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Global literary refractions: Reading Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* in the post-Cold War era

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This article critically examines Pascale Casanova's recent theorization of the world literary space from the point of view of postcolonial and especially post-Cold War debates on global literary comparativism. It investigates whether her Bourdieu-derived 'field' approach, with its overwhelming conceptual dependence on 'market' and 'nation' metaphors, equips her to make valid qualitative judgements on vast swathes of 'non-European' and 'transnational' literary spaces. In annexing all literatures of the non-European, postcolonial world to a historiography of European literatures, Casanova's book, this article argues, is not well positioned to theorize contemporary forms of literary 'worldling' where Europe is but one node among many others and scarcely the 'Greenwich Meridian' of literary taste. Finally, the article discusses alternative ways of studying world literary spaces and histories that have emerged in recent years, especially in the works of David Damrosch and Franco Moretti. In the process, it also weaves in aspects of a post-1989 Anglophone world literature project the theoretical and geopolitical assumptions of which are in quite some tension with those of Casanova's book.

Keywords: comparative literature; globalisation; literary history; post-Cold War; postcolonialism; world literature

In 1952, after enduring a long period of exile from Nazi Germany and writing his magnum opus *Mimesis* in Istanbul, the renowned philologist and comparatist, Eric Auerbach, wrote from Princeton, 'literary criticism now participates in a practical seminar on world history'. He added, 'Our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation' (1969, 1–17). Auerbach was signalling the urgency of comparative literature at the time to engage with its maximum geographical dimension, the world itself, in the aftermath of an age of expansion, conquest, genocide and warfare. The end of the World War II allowed scholars like Auerbach a moment of global vision – at once promising and unnerving – before it was fractured yet again by binary divisions of the

Cold War and emergent nationalisms of Asia and Africa. Auerbach himself retreated into mourning the irrevocable passing of the glory of European humanism.

Post-1989, Auerbach's global or world vision for comparative literary studies, but this time unmoored from its European legacy, has re-emerged in many forms against the backdrop of a radically transformed, though no less crisis-ridden, geopolitical scenario. Works by Emily Apter (2006), Christopher Prendergast (2004), Franco Moretti (1998, 2004), David Damrosch (2003), Edward Said (2004), and Gayatri Spivak (2003) have articulated aspects of this vision. With so many contemporary works produced, circulated and received, often in translation, at the interstices of local, national and international borders, these scholars acknowledge that the axes of comparison have become very complex and are no longer based primarily on national or linguistic differences. Nor, they suggest, is it tenable to envision a world literary space determined solely by postcolonial geographies of French and British Empires and their liberated colonies. The collapse of the Soviet imperium has reconfigured Europe and Central Asia, generating in the process new forms of literary postcoloniality and transnationalisms. Also significant has been the global impact of the emergence of a vocal, non-territorial demographics of the Muslim world, urging comparativists to engage actively with writing from the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa.¹ Comparativists of this post-Cold War age have identified many new heuristic challenges in undertaking critical studies of 'world literature' – global translation, multi-media publications/adaptations, linguistic imperialisms, new humanisms/cosmopolitanisms and postmodern/ethnic/religious (trans)nationalisms. They have also critically addressed the problem of the 'great unread' – that to do world literature is to recognize the impossibility of ever reading and knowing all. As Franco Moretti says, 'The literature around us is unmistakably a planetary system'. Yet, 'reading "more", [while] always a good thing, [is] not the solution' to the problem of how to do world literature (2004, 148–149). To adopt a conceptual apparatus that presumes to talk for the totality of world literary space is untenable, as it is now untenable to talk of histories of the world through Hegel's world-history model. What is possible, however, in the present literary scenario of rapid exchanges is to 'read the world' through an optic that traces difference and connectivity – between genres, themes, styles, chronologies – across discrete translocal sites.

