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

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Duke University

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
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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…

Contents

Acknowledgements

I am grateful of the continuous support of my committee in the long road to dissertation. Their work and intellectual caliber inspired me deeply. I learned from Fredric Jameson the dialectical vigilance for testing theoretical assumptions at multiple sea levels; from Ranjana Khanna the ethical care for difference and singularity in pursuing comparative work; from Kenneth Surin the search for frames of articulation and synthesizing multiple threads in a coherent argument; and from Michael Moses the attention to the social critical enunciations of literary texts. I thank them for these enduring insights and beyond.

At Duke, in addition to those offered by my committee members, I benefited greatly from the graduate seminars of Toril Moi, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Alberto Moreiras, Janice Radway, George Lamming, and Marianna Torgovnick. I would like to thank Michael Hardt, Rey Chow, Negar Mottahedeh, Jane Gaines, Walter Mignolo, Grant Farred, David Need, Marcy Litle, Jehanne Geith, Leo Ching, miriam cooke, Ellen McLarney, Ebrahim Moosa, and Ara Wilson for extended and always stimulating conversations and feedback at different stages of the project. Erdağ Göknar, Srinivas Aravamudan and Ian Baucom kindly offered their help with their incisive comments on earlier versions of my work. I am also thankful to my former teachers, William Spanos,

The beginning and end of this dissertation coincided with the early loss of my father and my mother, respectively. May they rest in eternal peace.

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-

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[1] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 176.
[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 Encyclopedia Britannica. Gibbon. Macaulay. Toynbee. The complete works of Bernard Shaw….Hobson *Imperialism*. Robinson *An Essay on Marxian Economics*….Thomas Hardy. Thomas Mann. E.G. Moore. Thomas Moore. Virginia Woolf. Wittgenstein….*Gulliver's Travels*. Kipling. Housman. *The History of the French Revolution* Thomas Carlyle. What play-acting is this? What does he mean? Owen. Ford Madox Ford. Stefan Zweig. E.G. Browne. Laski. Hazlitt….*The Koran* in English. *The Bible* in English. Plato….*Prospero and Caliban*. *Totem and Taboo*. Doughty. Not a single Arabic book….An insane idea.[5]

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

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[3] Jacques Derrida, *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres and Genius: The Secrets of the Archive*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 14.

[4] Ibid., 48.

[5] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North,* trans. Denys Johnson-Davis (London: Lynee Rienner Publishers, 1997), 137.

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 placed 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.*[1]

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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[1] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 15.

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."[2] 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.[3]

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.[4]

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[2] Ibid., 16.

[3] Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *This Earth of Mankind* [1980], trans. Max Lane (New York: Penguin, 1991), 264.

[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*.[5]

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."[6] 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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philosophy, was held no higher by the age he lived in than the subtle and curious jargons of heraldry and falconry" (180).

[5] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood* (New York: Dutton, 1978), 109. (emphasis added)

[6] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 215.

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 naiveté 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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[7] Yan Hairong, "Position without Identity: An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak," *positions* 15, no.2 (2007), 431-32.

[8] Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983) 15. (emphasis added)

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."[9]

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.

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[9] Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 27.

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.
[11] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 160. For a detailed discussion of Kojève's "end of history," see Michael Valdez Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-25.

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."[12] 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.[13]

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" [14] 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).

[13] Takeuchi Yoshimi, *What Is Modernity?* , trans. Richard Calichman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 55-56.

[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,[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. [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

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[15] Ch'ae Man-shik, "A Ready-Made Life [1934]," in *A Ready-Made Life: Early Masters of Modern Korean Fiction*, eds. Chong-un Kim and Bruce Fulton (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 60.
[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

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[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 *geo*political 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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[18] For an extensive treatment of this brief description here, see Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 44-83; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 194-270; and Michael V. Moses, "Disorientalism: Conrad and the Imperial Origins of Modernist Fiction," in *Modernism and Colonialism*, eds. Richard Begam and Michael V. Moses (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 43-69.
[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.

expense of underdeveloped zones? Jed Esty, "Virginia Woolf's Colony and the Adolescence of Modernist Fiction', in *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, eds. Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 72-84.

'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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[20] Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11.
[21] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 246.

shoal, [which] seemed to wink at [the pilgrim ship] its eye of flame, as if in derision of

her errand of faith."[22] It is almost as if faith makes the pilgrims *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 *the stealthiness of a conspiracy*. The two Malays
> had meantime remained holding to the wheel. *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 profound ignorance of hundreds of
> human beings, with their weariness, with their dreams, with their hopes, arrested, held by an invisible hand
> on the brink of annihilation*.[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."[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

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[22] Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, 12.
[23] Ibid., 70 (emphasis added).
[24] Ibid., 70.

becomes "the sublime incomprehensibility of catastrophic turns."[25] 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."[26] 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."[27] 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":

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[25] Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World*, 50.
[26] Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, 192.
[27] Ibid., 197.

