai, the real threat is the elimination of the International Settlement as “the dumping ground for the bourgeoisie

84 Yokomitsu, Shanghai, 108.
of the Great Powers through a successful general strike by the Chinese proletariat.\textsuperscript{85} The unbound serialities of modernism are bound to be refracted by the field of international relations, anti-systemic movements and geopolitical identities.

Studying the modernist novel as a geoliterary form of comparative mapping that enables subjective positionings and situational alterities under the historically determined conditions of an unevenly developed and imperialist modernity thus highlights more expansive maps of the modern and its alternate plebeian configurations. By virtue of being the most comprehensive archive of global plebeianization and its complex cultural and aesthetic history, modernism gains its enduring significance as the first mode of world writing in the twentieth century.

4 Kaleidoscopic Nations: Postcolonial Disproportionality in the Age of Three Worlds

I viewed the vast world in the geography lessons as though it were a chess board.

—Tayeb Salih, Season of Migration to North

Every representation of an unstable world cannot automatically be subsumed under the heading “chaos.”

—Achille Mbembe, On the Postcolony

Postcolonial/third-world writing occupies a central place in the formation of world literature in the second half of the twentieth century.¹ Not only did it force the expansion of the initial scope of world literature but also announced a new mode of aesthetic production that was categorically different from the earlier forms of oral and written traditions in formerly colonized countries.² As a generic category, postcolonial writing deliberately connects the local quotidian on earth to modernity’s global processes, situating literary representations of the national space in the kaleidoscopic (montage-like) interaction of the global and the everyday local. Even so, literary postcoloniality has all too frequently been relegated to a secondary or derivative status.

¹ For an early articulation of this centrality in contemporary reformulations of the category of world literature, see Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Social Text 15: Autumn (1986), 68: “Today the reinvention of cultural studies in the United States demands the reinvention, in a new situation, of what Goethe long ago theorized as ‘world literature.’ In our more immediate context, then, any conception of world literature demands some specific engagement with the question of the third-world literature.”

vis-à-vis the politics of “the age of three worlds.” Yet, in a paradoxical way, third-world écriture was also imagined to single-handedly transcend or subsume the uneven development and socioeconomic contradictions of national modernization in the aesthetic/cultural realm. This strand of postcolonialism saw fictive imagination as already advanced (“progressive”) and ahead of a backward mode of production, or an underdeveloped base. Literature, as “an aural realm that could both account for (precede) and overcome (succeed)…unbearable cycle of political and social repetitions,” was expected to surmount socio-historical polarities for once and all. The assignment of literature was to prepare the groundwork for the nation to emerge as “a reality,” as the “gestative political structure” of belonging and commitment in the postcolonial world.

In the historical context of the Cold War era, the “free” First World hailed third-world fictions as expressions of “dissent.” In accordance with the cultural gold standard that was adopted in the post-War hegemonic/metropolitan discourse, a selective body of third-world texts was given the currency of “the universal” as they proved to “transcend

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3 For further elaboration on “the age of three worlds,” see Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London Verso, 2004). In his *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell), Robert C. Young proposes “Tricontinental” as an alternative term to refer to the post-World War II conjuncture.


the nation and region of origin.\textsuperscript{6} While the First World generated its own ideology of world literature under the presumption of universality, the Soviet Union entered the post-War geocultural battleground by assigning the cultural program of the party as the great arbitrator of aesthetic production. But the great utopia of creating a dynamic dialectic between the political vanguard and the cultural avant-garde worked only in the intense yet brief climactic moments of the revolution as was the case in Cuba between 1959 and 1970.\textsuperscript{7} We should note, in tandem, that the rise of Paris as the center of the world literary space in the classical twentieth century (Pascale Casanova’s main leitmotif in \textit{The World Republic of Letters}) is closely correlated with the disillusionment of the avant-garde in Latin America, Eastern Europe and Africa by the pressures coming from the party line and the subsequent decision to go on exile. The intensity of “the conflict between the two power blocs no longer spares anyone,” rendering the commitment-autonomy axis all the more unstable.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{6} Jean Franco, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 35. For alternative accounts, see Diana Sorensen, \textit{A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties} (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), and Brett Levinson, \textit{The Ends of Literature: The Latin American “Boom” In the Neoliberal Marketplace} (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001).

\textsuperscript{7} The Serbian novelist Danilo Kis tells us powerfully the story of these “the Bolshevik Hamlet”s. Their life and eventual demise either in exile or at home, as in the case of Boris Davidovich, is only a source of intrigue and sensation for the Western press. Danilo Kis, \textit{A Tomb for Boris Davidovich}, trans. Duška Mikić-Mitchell (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001), 88; 108.

At the height of the Cold War era, the harshest critique of third-world “dissenters” (especially of the Latin American “Boom”) comes from the Cuban critic Roberto Fernández Retamar. From Retamar’s perspective, they were deserters of the revolution by taking refuge in the autonomous zone of literature. Even the Borgesian vision of the “library” is dismissed as a creation of the colonial and now-defunct class. The Boom merely continued the colonial aspiration to imported culture and literature and manifested itself in a provincial pedantic feat of language. For Retamar this amounted to a withdrawal of literature from any combatant role for the sake of a “pathetic bovarism” and commitment to rejection of all colonialisms. Drawing attention to the financial involvement of the CIA in funding avant-garde journals and platforms, Retamar dismissed the Boom as a right-wing project (a “Literary Bay of Pigs”) under the mantle of left-wing terminology. Retamar’s focus on the career trajectories of the writers of the period, on their fluctuations in political commitment, their utopian desires and betrayals is very tempting. Yet we should also recognize its limit to avoid the risk of equating the political stance of the authors with the subject-positions represented in their novels.

The high expectations eventually produced in postcolonial criticism a counter-discourse of disillusionment with third-world aesthetics for having failed in the task of

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creating the nation at the imaginative level. Rather than a reality, the nation in postcolonial writing remained its absent object of desire, its missing content in the horizon of longing. What hope from a belated literary mode in representing equally belated nations? In this argument, the double-yoke of belatedness paralyzed both narration and nation (one in the aesthetic and the other in the political realm) under the helpless pressure of “catching-up.” Yet both perspectives briefly outlined above tend to overlook the worldliness of the literary; for literature too, is always already entangled with the very social reality that it figuratively attempts to represent. Resisting the temptation to either readily ascribe postcolonial writing the status of heroic resistance or dismiss it as a tristesse of underdevelopment and belatedness, this chapter will revisit the classical age of Third World literature in its representations of entanglement. If one were to use “a measure of success” to gauge postcolonial world writing, therefore, this must be the level of complexity in representing entanglement. It is this peculiar feature of postcolonial aesthetics that has given it a unique hermeneutical position in representing the new world-systemic transformations and the lives of so many diverse populations who felt the acute pressures of these seismic changes in every social sphere. This also explains why postcolonial writing emerged as the flag-bearer of world literature in the second half of the twentieth century.
4.1 The Entanglement-Delinking Dialectic

The condition of entanglement, as much as the term invokes a sense of suffocation, resonates more accurately with the postcolonial chronotopia and heterotopia than the reductive logic of mapping the postcolony onto a linear plane. “As an age,” writes Achille Mbembe, “the postcolony encloses multiple durées made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an entanglement.” ¹⁰ These modalities take shape in indeterminate directions.¹¹ In its literary variant, entanglement defines the spatio-temporal matrix in which postcolonial representations of the world are generated through creative acts of patching together ruptured histories, geographies and subjectivities in the forcefield of retourn (return) to questions of language, orality, native structures of feeling, myth, and so on and detourn (outward movement) to external sources of past dispossession, present peripheralization and future closure. Postcolonial writing has to reserve its energies to these points of entanglement (point d'intrication).¹²

The Malian writer Yambo Ouologuem offers a vivid parable of the concept of entanglement in *Bound to Violence* (1968):

The Chinese have a game: the connecting link [*trait d’union*], they call it. They capture two birds and tie them together. Not too close. The cord is thin, strong and fairly long. When the birds are released, they take flight, they think they are free and rejoice in the wideness of the sky, but suddenly: crack! The cord is stretched taut. They flutter and whirl in all directions….Sometimes the cord get tangled in a branch or twines around the bird, and they struggle as though caught in a trap.\(^\text{13}\)

