Comparative Literature/World Literature: A Discussion with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and David Damrosch

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# COMPARATIVE LITERATURE/WORLD LITERATURE: A DISCUSSION WITH GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK AND DAVID DAMROSCH

*The following is a discussion between two distinguished comparative literature scholars, David Damrosch and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This is a transcription of their dialogue, delivered orally before a large audience at the 2011 American Comparative Literature Conference in Vancouver, Canada, on 2 April. It has been lightly edited to remove the natural redundancy inherent to oral communication, to eliminate asides regarding technical aspects of the presentation, and to fill in gaps in the recording process, which left inaudible portions. They were introduced by then-president of the ACLA, Haun Saussy. (Biographical data on Damrosch and Spivak can be found in the "Contributors" section at the end of this journal.)*

[*David Damrosch*]: I'm happy to be here with my old friend and longtime colleague Gayatri Spivak, with whom I've shared productive disagreements that continue to this day, so I'll try to think about that a little bit with you today. Certainly, we have seen an extraordinary sea change—but you may think I'm speaking of the Aquatic Activity Caucus, our water-borne action group. We do try to do something each year, and we went kayaking yesterday, but beyond the ACLA/AAC, there has been a real sea change in the discipline since we of the older generation were in school, when comparative literature really meant the study of a very few, mostly Western European major literatures. As the Swiss comparatist Werner Friederich said in 1960, "World literature is a presumptuous and arrogant term. Sometimes, in flippant moments, I think we should call our programs NATO literatures. Yet even that would be extravagant, for we do not usually deal with more than one quarter of the NATO-nations."[1] Or as Sukehiro Hirakawa has written of studying at Tokyo University in Japan's first comparative literature program, reading Wellek, and Curtius, and Auerbach in the 1960s: he describes being tremendously impressed with these great scholars, but it seemed to him and

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his colleagues in Japan that comparative literature "was a sort of Greater West European Co-Prosperity Sphere."[2] Interesting analogy . . .

Of course, what comparative literature really meant, first and foremost, was to have a really good *accent* in French and German. This was the price of admission, and then you might do theory or you might not, you might study one or another period, but the accent was really what became a marker of excellence and a sort of security. I remember, in graduate school, coming out from a seminar taught by Paul de Man; one of my fellow students was clearly rather insecure, as I was, about whether we were really following de Man's incredibly rich and intricate exposition. She comforted herself by declaring: "But, you know, his French really isn't very good." Well, what she meant was that he was Belgian—a native speaker of French but not with a Parisian accent. This stuck in my mind, as neither could I follow his theories properly, nor was my French accent very good either, and so I couldn't take that level of comfort. But it's been a great thing that the world has opened up to a much broader set of nations, both larger and smaller, both in Europe and outside, so that the *Longman Anthology* now includes Gayatri's sparkling translation of Mahasweta Devi's *Breast-Giver*, plus translations from Nahuatl, Sumerian, Middle High German, Polish, and Vietnamese, the kinds of thing that were rarely in comparatists' view before, and I think we can have much to celebrate here.

I myself think that there are really only three problems with the newly expanded world of comparative studies today. I know I share an interest in these problems with Gayatri; perhaps we have a different perspective on them. The three intertwined problems are that the study of world literature can very readily become culturally deracinated, philologically bankrupt, and ideologically complicit with the worst tendencies of global capitalism. Other than that, we're in good shape.

There has been no one more attentive to these problems than Gayatri Spivak, as we can see in the preface to her influential *Death of a Discipline* of 2003. There she says that "between the presentation of the Wellek Library Lectures of May 2000 and the final revision of the book in May 2002, the discipline of comparative literature in the United States underwent a sea change"—so the sea change metaphor is already there, and the Aquatic Activities Caucus will have to get Gayatri into a kayak next year in Providence. She continues: "Publishing conglomerates have recognized a market for anthologies of world literature in translation. Academics with large advances are busy putting these together." (Who *are* these academics with large advances for their anthologies? I wish I knew!) She goes on to say that

> the market is international. Students in Taiwan and Nigeria will learn about the literatures of the world through English translations organized by the United States. Thus institutionalized, global educational market, only teachers, presumably the graduate discipline of comparative literature will train these teachers. The book you are about to read is therefore out of joint with the times in a more serious way than were the Wellek Library Lectures of May 2000. I have changed nothing of the urgency of my call for new comparative literature. I hope this book will be read as the last gasp of a dying discipline.[3]

Gayatri's preface has already formulated all three of my concerns: the philological one of translation, the methodological one of American specialists presuming to put together world anthologies, and the ideological one of the publishing conglomerates trying to Americanize the world.

The moral force of this statement is not compromised by the fact that this critique is not in fact correct. These world literature anthologies, to my knowledge, have never been published for the global market, not from any wish to avoid spreading American visions of the world but simply for market reasons: permission costs are too high. You have two ways to get anthology permissions: you can get North American rights or global permissions. To get global rights costs twice as much as the North American rights, and none of the major survey anthologies has opted for the higher expense of global permissions, because there's not yet enough of a market outside North America. So that what we are really purveying through these anthologies is a vision of the world for a North American audience. The critique of these anthologies does apply quite well in relation to the Canadian market, where students are being given versions of world literature that have a good number of selections from the United States but little or nothing from Canada. Outside North America, though, if some students in Nigeria or Taiwan get hold of these anthologies it is through websites that Longman and Bedford and Norton don't control and don't figure into their marketing or their publishing plans. So capitalism itself has an interesting way of protecting the wider world from the invasion of American world literature anthologies.

Even so, there is a real issue here, in that Gayatri's critique taps into a long-running debate that began in the 1950s as world literature courses began to gain visibility in the United States. There was an important conference held at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1959 on the teaching of world literature. You can see it as a conference volume published the following year, *The Teaching of World Literature*, edited by Haskell Block. And what is revealed if you look at the volume is a deep divide between comparative

literature and world literature. It was fully in place there, and it's a divide along lines of class and of geography.

What you had in the late 1950s and early 1960s was the elite East Coast schools with strong language departments, where comparative literature departments expected that students would come in to their graduate programs knowing French and German and Latin—the same three languages that were commonly taught in prep schools. If you wanted to work in another language, the surrounding language departments would provide that training, and if the university didn't offer, say, Bengali or Nahuatl, then you simply wouldn't work on those literatures, as these programs had a real distaste for translation. And then you had the populist public universities, mostly in the Midwest, the South, and the Rocky Mountain states, in which world literature was growing like Topsy. With some embarrassment, the speakers at the Wisconsin conference talk about how their enrollments had been growing in the 1950s from forty to four hundred in just a few years in one case at Iowa, with the encouragement of the dean of the Business School, who started requiring his *business* students to take a world literature course. One can see already smoke coming out of Gayatri's ears as I say this, and I understand the reason and share that concern.

But it's very interesting that in all this whole debate, the world literature people are mostly from midwestern and southern schools. One of the opening speakers at the Wisconsin conference regretted that they didn't have more people "from farther away," but I think he was really regretting that no one had come from any of the elite East Coast schools—and no one from either coast, as a matter of fact: no speakers from Stanford, Berkeley, or UCLA. The proponents of world literature were well aware that their thriving new survey courses were coming under attack as linguistically and culturally amateurish. When Werner Friederich noted that most programs were teaching only "NATO literatures," he wasn't saying that the sense of comparative literature should be expanded. Just the opposite: he went on to advocate abandoning the term "world literature" outright, because comparatists only really wanted to talk about one quarter of the NATO literatures.

Friederich then clarified the nature of his opposition. In his essay in the conference volume, called "On the Integrity of Our Planning," he noted that

> I am bitterly opposed to sweeping survey courses such as "the novel and world literature drama" from Aeschylus to Tennessee Williams in three hours per week in one semester. It is because of courses like these that bricks have come flying from the left and from the right, from the solid language departments snorting that this is the flimsiest kind

> of sheer amateurism and from the solid comparatists complaining that it is because of such courses that comparative literature ever since the 1920s has gotten a black eye and ill repute from which it has yet not completely recovered.[4]

He went on to say that the concept of integrity "must be applied most strictly in our planning, and if an all too enthusiastic world literature teacher is not capable of self-discipline and renunciation, the course committee in his own campus must restrain him most emphatically and insist on the inviolability of fairly stiff academic standards." Translation per se was not Friederich's problem but the very concept of the survey: "At North Carolina," he concludes, "we have about eight or ten translation courses, in the Greek drama, French classicism, Goethe, but we do not have a single survey of world literature; our people would not stand for it."