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> '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*.[28]

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*.[29] 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 Dardenelles*…and *neutralised Bosphorous*" (223; emphasis added).[30] 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

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[29] Joseph Conrad, *Last Essays* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons 1926), 222. Further citations are given in text.
[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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[31] D. H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent (Quetzalcoatl)* (London: Martin Secker, 1926).

[32] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Universalism and Belonging in the Logic of Capital," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 653–78; Srinivas Aravamudan, "The Return of Anachronism," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2001): 331-53.

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.[33] 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

[33] For a comprehensive account of modes of entry to world literature in its anthological forms, see David Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) and David Damrosch, ed., *Teaching World Literature* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009).

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

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[34] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London Verso, 1998), 194-5.
[35] Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1, no. January-February (2000), 58.

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."[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*

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[36] Ibid., 59 (emphasis added).

the sum of their parts"—should not efface the question of agency in the world literary space.[37] 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).[38]

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

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[37] Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London Verso, 2005), 53.
[38] Ibid., 81-90.

European form are taken in as components of the content itself.[39] This is not a straight forward 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.[40] This would invite an alternative model of situational comparativism that would bring to light the contingencies of "global strife in the production of textuality" [41] and the production of autochthonous discourses that also "come across as transcultural, with implications that resonate well beyond their individual locations."[42]

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

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[39] Neil Larsen, *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative, and Nation in the Americas* (London: Verso, 2001), 95.
[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.
[41] Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 5.
[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.[43]

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.[44]

 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.[45] 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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[43] Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 15; 66.

[44] Wai Chee Dimock, "Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge," *PMLA* 122, no. 5 (2007): 1377-79; Wai Chee Dimock, "Literature for the Planet," *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 173-86.

[45] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Further citations are given in text. For an exposé of the book, see Pascale Casanova, "Literature as World." *New Left Review* 31, January-February (2005): 71-90.

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]

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[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

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[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."[49] 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."[50] 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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[49] Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 478. (emphasis added) For a similar position, see also Jabra Ibrahim Jabra "Modern Arab Literature and the West," in *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1980).
[50] Shmuel Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry 1800-1970: The Development of Its Forms and Themes under the Influence of Western Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 133; 183; 217.

decrepitude (*inhitat*) and stagnation (*jumud*) vis-à-vis progress (*taqaddum*) and

civilization (*tamaddun*).[51] 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."[52] 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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[51] For an important critique of how this ideology obscured the autochthonous interpretive codes of anti-colonial resistance and technologies of self-fashioning, see Terri DeYoung, "Colonialism and the Writing of Modern Arabic Literary History" in *Placing the Poet: Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab and Postcolonial Iraq* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 151-185. For a comprehensive history of Arab develomentalist thought, see Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).
[52] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 18. Also see, Andreas Huyssen, "High/Low in an Expanded Field," *Modernism/Modernity* 9, no. 3 (2002), 364.

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

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[53] Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6.
[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.[55] 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."[56]

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-

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[55] Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007), xii-xix.
[56] Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 7.

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!"[57] The decoding of overcoded life-worlds of premodernity also

enabled the conditions of possibility of "recoding of secular reality" on a global scale.[58]

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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[57] Lu Xun, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, trans. Xianyi Yang and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980), 167.

[58] Fredric Jameson, "Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism," *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 8, no. 1 (1975): 17.

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

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[1] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Penguin: London, 2002), 224.

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

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[2] For a specific case study, see Stephanie Anne Sieburth, *Inventing High and Low: Literature, Mass Culture, and Uneven Modernity in Spain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

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

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[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.

[4] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German
Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 11. We owe the preliminary
conceptualization of the new paradigm to the German Romantics—arguably, the first comparatists in the
cultural periphery of Western Europe and theoreticians of symbolic domination in the literary field. On
autonomy and differentiation, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick
G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987) and Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, trans.
Stephen Holmes and Charles Larmore (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

[5] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*: *An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (Routledge: London, 2001), 327.

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 *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]

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[6] Paul De Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," in *In Search of Literary Theory*, ed. Morton W.
Bloomfield (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 248.
[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".[9] 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.[10]

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

[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'?"[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.[12] These plebeian artists coming from the *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

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[11] Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

[12] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 48; 54. For another account that lays out a complex portrayal of literary autonomy in the French context, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821-1857*, Vol. 5 (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1993), 57-182.

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.[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, *ostranenje*, didactic formulas, style itself—could keep pace."[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 to 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

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[13] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 45.