This article proposes to analyse Pascale Casanova's mapping of the world literary space in her *The World Republic of Letters* (2004), against the backdrop of both this critical corpus and a world order that has emerged since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Published in 2004 under the Harvard series, 'Inventories of the Present', it has had an amazing press with critics such as Terry Eagleton hailing it as 'a milestone in the history of modern literary thought' for being both an exemplary account of current world literary flows and 'an innovative conceptual and historical analysis of late modern literary globalisation.'² Casanova's main purpose in the book is to designate the realm of world literatures today as one of inequality, conflict and competition, rather than a realization of the Goethean ideal of civilized cosmopolitan conversation in a world of

enhanced economic connections. Her primary argument is that the overt dependence of literary production on the politics of nation-making in the last three hundred years has generated a field of global competition wherein those national languages that have had the advantage of accruing more ‘capital’ due to their dominant status in world affairs, emerge as leaders in the literary realm. They create powerful urban centres, such as Paris, London and New York that act as exchange alleys through which writers have to pass (in translation) in order to be transported to the autonomous, world-making realm of literary universality. What these writers accrue in the process is not enhanced aesthetic worth due to any literary innovation, but merely a ‘speeding up of literary time’, becoming ‘up-to-date’ as it were.³ Casanova metaphorically designates the world-making urban capitals such as Paris, New York and London, but especially Paris, as the ‘Greenwich Meridian’, or the controller of the rhythm of literary time and the ultimate arbiter of the latest in world literary tastes. These urban nodes are the repositories of substantial literary capital determined by the longevity of their literary traditions, their canonical classics, evolved professional milieu of publishers, editors, reviewers and critics, and informed reading publics. This singular world literary force-field is constantly subject to dynamic shifts depending on the way writers from the ‘periphery’ negotiate the Greenwich Meridian of literary taste: they can *assimilate* like V. S. Naipaul, or *rebel* by withdrawing into their national traditions like Ngugi wa ’Thiongo, or be *revolutionary* and storm the metropolis like Joyce, Rushdie and Beckett. The centre of the literary world, that is Paris, however, continues to hold firm through these tectonic shifts.

This summary signals, notwithstanding Eagleton, the extent to which *The World Republic of Letters* is at odds with current trends in literary internationalism and postcolonial/global comparativism as discussed briefly in the opening paragraphs. In the first place, the book aims at nothing short of providing a comprehensive template to account for all aspects of international or world literary topography as it stands today, an exercise that most critics would currently shy away from. This template is founded on Bourdieu’s idea of ‘literary capital’ as it emerges in competition between multiple national literary cultures around the globe. It is also aligned with an evolutionary narrative of literary/aesthetic worth such that traditions with impoverished capital are designated as ‘inferior’ till they catch up with Greenwich Meridian of Parisian literary taste. Second, the book problematically names all linguistic and literary collectivities since early modernity only in terms of the dynamics of ‘nation-making’. Third, it locates the centre of the world literary space not just in Europe but in Paris. Recognition in Paris enables writers from around the world to extricate themselves from the influence of their national-political domains and graft themselves onto an autonomous, world-making aesthetic space. It is, thus, resolutely Eurocentric in the classic sense of the term and appears to have no engagement with postcolonial and post-Soviet modalities of provincialising/re-situating Europe in the global scheme of things. Fourth, it categorically invests in a singular idea of modernity and appropriates the postcolonial period in the making of a post-War world literary space to the *longue duree* of European imperial

historiography. Finally, it purports to study the making of world literary space in the 21st century while resolutely ignoring all non-Euro American literary historiographies.

The exposition that follows addresses these concerns in three stages. First, it examines Casanova's templates of 'internationalization of literatures' and 'world literary historiography' in the light of postcolonial and especially post-Cold War debates on global literary comparativism. Second, it asks whether her Bourdieu-derived 'field' approach, with its overwhelming conceptual dependence on a market and nation metaphor, really equips her to make valid qualitative judgements on vast swathes of non-European literary spaces. Finally, it discusses alternative ways of studying world literary spaces and histories that have emerged in recent years, especially in the works of David Damrosch and Franco Moretti. In the process, it also weaves in aspects of a post-1989 Anglophone world literature project I am currently working on and whose theoretical and geopolitical assumptions are in quite some tension with those of Casanova's book.

