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ARTICLE

World Literary Histories as Rewritings of World Historiography

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ABSTRACT

This essay approaches the question of rewriting world civilization through a sub-set of civilizational history, namely the historiography of world literature. I will use the changing conceptions of world literature to track a change of emphasis on what matters in world civilization. My presentation is in three parts: a discussion of the nature of history, of literature, and of world literature; a comparison of two nineteenth-century German histories of world literature; and a comparison of two twenty-first century histories of world literature.

摘要

从文明史的一个截面即"世界文学史"入手，美国宾夕法尼亚大学托马斯·比比教授（Thomas O.Beebee）探讨了重写世界文明的问题。通过梳理"世界文学"这一概念内涵的变化，本文追索了世界文明史书写中重点的改变，论述共分为三个部分：对历史、文学与世界文学本质的讨论；对19世纪德国出版的两部世界文学史的比较；以及对21世纪问世的两部世界文学史的比较。

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It goes without saying that we could have selected another cultural sphere, such as science and technology, religion, graphic arts, or cuisine as our synecdochal stand-in for civilization. Conversely, it is difficult to say how these various cultural elements could be woven into a single story. Arguably, the concept of civilization refers to either the whole of cultural achievements, or to an essential feature that runs through the various spheres. We will see in what follows that G. F. W. Hegel chose Geist (spirit) as that essential element. Another ambiguity in the word "civilization" lies in deciding whether it is used in a neutral sense, as a synonym for culture, or in an ideological (and frequently Eurocentric) sense of a culture that is advanced and progressive. Not coincidentally, the use of "civilization" in either of these senses was first recorded in English in the eighteenth century, coinciding with the rise of our current valence of the word "literature."

Famously, and uniquely, the German philosopher Hegel drew a strong connection between general history and the history of aesthetics. First of all, both history and art develop in stages whose successional logic is governed by the way that they allow spirit to express itself and to know both itself and freedom. Hegel defines art

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as the sensuous appearance of an idea. A work of art mediates between pure sense and pure thought. This definition allows Hegel to distinguish the various artistic media in terms of the relative predominance of sense or idea or spirit in them. Hegel's choice of terms to designate three possibilities carry with them an idea of historical progression: the symbolic; the classical; and the romantic. Hegel's analysis combines to the highest degree historical remarks on a variety of civilizations with analysis of the particular type of art that they developed. I will give here only a sampling of his discussion of the classical mode, which he finds belonging above all to Greek culture:

> As regards the actualization of classical art in history, it is scarcely necessary to remark that we have to look for it in the Greeks. Classical beauty with its infinite range of content, material, and form is the gift vouchsafed to the Greek people, and we must honour this people for having produced art in its supreme vitality. The Greeks in their immediate real existence lived in the happy milieu of both self-conscious subjective freedom and the ethical substance. They did not persist on the one hand in the unfree Oriental unity which has a religious and political despotism as its consequence; this is because the subject, losing his self, is submerged in the one universal substance, or in some particular aspect of it, since he has no right and therefore no support in himself as a person. Nor, on the other hand, did the Greeks make the advance to that deepening of subjective life in which the individual subject separates himself from the whole and the universal in order to be independent in his own inner being; and only through a higher return into the inner totality of a purely spiritual world does he attain a reunification with the substantial and essential. (Hegel 436–37)

Here Hegel links the three modalities – classical, symbolic, and romantic – with three different cultures: Greek, "Oriental," and contemporary European, respectively. In other words, "Oriental" art remains mired in the symbolic due to the political despotism that does not allow individuality to flourish, while at the other end romantic art depends on a feeling by individuals that they are separated from the whole, typical of the alienated, bourgeois modern society. Aesthetics has a history that moves from the symbolic through the classical to the romantic, accompanied by civilizational developments leading from Egyptian, Chinese, and Indian to the Greeks, and then beyond into Christian Europe. Space does not allow for a detailed explanation of Hegel's totalizing scheme for world aesthetics. It uses a compelling logical framework to justify viewing European civilization as the culmination of world history.