[14] Neil Larsen, *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative, and Nation in the Americas* (London: Verso, 2001), 12.

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

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[15] M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 43. Also see Chenxi Tang, *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity: Geography, Literature, and Philosophy in German Romanticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008).
[16] Zygmunt Bauman, *Europe: An Unfinished Adventure* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2004), 11.

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

globe."[17]

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.[18] 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.[19]

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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 Press, 1998), 108.

[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 Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 18-40.

[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."[20]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."[21]

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

[20] Quoted in Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 22. For another recent revisit to Posnett's work as one of the early instances of global comparatism, see David Damrosch, "Rebirth of a Discipline: The Global Origins of Comparative Studies," *Comparative Critical Studies* 3, no. 1–2 (2006): 99–112.

[21] Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 357.

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.[22] 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."[23]

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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[22] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London Verso, 1998), 5. For a critique of the temporal paradigm of classical (Hegelian, that is) literary history which conceived literature as formal aesthetics of resolving or subsuming the tensions between European identity and European time and an alternative call for a Gramscian model, see Edward Said's essay "History, Literature and Geography," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 453-73.
[23] Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

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

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[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 World Literature?*(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); John David Pizer, *The Idea of World 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

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[27] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 148.

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.[28] Moreover, modern

subjecthood 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.[29]

Following the French Revolution, there emerged at least three competing orientations

along the mass-subjectivity and mass-print axis: the bureaucratic invention of national

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[28] For a fuller account, see Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang), 1977.

[29] 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).

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 subjecthood 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."[30] 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.

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[30] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, New ed. (London: Verso, 2000), vii.

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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[31] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1989).

[32] Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 179.

[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,

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[34] Jürgen Habermas, "*Modernity—An Incomplete Project*," in *The Anti- aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983): 3-15.

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*."[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.[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 *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."[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.[38]

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[35] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 37-8.
[36] For an extensive elaboration of the "non-economic economy" argument, see Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
[37] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, xviii.
[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.[39] As a result of the inevitable invitation of the masses into history, a "vast republican army of anonymous trampers" appears on the horizon.[40] 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.[41]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.[42]

Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky, (New York: International Publishers, 1925), 192.

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

[40] Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1967), 248.

[41] For an extensive discussion of the history, geography, production, translation and circulation of The *Communist Manifesto* as a primary example of how world literature operates, see Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 33-67.

[42] The term "*Bildung*-fever" belongs to the German novelist and poet Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff. Koselleck also mentions that the *Groeschenbibliothek 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

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[43] Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1996), 44.

revolution in the New World and imperialist rivalries give rise to anti-Western resistance.[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

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[44] Takeuchi Yoshimi, *What Is Modernity?*, trans. Richard Calichman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 56.

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.[45] Fictive

imagination, as a mode of representing "new orderings [and] possible worlds" [46]

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

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[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

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[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 schemes." Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007), 172.

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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[48] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 552.
[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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[50] Hagiwara Sakutarō, *Principles of Poetry = Shi No Genri* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1998), 157.

[51] Antonio Candido, *On Literature and Society*, trans. Howard Saul Becker (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 129.

[52] Anthony L. Geist and Jose B. Monleon, eds., *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America* (New York: Garland, 1999), xvii-xxxi.

[53] Lu Xun, *Selected Works,* vol. 2, trans. Xianyi Yang and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980), 204.

archeological ruins and bringing the national *topos* into alignment with *cosmos*, or

contemporaneity.[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.[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."[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."[57]As

the globalizing processes of modernity intrude upon everyday practices of individual

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[54] George Seferis, *On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism*, trans. Rex Warner (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1966).

[55] T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933), 108.

[56] T.S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, 64; Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 58; 12.

[57] Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 68-9.

lives, comparison emerges as "an inevitable and even unconscious perspective."[58]

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."[59]

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.[60] 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."[61]

Before C.L.R. James's vision of Black self-determination as a "self-generated and

independent motion" towards "an integrated humanity,"[62] Alain Locke, in his landmark

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[58] Pheng Cheah, "Grounds of Comparison," in *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Jonathan D. Culler (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

[59] Xudong Zhang, "Political Philosophy and Comparison: Bourgeois Identity and the Narrative of the Universal," *boundary 2* 32, no. 2 (2005), 87.

[60] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) treats extensively the Black Atlantic as a counter-and restless discourse of modernity.

[61] W.E.B. DuBois, "The Negro Mind Reaches Out," in *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925, 386.

