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Frames for World Literature

At first sight, it may seem paradoxical to include a discussion of world literature in a volume on »Grenzen der Literatur«, as world literature may be considered to consist of those works that ignore borders and boundaries of many sorts – geographic, generic, and temporal. Yet if the scope of world literature truly is boundless, how can we make sense of the vast array of all the works ever written anywhere in the world? »What can one make of such an idea?« the comparatist Claudio Guillén has asked in alarm.

> The sum total of all national literatures? A wild idea, unattainable in practice, worthy not of an actual reader but of a deluded keeper of archives who is also a multimillionaire. The most harebrained editor has never aspired to such a thing.[1]

The present essay will attempt to sketch the boundaries of a global world literature that may be attainable in practice by actual readers, archivists, and editors alike.

From Goethe in the 1820s to Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova today, different observers have sought to chart the conceptual and material boundaries of world literature, but no one definition or approach has yet compelled general agreement. In what follows, I will argue that world literature must be understood in multiple senses. Whether considered as a set of texts or as a mode of circulation, world literature does have definable boundaries, but these boundaries cannot be sketched at only one level, on a single plane. Rather, world literature operates in a multi-dimensional space, in relationship to four frames of reference: the global, the regional, the national, and the individual. These frames of reference, moreover, continually shift over time, and so the temporal dimension serves as a fifth frame within which world literature is continually formed and reformed.

Common to most definitions of world literature is a recognition that it is possible to delineate the concept of world literature as something more

1 Guillén: Challenge, p. 38.

specific than the plenum of all the world's literatures, for which the unmodified term ›Literature‹ already suffices. If we consider world literature as including works that achieve an effective life outside their country of origin, we have already begun to give definite boundaries to the concept. Most literary works do not in fact find readers beyond their country of origin, and so the canon of world literature is a fairly selective canon even in expansive times such as the present. Some works can circulate broadly in the original language – Vergil was widely read in Latin in Europe for many centuries, and writers in global languages such as English or Spanish can be read untranslated in many countries. Yet even the writers in global languages are regularly translated into many other languages when they achieve a substantial presence beyond their country of origin: Paul Auster is read in some thirty languages today, and may well sell more copies in translation than in English. This is all the more true of a writer in a less commonly spoken language: Orhan Pamuk has been translated into fifty languages, and his foreign sales vastly outnumber his sales in Turkey. A defining feature of world literature, then, is that it consists of works that thrive in translation.

There are always serious stylistic losses when a work is translated, and yet there can be offsetting gains as well, not only in terms of the size of the audience but also in terms of understanding. A work that profoundly challenges home-country values may find its best readers abroad: the *Book of Job* could only be read in a relatively cautious manner by orthodox readers in the classical Hebrew tradition, and the *Thousand and One Nights* was long regarded in the Arab world as sub-literary, not worth serious attention at all. Even a work that has a classic status at home gains new dimensions when it travels abroad: Seen together with Sophocles, Kalidasa, and Brecht, Shakespeare looks different than when he is viewed only in the company of compatriots like Marlowe and Jonson. Many works, however, do not take on new meaning and new stature when read in abroad, either because their language simply is not translatable without crippling losses, or because their frame of reference is so exclusively local that they have little resonance abroad. Such works may be treasured and influential within their home tradition but never become works of world literature in any effective sense; they are read abroad, of at all, only by specialists in their culture and language of origin.

The distinction between works that thrive in translation and ones that fail to do so is not a distinction in terms of literary quality or even in terms of the author's own local or global perspective. There can be no more global work than James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, yet its prose is so intricate and so bound to English – despite, or even because of, its complex multilingual punning – that it becomes a curiosity in translation, hardly readable

at all. Joyce's *Dubliners*, a far more localized work, has been much more widely translated than the *Wake*, and has had a far greater impact abroad. Indeed, for several decades *Dubliners* had a far greater impact abroad than at home, where the first edition was quickly destroyed by its own publisher, after he started receiving complaints about the book's use of vulgarisms and its unflattering portraits of Dublin citizens, some of them by name.

The West and the Rest

Most works, then, remain within their culture and language of origin; only some ever travel effectively abroad. The selectivity of the corpus of world literature is greatly heightened by the fact that some countries contribute more works to the corpus of world literature than do most other countries, a fact that introduces important issues of political and economic power, worldly matters that must be taken into consideration in any discussion of world literature today. Until recently, students of comparative literature generally took such imbalances for granted. Though some early comparatists such as the Transylvanian Hugo Meltzl advocated a global perspective, more common was a great-power perspective centered on Western Europe. Though himself a Dane, for example, the literary historian Georg Brandes confined himself to discussing the literatures of England, France, and Germany in his *Litteratur des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts in ihren Hauptströmungen* (1882).