Among other things that may cause us to identify literature as an important window into civilization is the etymological tie between the two words. That is, "literature" refers to written compositions, and literary studies have had a difficult time dealing with oral productions, which must be translated into writing in order to enter into history. At the very least, we can say that literary studies always deal with written texts, even if these are transcriptions, real or imagined of bards or folksingers. In parallel, civilization literally means "city-culture," as related Latin words such as *civitas* (city) and *civis* (citizen) make clear. Cities are the strongholds of literacy, which is the necessary platform for literary culture. What happens outside of cities belongs in general to "culture" or "folklore," not to civilization. Furthermore, world civilization is based in large part on what happens in cities, which come to resemble each other more and more. Oswald Spengler had a valid point with his pun in German that "Weltliteratur ist die führende weltstädtische Literatur" (Spengler 684; "world literature is the dominant metropolitan literature"). In

German, the etymon "Welt" occurs in the terms both for world literature and for metropole, linking the two inextricably.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, world literature reemerged as a topic of discussion and debate, including questions about its basic mechanism for existing and expanding, and the proper perspective from which to observe its products. Ayesha Ramachandran formulates the question thus: "One of the central questions raised by the rubric 'world literature' concerns perspective: *from where* is world literature – and indeed 'the world' – to be envisioned? If the world looks different from different places and cultural vantage points, how can it be treated as a stable category that is intelligible across multiple contexts without subordinating some positions to others?" (Ramachandran 111–12; emphasis in original).

But what – and what for – is literary history? We must first recognize the difference between literary history and other kinds of history. If history in general is the science of reconstructing "what really happened," literary history works differently. Leon Goldstein explains that "historical knowing is not the knowing of what can be witnessed. [. . .] What we can witness does not require the techniques of historical constitution to be known. If we need the discipline of history, it is precisely because we believe that there are things that may be known about the human past which cannot be known in the direct way" (Goldstein 320). But the remarkable aspect of literature – a feature that it shares with art and philosophy – is that literary historians *do* have direct knowledge of the past textual world, assuming that they possess mastery of the various language stages of literary composition. That is, they can actually experience the texts that form the history they are writing about, though that "direct" textual experience is only one element of literary history. Also, almost by definition world literature takes scholars beyond the boundaries of languages they know well enough to read literary texts in, and they therefore must make use of translations. There is, then, a "translational constitution" of world literary history, unless the history is a group project such as the *Cambridge History of World Literature* that I discuss below. Wendell Harris published an article with that question as a title *(College English* 56, No. 4 (Apr., 1994), pp. 434–51), answering it as follows: "For the most part the history of a [national] literature is a mixture of bibliography, biography, cultural analysis, literary change, and critical commentary" (445). In other words, literary history on a national scale may coordinate internal (bibliography, critical commentary, literary change) with external (biography cultural analysis) data to construct its narrative. Of course, we can add genres, for example theory, to the mix. In addition, an anthology of literature can also perform the function of delivering a history.

1. Literature as civilization I: two nineteenth-century examples

Such was the case with the first German anthology of *Weltliteratur*. Johannes Scherr's 1848 *Bildersaal der Weltliteratur* (Picture-Gallery of World Literature). Scherr was on the side of democratic reform in that year of rebellion against the German political system that was still feudalistic, a stance that would result in his exile to Switzerland. Scherr was, in Anthony Appiah's term, a "cosmopolitan patriot." His anthology would go through two further editions in his lifetime, adding a second volume in 1869 and a third in 1884. The revival of the anthology 20 years after its first appearance came on the eve of the founding of the Second Reich under Prussian dominance, and two years after the first

publications in Reclam's Universalbibliothek (Universal Library), which would deliver for the most part whole texts rather than snippets, so that Scherr's anthology could be seen as a supplement in the effort to deliver world literature to the German reading public.