[62] C. L. R. James, *The C.L.R. James Reader*, ed. Anna Grimshaw (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 304.

anthology of the Harlem Renaissance, *The New Negro*, situated the Harlem Renaissance as "coexistensive with global strivings for self-determination and national cultural expression."[63] 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."[64] 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."[65] This new conjuncture inevitably required different modes of measurement than those of

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[63] Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 73.
[64] Alain LeRoy Locke, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: A. and C. Boni, 1925), xi. For further history, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[65] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 51.

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."[66] 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."[67] 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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[66] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London Verso, 1998), 45.
[67] Fernando J. Rosenberg, *The Avant-Garde and Geopolitics in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006, 5.

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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

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[68] Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 43.

strata, is tied to "the means to restore and secure political authority." [69] 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.[70] 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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[69] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 135.

[70] Ángel Rama, *The Lettered City*, trans. John Charles Chasteen (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 37.

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

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[71] Ibid., 66.

[72] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 138.

[73] Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers*, 8. Also see, Morag Shiach, "'To Purify the Dialect of the Tribe': Modernism and Language Reform," *Modernism/Modernity* 14, no. 1 (2007): 21–34.

afford to lose its contact with the changing language of common intercourse."[74]

Elsewhere, Eliot would describe the modernist conjuncture in the English language as "a

revolution in the philological sense of the term."[75] 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."[76] 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.[77] 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.[78] 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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[74] T.S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, 21-3.

[75] T. S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic, and Other Writings* (New York: Farrar, 1965), 171.

[76] Ibid., 189.

[77] For a parallel approach by another major figure of English modernism, see Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, 384, and Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965* (New York: New Directions 1975), 166.

[78] 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.[79] 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.[80]

In this "grassroots," or plebeian variant of the demotic orientation, we find a

counter-hegemonic insurrectional effort of surviving cultural and linguistic extinction

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[79] George Seferis, *On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism*, trans. Rex Warner and Th D. Frangopoulos (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1966), 77.

[80] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 191.

"for purposes of national and cultural self-strengthening."[81] 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."[82]

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.[83] 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

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[81] Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 65.
[82] Lu Xun, *Selected Works*, vol.2, 333.
[83] Ibid., 44. See also the following essays in this volume: "The Classics and the Vernacular" 246-8; "Silent China" 328-33.

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slogans to show their modernity."[84] 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.[85] 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."[86] 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).
[85] For a detail history see Lydia He Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); for a critique of Lu Xun's cultural/aesthetic program see Shumei Shi, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). In addition, Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature : The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895-1937* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005) revisits the "failure" discourse as a politics of resilience, a historicist consciousness of regeneration and a complex cultural mode of self-perception in relation to the outside world.
[86] Amit Chaudhuri, ed., *The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), xix.

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."[87] 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.[88] To this end, the *Genbun-itchi* movement and the subsequent abolition of *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.[89] 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

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[87] Hagiwara Sakutarō, *Principles of Poetry*, 153.

[88] Ibid., 154-55.

[89] Kojin Karatani, *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, *Accomplices of Silence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 27.

sense.[90] 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.[91] 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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[90] George Yudice, "Rethinking the Theory of the Avant-Garde from the Periphery," in *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America*, eds. Anthony L. Geist and Jose B. Monleon (New York: Garland, 1999), 71-2.
[91] Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*,145.

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"[92] (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.[93] 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.[94] 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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[92] Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 65.

[93] Jean-Michel Rabaté puts the difference in their conceptions of "tradition" concisely as a difference in the translation of polis, where translation functions as a synonym for tradition: "Pound always sees the polis in its original Greek context, a context determined by state or city polytheism and politics. Eliot, following the drift of his inquest into European roots, revives linguistic energies dormant in Virgil, Augustine, and Dante. He deliberately drifts toward Latinity, translating the 'city' into the more comprehensive 'civitas'" (Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Tradition and T.S. Eliot," in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*, ed. Anthony David Moody [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 215). Also see Frank Kermode, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (New York: Viking Press, 1975). For a critique of the modernist engagement with tradition as belatedness, see Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern: A Study in British Literature and Criticism after 1850* (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 1987).

[94] Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965* (New York: New Directions 1975), 119.

imagined themselves in a better position to see "the effect of the central decay" in the

metropolis.[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.[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."[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

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[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).
[96] T.S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, 150.
[97] T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 24.

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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[98] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, 169.

[99] W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 11. Further citations are given in text.

[100] Quoted in Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 355.