This parable, despite its undertones of necropolitics, captures a certain depth in regard to the sense of entrapment felt in a world divided into three politico-cultural units and under the multilayered tensions of the Cold War era. In the polarized cartography of the Cold War era, the non-aligned Third World would not have the luxury of avoiding the challenges of the global strategies of containment.\(^\text{14}\)

In Milan Kundera’s *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979)—an East European “postcolonial” text—we find an impressive portrayal of the geopolitical conflicts of the Cold War period as coming one after another in a dazzling speed:

The bloody massacre in Bangladesh quickly covered over the memory of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the assassination of Allende drowned out the groans of Bangladesh, the war in the Sinai Desert made people forget Allende, the Cambodian massacre made people forget Sinai; and so on and so forth until ultimately everyone lets everything be forgotten.”\(^\text{15}\)

\(^\text{14}\) For a good portrayal of the Cold War standstill in the American postmodern culture, see Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narrative, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). Nadel argues that postmodern American novels emerge out of dissatisfaction with the Cold War culture of containment.
The Cold War conjuncture generates a series of radical discontinuities and ruptures to the extent that history reveals itself as a sequence of unprecedented experiments. In the world-‘kitsch’ of the Cold War, small-power nations inevitably engage in “a game of hypotheses.” History’s time arrow does not take much into the consideration the fateful inexperience of nations. It does not respond to their child-like call for another chance, which Kundera epitomizes in the expression, “Einmal ist keinmal”; that is, “what happens but once might as well not have happened at all.” In the Prague of 1968, history’s delicate and jocular pressuring of its determinations (expressed in Beethoven’s motif of “Es muss sein!”) turns into “der schwer gefasste Entschluss” (“the difficult or weighty resolution”). The ruptured history of the Czech nation may at first glance grant a certain lightness of being. But in the twentieth century this very lightness becomes “unbearable”: the unbearable feeling of small nations in the geopolitical standstill of the Cold War “as dust swirling into the air” and an accompanying desire for escaping from “the world operating table.”16

The new global conjuncture poses a set of specific challenges that literature is bound to take into account: how to make sense of a world marked “by the quickly shifting parameters of the geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocultural, on the one hand,

and by, on the other, internal dynamics of change”?

The geopolitical and geocultural idioms of the Cold War era create a translational or metonymic paradigm of transcoding national situations in relation to the global system. For the Cold War (along with the global reproduction of Fordism in a highly uneven and fragmented fashion) increasingly impacts the direction of decolonization and national development trajectories worldwide.

In retrospect, one is struck by the extent to which the world-systemic pressures of the Cold War constitute the geopolitical unconscious of the third-world fiction. In the Cuban novelist Jesús Díaz’s *The Initials of the Earth* (belatedly published in 1987), the pre-revolutionary world of Everyman protagonist, Carlos Pérez Cifredo, is inundated by images, news, iconographies coming from elsewhere in such a way that he has to reflect on national issues such as the land reform, for instance, through externalized polarities that are codified in “a whirl of words,” exploding in his mind one after another: “Marti, Marx, Christ, Lenin, God, Devil, Washington, Moscow, Vatican, Havana, Believer, Atheist, Patriot, Traitor.”

In another novel on the Cuban revolution, in Edmundo Desnoe’s *Inconsolable Memories* (“Memories of Underdevelopment,” *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*, 1962), we find a parallel instance of the extent to which this historical conjuncture introduces new vocabulary to the national public sphere, which puts the

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narrator in a perplexed situation: “words...as if they were Mexican or Venezuelan expressions, or Argentinisms, my own language, but in a foreign country.” Finally, Isabel Allende’s *The House of the Spirits* (1982), in the section that chronicles the turbulence surrounding “the Chilean Path to Socialism” (*La vía chilena al socialismo*), highlights a very dramatic moment in which anti-communist forces stain the revolutionary murals with a single word printed in enormous letters: “Djakarta.” The inscription of “that Asiatic word” on the walls conveys a strange and unfamiliar code to the nation, who “had never heard about the piles of corpses in the streets of that distant city.” After the military overthrow of the Allende government in 1973, this time the word “Chile” would surface in Turkey, another distant location in the world, to signal the imminence of a *coup d’état* to crush the Turkish left. The political positions in the local public sphere are articulated through the idioms of the Cold War—idioms that constitute a form of global translational and metonymic framework for the multiple local situations under the rubric of “Third World.”

From Naguib Mahfouz’s *Miramar* (1968), a novel that depicts the aftermath of Nasser’s 1952 Revolution in Egypt, we can also observe the extent to which the policy of non-alignment is entangled in the matrix of the global geopolitical alignments. At one

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21 Nasser himself would invoke the need for a postcolonial cognitive mapping attuned to geopolitical positionality: “It has become imperative that every country should look around itself to find out its position
point in the novel, Tolba Marzuq, as one of the voices of the old land-owning class, praises Egypt’s stance, referring to a red headline about the relative poverty of Eastern Germany as a Russian satellite. From Tolba Marzuq, we get a historical glimpse of why the establishment classes in the third world were attracted to the non-alignment policy, since it simultaneously kept a socialist revolution at bay and did not close the possibility of flirting with the United States: “Russia has nothing to offer her satellites. But the United States...”  
22 The elliptic ending of the sentence is symbolically charged with the expectation of putting an end to non-alignment and the stealthy implication of the fear of “delinking” (as the anti-systemic mode of thwarting entanglement) at the height of popular investment in nationalization. The fear of a successive series of socialist revolutions following independence is already present during the decolonization years. Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s A Grain of Wheat locates explicitly one of the anxieties of Britain regarding decolonization as a sign of yielding to “International Communism”: “Didn’t you see what was happening in Uganda and Tanganyika? The Chinese and the Russians had rushed to establish embassies....In ten years these countries will be Russian satellites, or worse still, part of the Chinese Empire.”  
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and its environment and decide what it can do, what its vital sphere is and where the scene of its activity and what its positive role could be in this troubled world....We cannot look stupidly at a map of the world not realizing our place therein and the role determined to us by that place.” Gamal Abdel Nasser, The Philosophy of Revolution (New York: Smith, Keynes & Marshall, 1959), 59.

Against the background of this calculative thinking, the postcolonial nation-state as the political form of emancipation is gradually and systemically reduced to a political unit that would work in harmony with the cold war logic of the ascending U.S. hegemony, mediate the incorporation of the decolonized world into the new international division of labor, and channel disenfranchised citizens into a state-guided development project. The prospects of national autonomy and unity would be displaced by the position of wavering between development and dependency.²⁴ Franco Moretti’s conclusion to his analysis of Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967) sums up this world-systemic configuration as follows: “Eventually, Macondo comes back into contact with the outside world. With the world? Not any more. With only part of it: the United States. A thousand and one possibilities then really do become a thousand and one dead ends: the multiplicity of possible developments, a set route.”²⁵ Developmentalism (even in its non-aligned form) becomes the convenient ideology of reproducing hegemony by other means.²⁶ As an ideology, it cancels heteronomous

²⁵ Franco Moretti, Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to Garcia Marquez, trans. Quintin Hoare (London Verso, 1996), 244-45.
²⁶ The cultural anthropologist James Ferguson astutely remarks that the “development” apparatus was manipulative tool to efface the history of colonialism, as he exemplifies by a World Bank Report describing Lesotho as “virtually untouched by modern economic development,” ignoring the crucial role and relationship of the region with South African industrial economy as labor reserve. Lesotho (very much like many parts of the world) “was not untouched by ‘modern economic development’ but radically and completely transformed by it, this is not in 1975 or 1966, but in 1910.” James Ferguson, The Anti-Politics Machine : “Development”, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho, (Cambridge: Cambridge
projects of national autonomy, social egalitarianism and autochthonous forms of modernization.