Scherr's anthology is arranged according to nation, which follow each other in the order in which they contributed to world literature. Thus, the first volume begins with China, followed by Japan, India, Israel, Arabia, and Persia. The second part of the volume continues with Greece, Rome, and early Christian literature. The remaining parts deal with the "Romanischen Länder," namely France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Romania. The second volume is taken up entirely with German literature, and the third begins with literatures of Germanic countries such as England and Scandinavia. History in the anthology comes in the form of the prefaces to the chapters and in the brief introductions to each national tradition that combine the various components of literary history identified by Wendell Harris. The approach is at once universalizing and hierarchizing. Scherr posits the origins of civilization in Asia, and places cultures of the region at the beginning of the anthology. At the same time, he places emphasis on the earliest literary products of those periods, resulting in a division of the world into a traditional East and a modernizing West. As part of the latter, Scherr recognizes France's "Hauptrolle in dem Entwicklungsdrama der Weltgeschichte" (Scerr 229). Germany also figures prominently, taking up most of a volume, and including authors whose resonance on the world stage is highly debatable.

It is interesting to contemplate Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels writing in parallel with Scherr, invoking *Weltliteratur* as a sign of the uniting of the world under the bourgeoisie. Their famous statement in the *Communist Manifesto* reads: "The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature" (Marx and Engels 476–77). Influenced by the philosophy of G. F. W. Hegel, Marx sees world history as a single, interconnected story, but with a material rather than intellectual force driving its development. Capitalism's unceasing search for new markets and new resources breaks down barriers, making intellectual traditions the common property of all. This is a dynamic process, unlike the crystallized, static division of the world in Scherr's anthology. Nevertheless, Venkat Mani comments on this parallel between Marx and Scherr:

> Scherr made his statement . . . in 1848, a year in which the most well-known statement [on world literature] by Marx and Engels would appear in the *Communist Manifesto*. Scherr is not too distant from Marx and Engels. Like them, he would use the term *geistige Produkte* to determine the intellectual production of a particular nation and also present books as the *Gemeingut* (shared wares) of humanity. This idea of shared property would undergo further transformation. (Mani 112)

Mani does well to place his discussion of Scherr's *Bildersaal* within a chapter titled "Half Epic, Half Drastic" in his *Recoding World Literature*. Though German politics were not the same in 1869 as in 1884, and neither year much resembled 1848, Scherr was unwilling to update the political placement of his anthology to reflect the most recent political events. It is tempting to relate Scherr's repetition compulsion to the metaphor of the portrait gallery he used as a title for the anthology.

As both Rebecca Braun and Andrew Patten have pointed out, Scherr's strategy in the *Bildersaal* of having lyric poetry snippets stand in even for entire prose epics such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* results in a representation of literature in which the part stands for the whole, the snippet for the work, the work for the author, the collection of authors for the whole of *Weltliteratur*. Patten begins his essay by describing an event that occurred between the first edition and the second: the World's Fair in London's Crystal Palace in 1851. He argues that the *Bildersaal*, as its title suggests, owes much both to the rise of museum culture in Europe during the nineteenth century and to the ever-increasing flood of print literature. The first impetus sacralizes the objects and imposes a taxonomy that governs any reading of them, such as for example the familiar orientalizing strategy of dividing "morgenländische" from "abendländische" literature. Scherr's organization and paratext spatialize the picture gallery: "To commence the anthology, Scherr begins his foreword by signifying a physical entry point to the space of the collection with the bold-ink [i.e., boldface font] declaration: 'Zum Eingang' and with the performative epigram commanding entry: *Introite! Et hic dii sunt* 'Enter! For here too are gods'" (Patten 128). Braun adds that "Script and agency are . . . both visually present in the anthology, but in such a way as to appear independently of one another. In this radically decontextualized, frozen state, the resulting snapshots of literary texts portrayed must have more in common with an eclectic curiosity cabinet than any sort of inspirational 'performance of subjectivity' in and through literature. . . . [A]ll that remains is a museum of more or less material objects" (Braun 91). Thus, Scherr's attempt at using *Weltliteratur* to make an end-run around the blockading of democracy contradicts the method and the metaphor that he uses to present his material. The original, pre-museal purpose of the portrait gallery was to present either the genealogy of a family, or a private art collection of great value. Galleries were to be seen by invited guests in an appropriate room of the manor house or castle. The *Bildersaal* thus represents both power and accumulation, and the anthology contributes further to this idea of stasis by foregoing any connectors between the texts, and by evening out the linguistic differences through German translation. The chronological arrangement of texts also contributes to the feeling of stasis, since style and format do not change from epoch to epoch due to the relative contemporaneity of the various translations. As an aside, we could perhaps contrast Scherr's presentation with present complaints about the current study of *Weltliteratur*, namely, that a good portion of its better-known theorists derive their models for its development by excluding all forms other than prose fiction. Such was Erich Auerbach's approach in *Mimesis* (1946), for example, though he restricted his study to *abendländische* (Western) literature, half of Scherr's scope.