Internationalisms new and old

There is a broad consensus among political analysts, social theorists and cultural historians that with the fall of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall in 1989, the world has entered a different phase of international politics, and economic and cultural exchange.⁴ The post-1989 period has been labelled the era of intense globalisation via a technologically advanced capitalist and information expansion and the age of unprecedented transnational networks of migrancy, violence and terrorism.⁵ In the wake of the collapse of the bipolar antagonism of the Cold War, the years between 1990 and the present have witnessed the emergence of a collaborative network of global capital with the US as a politically central node. This neoliberal capitalist world order has had to contend with radical political imaginaries such as those of the Al-Qaeda and other extremist / fundamentalist networks around the globe in ways that continue to have grim implications not only for governance, but also for human sociality as a whole.

This contemporary world order, say philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'can no longer be understood adequately in terms of imperialism as it was practiced by the modern powers, based primarily on the sovereignty of the nation-state extended over a foreign territory. Instead, a 'network power', a new form of sovereignty, is now emerging and it includes dominant nations along with supranational institutions, major capitalist corporations and related powers' (2004, xii). As a supplement to this scenario of network power and resisting Hardt and Negri's *presentist* reading of the reach of capital, Gayatri Spivak speaks of a 'return of the demographic, rather than territorial, frontiers that predate and are larger than capitalism'. These demographic frontiers, she goes on to add, respond to large-scale migration of our era and create 'parastate' collectivities that in the past belonged to 'multicultural empires that preceded monopoly capitalism' (2003, 15).

The last decade and a half has also witnessed the emergence of unprecedented forms

of literary exchange through mass scale translational activities in the major world languages – exchanges that herald new transcultural literary spaces and that counter misguided globalisms heralding visions of a monochromatic, unified, homogeneous world. Further, we see the publication of literary works that are *immanently global* in that the writing is generated and informed by political, cultural and linguistic forces not limited to any single nation or region.⁶ At least two illustrations of the latter would be John Murray's collection of short fiction *A Few Short Notes on Tropical Butterflies* (2003) and Peter Dale Scott's *Coming to Jakarta: A Meditation on Terror* (1989). Murray is an Australian citizen who has worked as a medical researcher for many years in the US and then spent a few years as a doctor in countries like India and Rwanda among others. His collection of short fiction is immanently global with overlapping/cross-hatched stories of late modern societies in India, Central Africa, the UK, the US and Australia. Peter Dale Scott, a scholar-poet from Canada, a diplomat during the American War in Vietnam, and currently an academic in the US, wrote his long poem *Coming to Jakarta: A Meditation on Terror* as a way to contemplate his multiple worldly affiliations in this era of global terror. His varied intellectual and cultural debts to the world's knowledges and cultures is manifested in the rich array of references in his poem from the *Mahabharata*, modernists such as Ezra Pound, East Asian verse forms, hybrid diasporic verse genres from the American West Coast such as Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* and a vast amount of contemporary historical and political scholarship.⁷ Writers, such as John Murray and Paul Dale Scott, bring the globe inside the text.

Notwithstanding its claim to rediscover a 'lost transnational dimension of literature that for two hundred years has been reduced to the political and linguistic boundaries of nations' (Casanova 2004, xi), my contention is that Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* is not in tune with these contemporary forms of literary transnationalism and globalism. In the first place, it sees the 'transnational' as a supplement to the 'national' with the latter's genealogy firmly embedded in European history. Further, its tightly-knotted nation/market interdependency argument continues to draw on 'developmental' and 'dependency' models of internationalism prevalent in the 1950s and 60s.

In order to explicate further, I need to briefly mention the three historical phases of the genesis of international literary space in the modern world as identified by Casanova. They are:

- 1 The Renaissance, beginning with the sixteenth century and its 'revolutionary vernacular thrust of capitalism': This period challenged the exclusive use of Latin among the educated and witnessed a rising demand for an intellectual acknowledgement of the value of vulgar tongues which gradually led to the creation of modern literatures in the 'vernaculars' of Europe. Practitioners and critics of these literatures saw these works compete for grandeur with the classical literatures. An example cited by Casanova is that of Du Bellay challenging the dominance of Latin in his 1549 tract, 'The Defence and Illustration of the French Language'.