Throughout the twentieth century, most comparative studies focused on the literatures of Western Europe and North America, perhaps extending as far east as Russia but usually skipping over Eastern Europe in the process. The rest of the world was rarely discussed, much less included in full partnership with studies of Western literature. As the comparatist Sukehiro Hirakawa has written of his education in Tokyo in the 1950s,

> [i]t is true that great scholars such as Curtius, Auerbach and Wellek wrote their monumental scholarly works in order to overcome nationalism. But to outsiders like me, Western Comparative Literature scholarship seemed to be an expression of a new form of nationalism – the Western nationalism, if I may use such an expression. It seemed to us an exclusive club of Europeans and Americans. It was a sort of Greater West European Co-Prosperity Sphere.[2]

Hirakawa's ironic analogy of postwar Comparative Literature to Japan's prewar economic imperialism underscores the discipline's general bias in the 1950s and 1960s, even though many comparatists thought of themselves as promoting a literary world without borders, a kind of cultural

2 Hirakawa: Culture, p. 47.

analog to the United Nations. Idealistic though the Euro-American vision of world literature certainly was, Hirakawa and his colleagues in Tokyo were well aware that the field was dominated by a literary Security Council of quite limited membership, not coincidentally largely coinciding with the membership of the actual United Nations Security Council. In 1960 Werner Friederich, founder of the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, regretted that ›world literature‹ rarely encompassed very much of the world at all:

> Apart from the fact that such a presumptuous term makes for shallowness and partisanship which should not be tolerated in a good university, it is simply bad public relations to use this term and to offend more than half of humanity. [...] 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 fourth of the 15 NATO-Nations.[3]

The major-power focus continued to dominate well after Friederich issued his call for an opening out of world literature in Comparative Literature programs. In 1971 the German comparatist Horst Rüdiger offered a strong defense of a major-power comparatism, now by a negative analogy to the United Nations: Comparative Literature, he wrote, must not be seen as

> eine Vollversammlung der UNO, in der die Stimme der Großmächte so viel zählen wie die der politischen Provinz. Sie ist der liber aureus der ästhetisch geglückten und historisch wirksamen Werke der Literatur in allen Sprachen. Nur diese Beschränkung [...] macht sinnvolle komparatistische Arbeit möglich.[4]

In principle, Rüdiger's definition can encompass great books from any point on the globe, yet it is suggestive that in his United Nations analogy he doesn't even allow that the smaller powers are nations at all, but merely ›political provinces‹. In practice, Rüdiger focuses on writers from the great-power subset of what Friederich would term ›NATO-literature‹. In his essay, Rüdiger mentions twenty-five writers by name: two classical writers (Homer, Horace), nine Germans, eight French writers, and one writer each from England, the United States, and modern Italy.

Comparable proportions can be seen in the most widely used mid-century French survey of the field, Marius-François Guyard's *La Littérature comparée*, first published in 1951 by the Presses Universitaires de France in their series ›Que sais-je?‹ and re-issued several times thereafter. Surveying major trends and tasks of comparative literature, Guyard refers to just over 150 writers in the course of his book. This is certainly a substantial number, and yet eighty percent of these writers – 124 in all – come from only three countries: France, Germany, and Great Britain. In addition, Guyard

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3 Friederich: Integrity, p. 15.
4 Rüdiger: Grenzen, pp. 4f.

makes (always brief) reference to twelve Italians, six Americans, four classical Greek writers, four Spaniards, and three Russians. The only writers he mentions from elsewhere in Europe are Erasmus (who wrote in Latin and spent most of his career outside the Netherlands), and the Paris-based, Francophone dramatist Eugène Ionesco. The entire rest of the world is represented by a single reference to one Latin American poet, Rubén Darío.

This great-power emphasis is increasingly giving way today to a global focus, and an increasing number of writers is being made available even in anthologies designed for introductory courses. The *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* was content in its first edition of 1956 to survey the world through a total of only 73 authors, not one of whom was a woman, and all of whom were writers in ›the Western Tradition‹ stretching from ancient Athens and Jerusalem to modern Europe and North America. The numbers of included authors gradually expanded, and in the third edition of 1976 the editors finally found room for two pages of writing by a woman, Sappho, but the European and North American focus persisted into the early 1990s, in the Norton as in most other ›world‹ literature anthologies and the courses they served. The Chinese-American comparatist Rey Chow was rightly concerned at the time that the early efforts to broaden the spectrum of world literature weren't so much dismantling the great-power canon as extending its sway by admitting a few new great powers into the alliance. As she wrote in 1995:

> The problem does not go away if we simply substitute India, China and Japan for England, France, and Germany. [...] In such instances, the concept of literature is strictly subordinated to a social Darwinian understanding of the nation: ›masterpieces‹ correspond to ›master‹ nations and ›master‹ cultures. With India, China, and Japan being held as representative of Asia, cultures of lesser prominence in Western reception such as Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Tibet, and others simply fall by the wayside – as marginalized ›others‹ to the ›other‹ that is the ›great‹ Asian civilizations.[5]