If Scherr insists on world literature as a gallery of static images, Moriz Carrière insists on dynamic development as he translates Hegelian world history into world art history in five volumes published between 1863 and 1874. The Hegelian connection is evident already in his title: *Die Kunst im Zusammenhang der Culturentwickelung und die Ideale der Menschheit* (Art in the Context of Cultural Development and the Ideals of Humankind). The "development of culture" in the title is of course a gloss on the process of civilization. Following Hegel, Carrière makes the goal of this process self-realization and the attainment of freedom:

> Das Wesen des Geistes ist die Freiheit, die Selbstbestimmung; darum ist er nicht von Natur was er sein soll, sondern wird erst durch eigenen Willen, und seine Selbstverwirklichung ist die Geschichte. Ist er aber nicht fertig von Natur, dann ist seine Aufgabe die Selbstvervollkommnung. Das Vollkommene liegt darum im Geist, aber nicht als inhaltsvoller Begriff, sondern [...] als ethische Kategorie, als Unterscheidungsnorm, als leitender Gesichtspunkt. [...] Das Vollkommene ist das Seinsollende, darum sind wir nur dort befriedigt wo es uns in der Erscheinung entgegentritt, wo es durch die That vollbracht oder im Denken erreicht wird. [...] Kunst, Religion, Philosophie bezeichnen nach den Grundrichtungen des Geistes die Formen innerhalb welcher die Arbeit an dieser Aufgabe vollzogen wird. (Carrière, I, 62)
>
> (The essence of the spirit is freedom, self-determination; therefore, the spirit is not by nature what it should be, but only becomes what it should be through its own will, and its self-realization is [world] history. But if spirit is not a finished product by nature, then its task is self-improvement. That is why perfection resides in the spirit, not as a concept full of content, but rather [...] as an ethical category, as a norm of differentiation, as a guiding point of view. [...] The perfect is what ought to be, therefore we are only satisfied where it appears to us, where it is accomplished through deeds or achieved in thought. [...] Art, religion, philosophy designate the forms within which the work on this task is carried out according to the basic directions of the spirit.)

It is often said that profound influence is best shown by the absence of explicit reference. That appears to be the case here, as Carrière's vocabulary and his thesis are both implicitly Hegelian. The role of art is to facilitate the development of spirit, and the abilities of different cultures to develop the spirit can be compared with each other.