Now it was shortly after this conference that the ACLA commissioned the first "report on standards" for which Friederich was calling, chaired by Harvard's Harry Levin. So you have the elite schools in the Northeast—Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Cornell, Amherst and so on, Werner Friederich's UNC being very much an outpost of that elite pattern—allying themselves against large public universities in the heartland, schools like Iowa, Wisconsin, Colorado, from which the attendance was largely drawn for Haskell Block's world literature conference. When ACLA set up the first Committee on Standards, they put Haskell Block on the committee to pull him back in line, to get him back with the program, as indeed he did.

In the very first paragraph of his ACLA report, issued in 1965, Harry Levin declared that

> a preliminary question arises as whether it is necessary, desirable or practical for Comparative Literature to be represented in every institution, whether it does not make special demands in the way of linguistic preparation and intellectual perspective which ought to reserve it for the more highly qualified students. And whether it does not presuppose an existing strength in language departments and literature and libraries, to which not very many colleges and indeed not every university can be fairly expected to measure up.[5]

Even more restrictive was the second "Report on Standards," chaired by Yale's Thomas Greene in 1975—the year I entered the graduate program in his department at Yale. Greene's report noted the rapid growth of programs around the country in recent years and even nodded toward a novel vision

of world literature. "It is a vision," Greene said, "which will soon begin to make our comfortable European perspectives parochial." Soon, perhaps, but not yet. Greene continued:

> There is cause, we believe, for serious concern, in transforming our discipline, that we not debase those values on which it is founded. The slippage of standards, once allowed to accelerate, would be difficult to arrest and in at least some colleges and universities, Comparative Literature seems to be purveyed in the style of a smorgasbord at bargain rates. At the undergraduate level, the most disturbing recent trend in the universities is the association of comparative literature with literatures in translation.[6]

Greene's critique hit home. No self-respecting program in his day could wish to be seen as the educational equivalent of the food court in "the Mall of America."

We can best understand this geographical and class divide if we take a postcolonial approach, for which we're so indebted to Gayatri and to Edward Said and others. A decade before the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, in fact, the colonial dynamics of American higher education were already noted in Christopher Jencks and David Riesman's *The Academic Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1968). There they talk about the rise of higher education during the boom years of the postwar era, looking particularly at Catholic colleges, historically black American colleges, and public colleges generally. And they make a really interesting analogy: they say that American graduate programs treat comprehensive colleges and undergraduate institutions in much the way that colonial powers used to treat their colonies. They get raw material—undergraduates—produced by the colonies, they bring them to the metropolitan center for reprocessing, and they send them back out again to the colonies, value-added, to teach the undergraduates. So in 1968 Jencks and Riesman were very perceptive in seeing the comprehensive state schools and the colleges as existing in a colonial relation to the imperial graduate programs. I think that Gayatri's critique of world literature in the beginning of *Death of a Discipline* actually maps rather well onto the limitations of traditional comparative literature in the United States and Canada *before* the rise of the contemporary study of world literature, and the problem today may be that the opening up of the global canon may not in itself have solved the deeper structural problems long besetting comparative study overall.

How do we advance beyond this neocolonial situation, if we accept the seriousness of the critique that when it's done badly, the teaching of

world literature is, in fact, methodologically naïve, culturally deracinated, philologically compromised, and ideologically suspect? I would like to set out three proposals to start the conversation: one on the philological level, one on the methodological level, one on the ideological level.

On the philological level, I think we need, in fact, more languages and more language study. As a consequence, we need a more of a *sliding scale* of language study. The old model for comparatists was to acquire "near native fluency" in a couple of languages beyond English—usually French and then German or perhaps Italian, Spanish, or Russian, or very occasionally another "minor" European language such as Norwegian or a "major" language elsewhere such as Chinese. In this way, you were going to be as good as those otherwise narrow-minded people in the national literature departments: we'll show that we can do what they can do, and then we do it better when we add in the cultural capital of high-value literary theory.

It is certainly great to have near-native fluency in one or two languages beyond your native tongue, but there are a lot more languages out there. And from my point of view, the way to deal with this is in fact to study more languages. Particularly for those who have not grown up multilingual as the Swiss-born Werner Friederich did, this will usually mean learning languages on a sliding scale of fluency. The fundamental thing is to no longer have to be prisoner of translations, so that you can check a translation against the original. That's the first level, and it's often very useful, even before you have the time to get the near-native linguistic fluency or the greater cultural fluency gained by living abroad. So I would like to propose that we encourage much more language study in our programs, and at a more varied level, not so much trying to imitate the national literature departments' faculty in their specialized knowledge at every point. I think ideally every student will have such a near-native grasp of one language but then a range of competence in several others.

Methodologically, it seems to me that we need much more collaborative scholarship, as well as collaborative teaching, particularly insofar as world literature is no longer simply or possibly even primarily pursued at the level of the introductory survey course. As interested as I am in the challenges of the sophomore-level survey course, I think the discussion fixates too much on that beginning level. The study of world literature is percolating at many levels today, as we can see in hundreds of papers being delivered here in Vancouver. Increasingly in our scholarship, as in upper-level undergraduate work and advanced graduate study, world literature frames many discussions of comparative literature, including classic comparisons of two or three works read in their original languages.

The new scholarly importance of a broad outlook on the world's literatures means that we have to get serious about moving beyond the limited ability that any of us can have in more than a few languages. We are going to have to do much more collaborative work, which we still lag far behind most of the social sciences in doing. A new emphasis on collaboration will have consequences for teaching as well as for research, and it should entail a refashioning of the authority relation between professor and student. This begins to get us into the ideological issues. Rereading the debates of the 1960s and 1970s over comparative literature against world literature, one striking commonality emerges on both sides of the controversy. Universal in all those documents—the Wisconsin world literature volume as much as the Levin and Greene reports—is the assumption that the only person in the classroom who really knows another language is the professor. The teacher is always represented as having to bring the original into class, and the real debate concerns whether such knowledge on the professor's part is necessary or only desirable. There seems to have been no thought that some other person in the class would possess a language that the teacher doesn't know. This can hardly have been the case even in the 1960s, and it is still less true today on more and more campuses, both in North America and in many parts of the world. Many of us find that our students collectively know many more languages than we do, and often they have substantial cultural knowledge that we do not have. Rather than struggle to work up a little "background" on unfamiliar literary cultures, we can collaborate with our students.

In my own undergraduate world literature survey course, instead of requiring two papers each semester as I always used to do, I now require one paper and one wiki. For each week, two or three students collaborate to produce a wiki for the week's reading. Very typically, one of the students will be someone who has some special linguistic knowledge or cultural background, either by heritage or because they've started taking courses in the area, and it's quite remarkable to find how many languages can be accessed by students. The other students in the wiki group may have no linguistic knowledge but merely an active interest in the material, and they often prove to be extremely adept at finding good information to present on the wiki.

This is not at all a feature only of Ivy League schools; I hear similar reports at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, where the *Longman Anthology* is used, and at Auburn University in Mississippi, places that a generation ago had not nearly so much of a cultural range among their students. So it allows us to explore a different kind of methodology, which involves also the possibility of using new technologies such as wikis to encourage the

collaborative work that gives students a new purchase on our authors. And there's nothing like such collaborative work for giving the students a sense of access and power. In a great moment in my class last year, a student recited from memory a verse by Hafez, in Persian. This was a sophomore from the Dominican Republic, with no heritage background at all; he was just taking second-year Persian and he had memorized this poem; his recitation earned him a standing ovation from the class. We have a whole other world right in front of us in our classrooms today.