- 2 The Age of Empire especially from the late 18th century and unfolding throughout the 19th century: This period has been referred to as the age of ‘philological-lexicographic revolution’ by Benedict Anderson (1983, 80). It is marked by the emergence in Europe of new nationalist movements associated with the ‘invention of self-consciously national languages and subsequently the creation of popular literatures, summoned to serve the national idea and to give it the symbolic foundation it lacked’ (Casanova 2004, 48). Casanova names this period as that of ‘Herder-effect’ for it witnessed the emergence of the category of folk or people’s literature. It was also the age when nation-making was seen as expansionary, extending to colonies across the globe and creating new reading publics for the national literatures of English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese empires.
- 3 The Decolonisation phase from end of World War II to the present: For Casanova this period marks the third major phase in the enlargement of the world literary space. She specifically reads it as marking the entry into ‘international competition of contestants who until then had been prevented from taking part’, that is, literary works from the ex-colonies of Asia, Africa and Latin America. She interprets this phase in *developmental* terms where ‘minor’ literatures from non-European parts of the world have begun catching up with Europe in the production of ‘proper’ literature. There is no recognition in her analysis of their pre-colonial literary heritage. They are assumed to be ‘pre-literary’ till they establish themselves in the European market (47–48).

In Casanova’s scheme of things, we are continuing to live in the phase of decolonization and all current struggles for space in the international literary market space can be understood in terms of an imperial-national model where emerging literatures from newly liberated nations continue to clamour for space and recognition amidst the post-imperial dominance of established English and French literary traditions. They are totally dependent for their ‘world status’ on such recognition. Hence only those writers who can establish themselves literally either in London or Paris, especially Paris, are ‘world’ writers. In her template of internationalization, the impact of old European empires still sways supreme. The template does not address the dramatic shifts wrought on both literatures in English and French with their globalization as ‘world’ languages.

It is important to remember that the postcolonial phase of literary internationalism did not just bring literary cultures of the ex-colonies into alignment with those of the metropolitan French and British traditions. It was not just a process that allowed hitherto ‘pre-literate’ cultures access to ‘literary’ wealth of European civilization. It was a phase of vigorous exchange and challenge, albeit often on unequal ground, that irrevocably transformed the world literary space. It generated seismic geocultural shifts and questioned the very foundations of European literary canon-making by catapulting onto the world stage diverse modalities of literary creativity – textual, oral, and performative – some of which had traditions that went far back in antiquity. Concepts such as Diaspora

and hybridity, reflecting the mass migrations of the post-War period, also challenged the overweening dependence of comparative literature on nation-based models and the isomorphism of European national literary traditions. Postcolonialism, thus, cannot be unproblematically annexed, as Casanova does, to a seamless history of the emergence of world literary space in European modernity and of the foundations of comparative literary practice. A recent reading of *The World Republic of Letters* by Elinor Shaffer, disconcertingly commends Casanova's book precisely on these grounds:

[In] Pascale Casanova's excellent *The World Republic of Letters* . . . the formation of a literary sphere of value and influence is examined through the model of France, itself built upon Roman and Italian Renaissance forerunners, as it was challenged in the late eighteenth century by the Herderian model of a variety of "folk" cultures, which in their European forms nevertheless required validation as national literary cultures during the nineteenth century, and now by postcolonial nations still enacting the struggle for cosmopolitan recognition at the "centre" while seeking to gain or regain an independent indigenous culture. These and related considerations were at the foundations of comparative literature in the immediate post-war period; many of the founding works of comparative literature had a similar scope and mission. (2006, 79–80)

Both Casanova and Shaffer execute what Sunil Agnani has called 'postcolonial theory in reverse', annexing within their Euro-comparativist template 'all late arrivants, all the literatures produced in the wake of decolonisation' (2006, 332).