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.[101] In Yeats' narrative, all these

mytho-historical factors endowed the Irish periphery with *gemeinschaftlische* 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 *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— *asabiyyah*; that is, a

"barbaric," yet at the same time fresh and potent, force. The reference to Ibn Khaldun's

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

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[101] The weakness of *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]

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[102] For further exploration of the cross-currents of this cultural internationalism through another Irish poet and anthologist James Cousin, theosophist Annie Besant, Tagore, and the Japanese pan-Asianist Okakura Kakuzo, see Gauri Viswanathan, "Synthetic Vision: Internationalism and the Poetics of Decolonization," in *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, eds. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 326-345. Yet, it would be inaccurate to interpret post-romantic internationalist visions as clear-cut political and cultural projects. On the contrary, they signify, following, referentially inadequate "metaphysical futures," while retaining powerful appeal due to their epistemic "patterns of resemblance and analogy with deeper universal signatures" and their capacities of generating "transidiomatic practices." See Srinivas Aravamudan, *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 266-7; Srinivas Aravamudan, "The Colonial Logic of Late Romanticism," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 1 (2003), 182. Elsewhere, Declan Kiberd links the birth of "the international theme" to the belief among writers of the time that conditions in which their literature was produced could be repeated in other places by other people. Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 129. Elleke Boehmer's *Empire, The National, and The Postcolonial, 1890-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) is another work that emphasizes the productive role of "suggestive cultural remoteness" (199).

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]

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[103]Edward 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

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[104] For this line of critique in the postcolonial Arab thought, see Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?*, trans. Diarmid Cammell (Berkeley University of California Press, 1976). For a handy introduction to Arab modernism, see Muhsin Jasim al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition* (London Routledge, 2006).

[105] Adonis, *The Blood of Adonis,* trans. Samuel Hazo (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), vii.

[106] Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, trans. Catherine Cobham (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 76. Further citations are given in text.

[107] Adonis, "Poetry and Apoetical Culture," in *The Pages of Day and Night*, ed. Samuel Hazo (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 101-09.

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*).[108] 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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[108] For further elaborations, see Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) and Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual, Myth and Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

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."[109] 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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[109] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 18. For a more specific focus on the question of logocentricism in Arab-Islamic tradition, see Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi, 2002).

Atlantic as a unifying historico-geographical term in order to restore, in Aimé Césaire's

words, "the double continuity that [was] broken by colonialism."[110] It comprised the

poetic exploration of "the Negro situation"[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."[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

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[110] Aimé Césaire, "The Responsibility of the Artist," in *The Africa Reader*, eds. Wilfred G. Cartey and Martin Kilson (New York: Random House, 1970), 160. For further discussions, see Melas, *All the Difference in the World*, 170-188; Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 118-134; Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), 104-110; E. San Juan, "Aimé Césaire's Insurrectionary Poetics," in *Surrealism, Politics, and Culture*, eds. Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003), 226-245; Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution : Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 189.

[111] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 92.

[112] James Clifford, "A Politics of Neologism: Aimé Césaire," in *The Predicament of Culture Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 177. Eduard Glissant explains the meaning of this politics as follows: "To name oneself is to write the world into existence." Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 44.

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]

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[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.
[115] Leopold Sedar Senghor, *Prose and Poetry*, trans. John O. Reed and Clive Wake (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 78.
[116] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Black Orpheus," in *"What Is Literature?" and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard 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

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[1] Tani E. Barlow, "On Colonial Modernity" in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 6.

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

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[2] Gregory Castle, *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 253.
[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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[4] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 102.
[5] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1946), 58.
[6] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, trans. Surendranath Tagore (London: Penguin, 2005), 37-8.

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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[7] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 136.
[8] Georg Lukács, "The Ideology of Modernism" in *Marxism and Human Liberation*, ed. E. San Juan Jr., (New York: Delta Books, 1973), 302.

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."[9]

   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."[10] The profane illumination and revolutionary intoxication of surrealism now

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[9] Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky (New York: International Publishers, 1925), 185; 54.

[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

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[11] Roland Barthes, "Whose Theater? Whose *Avant-Garde*?," in *Critical Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 68.

[12] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981): 3-14

[13] Andreas Huyssen "Critical Theory and Modernity," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1982), 3-12.

marvelous exemplar of US commitment to liberty of expression, rugged individualism

and creative freedom."[14] 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."[15] 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."[16] 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

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[14] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (New York: Blackwell, 1990), 37.
[15] Fredric Jameson, "Reflections in Conclusion," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, Ernest Bloch *et al.* (London: NLB, 1977), 212-3.
[16] Perry Anderson, "Marshall Berman: Modernity and Revolution," in *A Zone of Engagement*, (London: Verso, 1992), 45.

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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[17] Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 200.
[18] Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 129.

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."[20] Modernist works were consecrated as "the only right objects of contemplation" for the modern young Werthers.[21] 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

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[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.

[20] Lionel Trilling, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," in *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 4.

[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."[23] 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."[24] 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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[23] Irving Howe, *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts* (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), 14.

[24] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 102.

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

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[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.