Equally important, in the postcolonial reconstruction of social classes, the discourse of developmentalism provides the new governing elite with a new framework for reinstating the older urban-rural, enlightened middle class-backward peasantry, modern-traditional dualisms in reference to the so-called universal principles of modernity and an ever-expanding process of modernization.27 However, these dualisms actually served to obscure the lingering presence of the pre-capitalist oligarchies under the guise of national bourgeoisie, the rapid, yet unstable capitalist development and modernization and the haunting possibility of a global socialist revolution on the horizon, imagined by Amamu, the idealist lawyer in Kofi Awoonor’s *This Earth, My Brother*, in continuous movement "through the grass plains of Africa...to the shores of Tun Hu in China across the vastness of the dream lands of Soviet Russia, the canefields of Oriente Province in Cuba to the hills of Mexico"28 The potentials of resisting the imposed standards of the world-system were dismissed as “failure” to abide by

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28 Kofi Awoonor, *This Earth, My Brother* (Garden City, N.Y.; Doubleday, 1971), 73.
universal standards of modernity, challenging the normative conceptions of the international order of statehood as giving way to chaos and fragmentation.

Postcolonial narratives function as the literary mode of charting the structural superimposition of external systemic forces on the national space of sovereignty in a form that is reminiscent of montage. In the postcolonial context, montage refers to the collision of the national and transnational—as expressed in the original Eisensteinian idea that each sequential element is perceived not next to the other, but on top of the other. While the geopolitical international intersects closely with individual lives, this does not entail an exact replication of the former in the latter. On the contrary, the relationship is remarkably disproportional and overwhelming, as it is very dramatically represented in the bourgeois writer Sergio Malabre’s juxtapositions between nuclear missiles and his small apartment, the spinning disk made of the soft drink tins (a pastime toy) and the U.S. embargo on importation of cork to Cuba, North America and the Caribbean, and so forth.\textsuperscript{29} The disproportional and unfathomable distance between the juxtaposed units invites its own problematics of representation. The same disproportional situation, at the national level, holds true for the seemingly chaotic plurality, incoherence and excess of the everyday plebeian sphere, where “identities are multiplied, transformed and put into circulation” under the disciplinary institutions of

\textsuperscript{29} Edmundo Desnoes, \textit{Inconsolable Memories}, 117; 170.
governance and management of the political regime. The panoramic picture of the postcolonial urban public space in Kofi Awoonor’s *This Earth, My Brother* is one among many novels portraying the city landscape as dominated by state buildings.

Postcolonial disproportionality filters in the narrative as delinearized and elliptic temporality, a combination of strategies that includes the defamiliarization of reality, the expansion of narrative space, syntactic transgressions, incompatible scales and measures and bricolage of diverse styles and voices to achieve polyphony. The national situation functions as the metonymy of the world-system and vice versa through what Kumkum Sangari calls the non-mimetic mode of cognition of registering “the disjunctures in the understanding of the real,” which result from simultaneous heterogeneities, time-lag and uneven development of socio-economic formations and their neocolonial deformations.

### 4.2 Decolonial Emergence and Postcolonial Fall Back

We should emphasize at this juncture that this waking into the neocolonial world of the Cold War era marks a significant divergence from the earlier moment of decolonization which produces its own fictions of “emergence.” In his introduction to the first American edition of George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), Richard

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31 Kofi Awoonor, *This Earth, My Brother*, 24-25.
Wright invokes a powerful imagery as to how the moment of decolonization shakes the
dearchitectonics of the communal forms that were kept immobile under colonial
administration. Lamming’s novel, Wright claimed, was “a symbolic repetition of the
story of millions of simple folk, who, sprawled over half of the world’s surface and
involving more than half of the human race, are today catapulted out of their peaceful,
indigenously earthy lives and into the turbulence and anxiety of the twentieth
century.”\(^{33}\) Indeed, *In the Castle of My Skin*, like its African continental counterparts such
as Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1956), offers a first-hand account of the worlding
of native communities that emerge from their hitherto established patterns to the outside
world that is felt as “the large, invisible phantom,” exerting its authority on the native
consciousness from a distance. The closed pattern of the village communities, on the
hand, and the colonial distance, on the other, establishes the hegemony of the outside
world whose “imagined perfection hung like a dead weight over their [the native
community’s] energy.”\(^{34}\) The logic of colonialism prevents native communities from

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\(^{34}\) George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953), 27. In Achebe’s *Things Fall
Apart*, it is the earth that governs the peasant community as the dominating element of life. Okonkwo’s exile
as described as “the justice of the earth goddess” (117), while his act of suicide is regarded as “an offense
against the Earth” (190). Red earth is the essential material to build their shelters. Yet the community is also
very much under the earth’s whims: “They have to tread it at the right time. If it is early, the heap of
trodden earth will be washed away; if, conversely, it is late, then the earth will dry up and not lend itself to
any shape” (151). Finally, Nwoye’s attraction to Christianity is described as “like the drops of frozen rain
melting on the dry palate of the panting earth” (137). Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, (New York: Astor-
Honor, 1959).
looking beyond their limited location, even though the young G., the autobiographical character of Lamming’s novel, carries the intuitive feeling of the existence of unknown world beyond the confines of his native land.

But after World War II, the outside world is no longer in a position to maintain its hegemony over the native land. Those who are drafted from the colonies to fight for the British Empire come to the realization of a shared experience of colonialism. In Lamming’s novel, we can also observe the impact of print culture and mobility in the development of anticolonial consciousness. The village’s shoemaker learns from “a piece of paper by a J.B. Pristley that Barbados was part of some gigantic called colonial.” From the newspaper, he learns about civil disturbance in Trinidad as well as the tradition of tournaments which help him to realize that the people in Barbados shared a similar history with other communities in the Caribbean and beyond. In the United States, Trumper, G.’s older friend, discovers “the Negro race” and a larger anticolonial struggle for freedom and rights. Print and travel links the native community with “another world infinitely vaster than” than the village.

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35 From Chinua Achebe’s No Longer at Ease (New York: Fawcett Premier Books, 1969 [1960], 23), we gain insight into a peculiar long-term negative aspect of the World war experience of the colonies. While conscription to the empire’s army from different colonies across the globe raises anticolonial consciousness, it also endows the joining ranks with material benefits and prestige when they return to their native land. From this perspective, World War II establishes in the long run the military background of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie.

36 Lamming, In the Castle of My Skin, 99.

37 Ibid., 296.
With the demise of British Empire in the aftermath of the war, the landlord turns suddenly into “a relic of another time.”\(^{38}\) It is the native boy that is envisioned to embody the new time and the new subjectivity. Even so, G.’s dying father astutely anticipates the challenges of the postcolonial world. On the night before G. bids farewell to his native land, Pa warns his son: “Remember this: this world is a world o’ camps, an’ you got to find out which camp you’re in….We both settin’ forth tomorrow…I to my last resti’-place before the grave, an’ you into the wide wide world.”\(^{39}\) Lamming’s postcolonial Bildungsroman anticipates the fragile and insecure sense of postcolonial-being-in-the-world in the Cold War era.

If, following Mikhail Bakhtin’s definition of the classical Bildungsroman, narratives of emergence represent the transformations of the subject in a changing world, the departure from the private domain of the subject to “a completely new, spatial sphere of historical existence,” in postcolonial narratives “the ability to see time, to read time, in the spatial whole of the world”—the desired outcome of Bildung—is not guaranteed.\(^{40}\) The organizing force of the future on the present is absent. Because of the absence of a secure sense of being-in-history and a proper sense of belonging in the world, it falls to narrative to imagine or reconstruct the sense of temporal and spatial

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 230.
\(^{39}\) Ibid., 302 (emphasis added).
existence. While postcolonial storytellers such as Achebe and Lamming are aware of the limit and fragility of the situation, they also imagine “the historic chance of a new collective being and existential project.”