The problem with Casanova's delineation of the three historical stages of the emergence of world literary space is that it draws heavily on geopolitical transfigurations from the sixteenth to mid-twentieth century, but pays no attention to the late 60s' postmodern and the 90s' post-Cold War realignments of the global capitalist order and the mobilities and transformations they have wrought on cultures of the world and that can no longer be theorized in terms of a 19th century empire-nation model. Her lack of engagement with the complex shifts in literatures and cultures of the world since the early seventies is evident in her curiously narrow economistic reading of 'globalization' in homogeneous terms. In consciously rejecting the notion of 'globalization' in favour of the idea of 'internationalization' she says, 'The internationalization I here propose . . . signifies more or less the opposite of what is ordinarily understood by the neutralizing term "globalization", which suggests that the world political and economic system can be conceived as the generalization of a single and universally accepted model. In the literary world, by contrast, it is the competition among its members that defines and unifies the system while at the same time marking its limits' (40).

What she misses out in such a reading are new alignments of both power/hierarchy on the one hand and collaboration/connectivity on the other that the current phase of globalization has made possible and in which it is no longer possible to theorize 'competition' among literary nations in terms of an imperial model of Europe's pre-eminence. As Hardt and Negri put it, 'there are two faces to globalization. On one face, Empire spreads globally its network of hierarchies and divisions that maintain order

through new mechanisms of control and constant conflict. Globalisation, however, is also the creation of new circuits of cooperation and collaboration that stretch across nations and continents and allow an unlimited number of encounters. This second face of globalisation is not a matter of everyone in the world becoming the same' (2004, xiii).

What is being questioned here is not so much Casanova's emphasis on the undisputed global positions of English and, to some extent, French, as sites of world literary production (which they undoubtedly are) as her inability to theorise their world status except through dependence on a 19th century language-nation model. What this dependence does not allow her to see is that, in the present, the world status of neither world literatures in English nor world literatures in French is dependent on the continuing political and literary dominance of England and France in the global scheme of things. Rather, they bank on the large corpus of writing emerging from, what in Casanova's scheme of things, are utterly 'peripheral' sites – South, Central and West Asia, Australia, Canada, and the African continent – that bring into the global literary space diverse cultural capital that are not necessarily 'impoverished'. These regional mappings are further complicated by global emergence of large scale migratory and diasporic enclaves from within which so much of 'world' writing now emanates. To talk of the globe is, of course, not to reject the nation, but to challenge its dominance as a paradigm for literary and historical analysis.

What is not reflected in Casanova's analysis of internationalization is that, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, 'the sources of literary agency have expanded beyond the old European national literatures' (2003, 6). Spivak is, of course, radical in her critique of even contemporary attempts to world literatures through global language groupings – thus advocating that we move beyond 'anglophony, francophony, teutophony, lusophony and hispanophony'. Her vision for new comparative literatures is to make the languages of the global South 'active cultural media rather than as objects of cultural study by the sanctioned ignorance of the metropolitan migrant' (9). Staying for the moment, however, with the global-languages model of world literature, it is worth emphasizing that Anglophony and Francophony today mean more than just a relationship between literary cultures of metropolitan Britain or France and those of their erstwhile colonies. The terms signal 'linguistic contact zones all over the world' (Apter 2006, 55) in which English or French circulate amidst a plethora of other languages and even at the contested thresholds of so-called 'standard' tongues, what Colin McCabe has called 'the eloquence of the vulgar' (1999) by which he means the proliferation of Creole, slang, dialect or vernaculars that scatter off the surface of a standard language and that, in literary works, 'transcode linguistic politics into narrative structure' (Apter 2006, 190). Further, these world-making, refractory linguistic/literary zones often intersect with other non-national cartographic imaginaries such as the 'oceanic' or the 'transcontinental', thus unyoking the terms of literary critical engagement from 'nation' and 'empire'.