Finally, on the ideological level, I think we really need a great deal of pluralism. We will always have ideological divisions and debates in our field. I myself am a liberal humanist and proud of it, and there are many comparatists to my left and also to my right in the sense of more traditional in what they study, but I think that where all of us are very much on common ground is on needing to push back against the market at every possible opportunity. All of the best world literature anthologies, for example, are in fact deeply concerned to try to push the market from within, to really push against the limitations of American myopia and to help faculty move beyond the linguistic and cultural comfort zones of the sixties and seventies.

Comparatists based in the United States have a particular challenge in combating what Gayatri has criticized as "multi-culti" American exceptionalism, the unexamined belief that a nation of immigrants can celebrate some Disneyfied diversity without doing the hard work of learning anything substantial about other cultures. This is certainly an American problem, but I would say that there are very few countries where there's not a covert exceptionalism, a cryptonationalism or even open jingoism, deeply engrained within comparative studies. It takes a different form in different countries, both ideologically and institutionally, but whatever our location, our job is to use world literature to shake comparative literature out of its dogmatic slumber, to critique its nationalist self-involvement, and to really push back against the market at every opportunity. So a good anthology, or a good course, or a good research project challenges the reigning doxa, pushes against the euphorias of national self-satisfaction.

The other thing to emphasize is that world literature, taught well, will inspire more language learning, more genuine understanding of the world, more difficult engagement. And actually courses in world literature can help promote language learning even better at the schools that Levin and Greene were writing off, the schools they thought shouldn't even have comparative literature programs because they didn't have enough serious scholars doing enough languages. Our host for this conference, Simon Fraser University, seems to me an absolutely striking example of how world literature can

work when it's done well. When the faculty here were deciding how to build literary studies at the new satellite campus in Surrey, they considered setting up a standard comparative literature program, but they decided instead to establish a world literature program, with the inspiration of Paulo Horta and his dean and their colleagues; in the older model, you couldn't really have done a comp lit program at Surrey because you don't have enough languages offered on campus and probably also not sufficient interest among the school's largely working-class population in the kinds of high European theory that had become so central in the discipline during the seventies and eighties. So they developed their world literature program in view of their student body, at once very local and also very international, with dozens of countries of origin. After just a few years the program is thriving, with enrollments triple of what they had expected and a hundred majors today.

Their courses rely heavily on translation, yet the program is also activist about providing students with language possibilities well beyond what the small Surrey campus can offer. The two students who picked me up at the airport were complaining that there are not many languages offered at the Surrey campus, but the program is helping one to go to Italy and helped the other to go to Japan to do their work. The success of the program is also putting pressure on the administration to have more language offerings on campus, but also it's also not a bad learning experience to live with a host family in Japan, which is what one of these two students had done, or to go to Italy and eat really well, as the other is about to do. What's not to like about that?

To sum up, I think the critiques of world literature that we see today are actually also critiques of comparative literature when either is done badly. The challenge for us is to forge our divergent approaches into an active relation, in which we reframe comparative study in a global context, using it to spread the study of language and culture and to push back at every possible stage against the vagaries of the global capital market.

[*Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*]: David and I go back a long way, and he has persuaded me to the extent that I now think the approach that I would like to represent would persistently "supplement" (I cannot bring myself to use the word "collaborate") the efforts of the enlightened world literature-ists. However, I would like to start on a note of protest against the polarization between the high theory that comparative literature was supposed to have required in its heyday, and the inbuilt populism of world literature, which is implicit in much of David's presentation. The supplementation of the world literature effort is all the more necessary, because the idea that world literature

is more populist is itself vanguardist, an idea belonging to our moment. In Beijing, at David's invitation, I spoke of "supplementing the vanguard." Believe me, I taught at Iowa for twelve years, leaving as director of comparative literature, and we were not unable to run the program—established by René Wellek, with Rosalie Colie, Ralph Freedman, and Geoffrey Hartmann on its founding faculty. Haskell Block was my friend. While I was teaching there, I got an offer from Brown, which I refused, I got an offer from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, which I refused, because, in fact, Iowa was not so different from the East Coast, with its "nose up in the air." But I was not into that sort of regionalist prejudice, not even then. (I might add here that the University of Las Vegas holds Wole Soyinka and financed the extraordinary International Center for Writing and Translation headed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, whose stunning Conference on Global Conversations: A Festival of Marginalized Languages in October 2007 came from a position that questions the idea of world literature as such, that the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa was frequently visited by Derrida because Richard Rand taught there.) To think that there is something "charmed" about the Ivy League even as we patronize (in every sense) the populism of the "other" schools is not a good idea. I should know. I am a graduate of the University of Calcutta who, to quote my dear ironic friend Edward W. Said, "inched her way up to the Northeast," landing on Columbia's doorstep six months short of fifty. I almost didn't make it; a colleague (who will forever remain nameless) split the ad hoc. The students raised a hue and cry. Hardly an elite entry—quite like my position on world literature.

Certainly it is a great idea to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural diversity of a U.S. classroom. It is also a good exercise to create wikis and applaud the ability of a Dominican student to memorize Hafez in Persian. As someone with her feet in both worlds, however, I propose a test. Would the linguistic capacity and cultural knowledge of the student from elsewhere qualify for tertiary education in the country of the student's origin? If not, the student is not an appropriate informant for the class. This absolutely does not mean that we refuse to acknowledge diversity. But if we do so, we must earn the right to be able to judge what the student brings to the class.[7]

I have been counseling against the double standard that ignoring this question led to for many decades, before globalization called for the epistemological change that is now part of my argument. I think it might not be impertinent to quote myself from 1992 here:

> What actually happens in a typical liberal multicultural classroom "at its best"? On a given day we are reading a text from one national origin.

> The group in the classroom from that particular national origin in the general polity can identify with the richness of the texture of the "culture" in question. (I am not even bringing up the question of the definition of culture.) People from other national origins in the classroom (other, that is, than Anglo) relate sympathetically but superficially, in an aura of same difference. The Anglo relates benevolently to everything, "knowing about other cultures" in a relativist glow.[8]

We must, of course, and also, keep track of how first generations flow into later ones, become American in uneven ways, unless we want world literature studies—however much it travels hither and yon—always to be geared toward new immigrants, not a good argument for serious disciplinary change.

I should also add that I am not considering the issue from the point of view of increasing enrollment. That consideration is indeed crucial, especially when we speak at professional organizations. But I have to believe that there is room for epistemological arguments even when they do not seem practical in the short run. Let such arguments play a supplementary role? "It is the strange essence of the supplement not to have essentiality," Derrida wrote. "It may always not have taken place. Moreover, literally, it has never taken place: it is never present, here and now. . . . Less than nothing and yet, to judge by its effects, much more than nothing."[9] Our work, supplementing, is para-sitical on world literature ideas. I have always insisted that we earn the right to supplement by the most painstaking intimacy. John Drabinski's comment on the passage, not disclosing that care, does, however, show the other side of the double bind of supplementation ably. This too is importantly true: "A conception of an addition to that which *pretends* to be self-sufficient, which then unravels self-sufficiency with a constitutive contingency." Supplementation is not necessary, it is contingent. Without us, you'll be more popular. With us, an abode of bliss.

The point of view that I represent, then—not a very popular point of view at the moment—should see itself as supplementing the stakes of world literature rather than anything else. I'm of course sorry I hadn't checked the facts about world distribution and the Longman's anthology.[10]

Our concern is not how to situate the peaks of the literary production of the world on a level playing field but to ask what makes literary cases singular. The singular is the always universalizable, never the universal. The site of reading is to make the singular visible in its ability.

Kant thought the world and self were "as if"'s. Derrida thought this was the reason why Kant could not solve the problem of world government today.

Yet it is also true that this thinking of world and self as "as if"'s can take on board Marx's insistence that the material determines the mental. To step into a world literature by ourselves today—because everything is opening up—and to say that it's the message of capitalist globalization is not to be tendentious but to point out that this moment is conjuncturally similar to the time of Goethe and Kant. A sudden access to a world, and they start talking about *Weltliteratur* and *cosmopolitheia*, in the same way, but with a great difference as well, that we talk about world literature and cosmopolitanism.