Like Hegel, Carrière is explicit about what counts and what doesn't count in the overall historical process. Oddly, it has much to do with the grammar of languages. Only synthetic languages have contributed to world culture. This excludes the Chinese, above all:

> Die Cultur der Menschheit ist das gemeinsame Werk der Völker mit Flexionssprachen, der Arier und Semiten. China steht bisjetzt außerhalb des Stroms der Weltbewegung, die Turanier haben durch Attila oder Tamerlan wie durch die scythischen. Einfälle in Persien und Babylon nur durch äußere Anstöße gewirkt, ohne selbst eine originale Idee erzeugt und fortgepflanzt zu haben. (Carrière I, 58)
>
> (The culture of mankind is the common work of peoples with inflected languages, the Aryans and Semites. China has hitherto been outside the flow of world movement, in which the Turanians have participated through Attila or Tamerlane, as well as through the Scythian Incursions into Persia and Babylon only by external impulses, without having created and propagated an original idea.)

Thus, as in Hegel, there are winners and losers in the history of cultures, and the five volumes soon leave the rest of the world behind to focus solely on Europe.

The references to Hegel crescendo in the fifth and final volume, ominously titled Das Weltalter des Geistes im Aufgange (The world epoch of the spirit ascending) with 35 citations, and an even more direct declaration that Carrière is attempting to carry out in greater detail Hegel's vision of history:

> Nur von diesem Standpunkte aus konnte Lessing den Begriff göttlicher Offenbarung und menschlicher Entwickelung in der Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts finden und dadurch die Philosophie der Geschichte und der Religion möglich machen, die alsbald Herder, dann Schelling und Hegel begründeten, die unsere Gegenwart auszuführen bestrebt ist; auch dies Buch will ein Baustein der selben sein. (Carrière V, 236)

> (Only from this perspective was [G. E.] Lessing able to locate the concept of divine revelation and human development in the education of humankind and in this way enable the philosophy of history and of religion, which [J. G.] Herder, then [F. W. J.] Schelling and Hegel went on to found, and which our present day is attempting to carry out; this book, as well, is intended as a cornerstone of these endeavors.)

The genealogy given here is well-known. Carrière credits German thinkers with the invention of a philosophy of history dependent on a cultural relativism that rejected the absolutist cultural strictures of the Classical world and Christian doctrine, for which Herder provided the essential arguments. Hegel then reestablishes the hierarchy not as divine revelation, but as the realization by spirit of its own freedom. But Hegel world history is philosophical rather than historiographic. This leaves room for Carrière's world art history to become a "cornerstone" of world history.

Our two examples of world literary history, then, represent approaches that differ significantly from one another, but which also share a sense of the historical trajectory of literature, in which the leading role in civilizational advances passes from the East to the West.

2. Literature as civilization II: two twenty-first century examples

Eurocentrism as a philosophical ground was severely shaken by events of the twentieth century. The slaughter of millions in war and genocide was accompanied by the liberation of former colonies and semi-colonies, a change of status which allowed their own cultural viewpoints to contribute more clearly to the global discourse of civilization. (It is worth noting in this context that neither Scherr nor Carrière included Africa in their histories.) The Cold War, on the other hand, had the opposite effect of shutting down cosmopolitan discourse in favor of closed ideological circuits of communication. Inevitably, then, interest in world literature revived strongly in the 1990s with the triumph of global capitalism. This section compares two world literary histories of the twenty-first century.

The title of Walter Cohen's *A History of European Literature* (2019) seems excessively modest, while the subtitle captures the ambition of his work more accurately: *The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present*. Cohen compares the history of world literature to an hourglass on its side (Cohen 1): the two narrow ends are antiquity and the present moment, the latter perhaps dating from the postcolonial liberation that brought many new "national" literatures front and center. The narrow, middle part of the hourglass encompasses roughly the period of European imperial expansion through the end of WWII. We could add to the metaphor of the hourglass the image of the pulse of world literature consisting of a systole, where literatures are localized, and a diastole, where they are ecumenized. The last term is owed to Sheldon Pollock, who deploys it to indicate a regional structure dominated by a single prestige language, whether Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Arabic, French, or English. Pollock describes the systole and diastole thus:

> The history of literary developments in South Asia can to a large degree be plotted along two axes, one unidirectional and the other recursive. The recursive axis of literary history plots the presence and fate of subcontinent-wide cultural ecumenes—chiefly Sanskrit, Perso-Arabic, and English. These are all obviously very different kinds of ecumenes, with very different histories, but they are comparable in constituting super-regional communities of readers and potentially super-regional communities of citizen-subjects or at least super-

> regional classes. This component is crosscut by the largely unidirectional development of what might be called the growth of literary "incommunication" [. . .] that is, of ever more delimited reading publics and, putatively, delimited aggregations of citizen-subjects. (Pollock 129–30)

Pollock's oppositional pair are "ecumene" – corresponding to the thick parts of Cohen's hourglass – and the "incommunication" corresponding to the thin part. One much-studied example of the transition from ecumene to delimited reading publics is the gradual replacement of Latin as the language of civilization in Europe by the vernaculars over the course of nearly five hundred years, until by the nineteenth century Latin publication had an extremely small market share and public impact.

From his vantage-point as a Shakespeare scholar, Cohen is able to explore world literature in this comprehensive way through a methodology of distant reading, making use of voluminous studies on the many literatures that he cannot read in the original. Cohen's bibliography is 73 pages of single-spaced 8-point font, containing more than two thousand works. His approach moves from a bird's-eye view of overarching trends to the micro-level of close reading of individual texts. If we focus on the latter, we discover that the author's approach to world literature follows a Great Books model. Canonized works and authors are seen as the guideposts for understanding world literature, while at the same time much attention is paid to the infrastructures of language and economics, especially as these relate to imperial domination and the choice of a literary language. A remark inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of literary polyphony as a counter to Stalinist ideological conformism reveals Cohen's predilection for the canon(s): "the predicament of the present [i.e., of the twenty-first century], as it were, is that polyphony and popular culture, far from posing a threat to things as they are, simply represent business as usual" (Cohen 496). Rather than literature being obliterated by censorship, it is now marginalized or confused with popular culture. (Was the Nobel Prize awarded to Bob Dylan in 2016 the nail in the coffin of Literature with a big "L"?)

The title of Cohen's first chapter, "The Old World Literary System," could end with a question mark or with scare quotes, because he wishes to investigate the extent to which a broadly conceived ancient world "points to a coherent literary system," as opposed to a "mere collection of mostly unrelated materials?" (Cohen 17). He documents more literary interchange than normally assumed. The chapter on Roman literature rests on a truism, that none of its great authors was born in Rome, and that this caused its literature to impart a "sense of being on the 'receiving end' of *imperium*" (Cohen 54). The chapter "The Vernacular" (Cohen 85–116) is entirely devoted to the bird's-eye view, seeking to unravel the mystery of how Europe came to be an example of "incommunication." The question of the next chapter is "to what extent is [European] epic distinctively Western European?" (Cohen 117). The author's answer is that medieval epics are like weather events: singular; unpredictable; and the product of multiple factors. Despite the Latin tradition there was no epic "climate" in Europe. Lyric and prose narrative, on the other hand, reach their entelechy in the Occitan tradition and in the development of romance, allegory, and frame-tale collection respectively. Chapter Eight assesses the role of vernacular literature in the spread of Reformation ideas, and it includes a comparison with the *bhakti* poets of India.