The climax of anticolonial revolution is the spontaneous construction of this historic chance and the collective. The event of decolonization, as Franz Fanon witnessed, “explodes the old colonial truths and reveals unexpected facets which bring out new meanings and pinpoints the contradictions camouflaged by these facts.” At this climactic point, to refer to Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory of the ensembles, the revolutionary collective—at least, for a particular moment—breaks up everyday seriality (the Heideggerian Dasein). Individuals are recreated at and by the very moment itself. The Egyptian novelist Latifa al-Zayyat’s The Open Door (1960) gives us a vivid description of the formation of the revolutionary ensemble in the case of the 1952 Egyptian Revolution:

July 23, 1952. Morning. The army had shaken Egypt to the core. Awe, disbelief, a belligerent joy and pride; as news of the revolution spread, new sentiments trembled on millions of lips and shone through the tears in people’s eyes….Spaces between bodies vanished as one person clapped the next on the shoulder [in] a mood of ease and belonging.

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42 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 147.
Individuals are inundated with the excitement and passion of having the power to determine and make their future. The vanishing of the older society and its fundamentals, the rise of the revolution as the great mediator of the social sphere, the resolution to build a new world, the miraculous sense of growing up suddenly—all of these are constellated in the screams of the ensemble, the revolutionary speech-act *par excellence*:

A short scream lasted only seconds, but a whole life weighted it; a terror, a torrential desire to go on living, a painful despair of life. Revolution, love, hatred, submission, all the specters of the past and the glimmer of what might have been in the future were in those screams.45

The screams and slogans create poetically the new rhythm of the national collective, transforming spontaneity in the subaltern public sphere into a lived experience of “the insurgent everyday.”46 The plebeians of the native land fashion their historical existence in the event of revolution.

It may not be very surprising to find a similar representation of the moment of the 1959 Cuban Revolution in Jesús Díaz’s *The Initials of the Earth*. Individuals, fully aware of living in a heroic time, are committed to the revolutionary mission “to make the earth tremble and to change the face of America.” Whatever belongs to imperialism

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45 Ibid., 338 (emphasis added).
46 For the classical account of this moment, see Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963). For a contemporary reading of Fanon’s account, see Homi K. Bhabha, “Day by day . . . with Frantz Fanon” in *The Fact of Blackness*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), 186-205.
and its culture industry are either buried or thrown into the Caribbean Sea along with joyous singing and revolutionary fervor:

And here’s the latest,
Here’s the latest in the comics,
The end of the Yanqui
Superman is screwed
...
Little Cuba has kryptonite now,
You’ve got kryptonite, my beautiful little Cuba.\textsuperscript{47}

The event of revolution entails a vitalistic sense of incarnation, of empowerment: the will-power to resist colonial disposability and the determination to survive (\textit{sur-vivre}) finitude. As such, it is geared towards generating a new political ontology of self-actualization and freedom and articulating a new plebeian community.\textsuperscript{48}

It is not only the foreign colonizer but also the relics of the traditional native power structure that are discarded. Ahmadou Kourouma’s \textit{The Suns of Independence} (1968) is an exemplary narrative of the demise of traditional power structure in the figure of Fama Dumbuya, a tribal chief, whose life suddenly appears as a barren and impoverished one after Independence. As the protection of “ancestoral shades” disappears, the scorching sun of independence exposes him as “a grotesque figure”. “In a world turned upside-down,” he wobbles around “like a headless snake.” While as a former tribal chief he is reduced to “a sterile man living on alms in a city,” the plebeians

\textsuperscript{47} Jesús Díaz, \textit{The Initials of the Earth}, 367.
(whom Fama curses as “bastards and sons of slaves,” and elsewhere as “a swarm of grasshoppers”) embark on the implementation of “African socialism” in the newly independent national space, despite the persistent challenges on the ground of famine and lack of resources. Fama cannot accept the fact of unpredictability, the impossibility of fathoming “this world of the suns of Independence.” “Throughout Africa, before the suns of Independence,” he reflects, “people sought to foretell, to unveil the future. It is not true that the future remains hidden, like a wild beast crouched in a thicket.” But the postcolonial world under the scorching brightness of independence is an “unmagicked Africa.” As another example, in Naguib Mahfouz’s *Miramar*, Fama’s equivalent Tolba Marzuq (who adamantly “refuses any social theory that could justify his personal misfortune as an historical necessity”) is wary of the rise of the masses and laments the passing away of the old order. From Tolba Marzuq too, the masses do not receive warm welcome: at one point they are “beasts of prey [who] are fighting over the loot—our property!” In another occasion they are described as a cancerous organism that will finish off the body politic sooner or later.

Yet the spontaneous revolutionary ensemble, which sweeps away both the foreign colonizer and the traditional governing elite, quickly reveals (in Fanon’s terms) its “weaknesses” and falls short of its “grandeur.” In a considerable number of

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postcolonial novels, the psychic anxiety of the dissolution of the revolutionary grandeur and fall back is very closely incorporated into the moment of revolution itself. In narratological terms, this is expressed through a temporality that is marked with radical shifts in the mood (Stimmung) of the collective. The intensity of these shifts can be gauged with their temporal speed. In Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat* (1968), it is marked by the “overnight” difference between the carnivalesque climax of the Kenyan independence, which is celebrated by dances performed only in initiation rites, and the sense of dullness and vacuum in the next morning (“so dull we feared the day would not break into life”). In Kofi Awoonor’s *This Earth, My Brother*, the figuration of the temporal gap is more dramatic: the poor in the capital are herded off into cattle trucks to outlying villages *before* the independence celebrations. In Latifa Al-Zayyat’s *The Open Door*, the scene that dramatizes the destruction of the statue of De Lesseps (the French architect of the Suez Canal) as the symbol of foreign domination reaches its climactic point in the prophetic voice of Layla, the female protagonist of the novel: “‘The head! Only the head is gone!’ Indeed, it was only the head and the paint that had gone; the body remained crouched in place as if its roots extended deep into the ground.” In this symbolically charged *mise-en-scène*, nobody who is taking part in the event is ready to

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52 Kofi Awoonor, *This Earth, My Brother*, 118.
hear Layla’s exclamation. In fact, even Layla is not sure about the implications of her "radicalism," which would entail a complete archeological excavation of domination.

In addition to the examples above, one of the earliest works that thematizes the dissolution of the revolutionary decolonial visions after independence is Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World* (1949), a historical novel about the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), the first anti-colonial rebellion. The novel presents the course of Haitian independence as foreshadowing what will take place in much of the Third World almost 150 years later. As Carpentier states in his “Prologue” to the novel, when “miracle workers turn into bureaucrats,” when, that is, the magic of prevailing against the colonial master itself is prevailed by the intoxicating lure of power, the emancipatory prospects of revolution gradually vanish. The mulatto take-over mimics the colonial order and keeps the exploitative distance between the post-independence Royal Palace (*Citadelle Laferrière*) of Henri Christophe and the sufferings of “the Negroes of the Plaine” intact. Even though the colonizers are “outwitted by the Mighty Powers of the Other Shore,” the motto of *Liberté, égalité* that decorates the walls of the Citadel is “still unproved”—an interesting alternative way of expressing Jürgen Habermas’s description of modernity as unfinished.54 The anti-colonial projections of the Enlightenment, like the emancipatory potentials of bourgeois modernity, are suspended. Ti Noël, the plebeian

54 Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World* (London: Deutsch, 1990), 36-7; 94.
figure in the novel, in the sack of the Palace of Sans Souci ransacks three volumes of the *Grande Encyclopédie* only to sit on them when he eats his sugar cane. As a member of the new nation, Ti Noël paradoxically feels himself “centuries old.” With the failure of anti-colonial emancipation, he is overwhelmed with “a cosmic weariness, as if a planet weighted with stones, fell upon his shoulders.” The euphoric moment of decolonization is taken over by postcolonial melancholia. The confident epistemology (*ideological clarity*) of getting rid of the colonizer gives way to an unclear sense of the meaning and purpose of the revolutionary struggle. The epic of the revolution is gradually erased in the face of the prosaic “Kingdom of This World.” Now what is left for Ti Noël and for his descendants is to commit their existence to the messianic expectation of “the possible germinations the future held.”