Negotiating the poles of global aspiration and nationalist interpellation today is very different from the journeys made by Joyce and Beckett from Ireland to Paris,

Casanova's paradigmatic instances of world-making literary journeys. For her, such journeys lead straight to the heart of Europe. What her 'Euro-chronological' template cannot innovatively theorize are the makings of a world literature where the journeys are multi-linear and where literary capital can be found in works that are locally inflected and have both regional and global purchase. Instances include the works of writers such as Carpentier, Djébar, Mahfouz, Seth, Conde, Farrah, Soyinka and Coetzee, to cite only a few. In short, Casanova is unable to theorise a global-local dynamic in terms of a metaphoric of transmission, exchange and collaboration, in terms of unforeseen matings, crossbreeding and cross-braiding where Europe is one important node among others and not the final destination. Such theorization requires different readings of contemporary flows of literary-critical history.

Literary capital versus literary quality

The discussion now turns briefly to another unsettling observation about *The World Republic of Letters*. Casanova's social scientific analysis of world literary competitiveness based on Pierre Bourdieu's 'field' model is too deterministic and does not make room for valid qualitative analysis of literary works except in terms of their 'capital' in the world literary market. This 'capital', as has been seen, is only progressively acquired by writers from the periphery the more they eschew local-national engagement and aspire to an autonomous and universal aesthetics amidst the rarefied environs of Paris. French literature is, of course, always already 'universal'. Since Casanova's idea of 'literary capital' and inequities therein is so bound up with her nation-imperium model and with the polarities of 'politico-literary' and 'autonomous', it not surprisingly leads to her make adverse qualitative judgements on vast literary fields that are at the 'periphery' of what she considers to be the Greenwich Meridian of world literature – Paris. To mark hierarchies in the 'field' on the basis of economic and political disparities among nations is one thing, as she does in the following passage:

The original dependence of literature on the nation is at the heart of the inequality that structures the literary world. Rivalry among nations arises from the fact that their political, economic, military, diplomatic and geographical histories are not only different but also unequal. Literary resources, which are always stamped with the seal of the nation, are therefore unequal as well. (39)

To allow such hierarchies to determine the qualitative worth of whole swathes of literary fields is quite another. As a matter of course, the book uses the terms 'impoverished', 'destitute', 'small' 'weak', 'least endowed' to describe literatures at the 'periphery'. Thus, V.S Naipaul chose to 'assimilate' with English because of the 'absence of any literary tradition in his native country'. Here is Casanova's narrative of Naipaul's predicament: 'V. S. Naipaul, born on the outer edges of the British Empire, is an outstanding example of a writer, who wholly embraced the dominant literary values of his linguistic region; who, in the absence of any literary tradition in his native country,

had no other choice but to try to become English' (209). There is no mention of his multiple cultural and literary inheritances that spread across a transcontinental arc from the Caribbean to the Indian subcontinent. Again, in talking about the decolonization phase of 'internationalization' of literatures, she says, 'the newly decolonized countries had often inherited languages having no *real* literary existence' (80), a statement that is completely erroneous in the context of 'new' nations such as India, for instance, even if one for the moment accepts her very narrow definition of 'literature' as imaginative works in print. To stay with India's literary traditions (or 'existence' as Casanova puts it) for just a while, there are currently fifteen languages in which literary works are produced and quite a few of them have histories that go back to the early years of the second millennium – Kannada and Marathi for instance. Others like Tamil have a continuous history of three thousand years. These languages either belong to the Dravidian family or the Indo-Aryan one. They emerged in the second millennium and their history is one of intimate exchange with not only the ancient literary traditions of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit, but also those of the period of Islamic rule such as Persian and Arabic. In the last three hundred years, their evolution has been marked by the influence of modern European languages, especially English, but also in some cases, French and Portuguese. Thus, postcolonialism, and especially the impact of English, in the context of literary production in India is but one recent stage in the long history of the evolution of Indian literatures. While there is no doubt that British colonial practices, especially in the domain of education and culture, led to a reconfiguration of linguistic and literary hierarchies, the reception of English in India was mediated at every stage by literary traditions in different parts of India. Hence, a postcolonial literary history of India cannot be reduced to a narrative of the dominance of English over gradually weakening regional/local literary traditions. In fact, in terms of reading publics in India there are substantially more readers in Marathi, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, than in English. Bengali, Urdu and Tamil have transnational reading and reception spheres across Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka respectively. The dominance of English appears to be evident primarily in India's global literary mediations, especially with the West. This, of course, is all that matters under Casanova's template. But one can well argue that, in the light of late 20th century postcolonial and global critical reconfigurations of world literary history, it is more fruitful to see works in English from India not so much in terms of a polarization of 'global' and 'national/ regional', but in terms of their location along multiple sites of literary production, circulation and reception within a complex plural culture characterized by urbanization, translation and bilingualism.