To a very real extent, the expansion of our understanding of world literature has improved this situation during the past dozen years. The major American anthologies (such as those now published by Longman, Bedford, and Norton itself) today present as many as five hundred authors from dozens of countries, including works originally written in Akkadian, Chinese, Japanese, Kikuyu, Korean, Nahuatl, Quechua, Swahili, Vietnamese, Zulu, and many other languages. Even within the boundaries of Europe alone, *Don Quixote* now shares the stage with Arabic and Hebrew writing from medieval Andalus, while Welsh laments, Norse sagas, and the poems of the Polish Nobel Prize winner Wislawa Szymborska further expand the linguistic boundaries of courses that once viewed Europe ex-

5 Chow: Comparative Literature, p. 109.

clusively in terms of the Romance languages, English, German, and Russian. Comparative Literature surveys a whole new world today, including a new ›Old World‹.

Classics, Masterpieces, and Windows on the World

The more restricted boundaries of the older world literature did have the virtue of allowing – or enforcing – a degree of built-in coherence in terms of literary history and culture. As the focus of world literature broadens, it becomes newly important to define just what it is we are reading when we read a work of world literature. From Goethe's time onward, definitions of world literature have oscillated among three basic paradigms: as *classics*, as *masterpieces*, and as *windows on the world*.[6] These alternative conceptions are implied in such titles as the following: *The Harvard Classics* (1910), *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (1956), and *The HarperCollins World Reader* (1994). The dates of these three collections correspond to a gradual shift of emphasis, but the three conceptions are not mutually exclusive, and ideas of the classic and the masterpiece continue to figure in many courses and collections. All three definitions still need to be taken into account today.

As Frank Kermode has argued in *The Classic*, classics are foundational works for their culture, most often of imperial or aristocratic origin, often ancient and certainly influential over time. As enshrined academically in departments of Classics, the term was used to refer to Greek and Latin literature *tout court*. In principle, the study of Classics could encompass virtually any author active in those ancient cultures, whether major authors such as Sophocles and Vergil or figures of far less exalted literary status, such as the Roman playwright Livius Andronicus. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* admitted in 1910, »to judge from the insignificant remains of his writings, and from the opinions of Cicero and Horace«, Livius Andronicus »can have had no pretension either to original genius or to artistic accomplishment«. Yet the *Britannica* devoted a respectful article to his work as a translator and a pioneer of Greek techniques on the Roman stage: »His real claim to distinction«, the article declares, »was that he was the first great schoolmaster of the Roman people«. Though classical culture retains a definite prestige today, minor Roman writers can no longer be assured of the attention they received in 1910; the current online edition of the *Britannica* regrets to inform a searcher that it can find no references at all

6 I discuss these definitions further in Damrosch: What Is World Literature?, pp. 1-36.

(much less a free-standing article) for Livius Andronicus in its myriad electronic pages.

Whereas collections such as the *Loeb Classical Library* never hesitated to make room for minor as well as major authors, aesthetic criteria come to the fore in conceptions of world literature as the corpus of the world's masterpieces. To a practicing author such as Goethe – the first great promoter of the idea of *Weltliteratur* – an emphasis on world masterpieces had the considerable advantage that his best works could take their place in this pantheon during his own lifetime, rather than only long after his death. In contrast to the vertical orientation of the classical tradition, extending upward in time from the deep past, the category of ›the masterpiece‹ works just as well on a contemporary, horizontal plane. The world masterpiece can be recognized almost as soon as it is published to glowing reviews and begins to circulate in translation. Far from needing to live in a cultural capital such as imperial Rome, the writer of a masterpiece can come from a small country (such as the duchy of Saxe-Weimar in a not-yet-unified Germany), and can personally stem from quite modest origins: Johann Wolfgang Goethe was granted the aspirational ›von‹ by his Duke only at age thirty-three.

The emphasis on masterpieces has advantages for the teacher as well as for the writer, since it is a highly selective category. This frees an instructor to take up only a few works in a course, with no need to set the major authors within a frame of the much larger body of less transcendent writing around them. Where *The Harvard Classics* ran to fifty volumes, the Norton *World Masterpieces* could make do with two, conveniently arranged for use in a two-semester survey course. The masterpiece thus offers a kind of inverse economy of scale: the greater the works, the fewer of them you really need to teach. A culturally grounded course in Dante might logically entail assigning dozens of associated writers, from the theologians Thomas Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux to the poets Brunetto Latini and Bertran de Born – all of whom appear as characters in the *Commedia* – but a masterworks course can leap directly from peak experience to peak experience: from the *Aeneid* to the *Commedia* and on to *Paradise Lost* and *Faust*.