This pattern of the rise and fall of utopian horizons is engrained into the fabric of a great number of novels of the age of three worlds. The South African novelist Peter Abrahams’ *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956), for instance, follows this pattern. It narrates the story of Michael Udomo, who returns to his native land after completing his education in England to join the ranks of the national liberation movement. On his way back home, Udomo is immersed in high ideals of bringing Mother Africa to the respectable position she deserves. Yet the discrepancy between “the dream” and “the reality” suddenly

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55 Ibid., 148-49.
shows its grim face. Udomo finds the capital as “an overgrown African village” with “a bit of England transported to the tropics.”56 Joining the ranks of the Africa Freedom Party, he embarks on fulfilling the dream of catching up through technological Africanization. But the modernization paradigm will not provide young postcolonials with much time to turn dreams into reality: “There were the rules of life’s game.” As his modernizationist strategy to “match white cunning with black cunning,” “to defy all that is ugly and evil in the past,” to put “the great machine of progress in motion” fails, Udomo (like all of the “pseudo-Fausts” of the Third World) follows the fatalistic path of metamorphosis into a corrupt figure in the power cadre.57 The sense of collectivity that gather everybody under the suns—or in Chinua Achebe’s metaphor, “the rain”—of independence gives way to scramble for the “one shelter” (that is, the state apparatus) left by the colonizer.58 The lure of the state apparatus (“the poisoned gift of national liberation”) comes with the blurring of the utopian horizon of transforming a globally operating system taking control of the apparatuses of the postcolonial nation-state apparatuses.59

57 Ibid., 320; 347-49. Models of modernization always come from elsewhere: in Chinua Achebe’s No Longer at Ease (102), it comes from the late nineteenth century Egypt in the figure of the “good” modernizer, Mohammed Ali, who is considered the founding father of modern Egypt. But we now know more about the extent to which Mohammed Ali’s reform projects were closely tied to the incorporation of Egypt’s cotton production to the world market.
The poetry of revolution, losing its struggle against the science of bureaucratic state, comes to a halt, as in the young idealist Obi Okonkwo’s symbolic act of crumpling his poem “Nigeria” like a tiny ball and throwing it on the floor. Okonkwo’s discarded poem echoes Ernest Renan’s idea of civic national collectivity upon the premise of forgetting:

To build our nation dear;
Forgetting region, tribe, or speech,
But caring always each for each.

While this national poetic project is cancelled at the end of the novel, Chinua Achebe, perhaps with no other alternative choice, would set his novel with a modernist epigraph, this time from T.S. Eliot’s “The Journey of the Magi”:

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

Instead of a new collective beginning in which subjects recreate and recognize themselves through altruistic amnesia, this epigraph conveys the opposite sense of a prevailing colonial past, an estranging community and a dying future.

The new country, in Antonio Candido’s apt phrase “the country of the book,” reveals itself as the underdeveloped country, putting poverty, lack and misery into the

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60 Chinua Achebe, No Longer at Ease, 142.
61 Kofi Awoonor’s This Earth, My Brother bypasses T.S. Eliot. The epigraph comes directly from Dante’s Inferno: “In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost.”
highest relief.\textsuperscript{62} Underdevelopment is taken as the perennial condition of a gap between the efficient, hygienic, powerful and willful center and the incompetent, miserable, dirty, weak and impoverished peripheral country. In the Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes's \textit{Death of Artemio Cruz} (1962), this sentiment is expressed as the regret for being condemned to live with a “geographical error,” that put the Artemios of Latin America in the disadvantaged side—that is, the periphery—of the world-system: “You ache because you know that no matter how hard you try, you can never be what they are but can become at most a pale copy, a near approximation.”\textsuperscript{63} This is a geopolitical position of underdevelopment as infinite regression. It leaves them with the painful knowledge that crossing the divide between center and periphery is a taboo. In Edmundo Desnoes's \textit{Inconsolable Memories}, from the inverted telescope of Sergio Malabre, even in the aftermath of the revolution (“the only thing that has hit Cubans over the head”), everything appears as “sunk in underdevelopment,” all the way from black beans to joy and sorrow.

What Chinua Achebe limited to an epigraph would soon become the very fabric of postcolonial novel, as the novels and poems of emergence are displaced by modernist narratives of disenchantment and alienation across Latin America, the Middle East and


Africa. In the Argentinian novelist Julio Cortazar’s Hopscotch (1963), this sense of postcolonial Weltschmerz is conveyed through the figure of the intellectual misfit Horacio Oliveira’s existential anxieties in the midst of a present revealing itself as “a strange and confused future” and his unfulfilled longing for “marvelous adjustments with the world”—albeit the potentials of the unregulated dynamic that the metaphor of hopscotch entails. In the Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North (1966), the sense of disorientation reaches a dramatic climax in the indeterminacy from the narrator’s perspective of any direction of the flow of Nile, preventing him from both going back and moving forward. In the Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah’s Fragments (1969), the old peasant woman Naana speaks in her own language the disorienting truth of closure and concealment in the postcolonial “official” beginning. Naana, the blind seer (the Tiresias figure) of the community, herself loses any transcendental clarity of foreseeing the future: “From the world and the life around me, nothing comes to me. The world…has hurried past me.” Her own familiar habitat looks alien and irreparably shattered. The modernizing state technologies direct their energies

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on the destruction of Naana’s subaltern lifeworld by the symbolically most brutal image of pushing her underneath the earth: “the fruits that fell from my own entrails are looking hard for ways to push me into the earth deeper than where my navel is buried and to stamp the ground above me smooth with their hasty shoes.”67 Technological and bureaucratic worlding is premised upon on this act of concealment—on the deathly act of sealing off Naana’s existence.

But Naana’s specter will haunt this end, “straining for another beginning,” not resting till she finds it. Where concealment happens, there lies the uncanny and spectral force of a messianic beginning. This would also be the beginning of another criticism that enters the archive of postcolonial writing as a spectral zone of cancelled beginnings, entangled lives, incomplete revolutions, fractured collectivities and disproportional political bodies. This kind of spectral work would also be accompanied by attunement to the resoluteness of Ngugi’s children to assert themselves into a world that constructs them as a disposable reserve—to continue the poetry of revolution in the midst of the acronymal signifiers of global capitalism:

> Untroubled by memories and doubts, puzzlement and despair in the eyes of the elders, little boys and girls prance about the banks, trying to spell out LONRHO, SHELL, ESSO, TOTAL, AGIP beside the word DANGER on the sidebelly of the tankers. They sing, in shrill voices, of the road, which will surely carry them to all the cities of Africa, their Africa, to link hands with children of other lands.68

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5 World Literature after the Twentieth Century

A novel? No. I don’t have the endurance any more. To write a novel you have to be like Atlas, holding up a whole world on your shoulders and supporting it there for months and years while its affairs work themselves out. It is too much for me as I am today.

— J. M. Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year

A horizon has to be discovered. And for this we have to rekindle hope—against the odds of what the new order pretends and perpetrates.

— John Berger, “Against the Great Defeat of the World”

Whither world literature? The question that Dipesh Chakrabarty’s friend poses in a letter from Calcutta seems to be relevant for all literatures of the world: “Will the investment in Bengali literature that marked Bengal’s colonial modernity survive the impact of globalization?” “I am sure,” continues Chakrabarty’s friend, “literary work needs a certain environment for its growth. This environment that you have seen in Calcutta in the past is disappearing. And nobody seems to care.”¹ There are a myriad of factors that would explain the disappearance of literature as we knew it and its habitats. The inventory of what has vanished or on the verge of vanishing sounds alarming: the dissolution of the twentieth-century world literary space which facilitated under the crushing commercial expansion of the international book market, the erasure of national, local, cultural and linguistic traces in the simultaneity of translation, the transformation

of world literature into a “risk-free” cross-cultural enterprise, the displacement of the novelists’ international by the literary agents’ global.²