But if Kant the philosopher knew the world was "as if," Kant the political writer wrote as if he did not. That is, to act out part of the architectonic of the programming of practical reason, but I can't go there now. Let us just say that *we* forget the "as if" in a less systemic way and posit a worldliness in search of the same, to see in what ways the past, the present, and the future of the literary impulse in the world can share. It is, alas, that false promise of a level playing field that we in our sanctioned ignorance (seeing only capital's social productivity, not its persistent subalternization), act out, the ideological damage controllers of the economic sphere of globalization: the material determines the mental, ideology shifts. In that forgetfulness of the "as if," the politics of identity can overcome the ethics of alterity. Thinking of any international student as an authority on globality because of his/her identity is like thinking all Americans abroad are experts on Melville.

I don't think we can hold back the stakes of a world literature. But we, who are interested in the singularity of the literary production, can always try to remain short of that final coding. Into a "universal," the "world" as adjective. I agree with David, my classical Greek is awful and I often hit my head against it, and my students know this, yet I can use it to ask questions. Even my French and German are not good—I fell upon them because I couldn't get financial aid in English in '61, before Lyndon Johnson lifted the quota on alien registration, because I was not a native speaker. I had had six months of French at the Alliance Française in Calcutta at the Centre Culturel and three months of German with the German widow of a Bengali freedom fighter. I had borrowed money to get to Cornell and had no work permit, so certainly I didn't have the money to go back either. De Man had just become head of comp lit and had soft money slots for financial aid, thought that I was smart enough that I could perhaps manage. He could take a chance because, in those days, if I goofed, he could put it down to cultural difference, right? So he, in fact, took the risk because at Cornell I could not go into language courses if I was working for a PhD in comp lit. This is why this is all the French and German I know. I've never made a secret of it, and therefore I agree with David that one should really try to

proceed with what one has rather than try to be as good as one can be in a single language. I have recently said that one should, on the other hand, assume that all languages can be a first language, that they can get the ethical moving, because a first language is learnt before reasonableness and primes the metapsychological. This is not to be confused with locating experts in the global classroom.

We might, then, as a globally dispersed and diversified collectivity, supplement that seemingly practical will to hold the world in a grid. I don't mean survey courses; I mean the presuppositions of world literature. Supplementing, remember, is to figure out the exact shape of a place that is empty in what is to be supplemented, zooming out, but not in competition with zooming in. We might ask Jean Genet's question about the essence of art: "What remains of a Rembrandt, torn into four equal pieces and flushed down the toilet?" The four equal pieces can be read in the politics of identity, voting blocks, Melissa Williams's view of multiculturalism, systemic grids, competing cultures. And in the ethics of alterity, we can imagine the other—here, a hero named Rembrandt, or in the case of Joe Diebes, the Canadian-U.S. composer, Bach—as singular, universalizable, but never universal.

This is a brand of provincializing Europe—from dispenser of signs to mere trace—that most of us cannot think of, because we the "other"s are caught within the politics of identity and can only offer as a substitute something coming from our own neck of the woods. This is what one expects from the so-called global classroom. We are going to be all critical of universalization, but not of ourselves, we're not Eurocentric. But on the other hand, this global classroom lets us all be self-interested and provide for little identitarian enclaves. I've made this kind of critique of the human rights folks, so much so that Didier Coste actually suggested in print that rather than listen to Gayatri Spivak one should substitute the classical multiculturalism of Europe à la Étiemble.

Let us speak for Rembrandt and Bach as universalizable but never universal. That rethinking is hard. And, in the end, I'll try to regionalize another case if I have enough time: the great Indian model, and that's Tagore. These are placeholders here for singular cases where the politics of practicing suspension of cultural identity as an examined or self-conscious cultural difference takes over. Even for the European, preparing for the ethical reflex calls for wasteful spending rather different from tax deductible write-offs of purchased virtue. We will come to the peculiar idea of wasteful spending in a bit.

People here and there have commented favorably on my remark that in globality we are in an island of signs, in an ocean of traces—this compares to

what you also were saying, David. A sign system promises meaning. We can follow that promise only in a few languages—and I agree with you that we should expand that—with the promise of meaning. A trace does not promise anything. It is something that seems to suggest that there was something before. In globality, we're in an island of signs, in an ocean of traces, and I could give you many examples, but the boring part of it is—and this is not in globality, but long before—when you don't understand a language, to simply say "Oh, the handwriting looks beautiful, it sounds wonderful"—that is legitimizing by reversal the reason why barbarians were called barbarians.

In my judgment, Joe Diebes, as the clip I'll show will show, tends to protect the trace from the promise of the sign, a kind of reversed grammatology, tracing the score by hand in real musical time, acting out iteration.[11]

The score is virtually phonocentric, a visual graphic reserving the sound of music, inviting its turning into sound, in real time, articulated as usual by the play of the blanks and the spacing. I saw this machine tracing, iterating, while the supposed original, another site of contingency, was remotely played by another kind of machine, empirically recognizable as such.

In other words, the artist was tracing printed musical scores, tracings which were almost like a sign system, like writing, meaning the contours of the music and the time of performance, so that finally an object remained which did not resemble the mere sanity of the score. This is the kind of earned intimacy that goes away when we're trying to approach remote things and to give them a certain standing and signification. This is an example, a miming, of how the ethical as such suspends the subject in the other's text, here, a musical score tracing.

If signifying is to turn into sign, tracing is to take us to the remains as trace. Was there music here? Joe's description is as follows:

> Each page of Bach's six suites for solo cello is traced on vellum in real-time. I perform these drawings in step with the Mstislav Rostropovich 1991 recording and videotape the process. The video documents the impossible attempt to write out the score in real musical time. As in my previous music installations I am interested in merging the time of writing/composing into the continuous present of performance.

The second page that the link above will open for you shows the final remains, a mute answer to the question of the essence of art—what remains?—disclosed by iteration, not systematization as such.[12] Bach is not here modified or universalized as a world artist or a world-class artist. The machine of the hand must know the machine of the score well enough

to be able to trace it and fail. Post-theoretical ethical practice and globality: the hand is a mechanical part object. The trace generates remains that cannot move up to systemic coding, calling for supplementation as task.

Marx thought of the trace as insufficient, incomplete because the representation theories never conclude. For him, the general equivalent, money, shedding its thingliness, became something like a numeric system. Yet he took us heuristically back into understanding traces. The fetish character of the commodity and the coat talking the language of commodities are the two best known. For only that will transform the quality of the detail of our lives, make the spirit uneasy, training for change without waiting for vanguardism to transgress the collective spirit. In spite of all the wikis and twitters that can create a systemic intimacy, in this space of learning you play to lose.

This is for me an important conversation, and so I quote myself again, something I wrote recently for a book catalog:

> The bottom line of teaching literature as such is to teach how to read, in the most robust sense. The bottom line of teaching philosophy as such is to teach how to think, again, in the most robust sense. It is to teach an activism of the imagination and intellect. It is to teach how to play oneself as an instrument—distanced yet connected—reading, thinking. It is only a few (an unexpected joy for the teacher) who slide into being taught to play to lose, the only way you can be a teacher in the humanities. What is loss here? Do you want to lose when you play to lose? Did Socrates? Does the parent or the teacher in *Putrāt shishyāt parājayam*? But *qui gagne perd*—a lesson I learnt (I think) from deconstruction. A *mise-en-abyme*, a hall of mirrors, gain to loss to gain to loss—but what remains?[13]

In order so to play, to turn the humanism of the humanities around in these hard times, you must be completely inside the intimacy of humanism itself, and you can't get around that one by polarizing East Coast language learning and Middle West moral imagination.