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[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."[28] 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

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[28] Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1967), 194. Further citations are given in text.

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."[29]

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.[30] 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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[29] Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 169.
[30] D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915) expresses this spatial transformation in temporal terms as the displacement of "a Sunday world of absolute truth and mystery" by "weekday of world of people and trains and duties and reports." D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (London: Heinemann, 1971), 281-82.

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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[31] E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (London: Edward Arnold 1947), 17.

[32] Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology* (London: Picador, 1997), 105.

[33] Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, trans. Ivan Zaknic (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 160.

[34] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 70.

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.[35] 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[36], 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.[37] 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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[37] Frederic Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York Columbia University Press, 1994), 89.

capital flows.[38] We should in tandem note that uneven development, or discrepant modernization, appears as a global fact. In Woolf's *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.[39]

Forster's *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.[40]

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[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 *Modernism and Empire*, eds. Nigel Rigby and Howard J. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

[39] Virginia Woolf, *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 *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992) and Raymond Williams, *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, *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 *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).

[40] E.M. Forster, *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.[41]

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.[42] 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).

[42] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), 253.

it into a heap of gray ashes.[43] In their quest for supposedly pre-capitalist local enclaves—

a practice reminiscent of the Latin American tradition of *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."[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 *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." [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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[43] E.M. Forster, *Howards End*, 342.

[44] Ernst Bloch, *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.

[45] D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, 496.

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]

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[46] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21; Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 72; 27. See also Gabrielle McIntire, *Modernism, Memory, and Desire: T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[47] E.M. Forster, *Howards End*, 114-15.

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.[48] 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.[49] 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.[50]

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.[51] 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

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[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.

[51] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.,: M.I.T. Press, 1971), 103.

way out. "What happens," asks Lu Xun, "after Nora leaves home?"[52] In India, Rabindranath Tagore records the erosion of the *purdah* (veil, screen, or curtain) of the "*sanatan* [eternal] home-dwellers."[53] 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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[52] D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, 281; Lu Xun, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, 85-7.
[53] Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Anthology*, 118.

worldly existence in the untotalizable and interchangeable serialities that stretched

"beyond the threshold of [their] bounded life."[54]

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.[55] 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.[56] 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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[54] Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald Nathan Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 247.

[55] 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).

[56] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, vol. 1, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: NLB, 1976), 268.

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, non-
> sensuous 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]

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[57] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 101-3.

[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."[59] 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." (xiii-xiv) 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." (xiv) One can only speculate on what course the twentieth century might have taken take 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.

[59] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 214-15. Lynch's anti-climactic point right after Stephen's aesthetic epiphany is an echoing reminder of the colonial context of its enunciation: "What do you mean, Lynch asked surlily, by prating about beauty and the imagination in this miserable Godforsaken island?" (215)

of *moi*" and the merger of the self with the world.[60] 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.[61]

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."[62]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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[60] Junzaburo Nishiwaki, *The Poetry and Poetics of Nishiwaki Junzaburo*, ed. Hosea Hirata (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 33.

[61] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2006), 52-3.

[62] Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7. As Fredric Jameson points out, "at best, there stirs here everywhere an apocalyptic dissatisfaction with subjectivity itself and the older forms of the self." Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2002), 134-5.

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."[63] 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."[64]

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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[63] Soseki Natsume, *Kokoro*, trans. Edwin McClellan (South Bend, Ind.: Regnery Gateway, 1979), 165.
[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.

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[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 bits of color like a damaged kaleidoscope." Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 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

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[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.[68] 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-meditated 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. [69]

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.[70] 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.[71] 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.[72] 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,"[73] 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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[72] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, 26.
[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.[74]

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.[75] 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.[76] 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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[74] 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 boeono* ("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).

[75] 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).

[76] Fredric Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism," in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, Terry Eagleton *et al.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 48-51.

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

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[77] Harry D. Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 64.

[78] See Melba Cuddy-Keane, "Modernism, Geopolitics, Globalization," *Modernism/Modernity* 10, no. 3 (2003): 539-58.

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 panaroma are very much reminiscent

of a Conradian narrative:

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[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.[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."[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.[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

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[81] Yokomitsu Riichi, *Shanghai*, 44.

[82] Ibid., 34.

[83] Yokomitsu Riichi, *Shanghai*, 77. In *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

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[84] Yokomitsu, *Shanghai*, 108.

of the Great Powers through a successful general strike by the Chinese proletariat.[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.

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[85] Ibid., 103. On an analysis of Shanghai's overlapping topographies in the novel as the colonial city, the revolutionary city and the slum city, see Seiji M. Lippit, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 73-116.

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

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[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."