The category of world literature has been extensively debated from many different perspectives in recent years. But in an uncanny way, we have explored our answers to questions of world literature at a time when contemporary fiction releases a strong autumnal mood. Published two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and in the same year as the Gulf War and the announcement of the new world order, Don DeLillo’s Mao II (1991) had already declared literature’s defeat at “the end of history.” How is it possible to register “a planetary record [of] writers of Earth” amidst persecution, imprisonment, house arrest and other violations of human rights and freedom of expression in many parts of the world? The novelists in the West look like mere “effigies,” who no longer have as much influence and power “to alter the inner life of the culture” and “to make raids on human consciousness” as terrorists. By producing grand narratives of disaster by deed, the figure of the terrorist takes up “what writers used to do before we were all incorporated.” In the dark images of the disaster, the society of the spectacle finds its teleological meaning. The novel’s secular transcendence

² In Don DeLillo’s Mao II (New York: Viking, 1991), there is a remarkable parody of the conglomerate publishing industry in the figure of publisher/editor Charles Everson’s description of his business: “I take them to a major eatery. I say, Pooh pooh pooh pooh. I say, Drinky drinky drinky. I tell them their books are doing splendidly in the chains. I tell them readers are flocking to the malls. I say, Coochy coochy coo. I tell them the reprint bidders are howling in the commodity pits. There is miniseries interest, there is audiocassette interest, the White House wants a copy for the den, I say. The publicity people are setting up tours. The Italians love the book completely. The Germans are groping for new levels of rapture. Oh my oh my oh my”(101).
is replaced by the apocalyptic immanence of news broadcast. The news (in the form of reports, predictions and warnings) feed the mood of catastrophe in a way that the novel cannot offer. In the post-apocalyptic age, when the possibility of history is at stake, the danger of terror equals the novel’s failure to be dangerous. For the novel is no longer outside, but absorbed in, the culture.\(^3\)

The South African Nobel laureate (and winner of two Bookers) J.C. Coetzee’s *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) rearticulates a parallel sentiment in the post-9/11 era through the late career of Señor C, a novelist in his seventies. Señor C is invited to contribute to a book project conceived by a German publisher. Six eminent contemporary writers are asked to express their *Ansichten* (“strong opinions”) on the state, democracy, terrorism, universities, among others—to “pronounce on what is wrong with today’s world.”\(^4\) The old writer accepts to participate in the project as an opportunity for “a magic revenge on the world for declining to conform to [his] fantasies” (23). But this nemetic desire for recuperating *author-ity* is eventually displaced by ironic self-loathing: “Tell us, O Master, we pray, what has gone wrong with our civilization! Why have the wells run dry, why is there a rain of frogs? Look into your mystic ball and enlighten us! Show us the road to the future!”(207). Señor C’s ironic rewriting of the invitation coming from the Old Europe debunks the figure of the world republic intellectual/writer as defunct and

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destined to a “provincial fate” (191). Even Mao II’s writer persona Bill Gray, who is actively engaged in the rescue of a Swiss poet abducted by a Maoist group in Beirut, conveys a stronger sense of presence and impact. In his encounter with the leader of the terrorist group, he can still reinstate the power of fiction: “Do you believe why I believe in the novel? It’s democratic shout...And this is what you want to destroy.” For Bill Gray, writing about the hostage is an act of retrieving a meaning that is lost to the world when he is locked in a room. Fictive writing is a way of filling the void space of the abducted subject. “We reply to power and beat back our fear” tells Bill Gray, “by extending the pitch of consciousness and human possibility.” But in J.C. Coetzee’s Diary of a Bad Year, “strong opinions” do not amount to a shout that would fill the global vacuum. While Señor C copes with being rendered irrelevant through self-derision, the attacks of his neighbor Alan (who is an investment consultant and at one point takes control of the author’s finances by installing a spyware on his computer) are direct and deadly:

[Señor C] is a leftover from the Sixties, that is all he is…. An old-fashioned free-love, free-speech sentimental hippie socialist, sentimental because there was nothing left of socialism except the flavor....Wake up!—you should tell him that. The world moves on. A new century....He doesn’t understand modernity. He doesn’t understand the managerial state....He comes from another world, another era. The modern world is beyond him. He looks at the US and all he sees is a battle between good and evil, the evil Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld axis on the one hand and the good terrorists on the other along with their friends the cultural relativists.6

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5 Don DeLillo, Mao II, 200.
6 J. M. Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), 92-98.
In Alan’s irreverent portrait, C poses as an anachronistic figure, out of touch with the new global conjuncture. As such, he appears as lacking the capability of representing the conflicts of contemporary global world that are beyond good and evil.

Another Nobel laureate, the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk fictionalizes the same question of authorship at the national level in *Snow* (2002). Ka, a minor poet and former political exile (because of his leftist activism prior to the 1980 coup d’état), is sent as a reporter for an Istanbul newspaper to a distant Anatolian city, Kars to investigate a series of suicide cases contagiously multiplying among young women. But the provincial town under its deceitful simplicity hides the political labyrinths of contemporary Turkey into which Ka is thrown. The novel ends with the mysterious assassination of Ka in Frankfurt. Ka’s death is the only event through which he and his poetry could generate some interest: and this, only due to a conspiratorial curiosity as to who his murderers might be: “The Islamists, MIT [Turkish Intelligence Agency], the Armenians, German skinheads, the Kurds, Turkish nationalists”? In *Mao II*, Bill Gray describes the author’s death as a democratic event, for it is there “for everyone to see, wide open to the world.”8 Not any more in Ka’s case. The images of the impotent or dying authors stand as the metaphorized representations of literature’s end at the turn of the twenty-first century.

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8 Don DeLillo, *Mao II*, 159.
In an essay that interrogates the situation of the literary in the post-9/11 world, David Palumbo-Liu points at the pitfalls of Imagination, the very human faculty upon which the post-Enlightenment concept of modern literature has been established. Tracing the modern history of imagination in the intersections between Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Karl von Clausewitz, Palumbo-Liu explores the invisible affinities between imagination and war in their penetration into “the realm of the uncertain.” From these foundational texts, Palumbo-Liu points at the necessary need to counterbalance the abuses of imagination as unrestrained pathological indulgence toward a seemingly unlimited horizon by putting the obscure flights of imagination under the scrutiny of the Kantian “understanding” (Vernunft) and common sense of the empirical and rational world. The aesthetic expression of this in Kant is “an assumed shared affect” that “stands outside one’s subjective position and assumes that of the Other.”

From this perspective, the post-September 11 world appears remarkably un-Kantian. The interlocking imperatives of global security policies and capitalist financial flows not only bring the autonomy of spheres to the threshold of collapse, resulting in the weakening of the structural distinctions between the public and private realms, but

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10 This is also how Jack Levy, the typical Updike character of secular American everyman, seems to feel: “Religious fanatics and computer geeks: the combination seems strange to his old-fashioned sense of the reason-versus-faith divide” (27).
also establish the following motto as the order of the day: “everything is imaginable.” To refer to Coetzee’s *Diary of a Bad Year* again, Alan, in contradistinction to Palumbo-Liu, presents this picture of our contemporary world as precisely following the Kantian logic: “Everything is a perception…. We simply don’t have access to the noumenal.”

The globalized world, Alan seems to claim, takes the Kantian project to its logical extreme. The increasing irrelevance of the public and private spheres is a cause of celebration; for it reveals the economic dimension that constitutes “the big picture” of our phenomena and that sums up the individual dimension (if not totally a thing of the past) by transcending it. As for the question of imagination, it finds its meaning in the infinite realm of the objects and desires that the market offers or in the “anxiety dreams” of the equally infinite number of things that the individual cannot afford to purchase: “dreams about shoes can’t extend into the economic dimension if you can’t afford to buy shoes.”