Such a course can emphasize the gradual unfolding of a classical tradition, but the presentation of world masterpieces can equally take the form of a multi-polar ›great conversation‹ among works grouped in an ideal simultaneity. This conversation can be held among works that are linked by genre or theme, with little reference to historical influence or national context. The conversation may be inscribed within the texts themselves, in references to predecessors or to contemporary rivals, but it can equally be constructed at will by the instructor, as when a course pairs *The Iliad* and

The Mahabharata, with no need to show any genetic connection from one to the other.

Since the mid-1990s, the classical and masterpiece approaches have increasingly been supplemented by an emphasis on a view of world literature as a set of windows on the world. Reacting to the tendency of earlier models to focus largely or even exclusively on works by a few privileged (usually white and male) authors from a handful of Western countries, many comparatists have broadened their focus to include intriguing conjunctions of compelling works of many origins. These works may be discussed and taught regardless of whether they can be described as ›masterpieces‹ – or at least as what Western readers might readily recognize as masterpieces. Thus the *HarperCollins World Reader* includes substantial sections on African and Amerindian oral works, which aren't even literature at all in the etymological sense of ›written in letters‹. In her preface to the collection, general editor Mary Ann Caws emphasizes that the anthology has been created from »a global perspective« and with the selections and arrangement »determined by their own cultural context rather than by Western or Eurocentric preconceptions«.[7] Not only do these writers represent different cultural circumstances and artistic norms; they need not be dominant figures even within their home culture. The collection showcases »marginal as well as mainstream voices in literature, particularly the inclusion of women's voices«.[8]

Distinct in theory, the three definitions of ›world literature‹ are often combined in practice. Goethe, indeed, held all three views simultaneously, cherishing the Greek and Latin classics he read in the original, promoting the modern masterpieces he and his friend Schiller were composing, and enjoying Chinese novels and Persian poetry as windows on very different worlds of culture and aesthetic expression. World literature surveys have long combined all three approaches, as in the case of Columbia University's venerable great books course, Literature Humanities, which has a Classics-based fall semester giving a window onto Greco-Roman literary culture, followed by a spring semester of European masterworks. Conversely, the new global anthologies include works far beyond the purview of traditional Western-based courses, but they still typically give most of their pages to works long recognized as masterpieces within their culture of origin. *The Tale of Genji* can't be read in the same way as *Don Quixote*, but it is equally a masterwork, and Murasaki and Cervantes offer windows on their respective worlds of Heian Japan and early modern Spain.

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7 Caws / Prendergast: World Reader. Vol. 1, pp. xl-xli.

8 Ibid., p. xli.

This sort of blending of perspectives is nothing new, and it can already be seen in a multivolume collection published over a century ago under the title *The World's Great Classics* (Hawthorne, 1901). The title shows the collection's debt to the classicist ideal, while the use of the term ›great‹ shows that the collection will be made up of a subset of classics: great books or masterpieces. Interestingly, the series first appeared in 1900 under the title *The World's Greatest Literature*; the following year the publisher decided to up the ante from ›Literature‹ to ›Classics‹, but at the same time toned ›Greatest‹ down to ›Great‹. This latter choice reflects the editors' ambition to move well beyond the ranks of what their readers would have recognized as the greatest names in world literature. The sixty-one-volume series came to include volumes on East Asia, the ancient Near East, ›Moorish literature‹, and even Armenian literature. A 450-page volume is devoted to Turkish literature – »Comprising«, as its subtitle says, »Fables, Belles-Lettres and Sacred Traditions, Translated into English for the First Time«. The volume's editor, Epiphanius Wilson, included anonymous folktales together with upper-class poetry and bourgeois drama, offering his readers a mimetic view of literature as directly reflecting national character and culture. One Turkish playwright's works, for example, »reflect domestic, forensic, and official life at Constantinople during the last century as truly as those of Molière reflect the speech and manners of Parisian society as they existed in the reign of *le grand monarque*«.[9]

Writing for the all too aptly named Colonial Press, Epiphanius Wilson wasn't finally prepared to set Turkish culture on a par with European. »The weaknesses of the Turkish character«, he announces at the outset, are »reflected in fables which contain but little wisdom, [displaying] the apathy which puts up with everything« and »the want of enterprise and energy which is characteristic of the Turk«.[10] Yet against his own prejudices, Wilson asserts that the fables »bear a reality about them which is lacking in the artificial productions of Gay and Lessing«,[11] and he makes unequivocal claims for Ottoman poetry: »In imagination and passion these Ottoman poems will hold their own in any company.«[12]

Though we can hope to surpass Epiphanius Wilson in achieving a cosmopolitan equality of regard for the world's cultures, the reality principle is only useful up to a point. Artifice and realism mingle in the works of Fuzuli, Nedîm, and Orhan Pamuk as much as in the productions of Gay and Lessing. Taken to a logical extreme, moreover, the view of literary works as win-