[2] Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 21.

vis-à-vis the politics of "the age of three worlds."[3] 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 auratic 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.[4] 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.[5]

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.
[4] Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 32..
[5] Imre Szeman, *Zones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 1-2; Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), 170.

the nation and region of origin."[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.[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 *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.[8]

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[6] Jean Franco, *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, *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), and Brett Levinson, *The Ends of Literature: The Latin American "Boom" In the Neoliberal Marketplace* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[7] The Serbian novelist Danilo Kĭs 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 Kĭs, *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich,* trans. Duška Mikić-Mitchell (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001), 88; 108.

[8] Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment," in *Notes to Literature,* vol. 2, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 76.

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.[9] 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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[9] Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, trans. Edward Baker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

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 *retour* (return) to questions of language, orality, native

structures of feeling, myth, and so on and *detour* (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]

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[10] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 14. For a specific application of Mbembe's insights, see Pius Adesanmi, "Of Postcolonial Entanglement and Durée: Reflections on the Francophone African Novel," *Comparative Literature* 56, no. 3 (2004): 227-43. On the concept of entanglement from a world-systemic perspective, see Ramon Grosfoguel, "World-System Analysis and Postcolonial Studies", in *The Postcolonial and the Global*, eds. Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 94-104.

[11] Achille Mbembe, "At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 259-84.

[12] Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 26.

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.[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.[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."[15]

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[13] Yambo Ouologuem, *Bound to Violence*, trans. Ralph Manhein, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971), 177.
[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.
[15] Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York, N.Y.: Penguin
Books, 1981), 7.

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,

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[16] Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 223; 195; 234.

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and by, on the other, internal dynamics of change"?[17] 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."[18] 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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[17] Peter Hitchcock, "Postcolonial Failure and the Politics of Nation," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106:4 (2007), 727.

[18] Jesús Díaz, *The Initials of the Earth*, trans. Kathleen Ross (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 110.

narrator in a perplexed situation: "words…as if they were Mexican or Venezuelan expressions, or Argentinisms, my own language, but in a foreign country."[19] 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."[20] 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. [21] At one

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[19] Edmundo Desnoes, *Inconsolable Memories* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 140.
[20] Isabel Allende, *The House of the Spirits*, trans. Ayumi Takano (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985), 307-08.
[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."[23]

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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.

[22] Naguib Mahfuz, *Miramar*, trans. Fatma Moussa Mahmoud (Heinemann: London, 1978), 107.

[23] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann, 1968), 185.

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 Hunbdred 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

[24] Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Concept of National Development, 1917-1989," *American Behavioral Scientist* 1992; 25, no 3-4; 517-529.

[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 exemplies 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 egalitaianism and autochtonous 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

University Press, 1990), 26. Also see his more recent article, "Decomposing Modernity: History and
Hierarchy after Development," in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania Loomba (Durham: Duke
University Press, 2005).

[27] For an extensive critique of the case in the Arab world, Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*
(Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

[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.[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

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[29] Edmundo Desnoes, *Inconsolable Memories*, 117; 170.

governance and management of the political regime.[30] 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.[31]

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,"[32] 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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[30] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 102.

[31] Kofi Awoonor, *This Earth, My Brother*, 24-25.

[32] Kumkum Sangari, 'The Politics of the Possible', in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

Wright invokes a powerful imagery as to how the moment of decolonization shakes the

architectonics 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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[33] Richard Wright, "Preface" to George Lamming, In the *Castle of My Skin*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953), xx.

[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.[35] 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."[36]

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.[37]

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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

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[38] Ibid., 230.

[39] Ibid., 302 (emphasis added).

[40] M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 24. See also Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 240-43.

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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."[41]

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."[42] 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*).[43] 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.[44]

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[41]Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 157.

[42] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 147.

[43] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason. Vol. 1. Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso/New Left Books, 2004).

[44] Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 159-60.

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.[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 (*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.[48]

It is not only the foreign colonizer but also the relics of the traditional native

power structure that are discarded. Ahmadou Kourouma's *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

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[47] Jesús Díaz, *The Initials of the Earth*, 367.
[48] For further elaboration, see Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 235-48.

(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."[49] 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.[50]

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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[49] Ahmadou Kourouma, *The Suns of Independence* (London: Heineman, 1981), 6; 14; 61; 68; 107.
[50] Naguib Mahfuz, *Miramar*, trans. Fatma Moussa Mahmoud (Heinemann: London, 1978), 12-13.

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").[51] 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.[52] 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."[53] In this

symbolically charged *mise-en-scène*, nobody who is taking part in the event is ready to

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[51] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann, 1968), 231-32.
[52] Kofi Awoonor, *This Earth, My Brother*, 118.
[53] Al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 362.