Imagination, in Alan’s argument, is eclipsed by the market. The atmosphere of this argument is certainly suffocating; yet it would still pose itself as a genuine challenge to any exploration of a literary and cultural politics in the age of globalism. Palumbo-Liu makes the following observation:

> We simply do not yet know whether the very information technologies and entertainment and other cultural networks that form one set of powerful conduits through which we are incorporated

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11 J. M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year*, 90.
12 Ibid., 79-81. It is interesting to note Alan’s reference to the example of the shoe, which, beginning with Heidegger, has served as the emblematic object of the history of commodification. For the afterlife of the shoe in the age of transnational capitalism, see Peter Hitchcock’s essay, “Chronotope of the Shoe (Two),” in his *Imaginary States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 118-152.
into “the globe” are not at once habituating us to a different set of representational phenomena—sound and visual bytes, differently formatted images and information packages—or whether the residual forms of modernist aesthetics are not still the dominant modes of producing and receiving narratives.\footnote{13} If the material sphere of everyday life itself is challenged by the new forms of the global high finance, can the literary aesthetic, using its modernist capacities, \textit{simultaneously} register global flows and streams of information and rework them in “an affective and ethical content”? Or, is world literature becoming “World Bank Literature”?\footnote{14} Inspired by Richard Rorty, David Palumbo-Liu envisions “a manipulative ethics of the literary” that will generate new forms, phenomenologies, and technologies of representation, on the one hand, and will modulate and mediate the structures of feeling the globe through “a shared set of rational/sentimental values and affects,” on the other.\footnote{15} Whether the literary has the ability to deliver ethically transformative texts still remains an unresolved question, particularly because contemporary fiction in the aftermath of 9/11 appears to be moving towards an aesthetics of systematicity and a globular chronotope of what Emily Apter calls “oneworldedness”\footnote{16} —at a time when comparative/global literary studies envisages a model of world literature that is depredicated of territorial sovereignty and chronology and a planetary aesthetic of the

\footnote{14} Amitava Kumar, ed., \textit{World Bank Literature} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). 
globe as a democratic ecology of human habitats and cultures. In contradistinction to the planetary and transnational sense of worldliness which underlies the rich heterogeneity, coevality, and interconnectedness of human experience, oneworldedness envisages the planet as shrinking into a claustrophobic all-inclusiveness that is held in place by the premise that “everything is connected.” Instead of a prospect of literary transnationalism—identified with the plurilingual dissemination of codes, genres, styles, or ideas across the borders of time and territorial sovereignty—dystopic oneworlded fictions have come into existence as allegories globalism.

The feeling of world-closure becomes the only common denominator shared by individuals coming from different and even antagonistic walks of life. In John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006), it connects as many diverse figures as the Secretary of the Homeland Security (who surveys in the “three hundred million anarchic souls” and in their “millions of daily irrational impulses and self-indulgent actions” the blind spots “whereupon the enemy can grow one of his tenacious, wide-spaying plots”), the African-American priest (who alerts his audience to those who control “the means of pro-duc-shun”), the housewife Beth Levy (who sees “the so-called electronic revolution” as a scheme for “painlessly extracting money from us in monthly charges for services we

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don’t need”), the Muslim teenager Ahmad (who feels the crushing towering structures of the devilish metropolis as reducing individuals to the size of insects) and the high school guidance counselor Jack Levy (who perceives history as “a machine perpetually grinding mankind to dust,” and the world as a “fatal morass” its resources dwindled, freedoms disappeared and culture commercialized).\textsuperscript{18}

In Don DeLillo’s \textit{Cosmopolis} (2003), it is the currency exchange that constructs the world as closed-circuit connecting “every sort territorial entity, modern democratic nations and dusty sultanates, paranoid people’s republics, hellhole rebel states run by stoned boys.”\textsuperscript{19} The global “digital imperative” governs the biosphere of the planet, transforming bodies and oceans into numbers and charts—disciplining “unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units... in the zero-oneness of the world” (24). It goes even further than that: the digital form acquires a living soul of itself: the yen, for instance, is no longer a currency the movements of which financial experts can chart in the standard models of technical analysis; it has its own life and destiny. Market movements acquire the semblance of the state of nature and follow their own evolutionary path. This is a world completely abstracted in electronic form—in the patterns, indexes and maps of quantified information in the shadow of which “people eat and sleep” and make a living (14). In \textit{Cosmopolis}, even the

\textsuperscript{18} John Updike, \textit{Terrorist} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 44; 58; 121; 23. Further citations are included in text.

\textsuperscript{19} Don DeLillo, \textit{Cosmopolis} (New York: Scribner, 2003), 75-6. Further citations are included in text.
instance of an anti-market protest belongs to the totality of the market. “The tactical coup of reprogramming the stock tickers with poetry and Karl Marx” (99) is not outside of the fantasy world generated by the market. Only the act of a man setting himself in flames, self-annihilation in the name of protest, could escape assimilation by the market. For self-annihilation remains the only “thing outside [the market’s] reach” (100). In Don DeLillo’s later work, *Falling Man*, it is fundamentalist terrorism that escapes the system, imagined as “a virus” which reproduces itself outside the natural history of the world.\(^{20}\)

In Rick Moody’s *The Diviners* (2006), all the sunrises around the globe occur in a sequence that is climactically subsumed by the sunrise over Manhattan—the cosmopolis that incorporates men and women from all parts of the world into its “conspiratorial enterprise,” in which only ethnicities and corporations (not nationalities) matter.\(^{21}\)

In *The Diviners*, the world-as-closed-circuit is represented through “bipolar writing” (149) which established unexpected connections between disparate agencies or entities. In the conspiratorial imagination of bipolar writing, the connecting thread between multinational corporations and a third-world dictator is short and direct.

Bipolar writing is a mode of (pseudo)planetary hermeneutics of *Mysterium Cosmographicum*:

\(^{20}\) Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (New York: Scribner, 2007), 113. The virus metaphor appears in J.C. Coetzee’s *Diary of a Bad Year*, too. Senior C tries to debunk the idea of the presence of an omniscient global terrorist plot by “a devilish organization with agents all over the world” determined to destroy the West but does so under the strong belief in the system as completely fortified structure of the system. Otherwise, the terrorist noxious germs “would surely by now have poisoned water supplies all over the place” (31).

The diamonds glimmer as an afterimage, and part of this glimmering is the relation between forces, the force exerted on the carbon, which becomes the diamond, which becomes a legend, around which orbits the force of the African slave labor used to produce the diamond in the mines and the use of diamonds to finance and facilitate rebel activities designed to redistribute continental resources to disenfranchised nation-states and also to dictatorial regimes. (102-3)

The global mysteries are revealed with some strain of imagination and a Holmesian meticulousness in joining up the dots.

But it is not clear whether the representations of a oneworlded world and their fictional perception of the global political economy as a conspiratorial enterprise amounts to a cognitive hermeneutic effort, that Fredric Jameson identifies with a counter-systemic “thinking of totality...of the presence all around us of some overarching system” and a narrative structure capable of “forcing us to conceive of at least the possibility of other alternative systems, something we can...identify as our old friend Utopian thinking.” Instead, conspiratorial closure and its heavy impact on the individual psyche generate nostalgia for the simple in a life that feels “too contemporary,” time becomes “a corporate asset” and monopolized by the market: “It is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential” (Cosmopolis 27; 79). In Cosmopolis, the longing for ordinary, grounded life is crystallized in the ending of the young multi-billionaire asset manager Eric’s Manhattan odyssey in the barbershop of his father’s friend and an earlier visit to gold and diamond district (“the souk, the shtetl”), where orthodox Jewish merchants

trade in cash (65). In John Updike’s *Terrorist*, Hermione Fogel longs for the paradise-like atmosphere of the old Wanamaker’s (now incorporated by Macy’s the conglomerate chain of department stores). “Capitalism has been so open,” she thinks, that even the reality of coffee has disappeared. American society has turned into a fragile and defenseless society. “We Americans,” concludes Hermoine, “can never be happy again” (132). Conveying a parallel sentiment, her sister Beth, who is addicted to junk food and soup operas, longs for her native Pennsylvania town, where “a dollar is still a dollar, a meal a meal, a deal a deal,” and where carrots are still “tied in a bunch with the dirt and sand still on them” (260; 262). In Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, the figure of the Pennsylvania town appears again, where everyday life is “braided into sweet routine” of “sitting home in, reading the morning paper, taking the walk in the afternoon…eating the meal, unconfused, alive in true skin” (128). Whether these longings for authentic spaces of Gemeinschaft constitute a divergent path on which a new form of literary/critical aesthetics interrogating the place of the superstate of America in the world from within is a significant question. But if they are concerned with “the horror of the middle classes as their whole cultural world implodes”—to follow Jean Franco’s interpretation of contemporary (post)apocalyptic texts—oneworlded fictions of the