The early modern period coincides with Europe's creation of global empires, and Cohen's literary hypothesis is that literature's presentation of empire is nonrepresentational. The play *Hamlet* is a key piece of evidence (Cohen 244–50), along with the novel

Don Quixote. Cervantes, for example, was quite familiar with the Spanish presence in America, and the title figure could be seen among other things as a failed conquistador, but concrete references to the New World are almost entirely lacking in the novel (Cohen 261–72). Cohen admits that this line of inquiry into the "not-said" could end up in the extreme case of silence about empire being read as a strong critique of empire. It is also inconsistent with the anti-imperial feeling of Roman literature discussed above. The (non)representation of empire in European literature continues through the next chapters, for example in the consideration of the idea that the realist novel excluded the ability to depict empire, making the nineteenth century the thinnest part of the middle of the hourglass. In Chapter Fourteen (406–442), Cohen presents the striking thesis that Jewishness is at the heart of modernist fiction (Cohen brackets consideration of poetry, theater, and of course cinema from here to the end of his treatise. There is not a single index entry for Henrik Ibsen, for example, and only one for Bertolt Brecht, two for W. B. Yeats, etc.) The reasoning is compelling: "Jewishness offers a position in which you at once do and do not belong" (Cohen 421), belong, for example to the nationalist projects that seem tied to the practice of the novel in the nineteenth century. Of course, the most famous Jewish character of modernism, Leopold Bloom, was created by a non-Jew, James Joyce, whose Irish origins also made him an insider/outsider. Naturally, *Ulysses* is subject to one of the close readings of the chapter (432–39), as is the work of Franz Kafka (426–32).

In the book's last substantive chapter, Cohen goes all in for the identification of contemporary fiction with postmodernism, taking the "post-"in its widely accepted meaning of "after." Postmodernism returns to the themes and architectonics of the nineteenth-century novel, but incorporates both the formal innovations of modernism, and the alienation and cynicism of post-WWII thought that stem from the culmination of the nineteenth-century project in war and totalitarianism. Cohen explains the dialectic of representation in postmodernism by comparing it to the book we are reading:

> In recent historical fiction, a sense of the inevitably provisional, subjective character of any reconstruction is combined with a serious desire to make sense of and recover the past, sometimes in the hope of broadening the geographical and cultural options available in the present. This double spirit—of the tentative and the analytical—animated not the conception, but very much the completion of the present project. It is to just such a mix that I have aspired. (Cohen 506)

Following Franco Moretti and others, Cohen sees the novel form as Europe's most successful literary export. The novel is the surest marker that in the "American century," "European literature, including its American spin off, becomes so dominant globally that it ceases to be dominant in the form of a specifically European literature" (Cohen 492). Thus, one of the primary products of incommunication, the novel, becomes a key element of the present ecumene. Whether writing in Brazil, China, Japan, Mozambique, or Nigeria, everyone is either writing in English or with the goal of being translated into English. The global novel is "born translated" in the words of Rebecca Walkowitz. Everyone is more or less a European novelist today, a tautological statement since the novel is a world form. Those writers who work in vernacular forms that have not achieved currency outside of their language tradition do not register in world literary history.

There is overlap between Cohen's tome and the 2021 *Cambridge History of World Literature*, edited by Debjani Ganguly, and especially with that collection's first section,

entitled Genealogies. The size and complexity of this collection – close to one thousand pages in two volumes, with nine sections in forty-seven chapters, plus introduction – renders impossible the kind of summary of the "argument" somewhat achieved with Cohen's single-author work. Beyond size, complexity, and multiple authorship, the structure is not, as in many Cambridge Histories, that of a chronological mold to be filled up according to individual specializations in a particular chronological or geographical slice, but rather of ever-changing perspectives on the infamous question: what is world literature? Pluralizing either "History" or "Literature" in the title would perhaps have been more appropriate.