Gramsci will epistemologize Marx, calling for an incandescent political passion in the collectivity of workers with class consciousness. Nietzsche complicates matters by commenting on the actual move from trace to sign as the disclosure of arbitrary systemic determination: "The entire history of a custom can, in this way, be a continuous sign chain of ever new interpretations and revisions, whose causes don't even have time to be related to one another, but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and alternate with one another in

a purely chance fashion."[14] In other words, trace masquerading as sign. Kant systematized the trace as the necessity for the transcendental deduction.[15]

Encyclopedic world literature impulses fall within this systemic tradition, this good systemic tradition, the best of what I have called "the restraining of the future anterior." Unfortunately, it also works—in the discussion, perhaps one of you will ask me a question—it also works to finesse certain kinds of historical tracings, in the interests of systematicity, most significantly the retracing of the map of West Asia, in the early years of the last century, creating a certain kind of world, an episode in the vicissitudes of Byzantium, whose latest examples are the events in Mazar-i-Sharif. When Terry Jones says we are not responsible for their actions, we comparatists cannot dismiss him as an obscure fanatic, forgetting not only the "as if"'s, but also that history is larger than personal good will. So however much we say that a kind of unranked collectivity of languages and literatures has come because of the increase of immigration, however much we posit Mesopotamia as the origin of literature, we cannot undo this. No amount of Chinese culturalism will undo the Chinese appropriation of Euroteleology in Africa.

As we measure the casualties of the UN compound in Mazar-i-Sharif in April 2011, we must not forget that Eleanor Roosevelt eased out W. E. B. Du Bois when he had dared to suggest that the United Nations repeats the old colonial power lines. You cannot know the whole world. You make certain kinds of choices, taking the imperialist anti-imperialist position, adroitly analyzed by Raymond Williams as the Bloomsbury Fraction.

Those of us who represent the supplementary antisystemic position must not be thought of as "naysayers." We are what Rabindranath Tagore called "the wasteful spenders," the *bajey khorcheys*. In a piece that struggles with transcendentalism, chiastic balance like Schiller transforming the Kantian critique and reproductive heteronormitivity, there are two transgressive moments in Tagore that made that very piece unclear then to the Indian common reader in 1906.

The unexplained but declared translation of the English phrase "comparative literature," which he cites, in English, in his essay, is "*bishsho shahitto*, world literature," he says, without any explanation at all: "You have asked me" in Bengali he writes, "to talk about comparative literature, but I will call it 'world literature.'"

[Looking at David] It's worth looking at. And at what the range is between the general atmosphere of the liberal humanist essay and the transgressive moments—A) the repeated metaphor of *bajey khoroch*, or "wasteful spending," and B) the intimations of singularity, to which I cannot pay attention here.

Tagore was at every step self-distanced from the Shinpei Goto style, embattled Pan-Asianism of the early years of the last century. His attitude was cosmopolitan and critical toward mere nationalism—and I think David is right in saying that world literature can go against mere nationalism—and it combined with his love of what he perceived to be the possibility of a humane India. He thus had a serious engagement with India's nationalist message to the world. Yet, in the mistranslated name of world literature, he theorizes the imaginative creative bond that travels across national boundaries as *bajey khoroch*, wasteful spending, a powerful metaphor for what in the imagination goes above, beyond, beneath, and short of mere rational choice toward alterity. The uncertain intimacy open to ethical alterity is "wasteful."

The world is in bad shape with the loss of emphasis on the humanities. This message of Tagore—that what goes across is not immediately profitable or evaluable does not give us greater numbers, etc., that it is "value-added" in an incommensurable sense with no guarantees—this lesson is hard to learn, in the face of the will to institutional power, through knowledge management. Tagore's examples range from the opposition of Egyptian dervishes, as he calls them—it's the Mahdists—to the British in the 1880s—he calls it "literary" because of this wasteful spending of their lives, comparable to the Ghost Dance of the Sioux against the U.S. cavalry at Wounded Knee. He defines that worldliness beyond, beneath, above, and short of not only merely rational choice but also the verbal text. This can take on board the Kantian impulse to place the possibility of judgment in the aesthetic. In globalization, where all impulses of judgment, including "ethical waivers" claimed by government officials are managerial, this is an impulse worth subverting and sabotaging for a worldliness in the literary rather than restraining the future anterior—something (else) will have happened—by diagnosing and systematizing items to see how they qualify for our rubric.

Why should we endlessly quote Goethe? A magisterial writer but historically undoubtedly informed by that imperialist anti-imperialism which I already cited as the Bloomsbury Fraction. Marx is another story. If we remain focused on the North American context saying, hey, this is not about the world market, this is about North America, we forget to ask that kind of question because we can present ourselves as the tousled hair, erratic kind of "great" teacher, unable to imagine that we are folded and held within the terrible greed of rampant capitalism. It reminds me of all the romantic pieces in national media about the authenticity of the rural American way of life, the farm philosophy of the United States, our wonderful grandparents and how they lived very differently from the way in which this unrestricted greed is making us live, without once mentioning the subsidies. Those pious

pieces never ever talk about, let's say, how Brazil, India, and China together in the Cancun Group tried to fight against the subsidies, never talk about the fact that American agribusiness is a site of global conflict.

It's the same way if we say, "Hey, we're just talking about how well we're doing in North America." We have to think about this as we endlessly go on quoting the eighteenth and nineteenth century and talk about opening up the global classroom and study non-European antiquity.

I imagine rather a globally diversified collectivity of scholars, teachers supplementing and training to supplement, the epistemological performance of a world literature, how it constructs its object of knowledge, how it teaches the students to construct their object of knowledge. In other words, what David has very correctly supplied to us is how we should, indeed, undo the limits of old-style comparative literature and the pride of the national literatures, though it's very hard to try to fight against comp lit and the national literatures when, in a budgetary way, they're really not having a good time at all.

That kind of construction of the object of knowing, in the literature classroom, it seems to me, has to be supplemented in some way, and not just by reading the same old, same old with good language skills but by trying to read the same old, same old texts by undoing them, taking them away from the universal and give them the kind of singularity that Diebes is trying to give, and Genet, with the Rembrandt and the Beethoven and the Bach. If it's really for North America, let's hit the mainstream. This is not the Culture Wars. Augmenting the canon arithmetically is not the only task on the agenda. It's a time to singularize rather than provincialize the European context of comp lit, simply offering a substitute, a picture of North America within its boundaries and its global classrooms, giving us something called world literature that constructs its object in this way.

[*Damrosch*]: I guess I should say a few more words in response, and there would be a lot of things to discuss. It is certainly the case that Gayatri's work is so extraordinarily varied that one can't represent her accurately simply by quoting a passage from her work. I think that's part of her Goethian aspect, reminding me of what Eckermann says about Goethe: "He's a diamond that presents a different facet each way you look." That's certainly true of Gayatri.

I agree that Tagore is extremely interesting. I just finished this week collaborating with my friends Theo D'haen and Djelal Kadir in editing *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, in which we have essays on Goethe and on Tagore in our opening section on foundational statements. And again, I never heard of Tagore's essay when I was in graduate school. It simply wasn't there in the curriculum.

I really liked Gayatri's emphasis on singularity, and I think this is intriguing for "comp lit" versus "world lit," because when world lit is done badly the world is flat, it's Thomas Friedman on a bad day, and even Thomas Friedman on a good day can lead to a flattening or a leveling out, a kind of a mush of the global. We certainly don't want that. What's interesting to me is that when it's done well, world literature actually reframes the singular in new ways. A rather high proportion of the papers at this conference, for example, involve a single writer. That was not our teachers' comp lit. Comp lit used to be like my mother's dinner plates: something red, something white, and something green, sort of like eating the Italian flag for dinner every night. So you needed something French, and something German, and something English or possibly Italian or Russian. Nor was the textual range so great even within the favored few literatures. At the time I was writing my dissertation at Yale, half of all dissertations in progress in the department involved Henry James, or Balzac, or both. It was like that Monty Python restaurant where you can get a frog on a peach or a peach on a frog; that was sort of what it was.

But what's interesting is that the comp lit of that era had a particular problem with singularity, because you'd have to put two or three things together to be a comparatist. A couple of years ago I did a book on the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and it's a book on one text as a work of world literature, thinking about the chain of significations that circulates from Babylon up into Assyria and that from there gets recovered in the Victorian era. My book has two modern heroes: the first important Iraqi archaeologist, Hormuzd Rassam, who discovered the library of Ashurbanipal with its decisive trove of tablets, and the epic's decipher, George Smith, a fascinating working-class British guy who never went to high school, much less college. By studying *Gilgamesh*'s circulation out into the world, I was able to look closely into issues of race, class, imperial politics, and the singularity of a unique literary work and its exceptional history.