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23 Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 222. Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* appropriately situates Jean Franco’s point in the global geopolitical context of 9/11: “There is a word in German, Gedankenübertragung. This is the broadcasting of thoughts. We are all beginning to have this thought, of American irrelevance. It’s a little like
twenty-first century are bound to fail to genuinely respond to the planetary stirrings of
the multitude as the common subject of immaterial labor in the postmodern world.24
Otherwise they read as narratives of global costumbrismo mourning for the death of civil
society and its ecological world. This sense is already expressed in novels such as
Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), which sees in the destruction of earthly life—in the
sweeping of the “hydroptic and coldly secular”—the possibility “to see how [the world]
was made.”25 Waking from the mesmerizing pull of the postapocalyptic narratives of
contemporary literature would be possible by persistent attention to how they expose at
the unconscious level “the system of delusional democracy that keeps America in the
grip of a homogenized cultural program.”26

How does the scene look from other fictions of globalization originating from
other national literatures and diaspora/migration narratives? We can observe a parallel
sense of world-closure filtered into them. To begin with, the word “America”
increasingly appears the absolute point reference, or the specter, of global comparison
even when it is crystallized in a negative image. The examples are strikingly numerous:

In Ryu Murukami’s *In the Miso Soup* (1995), contemporary Japanese society resembles

telepathy. Soon the day is coming when nobody has to think about America except for the danger it brings.
It is losing the center” (191).

24 For the political theory of the multitude, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and
Innovation and Negation*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Cambridge: MIT


“America—a society in chaos!” In fact, the novel goes further and portrays contemporary Japan as a country that is not able to imagine any world outside itself except for Niketown and other spaces of consumption in the United States. In Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008), the rapid socio-economic transformation of India is described by the wealthy entrepreneur Ashok as the prospect of being “like America in ten years.” In Carlos Fuentes’s *The Eagle’s Throne* (2002), the functionality of Mexico’s national communication system is subject to the caprices of the U.S. administration. In Viktor Pelevin’s *Homo Zapiens* (1999), the advertising copywriter Babylen Tatarsky creates his “pseudo-Slavonic style” through adaptations of the principles of U.S. advertising gurus. In Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Manila’s slums filled with vast districts of men in dirty white undershirts lounging idly in front of auto-repair shops appear “like a poorer version of the 1950s America depicted in such films as Grease.” In Samina Ali’s *Madras on Rainy Days* (2004), each cultural discrepancy between Minneapolis and Hyderabad amounts to being possessed by American devils.27

But more importantly, the global baroque novels of contemporary diaspora literatures, in interrogating the limits of destiny, determination and connectedness in temporal and spatial distances and differences, often times fall in the black holes of

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fatalism. While the capacities of storytelling have dramatically increased (in part, also, due to global migration), expressed aptly by the Spanish novelist Javier Marias’ aphorism that “everything can be told,” the great sagas of diasporic subjects seem to follow a predetermined teleological path.

Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) begins with an epigram (which sets the keynote of the novel) from E.M. Forster: “Every little trifle, for some reason, does seem incalculably important today…. There’s never any knowing—how am I to put it?—which of our actions, which of our idlenesses won’t have things hanging on it forever;” and includes one in the middle from Nabokov: “In this wrought-iron world of criss-cross cause and effect, could it be that the hidden throb I stole from them did not affect their future?” In *White Teeth*, genetic/generational fate is mocked all too frequently that it loses its ironic effect and turns into an obsession on its own. Archie marries the Italian Ophelia Diagilo at the end of World War II in 1946, not knowing that “lurking in the Diagilo family tree were two hysteric aunts,”(7) Samad Miah Iqbal, the great grandson of Mangal Pande, the icon of the Indian Mutiny, sees the actions and accidents of the ancestors as the destinies of their descendants: “And the sins of the Eastern father shall be visited upon the Western sons. Often taken their time, stored up in the genes like baldness or testicular carcinoma” (135; emphasis added). To be an

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immigrant turns into being condemned to an eternal loop of incessant repetitive movement in four directions. The shuttling back and forth does not come to a halt even after arrival; for the children continue to repeat it after their parents: “There’s no proper term for it—original sin seems too harsh; maybe original trauma would be better. A trauma is something one repeats and repeats, after all, and this is the tragedy of the Iqbals” (136).

This irreparable and irrevocable trauma becomes the only inheritance that the immigrant subject is attached to. For it is built in the immigrant subject’s genetic codes. In *White Teeth*, the logical outcome of this attachment to genetic fate leads to two dead-ends, symbolized in the divergence of Samad Iqbal’s sons: Millat to religious fundamentalism’s tautological circle of “simple, neat fatalism” (419); Magid to eugenic positivism of genetic cloning:

Magid…witnessed the custom design of the genes….He witnessed the artificial insemination. And he witnessed the birth, so different from his own….No potluck. No random factors. No you have your father’s snout and your mother’s love of cheese. No mysteries lying in wait….No question about who was pulling the strings. No doubtful omnipotence. No shaky fate….It would not travel through time…because its future was equal to its present, which was equal to its past….No other roads, no missed opportunities, no parallel possibilities….Just certainty, just certainty in the purest form….What more is God than that?”(405)

To be sure, the novel has strong instances of debunking the closed-circuit of genetic/generational fate, as in the example of Irie’s sexual relationship with the twin brothers right after one another to put fatherhood under erasure as a symbolic enactment of her vision of a time “when roots won’t matter anymore because they can’t because they mustn’t because they’re too long and they’re too tortuous and they’re just
buried too damn deep” (437). But whether pushing generational roots into the abyss of time does not exacerbate their “hanging over” in the lives of Iqbals, Iries and others remains a pertinent question.  

Even so, it is in *White Teeth* and other narratives of contemporary diasporic literatures that we find the practice of world literature after the twentieth century, precisely because they imagine themselves as “destined” to carry over the haunting surplus of the “long twentieth century”: the ruptures of colonialism and war, displaced populations, fratricides, genocides, dictatorships, partitions, invasions, exiles—everything that the ideology of globalism desires to erase from the world’s memory in the name of declaring yet another beginning of the order of Empire. In as much as they stimulate alternative imaginations of plebeian dwelling in the world, foster the languages of democracy and the politics of hope, and exercise a transnational literary aesthetics, “a montage of overlapping maps in motion,” grounded in the dynamics of historical-spatial transformations in a relational world-totality (*tout-monde*), contemporary narratives transcend the claim of fate, the plot of fundamentalism and the conspiracy of the oneworld.

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29 For another comparable example on this question, see Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007), which layers the history of the family through the myth of *fuku*; i.e. the curse of eternal unhappiness.


Bibliography


Biography

Firat Oruc was born in 1974 in Midyat, Turkey. He attended Boğaziçi University, Istanbul and graduated with a B.A. in Western Languages and Literatures in 1999. In 2001, he earned an M.A. degree in English at the State University of New York in Binghamton. He published a reference article on “The Cultural History of Reading in the Modern Middle East” in *The Cultural History of Reading*, eds. Sara Quay and Gabrielle Watling (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008) and encyclopedia entries on “Yashar Kemal,” “Memed, My Hawk,” “Kahlil Gibran,” and “The Prophet,” in *Companion to the 20th-Century World Novel* (New York: Facts on File, 2007) and on “Fadwa Tuqan,” “Song of Becoming,” and “Enough for Me” in *Companion to World Poetry, 1900 to the Present* (New York: Facts on File, 2007). His forthcoming work include “Uses of Theoretical Interludes in Human Rights and Literature Courses” in *Teaching Literature and Human Rights* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2011) and a review of *Tales of Crossed Destinies: The Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Context* in *Comparative Literature*. He has been a recipient of the Bass Advanced Instructorship Award (2006-07), German Academic Exchange/DAAD Fellowship (2003-04), Literature Program Graduate Fellowship (2001-06) and the Fernand Braudel Center Research Fellowship (2001). He will be an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Humanities and Visiting Assistant Professor in English and Comparative Literature at UCLA for the academic years 2010-11 and 2011-12.