9 Wilson: Literature, p. iv.
10 Ibid., p. vii.
11 Ibid., p. vii.
12 Ibid., p. iv.

dows into distant times and places will tend toward extensive culture-specific study: Truly to see Dante in his world, we should devote years of research to him and his immediate contemporaries, ideally supplemented by extended research into Roman and Florentine history, art, religion, and literature. Any broad study even of a single national tradition requires high degree of selectivity in its use of cultural and historical context, but a degree of distancing from the home context is precisely what ensues whenever a work travels beyond its time and place of origin. What occurs with works of world literature is a heightened form of the transformation that already takes place when a work from an early period is read in a later era even within its own country: It enters into new relations with new texts and new readers, who will inevitably know much less about the work's original context than its first readers did. The original national context will usually continue to have an important weight even for readers abroad, but at the same time the work enters into new regional and global relations. As a result, the work comes to function in a variety of frames of reference, which can interact in new and surprising ways.

World, Region, Nation

The interplay of national, regional, and global contexts has been present as long as the idea of *Weltliteratur* itself. If contemporary globalization gives a new prominence to sweeping patterns of distribution and reception, these new planetary movements continue to co-exist along with vital national and regional cultures and markets. In his early discussions of *Weltliteratur* with his young secretary and disciple Johann Peter Eckermann, Goethe already showed a clear awareness of all three levels of literary circulation. He was intensely interested in the promotion of German literature abroad, and in the refinement of German literary culture in light of foreign views. As John Pizer has emphasized in his book *The Idea of World Literature* (2006), Goethe's focus on *Weltliteratur* in the 1820s was shaped by German intellectuals' disappointment that Germany had not achieved national unity in the wake of the fall of Napoleon. Goethe felt that as a center of literary production, translation, and circulation, Germany could exercise a cultural sway despite the lack of a unified political identity: He emphasized to Eckermann »daß [er] überzeugt sei, es bilde sich eine allgemeine Weltliteratur, worin uns Deutschen eine ehrenvolle Rolle vorbehalten ist«.[13]

Relatively weak and divided in themselves, Germany's writers would gain strength, in Goethe's view, by their participation in the regional culture of

13 Eckermann: Gespräche, p. 908.

Western Europe. Throughout his conversations with Eckermann, Goethe stresses the value of the wider regional context, both as a marketplace for ideas and books, and as a source of renewal and new inspiration for local authors: »Eine jede Literatur ennuyiert sich zuletzt in sich selbst, wenn sie nicht durch fremde Teilnahme wieder aufgefrischt wird«[14] – a perspective only underscored by Goethe's choice of a French loan-word to describe the ennui that an isolated German author would come to feel.

If the region is Goethe's primary focus, he is alive to a broader global context as well. It is highly significant that in the very days in which he was first developing his ideas on *Weltliteratur* in his conversations with Eckermann, Goethe was reading a Chinese novel, in French translation, and a collection of Serbian poetry, in German translation. In his most famous pronouncement on world literature, Goethe identifies *Weltliteratur* as the coming literature of the modern age, an age he envisions as virtually post-national: »Nationalliteratur will jetzt nicht viel sagen, die Epoche der Weltliteratur ist an der Zeit, und jeder muß jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen.«[15]

Increasing attention is being paid today to the idea of world literature as a global phenomenon. In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Spivak has called for a »planetary« perspective that would definitively supplant the Eurocentrism of older comparatist studies. What this perspective might mean in practice can be illustrated by the work of Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova. In an article entitled »Conjectures on World Literature« (2000) and more recently in a book (*Graphs, Maps, Trees*, 2005), Moretti has proposed to study world literature through the dual lenses of Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory and of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Arguing that the world's literature forms a system that is »*one*, and *unequal*«.[16] Moretti proposes a model that would study the ebbs and flows of genres across regions and around the globe. In Moretti's view, the European novel can be mapped as an invasive species, spreading around the world in the wake of colonial and neocolonial political and economic developments, putting down roots in cultures that previously had little history of extended prose fiction, and variously suppressing traditional genres and inspiring new creativity, usually after an initial period of uncertain, derivative composition.

Moretti's system operates at a high level of generality, as new genres and new media such as film sweep their way around the world, almost impersonally carried along in the wake of the movements of global capital.

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14 Ibid., p. 896.
15 Ibid., p. 198.
16 Moretti: Conjectures, p. 149.

He goes so far as to claim that literary history should eschew close reading in favor of tracing large-scale patterns discernible through »distant reading« of publication data and sales figures.[17] Moretti's model can perfectly well be combined, though, with close reading of exemplary texts, and close study of literary works is surely central in any full understanding of the ways in which the norms of the realist novel, or the film noir, are adapted and reinvented in new cultural contexts.