We can also use such studies to try to intervene in our culture, whether academically or beyond. The Gilgamesh book came from the distress that I felt following the events of 9/11, when there was a lot of very loose talk about a "clash of civilizations," this Samuel Huntington type of thing. And I asked myself what I could work on to show that if you really go back, there's only one common civilization underlying both Western and Middle Eastern cultures. "Okay," I decided: "the general public needs a book on the *Epic of Gilgamesh*." This wasn't the old kind of comp lit, but I told it as an adventure story, hung on the biographies of Rassam and Smith, about how the epic developed and circulated. What I was finding was the multiple singularity

of that text, it was not one thing. The epic was a different thing in the court of Ashurbanipal than it had been in Babylon, and it became something different when it was dug up, and it becomes something else again when it circulates back into the Middle East today. I can't say that I had any great success in intervening in Donald Rumsfeld's discourse, but it was probably the only book centered on the Neo-Assyrian Empire that has been reviewed in *Entertainment Weekly*. I hope that some readers saw the cultural-political lessons within the adventure story; I don't know, but one has to push.

And just to add a note on the question of language. I'm very interested by Gayatri's remarks on the limited French and German available to her as a student in India. The language I could not study in my high school in New York City was Spanish. This is kind of unbelievable, if you think about it now. Spanish was being spoken on the street outside the school, New York has one of the largest Spanish-speaking populations of any city in the world, it was in my own neighborhood, all around me. But because I attended a parochial school that wanted to send kids to the Ivy League, I could study French, German, and Latin, and only those languages. Sure enough, these were the three languages on which I had to pass language exams when I entered my graduate program in comp lit.

I did study Spanish in graduate school, as it happens, and this was because of what you might think of as the worst kind of superficial "Let's plug in a little bit of multicultural stuff" in a freshman-year art history survey course. Typical of the early seventies, the course dealt only with Western art, from the Greeks through Leonardo and on up to abstract expressionism. My particular seminar leader, though, happened to be a Mesoamericanist, Arthur Miller, a recently hired assistant professor. He was impatient with the Eurocentrism of the course, and he put in a week on Mesoamerican art, which I just thought was incredibly interesting to see. I decided to write my ten-page term paper on the uncanny statue of the goddess Coatlicue at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City. I discovered a book on *Aztec Thought and Culture* by Miguel León-Portilla, which quoted a lot of poetry to illustrate Aztec ideas. I thought this was the most amazing poetry, even in an English translation of León-Portilla's Spanish translations of the Nahuatl originals. This was a new world I'd never seen. I was deeply moved, and I thought, "If I get a chance, I'd love to study this language."

Four years later, in graduate school, I discovered that a Nahuatl course was being offered in the anthropology department. When I asked Bart Giamatti, my director of graduate studies, whether I could take this course for credit, he threatened to throw me out the window, which was then on the seventh floor of Bingham Hall. This produced a little moment of

vertigo, but to his credit, he did let me take it for credit. The enrollment doubled when I signed up. And it was because of studying that language that I realized I had to learn Spanish, because I couldn't work on the Nahuatl otherwise, since so many of the editions and the scholarly studies are in Spanish. So I studied Spanish, as a result of which I can now use the Spanish text of Cervantes when I'm teaching my world literature class. So we have a return of the once déclassé language that was below my private school's radar screen, via Nahuatl, thanks to a brief exposure to translated poetry in a survey class.

Such experiences can occur at any time. My middle child, Eva, changed schools after eighth grade in order to go to a high school where she could study Japanese, all because in third grade she'd had a class trip to a Japanese tea ceremony. And she studied Japanese for four years in high school and lived with families in Japan for two summers. You don't know what's going to do spark someone's potentially lifelong interest. The main thing about that is to not stop at the level of the superficial first acquaintance. Our students will find what hits them, and then you can encourage them to go as far as possible with it. That I think is a real moral imperative for us as teachers and scholars, to press that singularity in a globally and politically aware context.

[*Spivak*]: Edward Said, in his revision of *Orientalism*, quietly wrote that national liberation movements showed that subalterns were speaking, suggesting that upper-class bourgeois leaders, such as Nehru and Gandhi, were, in fact, subalterns. I only saw this by chance, because of course I had the first edition of *Orientalism*, which my dear friend and ally had given me when it came out. Because I couldn't find it in the wreck that is my office, I bought a second copy. And I saw that he had written this in the added "afterword." He never told me because he knew I would not agree and he certainly didn't give me a footnote—this idea of subalternity simply being non-European and colonized is a bad idea, which you also see in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's phrase "subaltern nation," since by Gramsci's classic definition, still useful in working at the relief map of a playing field that isn't level at all, the subaltern classes are those who are de facto not constituted into a (nation-)state.

The fact that a young North American student had not heard of Tagore, David—and I'm not saying anything personally—has nothing to do with the fact of this Nobel laureate poet being known exceedingly broadly. Let me share the unread bit with you because I think it's necessary for us to regionalize these national figures who are put together with—who did you say? Tagore and who?

[*Damrosch*]: Goethe.
[*Spivak*]: Goethe, there we go. So Tagore is a Goethe type of figure, I said, didn't I, transcendentalism, reproductive heteronormitivity, the chiastic balance like Schiller undoing Kant's critique, etc., and then there are these transgressive moments which the Indian reading public did not understand. I mean Tagore himself cites this, so he has to explain. Therefore, please let's not think of him as a subaltern figure because he happens to have written in another language. As Amartya Sen has recently written, in the West Tagore is thought of as a kind of Kahlil Gibran in drag.

In a paper presented in Baroda, in February, Professor E. B. Ramakrishnan suggested that we regionalize the multilingual Indian literatures, that we not try endlessly to find one example and translate it into English and put it side by side with something else. He asked us rather to "regionalize" these—his word—multilingual Indian literatures by way of context and language in order paradoxically to restore their Indianness that is at best a theoretical geopolitical fiction like "Europe," pleading perhaps for comparative literature, all world literature, to include something called "Indian" as a historical sign system to be traced post-theoretically rather than sketched in here through global English alone. In Baroda, I tried to follow Professor Ramakrishnan's directive with reference to the massive figure of Tagore. I poached from what I had done in my hometown three months before Baroda.

Speaking of Tagore in Calcutta as a bit of a mischievous feminist iconoclast, I segued into my subject by way of Jayasree Roy Chowdhury, now Jayasree Nath, a school friend from a small girls' school in Calcutta, who had continued on to Brabourne, a small women's college where we had both been students for the first two years (1955–1957) of undergraduate studies. In college, she and I would sit down at a harmonium and sing Tagore songs or "Rabindra Sangeet" on every possible occasion.[16] I should mention that these songs form a stock of occasional songs for groups and institutions in West Bengal and Bangladesh, and each one of them would be readily recognized by the entire reach of the middle class. So "Bhora thak" we sang at farewells, "Jibono jakhono" ("When Life") at deaths, "Nutan juger bhorey" ("At the Dawning of a New Era") on Independence Day, "Morubijoyer" ("Desert Conquering") on 25 *boishakh* (Tagore's birthday on the Indian calendar).

And I think at the end of the day, I'd said last December, asked to celebrate Tagore on his 150th anniversary, in Calcutta, "in spite of all of the grandeur of the poet's trajectory"—and they would have been very surprised that at his 150th anniversary, with extensive celebrations in Japan, and of course in all of the states in India, that he was being discovered for world literature in North America—"in spite of all the grandeur of the poet's trajectory, it is

this intimacy," I said, and I was being subversive in my hometown, "in our girlish souls, established now into examined lives, which 'mean' Tagore for us. Always a better articulation of our own feelings." Not just us. I remember my mother saying her college generation grew up on *Shesher kobita*, a slim love story of the deliberate end to an affair, where Tagore takes himself on in the name of a poet of a younger, rebellious generation. "This," I said, "is my Tagore, giving soul-shape to middle-class women," often mistaken for women as such. This is not the Tagore you will read when you compare him to Goethe, although Goethe's own contributions in this field are abundantly recognized.