Besides being a question, world literature has also been called a problem. If so, then writing its history is the problem of a problem. Here is how the editor confronts what she calls the "Historiographical Conundrum" in her introduction: "To compile a history of world literature is in some sense to attempt the impossible. Can one truly capture 5,000 years of human expressivity in oral and graphic forms? What civilizational worlds does one foreground, and at the cost of what other worlds?" (Ganguly 5). She goes on to propound several methodologies, such as: anthologization, the subject of an essay by Ankhi Mukherjee (749–64), and of course the pathway taken by Johannes Scherr, as discussed above; punctuationism, i.e., the listing of significant dates in various parts of the globe (1848, 1989, and 2001 are examples, cf. Vilashini Cooppan's "World Literature after 1989," 180–98); and the rise of world literature as inextricable from the rise of philology in its recognition of language as cultural production. In the end, Ganguly "see[s] the primary challenge for a contemporary historian of world literature as one of braiding centuries-long histories of global literary exchange and their traces in the contemporary with a conceptual universalism, theoretical multivalence, and methodological pluralism so as to generate a sense of coevalness among diverse literary cultures as they inhabit our present" (Ganguly 14).

The resulting structure of the history, then, is not an hourglass on its side, but a spiral in which there is both temporal movement forward in historical time, and also a recursive attempt in nearly every section to incorporate earlier periods into the theme at hand. All of this is complicated by a fundamental ambiguity as to whether the history of world literature or its historiography or its geography is at issue. The first section, "Genealogies" (49–198) moves from ancient Mesopotamia, ably covered by David Damrosch, to 1989, as mentioned above. The second section, "Thinking the World" (201–278), conversely, deals either in transtemporal concepts, as in Eric Hayot's question of whether poetry makes worlds, or specific examples, as in Theo D'haen's analysis of Victor Klemperer's invocation of *Weltliteratur*. "Transregional Worlding" (281–407) has a genealogical feel as well, for example in Doris Sommer's essay on Latin American Baroque, Uzoma Esonwanne's panoptic view of Africa and World Literature, and Sascha Ebeling's concluding piece on diasporic Tamil literature. The section "Cartographic Shifts" (411–509) begins with a chapter on the languages of Indian literature, and ends with an essay on the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer's long poem "Östersjöar" as a means for rethinking Nordic lands as archipelagic. Earlier configurations of world literature are more muted in the second volume, and its very last section, "The Worldly and the Planetary" (867–941) is devoted to the contemporary, with essays on the writings of refugees and asylum-seekers, the Guantánamo Diary, the nonhuman and posthuman, and planetary literature. (Other sections in the volume deal with translation, scales and polysystems, circulation, and a potpourri called "Poetics, Genre, Intermediality").

Again and again, chapters claim to decenter one or the other dominant conception of world literature. For Wen-chin Ouyang, the Silk Road provides an ideal model for the way world literature actually works, because "it allows us to see movement of ideas, motifs, aesthetics, bodies of knowledge, texts, genres, and literary worlds in a more complex fashion than the linear trajectory of West influencing the East" (Ouyang 64). Heekyoung Cho's chapter, on the other hand, "rethinks world literature models through a discussion of Russian and East Asian [. . .] literary relations and translation-related issues" (Cho 366). The title of Baidik Bhattacharyya's chapter, "Colonial Philology and the Origins of World Literature" serves as its thesis as well. Thus, the collection becomes a self-consuming artifact, in which any model proposed for world literature becomes provisional. World literature and other aspects of civilization are strongly related in concepts such as the Silk Road. The emphasis is not on development, but on motion and relational entanglements.

3. Conclusion

All four of my study-examples of the historiography of world literature (which could and should be expanded) bear a strong relation to civilizational history. On a relative scale, Scherr's anthology has most to say through its geographical arrangement according to regions, the presentation of which, along with some of the introductory language, makes the implicit argument for a development of world literature culminating in the Germanic sphere. Carrière sees himself as continuing the Hegelian line of comparing the relative development of *Geist* in various cultures, culminating in the European Enlightenment and of German philosophy and art. The works by Cohen and Ganguly, on the other hand, focus on the ebb and flow of cultural dominance and of openness vs. closedness to cosmopolitan influence of particular civilizations. In both works, literary history is firmly embedded within the parameters of cultural entanglements – and vice versa. The uniquely fragmented structure of Ganguly's collection, in particular, yields a fractal history of world literature with multiple origins.

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