If the pure form of Moretti's theory is relatively abstract, matters get much more concrete and personal in Pascale Casanova's *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999), which sees writers as competing for attention and prestige in an increasingly global market. Like Moretti, Casanova emphasizes the political and cultural inequalities of her »world republic of letters«, in which some nations are favored contenders, and of which Paris was long a crucial node of circulation and recognition. Observers outside France are unlikely to agree that Paris has ever been the sole capital of the republic of letters; certainly London, Berlin, Barcelona, St. Petersburg, New York, and Beijing among other cities have been enters of major publishing industries and have had major impact on the success of works abroad. Casanova's model is perhaps best seen not as a global model but instead as a regional one, well attuned to the central role of Paris – »capital of the nineteenth century«, in Benjamin's phrase – within Western Europe and for its colonies and now former colonies.

Casanova's argument shows a complex (and perhaps not fully worked through) mixture of nationalism and anti-nationalism. Paris holds pride of place as the proving-ground for authors who wish to shine on the world stage, and yet throughout her book Casanova argues that it is France's writers who are in the foreigners' debt: The vitality of French literature itself is in significant part due to the influx of new ideas and creativity coming in the form of traveling works and immigrant authors. Her book has been criticized for its Paris-centeredness, most sharply by Christopher Prendergast in the introduction to his edited collection *Debating World Literature*, but it is not altogether surprising that a French writer should see world literature from a nationally-inflected perspective. The nation remains a key locus of the creation and circulation of world literature, as well as of the training of the people who discuss literature.

At the same time, there are new efforts under way to conceive of regions such as Europe on a more capacious basis than the focus on just a few large literatures. This expansion is starting to influence the writing of literary history as well as the teaching of world literature. An ambitious first attempt to reconceive the boundaries of European literature can be

17 Ibid., p. 155.

found in Annick Benoit-Dusausoy's and Guy Fontaine's *History of European Literature* (2000), to which a hundred and fifty scholars contributed. As the editors say at the outset, »[a] persistent obsession with nationhood, limiting an author to one particular area, linguistically and geographically, is a mindset, passed on to us by the nineteenth century, that dies hard.«[18] In place of nations, the volume offers pan-European movements (humanism, the Enlightenment, Romanticism), genres (the traveler's tale, the picaresque novel), and broad themes (sensibility and genius, Woman and Myth).

Though still somewhat top-heavy in its representation of French writing – the Marquis de Sade, for instance, is given major-author attention, unlike Alexander Pope or Friedrich Schiller – Benoit-Dusausoy's and Fontaine's volume represents a major shift from most earlier practice, freely interspersing Hungarian, Dutch, and Catalan writers among the great-power figures. Discussing the Symbolist movement, for example, the contributors include the Czech Karel Hlaváč, the Greek Konstantinos Hadjopoulos, the Swede Vilhelm Ekelund, the Hungarian Jenö Komjáthy, the Bulgarian Ivan Vazov, and the Flemish August Vermeylen along with such standard figures as the French poets Rimbaud and Verlaine, the German Stefan George, and the English aesthetician Arthur Symons.[19] More has changed in the thirty-five years since Rüdiger delineated the »Grenzen und Aufgaben« of comparative literature than in the century between Rüdiger and Georg Brandes.[20]

Even in broadly conceived accounts of regional cultures, nations retain a major role, though the nature and extent of their role are far from self-evident. This issue has provoked controversy throughout the postwar era. The debate over the Francocentrism of Casanova's book, for instance, echoes the critique that the Czech-American comparatist René Wellek made of Guyard's *La Littérature comparée* forty years before. Discussing Guyard's book in the American *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* in 1953, Wellek disparaged Guyard's emphasis on French writers' fortunes abroad and on other countries' relations with France.[21] In a preface to a new edition of his book in 1965, Guyard felt the need to defend his emphases against Wellek's criticism. He roundly denied that his frequent recurrence to French writers might reveal »un nationalisme qui serait plus choquant ici qu'en tout autre domain«. Rather, he says, »ce manuel s'addresse d'abord aux jeunes Français qui abordent en France les études comparatistes«, and

18 Benoit-Dusausoy / Fontaine: History, p. xxvii.
19 See ibid., pp. 498-502.
20 Rüdiger: Grenzen.
21 Wellek: Concept, pp. 2f.

so the emphasis on French writers »n'a d'autre explication que ce souci tout pragmatique«.[22]

We may well share Wellek's unease about Guyard's flagrant Francocentrism, and yet Guyard's self-defense is worth taking seriously. As he recognized, the world's literature is not an ideal order existing beyond time, space, and culture; it is always seen from somewhere, taking pragmatic shape as what is available to buy in bookstores and what is assigned in classes. Addressing students who would have read little modern literature beyond the French canon during their years in the lycée, Guyard hoped to entice them to look beyond the borders of France by stressing the vital connection of the French classics to German, English, and Italian literature.