To show how much of this is generally internalized in cultural production today, I was going to show some clips from a film by Moinak Biswas called *Sthaniya sambaad*, "local news." But you get my point. When you regionalize him—and if I had shown the clip, you would have seen the Bengali stuff coming on—it's not because you need to know Bengali in order to understand Tagore but because in order to regionalize him, singularize him rather than keep him as one of those figures, we declaim so that world literature can be selectively worldly. You really have to think about singularity in a collectivity and put geopolitics over against this. Not only the secession of the global elite, not only the globetrotting preservationists, whom we haven't talked about at all in terms of a "world" supporting the unexamined culturalism of the metropolitan migrant elite, but also the call-center workers about whom Shehzad Nadeem has written: "Workers must be able to pass as American or British."

I should mention here that "singularity" doesn't necessarily imply single texts. It simply implies that what is singular in any text is the universalizable. We must be in search of this -ability. (I am thinking of Samuel Weber's excellent recent book with that title, but not then transgress into making the singular universal, place it on a grid. Weber deals with this task beautifully.)[17]

This is the other side. We used to say about the European Enlightenment, cutting a postcolonial riff on Adorno and Horkheimer, that the other side of the dialectics of the Enlightenment is the dark part of the colonies. Benjamin talking about civilization and its other side: barbarism. In the same way, the other side of that worldliness, in North America embracing the world via Goethe, there in the call centers, Nadeem has written, "workers must be able to pass as American or British and maintain their composure in the face of sometimes racist abuse by irate customers. It is simply part of the job." Thus the animating paradox of their condition, Nadeem writes, is that "they are reaping the benefits of the corporate search for a cut-rate labor but"—the other side—"also bearing the burden." "They are" he writes,

"upwardly mobile cyber-coolies."[18] Now when you think of that figure passing as American, outsourcing, think of insourcing and the opposite of what would be the antonym of "cyber-coolies" in the videotic classroom. Think about the two things together. This is one of the exercises that I would ask you to perform as you train your imagination to supplement the impulse to world lit.

David and I will probably—to quote him—duke it out again. The task is too important for both of us. And we'll probably say different things next time. In Turkey—we were very reverent and polite toward each other. Today we have said that we are going to supplement. I agree with him, he agrees with me, there was a little abuse right in the beginning of his talk, but it's nothing, we like each other. This is not the end of the conversation. You come again, to see how we step toward each other. Thank you.

## *Questions*

*Question One:* Thanks very much to you both. It was a fascinating conversation. I have a question for David regarding a comment that you've made at the end of your introductory talk, which was that the imperative is to push back against the market. And I wanted to push you a bit on that one. Is what you're talking about pushing back against the market, or is it in a sense enhancing the market? Is there a way to talk about the differences between those two, particularly if you talk about, for example, sending students on exchange programs, or deans expanding the availability of foreign language classes? How does one actually talk about the differences in a world literature context between pushing against the market and enhancing it? Thank you.

[*Damrosch*]: It's a really tricky question and one that certainly any anthologist thinks about very hard. Just to talk about my experience, my best education in the market came in my years as an assistant professor, when an old college roommate and I invented a board game called "True Love." The object was to get from "First Date" all the way to "Meaningful Relationship" while accumulating more points than your partner. It wasn't a very playable game, but it was a nice concept, and we got in to see various people at large game companies. The situation there is like the textbook industry, only much more so. The equivalent at these companies of an acquisitions editor is the vice president for marketing, so that's very clear. And the most interesting case was when we talked with the vice-president at Milton Bradley. We had the good fortune to get in to see him on a Friday afternoon when he

was tired and he just felt like musing. He told us that he often felt he knew exactly what his customers wanted, but he couldn't sell to his customers, he had to sell to the distributors. "If only I could kill my distributors," he said with a sad smile, "then I could really sell to my customers!" So here he was, a marketer who would only take a game if it would sell three quarters of a million units a year—extremely successful at what he was doing—and yet he was a prisoner in a sense of his own distribution mechanism.

And I thought of this conversation when I started to do the anthology work, because it's a similar thing. As scholars, we sell to our consumers—the graduate students or colleagues who will read us. But as textbook editors, we sell to our distributors, the faculty who teach the course. They aren't the people who actually buy the book, which they get for free as a desk copy; they assign the book to the people who buy it, the student consumers. So pushing the market means pushing the distribution mechanism. And it means that we anthologists can't simply include what we believe from our experience will be the best works to excite undergraduates, the works that they will love and that will teach them about the world. Instead, it's a question of what we can get the faculty to teach, to assign—people who have often been trained differently, under the older NATO-literatures model, and they're often out of their comfort zone when they're going beyond what's common. So major literature anthologies these days are about one-third non-Western and two-thirds Western. The proportion is completely distorted by the market. But again, we push away from 100 percent Western or 95 percent Western, which is what the proportion was not so long ago, and if we're now at 66 percent Western, we're getting somewhere.

I think that pushing the market can also be said to enhance the market, as it certainly does. The textbook publishers are now having to put out new editions at an insane rate of revision because of the used book market, which is a whole separate issue and problem, and it enhances the new edition to have some new texts in it. You can't find a new work by Dante that people want to use, but if you can tell them "You need this Vietnamese text, which is really cool," it enhances the market for the next edition of the anthology, even as it entices the faculty to try new things. To me, this is a kind of both/and situation, since it makes the publisher willing to include the works I'm eager to have there. When I speak of world literature as works in circulation, this could be just giving in to the market, but in fact I'm always pushing because I'm putting things into the anthologies that haven't been circulated before. So I think this should enhance the market against its own mindless principles toward a more mindful opening out.

*Question Two:* Hi, my question is to David. First of all, I'm not sure I understood your distinction between comparative and world literature. It seems to me you were saying what used to be comparative literature is now world literature, and if I'm wrong, please do correct me. But my second question has to do with your response to Gayatri's question about ethics in studying world literature. I'm not sure whether you really grappled with that question, and what I want to put to you was maybe one way to make you answer that question, which many of us have. Who wants to study world literature, you know, these sort of fictional thousands of students who want to study world literature, who are they, why do they want to at this moment study world literature and what kinds of literatures do they want to study? And that might in some way bring in the whole notion of politics and ethics which Gayatri was emphasizing.

[*Damrosch*]: An extremely important question, as we were both saying, and thank you for giving me the chance to clarify this. Every now and then, in the field of comparative literature you get someone making an imperialist claim for their particular thing and saying that the discipline has to become this, for example that comp lit has to be replaced by translation studies. And translation studies have come in and they're very important, but this would not be the whole of comp lit. I wouldn't want to be seeming to say "comp lit is now world literature." I think rather that we have a dynamic interplay in which world literature can help reframe comparative study. Comparative study is still a fundamental part of what we do. My department is still called Comparative Literature; I think the term has a history we should honor, and I often do compare actually, and comparison across literatures will remain a very viable mechanism in our discipline.

I also think you have a kind of figure/ground reversal between world literature and national literature, because, in one sense, world literature is prior to the creation of most national literatures, but in another sense, world literature exists only *within* a national space for any given reader. So in this sense world literature is actually a function of national systems and needs to be thought about that way. National literature, comparative literature, world literature exist in a dynamic interplay, and not one of these can eat the others up.

On the ethical question, I have to admit: I am a structuralist in recovery. I'm ethically challenged as result of my formalist training in the seventies, though this is somewhat paradoxically overlaid or underlaid with the fact that I'm also a preacher's kid. As a result, I'm very evangelical, though an evangelist without an ethics is sort of like Benjamin's Marxism, you might

say, a paradoxical Marxism of someone who doesn't believe in progress. But I think it's a kind of ethical stand at some deep level to press for a more capacious study of the world's literatures, but this does very much involve asking who is studying and why. We also need to think really seriously about the opening up of the power relations between teacher and students, and part of the ethical question is to take seriously the modes in which people come to studying comparative and world literature and the kinds of dialogue that can emerge.