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

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[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."[55]

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]

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[56] Peter Abrahams, *A Wreath for Udomo* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 151-52.
[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.
[58] Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* (New York: John Day Co., 1966), 34.
[59] Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations*, 173; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 134.

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.[60] 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.[61]

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.[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 *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."[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 *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

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[62] Antonio Candido, *On Literature and Society*, trans. Howard Saul Becker (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 119-20.
[63] Carlos Fuentes, *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (New York: Farrar, 1964), 28.

Africa.[64] 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.[65] 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.[66] 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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[64] For a specific discussion of postcolonial modernist narratives in the Arab world of the 1960s, see Saree Makdisi, "'Postcolonial' Literature in a Neocolonial World: Modern Arabic Culture and the End of Modernity," *Boundary 2* 22, no. 1 (1995): 85-115. As an example of the critique of the modernist turn in postcolonial writing, see Neil Lazarus, "The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism," in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania Loomba (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), and Aijaz Ahmad, "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," *Race and Class* 36 no.3 (1995): 1-20.
[65] Julio Cortazar, *Hopscotch*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 93.
[66] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davis (London: Lynee Rienner Publishers, 1997), 167.

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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[67] Ayi Kwei Armah, *Fragments* (London: Heinemann, 1974), 278-81.
[68] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood* (New York: Dutton, 1978), 263.

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 refind 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

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[1] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. Spring (2004), 654.

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

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[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 audiocasette 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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[3] Don DeLillo, *Mao II* (New York: Viking, 1991), 26; 41-2; 72; 157.
[4] J. M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), 21. Further citations are given in text.

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."[5] 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"?[7] 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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[7] Orhan Pamuk, *Snow*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Knopf, 2004), 386.
[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."[9]

From this perspective, the post-September 11 world appears remarkably un-

Kantian.[10] 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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[9] David Palumbo-Liu, "Preemption, Perpetual War, and the Future of the Imagination," *boundary 2* 33, no. 1 (2006), 157; 159.

[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."[11] 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."[12]

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.[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, *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"?[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.[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"[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

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[13] David Palumbo-Liu, "Rational and Irrational Choices: Form, Affect, and Ethics," in *Minor Transnationalism*, eds. Francoise Lionnet and Shumei Shi (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 64.
[14] Amitava Kumar, ed., *World Bank Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
[15] David Palumbo-Liu, "Rational and Irrational Choices: Form, Affect, and Ethics," in *Minor Transnationalism*, eds. Francoise Lionnet and Shumei Shi (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 64; 67-8.
[16] Emily Apter, "On Oneworldedness: Or Paranoia as a World System," *American Literary History* 18, no. 2 (2006): 365-89.

globe as a democratic ecology of human habitats and cultures.[17] 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-spreading 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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[17] Some of the most notable examples are Emily S. Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), Wai Chee Dimock, "Scales of Aggregation: Prenational, Subnational, Transnational," *American Literary History* 18, no. 2 (2006): 219-28, Wai Chee Dimock, "Planetary Time and Global Translation," *Common Knowledge* 9, no. 3 (2003): 488-508, and Wai-chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

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).[18]

In Don DeLillo's *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."[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 *Cosmopolis*, even the

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[18] John Updike, *Terrorist* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 44; 58; 121; 23. Further citations are included in text.
[19] Don DeLillo, *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*:

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[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).

[21] Rick Moody, *The Diviners* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), 39. Further citations are given in text.

> 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."[22] 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

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[22] Frederic Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York Columbia University Press, 1994), 70.

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[23] –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 diasporia/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 Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). Also see, Paolo Virno, *Multitude between Innovation and Negation*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), and Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. James Cascaito and Andrea Casson Isabella Bertoletti (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

[25] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 230-31.

[26] Emily Apter, "On Oneworldedness: Or Paranoia as a World System," 386.

"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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[27] Ryu Murakami, *In the Miso Soup*, trans. Ralph F. McCarthy (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2003), 65;
Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 77; Viktor Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens*, trans.
Andrew Bromfield (New York: Viking, 2002); Carlos Fuentes, *The Eagle's Throne*, trans. Kristina Cordero
(London: Bloomsbury, 2006); Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007), 64;
Samina Ali, *Madras on Rainy Days* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 26.

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?"[28] 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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[28] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (New York: Random House, 2000), 1; 219. Further citations are given in text. As another instance, Monica Ali's *The Brick Lane* (New York: Scribner, 2003) begins with an epigram from Turgenev: "Fate guides each of us."

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.[29]

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,[30] and exercise a transnational literary aesthetics, "a montage of overlapping maps in motion,"[31] 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 Diaz'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.

[30] Arjun Appadurai, "Hope and Democracy" *Public Culture* 19:1 2007; David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[31] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 24.

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