In the past, the study of world literature often found itself in tension with the study of national literatures. Specialists based in one or another national literature department were often suspicious of world literature courses as culturally superficial and linguistically hobbled by their reliance on translation; such courses were allowed, if at all, only as introductory surveys, preparatory to the serious work that would be done once students committed to mastering a language and studying a national culture in depth. European universities have tended to expect their literature students to work largely or even exclusively in a single linguistic tradition, leaving little time for comparative work. Comparatists, in turn, could speak dismissively of »the nationalistic heresy«, as Albert Guérard put it in a lead article of the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* in 1958.[23] Looking forward to a coming integration of literary studies across national borders, Guérard found an analogy in the nascent plans for the European Union: »Comparative Literature will disappear in its very victory«, he predicted; »just as ›foreign trade‹ between France and Germany will disappear in the Common Market; just as the ›foreign relations‹ between these two countries will be absorbed by a common parliament«.[24] The only real question for comparatists, Guérard claimed, was ›How and When Shall We Commit Suicide?‹ His answer was ›Not yet: we are needed so long as the nationalistic heresy has not been extirpated‹.[25]

Today we can see that Brussels and Geneva are not about to absorb the full governmental authority of Paris and Berlin, and we can allow that the nation continues to be a crucial setting within which most writers work and most books are read. World literature exists in a dialectical relation to the national culture within which any given reader is situated – both ex-

22 Guyard: Littérature comparée, p. 7.
23 Guérard: Comparative Literature, p. 4.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p. 5.

tending the possibility of what one knows from one's home tradition and yet also profoundly shaped by it as well. During the past fifty years, the balance has certainly shifted outward toward inclusion of much more of the world, but it remains the case that world literature will take a different shape in each region and country where it is realized in the concrete form of syllabi, available translations, and languages known by a given readership.

Shadow Canon, Countercanon, and Hypercanon

Thanks to an explosion of high-quality translations of new works and retranslations of older classics, there has been a steady expansion over the past several decades in the range and variety of works that can be read as world literature today. At times, it seems to some observers that the older canon of European classics and masterworks has fallen away altogether. As Christopher Braider has recently written, contemporary postcolonial scholars »have not only completed the critical dismantling of the inherited literary canon, but displaced the European metropolis from the traditional center of comparatist attention«.[26] This dismantling, however, is only half the story, and not only because it hasn't yet occurred in practice to the extent that it has been achieved in postcolonial theory. We do live in a postcanonical age, but our age is postcanonical in much the same way that it is postindustrial. The rising stars of the postindustrial economy, after all, often turn out to look a good deal like the older industries, most of which continue to be in business as well: Amazon needs warehouses of bricks and mortar, and more automobiles than ever crowd the roads in the age of the internet's ›information highway‹.

World literature presents a comparable situation; new writers are now under discussion, but the older European ›major authors‹ are mostly very much in view as well. Indeed, many of them are more discussed than ever, and they continue to be more strongly represented in survey anthologies than all but a very few of the new discoveries of recent decades. The James Joyce who used to be a central figure in the study of European modernism now inspires ambitious collections of articles with titles like »Semicolonial Joyce« and »Transnational Joyce«. Undeniably, comparatists today are giving more and more attention to ›minor literatures‹ and contestatory perspectives, yet these perspectives are applied as readily to the major works of the older canon as to emergent works of the postcanon.

How can this be? Something surely has to give. The number of hours in the day, and the number of weeks in the semester, haven't expanded along

26 Braider: Monuments, p. 161.

with the canon of world literature, yet we are definitely reading all sorts of works beyond the pale of the old ›Western Masterpieces‹. We must be reading them in place of *something*: hence the frequent assumption, especially by the attackers of the recent expansion, that scholars are abandoning Shakespeare for Toni Morrison. But this is not so. Instead, just as in the postindustrial economy, what has happened is that the rich have gotten richer, while most others just scrape by or see outright declines in their fortunes. It is too simple to say that the old canon has vanished. Rather, the canon of world literature has evolved from a two-tiered system into a three-tiered one. Formerly, world literature could be divided into ›major authors‹ and ›minor authors‹. Even in the heyday of the ›masterpiece‹ approach, a range of minor Western authors could still be found accompanying the major authors in anthologies, on syllabi, and in scholarly discussion: Apuleius and Petronius formed the frame from which Vergil and Ovid cast their radiance abroad to the world; the 1956 *Norton Anthology* included Aleksandr Blok along with its far more extensive selections from Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

In place of this older, two-tiered model, our new system has three levels: a *hypercanon*, a *counter-canon*, and a *shadow canon*. The hypercanon is populated by the older ›major‹ authors who have held their own or even gained ground over the past twenty years. The counter-canon is composed of the subaltern and contestatory voices of writers in less-commonly-taught languages and in minor literatures within great-power languages. Many, even most, of the old ›major‹ authors coexist quite comfortably with these new arrivals to the neighborhood, very few of whom have yet accumulated anything like their fund of cultural capital. In the field of world literature today, it is the old ›minor‹ authors who fade increasingly into the background, becoming a sort of shadow canon that the older scholarly generation still knows (or, increasingly, remembers fondly from long-ago reading), but whom the younger generations of students and scholars encounter less and less. Kafka is extensively represented in all major world literature anthologies today; Kleist is found in none of them. Wordsworth and Byron are more discussed than ever, both by national literature specialists and by comparatists; William Hazlitt and Robert Southey are far less discussed today than thirty years ago even by specialists and have fallen almost completely off comparatists' radar screens.