*Question Three:* [My question is] to both of the learned speakers here. Self-realization means to introspect and to be able to understand the meaningful relationship with God and humanity. But self-realization is also to build oneself in worldly circumstances. Now how would you define that self-realization in the world literature context, especially when you want to go into the text, subtextual meaning and intertextual meaning?

[*Spivak*]: Self-realization . . . now let me ask you if you would like to think of that English phrase in as many different languages as you can think of. I mean, you and I are obliged to speak here in English. I'm not making a silly remark here.

At the end of his book called *Rogues*, Derrida offers a task and he says: try to translate in all the languages of the world, beyond Latinity, what you think in your language is the difference between "reasonable" and "rational," which is an impossible request.[19] But the importance of the request is that these words come combined with a package that tells you something within the language, the nature of that language.

I don't know how I would agree with you that literature helps you to realize yourself. On the other hand, I could agree with you by saying what I was trying to say: that the ethical reflex is to go toward the other, and literature doesn't teach you that, but literature allows you to train for that in the way in which if you get the capacity to be able to trace a text, that is already a kind of training in the sort of thing that you need to have in this world of ours in order not to be like Nicholas Kristof, all the innumerable NGOs, etc. You said in introducing me, Haun, that I was doing some incredible work improving the lives of people, which I would be very shocked to think that that's what I was doing. That particular impulse is something that we ought to question a little bit.

So if you think about self-realization in that way, I suppose I would go along with you. But for me, the problem is that it's an English phrase. You look like you are perhaps from South Asia. If you go to that thing which

the Hindutwa people quote often: "*Na vā arē jāyāyai kāmāya jāyā priyā bhavati/ātmanastu kāmāya jāyā priyā bhavati*" and so on (that your wife does not become beloved because you desire your wife but because you desire your *ātman*—or the other way, the *ātman* in-forming you as a desiring-machine, as it were—that's why your wife becomes beloved, and so on with many important nouns—husband, knowledge, etc.). If you translate that *ātman* as *S*elf, capital "S," you're into that "self-realization in English" bag.

On the other hand, if you try to trace it and you see that it's cognate with *atmos* and it probably means something like that sort of *signifiance* conveyor belt, not meaning*ful*, which allows the possibility of meaning, so that Benjamin can speak at the end of "The Task of the Translator" of the *reine Sprache* without meaning which makes translation possible, then you get a completely different program from self-realization. So I would remain caught within that assumption because I would think of the many different ways in which self-realization can come to us given the world's wealth of languages. Think of Africa and the wealth of its languages, for example.

I was just looking at that sentence where Tagore talks about world literature and comparative literature—no, not of translation—"The responsibility that you've given me for a discussion in English you have given it a name: 'comparative literature.' I will call it '*Bishsho Shahitto*' in Bengali."[20] *Vishwa sahitya* (in the Sanskritized form) is not world literature, of course, because *sahitya*, as you know, is precisely collectivity, whereas literature is something like letters. So where are you going to find an answer to questions of this sort?

That's why I was saying let's not ignore the stakes of world literature, as self-realization seems to be a nice good goal, if you expand the self so that all of the world's different languages can be included. If you realize that the "self" is made up in language—that too is self-realization. But let's supplement it with those kinds of worries that I've just shared with you in this long answer of mine. The literary is wasteful spending. That's why I so catch on to that. It won't lead you to a systemic coding, that's why I showed you those pictures. So if you're not satisfied with my answer, it's not a problem, we can talk more.

*Question Four:* My name is Natasha. Actually, I'm an undergraduate student with the world literature program at the Simon Fraser University and one thing that I realized particularly with the undergraduate panel that occurred at the ACLA for the first time this year was that most academic institutions do teach quite a variety of different theories, narratives, prose, poetry. What I wonder is, could there possibly be a level playing field across academic institutions in North America? What are your opinions on that?

[*Damrosch*]: The great thing about the multiplicity of North America's system is that it's so much more varied than most countries' systems are. And, in particular, the comparative literature programs are best when they are localized to the interests and possibilities of the institution, and no one program does or should do just what the others do, so that variety is so much better than a leveling out. At the same time, I do think we have a much more even playing field these days, insofar as there isn't so much the hegemony of a few programs that there used to be. I think that's a welcome opening out, let's say, rather than leveling out, of programs and of events like this very ACLA meeting here. Not only do our eighteen hundred speakers reflect the extraordinary variety of the institutions in North America, but we probably we have people from forty different countries here. This is an extraordinary kind of opening out. This is the very opposite of a leveling, but it is an opening of the playing field to a much wider variety of players than we used to see, which is one of the most extraordinary things that's happening today.

[*Spivak*]: She was talking about funding and what is being taught. Now, when you talk about funding, of course you know that in this country, in Canada, and in the U.S., the situations are not exactly similar, but in the United States, since you have private institutions, public institutions, community colleges, and then university systems with many colleges, some of which are flagship colleges, the other are not so, etc., it would be very difficult to talk about funding. The budget of Harvard for example is bigger than some small third world countries . . .

[*Damrosch*]: Before the crisis . . .

[*Spivak*]: Yes, yes, even with the crisis. You know, I'm not fighting. Princeton is much smaller than Columbia, but it has a budget which is somehow bigger. So it's even within the biggies . . . I think that the answer to your question is a "no," and I'm glad you asked the question, but we should discuss why the question is impossible. You know, it's the same as why "it's opening up," etc., ignores these details. And we should talk about it. That's why I think in fact of Marx's third thesis, there is a difference between teachers and students. It's not a power difference, it's more like I'm my students' servant, because I have a little bit more experience. They can teach me things, but I can teach them a little something too. For example, on the question of funding here.

And the other thing would be to teach the same things everywhere. I think you asked the question in a good spirit, and I am glad you asked it.

But again, if you sit down to think about it, it might be better if they didn't all teach the same thing. So that you can go to Arizona to learn more about Native American stuff and you can go to Middlebury to do a little more with languages, so a little diversity might be better than uniformity. This is a good question and we can talk more about it now that I know what you meant by it. Thank you.

*Notes*

1. Werner P. Friedrich, "On the Integrity of Our Planning," in *The Teaching of World Literature*, ed. Haskell Block (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 14–15.
2. Sukehiro Hirakawa, "Japanese Culture: Accommodation to Modern Times," *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 28 (1979): 47.
3. Gayatri C. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), xii.
4. Friedrich, "On the Integrity of Our Planning," 17.
5. Harry Levin et al., "Report on Professional Standards," http://www.umass.edu/complit/aclanet/Levin.html (accessed 7 Oct. 2011).
6. Thomas Greene et al., "Report on Professional Standards," http://www.umass.edu/complit/aclanet/Greene.html (accessed 7 Oct. 2011).
7. Colloquium style classes can help here, but if I remember right, my main point in April in Vancouver had been epistemological. These issues do not for me address the problem.
8. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Teaching for the Times," *Journal of the Midwestern Modern Language Association* 25.1 (1992): 183.
9. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, corr. ed., trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 314.
10. We are inhabiting the register of truth rather than the register of exactitude (as Lacan would put it), I had said in Vancouver, trying to cover up a lapse in fact checking. So, my apologies to David.
11. Here Gayatri Spivak plays the clip, showing a hand overwriting the score, on a page of the printed musical score of Bach's six suites for solo cello, while Mstislav Rostrovich's 1991 recording plays concurrently (http://www.joediebes.com/works/one2one.html [accessed 29 Sept. 2011]).
12. Referring to http://www.joediebes.com/works/one2one.html.
13. "Playing to Lose," in "Loss," written for the Seagull Press's annual catalog (Kolkata, India).
14. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 77.
15. The Marx-Kant-Gramsci bit comes from my forthcoming book *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. The bit on the multicultural classroom is also from there.
16. There were plenty of Bengali speakers in the ballroom in Vancouver. I mentioned the initial phrase of many songs, beginning with "Bhora thak" or "Let it Be Full."
17. Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
18. Shehzad Nadeem, *Dead Ringers: How Outsourcing Is Changing the Way Indians Understand Themselves* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 2.
19. Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 159.
20. Rabindranath Tagore, "World Literature," trans. Swapan Chakravorty, in Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, ed. Sisir Kumar Das and Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 141. (Translation modified.)