This canonical bifurcation is pronounced even within a single period in a single country. The disparities of attention are more dramatic still when it comes to world literature, given the severe pressures of time and numbers involved, and the hypercanon is now extending far beyond the classic texts long enshrined in the older fields of study. In world literature, as in some literary Miss Universe competition, an entire nation may be represented by

a single author: Indonesia, the world's fifth largest country and home of ancient and ongoing cultural traditions, is usually seen, if at all, in the person of Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar divide the honors for Mr. Argentina.

A high degree of selectivity may be understandable in view of world literature's new scope, yet it is remarkable to see how the hypercanon has come to create divisions even in the newly emergent field of postcolonial studies. This field has shown rapid growth during the past twenty years, but this growth has affected different authors in very uneven ways, to a degree that seems quite disproportionate to any differences of artistic quality or literary influence. A few favorite writers have emerged into a new, postcolonial hypercanon: Salman Rushdie is constantly discussed, as are Chinua Achebe, Derek Walcott, and a handful of others, and yet most other authors have achieved nothing like their ubiquity, and instead are the subject of only a few articles each year.[27]

Additionally, in postcolonial studies as in British Romanticism, there is a shadow canon of figures everyone ›knows‹ (most often just through one or two brief anthology pieces) but who are rarely discussed in print: Fadwa Tuqan and Premchand have each been the subject of only a small handful of articles in the past twenty years. Some members of this shadow canon formerly loomed larger in discussions of colonial and postcolonial literature but are now being rather directly eclipsed by the ascendancy of other authors into the hypercanon: Alan Paton gives way to Nadine Gordimer, R. K. Narayan is upstaged by Salman Rushdie. The great ghazal poet Ghalib was regularly discussed in the 1960s and 1970s but is almost never written about today outside India, perhaps not in favor of any specific other poet but as a consequence of a general shift toward the twentieth century. All in all, even without the inherited underpinnings of author-specific journals and special interest groups (The Wordsworth Circle; the Shakespeare Studies Association), it appears that postcolonial studies is reproducing the hypercanonical bias of the older Europe-based fields. What Rey Chow warned in 1995 may have been averted at the level of the nation only to return at the level of the celebrity author.

27 For tables showing levels of scholarly attention to a variety of postcolonial and other writers, see Damrosch: World Literature, from which this section of the present essay is adapted.

The Reader

For all its theoretical extent, in practice world literature is what an individual reader experiences in reading works written outside the reader's own home tradition. For the nonspecialist reader of a foreign work, reading takes place in what can be described as an elliptical space bounded by the work's culture of origin and the reader's own culture. Inevitably, the reader's understanding of the foreign work will be conditioned by prior experience, first and foremost the fund of knowledge and expectations developed within the home tradition, but often also the expectations generated by previous reading of other works from the foreign culture: If we pick up a new novel by Murakami Haruki, or a previously unread classic by Gogol, we will read these books with certain expectations as to what ›a Japanese novel‹ or ›a Russian novel‹ will be like, if we already know other books by Kawabata and Tanizaki, or by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. The new work will interact with these expectations, potentially destabilizing them even as it takes a new shape and significance from these relations.

Particularly when we read a work in translation, the book already comes to us shaped by the translator's choices and the publisher's framing of the text for its new market. An assimilative edition can adapt the foreign work strongly toward host-country norms, while a ›foreignizing‹ translation can emphasize the work's difference, its violation of local expectations. Writers and readers alike often turn to world literature to provide resources and aesthetic experiences beyond what is available at home. Even as readers reach out in this way, they may not realize how strongly their prior expectations affect the way they read, and people who have a good knowledge of the foreign work's language and culture are often distressed to find how the original work has become distorted in the process, whether by mistranslation or by culturally obtuse misreading, whether assimilative or exoticizing in character.

It is the role of the scholar and teacher of world literature to keep readers alive to cultural difference and to develop illuminating analyses of creative conjunctions of distant works. At the same time, it would be a mistake to suppose that a work's foreign reception involves a simple process of loss of essence; rather, a work takes on a new form as it travels abroad, showing new facets and features that are brought into view in its new surroundings. The borders of world literature are formed at once on a global scale and at the most individual level, made and remade in the shifting relations between world-wide capital flows, national publishing industries and university systems, and the personal preferences of individual readers, who may be drawn to very different works for all sorts of reasons. The ultimate boundary of world literature is found in the interplay of works in a reader's

mind, reshaped anew whenever a reader picks up one book in place of another, begins to read, and is drawn irresistibly into a new world.

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