What is ironical is that Casanova's avowedly historicist tracing of the 'invention' of the idea of 'literature' in mid-18th century Europe does not make her own analysis of literary capital in late twentieth century historically nuanced, complex and inclusive enough to account for the diversity and amplitude of past and contemporary literary practices. As Christopher Prendergast notes in his edited volume *Debating World Literatures* (2004), there are 'anthropological' and 'historical' dimensions to the meaning-making of the term 'literature':

For instance, what in the West is called “literature”, in India is called “kavya” and in China “wen”; though cognate terms in some respects, they are clearly not identical. Thus, the suggestion that “all countries hitherto excluded from the very idea of literature proper (in Africa, in India, in Asia)” presumes a view of what is “proper” to literature that works only if it excludes vast swathes of Indian and Chinese writing that sit quite comfortably within the system of *kavya* and *wen*. (22)

In, thus, ethnocentrically narrowing the very notion of ‘literature’, and then tying it to a dated and deterministic reading of literary value vis-à-vis global geopolitics, Casanova’s template of a world republic of letters cannot offer much in the way of a viable world literary-critical analytic for our present times. What then constitutes viable conceptual and historiographical alternatives to Casanova’s dated Eurocentric approach to global literary comparativism? The final section of this article briefly considers a few such alternatives.

Global literary comparativism for our times

In what has become a *tour de force* in the field, Franco Moretti’s essay, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’ visualises the problem of ‘doing’ world literature not in terms of an ever expanding ambit of reading to encompass the globe, but in Weberian terms as a quest for ‘new conceptual interconnection of problems’ (2004, 149) that can generate new theories and methodologies. Drawing inspiration from models of world systems theory, he envisions a world literary system of interrelated literatures that is ‘one and unequal’, but that enables uncanny forms of comparativism constituted of ‘distant’ theoretical readings difficult to envision by conventional nation-based methodologies fixated on close and fine-grained analysis of primary texts. An example Moretti offers is that of ‘comparative morphology’ (158), a systematic study of variations in the genesis and evolution of literary forms across space and time. His own magisterial, *The Atlas of the European Novel (1750–1950)* is a brilliant illustration of comparative morphology tracing the two-hundred-year old global travels of the European novel and its cross fertilization with literary forms and cultural politics of regions from all major continents. For this, Moretti did not so much read novels from all non-European literary traditions, as engage with critical analyses by national/ regional critics of these traditions to finally emerge with his synthesis.

At first glance, Moretti’s adoption of the ‘one and unequal’ thesis from Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory to account for the uneven contours of world literary space, replete with familiar categories of the ‘metropolitan’ and the ‘periphery’, the ‘major’ and the ‘minor’, appears similar to Casanova’s scheme of literary hierarchies. But he does not repeat her mistake of grading these in terms of aesthetic worth and reducing all notion of literary ‘value’ to a market of tastes dominated by Europe. His approach is polycentric as he focuses instead on patterns of transmission and exchange that take on different forms depending on the vantage point of comparativism and sites

of reception. He theorises these forms in terms of two conceptual metaphors – the tree and the wave – to demonstrate the complementary and at times antagonistic forces of national literary traditions and the global marketplace respectively. The world literary system witnesses a tension between evolutionism and economism – the ‘philological tree’ and the ‘market wave’ that demarcate the parameters of literary historiography:

Trees need geographical *discontinuity* (in order to branch off from each other, languages must be separated in space, just like animal species); waves dislike barriers, and thrive on geographical *continuity* (from the viewpoint of a wave, the ideal world is a pond). Trees and branches are what nation-states cling to; waves are what markets do . . . Cultural history is made up of trees *and* waves – the wave of agricultural advance supporting the tree of Indo-European languages, which is then swept by new waves of linguistic and cultural contact . . . And as world culture oscillates between the two mechanisms, its products are inevitable composite ones. (160–161)

Moretti’s ‘wave’ metaphor to describe global literary flows exposes the limits of Casanova’s evolutionary reading of the world literary space in which peripheral literatures move up the scheme of literary value the closer they are to Paris. French or English hardly constitutes the phylogenetic tree of the world literature. But it is not difficult to imagine their global impact in terms of a transnational wave theory, just as it is quite productive to imagine literary genres or forms – novel, epic, lyric poetry, drama – afloat in a sea of influences and engendering for literary critics what Moretti calls ‘comparative morphology’, or Emily Apter, ‘a cartography of cultural capital in transit.’ (2006, 80)

Another recent attempt to demarcate the conceptual and methodological terrains of world literature in this era of globalization is David Damrosch’s *What is World Literature?* He reads the terrain in terms of works that are also networks or conduits of conversation beyond national or ethno-cultural borders and in which translation features as a key problematic. In doing so, he resolutely moves away from the great European canon/classics model as the standard bearer of taste and value to which literatures of the rest of the world aspire. Nor does he, in talking about translation, appear overly concerned about the spectre of Anglo or Franco globalism. As he puts it:

A central argument of the book . . . [is that] world literature is not at all fated to disintegrate into the conflicting multiplicity of separate national traditions; nor, on the other hand need it be swallowed up in the white noise that Janet Abu-Lughod has called “global babble”. My claim is that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike . . . just as there never has been a single set canon of world literature, so too no single way of reading can be appropriate to all texts, or even to one text at all times. (2003, 5)

Added to this lateral, polycentric and heterogeneous approach to the world literary space is Damrosch’s insistence on a ‘phenomenological’ rather than an ‘ontological’

approach to a literary texts (6), for the important question in global comparativism and world literature is not so much ‘what’ constitutes a work as literary in any singular sense, but ‘how’ it manifests itself as literature in diverse ways through different optics of reading from different locations. It is not hard to see how far removed such an approach is from the Casanova’s insistence on a Greenwich Meridian of literary value and a singular view of literary worlding.

In tandem with the interventions of postcolonial literary and critical theory, Damrosch’s and Moretti’s theorisations of world literary comparativism in our globalised age have opened up many productive conceptual, historical and methodological avenues of studying ‘world-making’ through literatures today. This article concludes by giving the outlines of one such world literature project I am currently working on. This work seeks to analyse Anglophone writing from around the globe in a period designated here as being of epochal import – the post-Cold War stage in world history from 1989 to the present. The literary works focused on both reflect and are constituted by the global immanence of terror, warfare and genocide which has become a sign of our times. Such a study offers an alternative account of the geopolitics of literature to that put forward by Casanova on many grounds. It acknowledges the impossibility of ever accounting for all world writing and settles for one particular archive within a specific time-frame while at the same time identifying this corpus as world-oriented and globally significant. The argument is that what is seen in this body of writing is the emergence of a global literary space that is intimately tied to the post-Cold War political landscape. No matter what their points of origin – South Asia, Central and West Asia, Central and South Africa, Australia, North America and the UK – these works in English display a deep engagement with key geopolitical shifts since the fall of the Berlin Wall. These include neoliberal capitalist domination and the concomitant rise of ethnocentric warfare and religious fundamentalisms, rise of the internet and its role in nurturing transnational networks of migrancy and terrorism, the war against terrorism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of the works I seek to analyse are: Khalid Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*, Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love*, Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*, Andrew Miller’s *The Optimists*, Tom Keneally’s *The Tyrant’s Novel*, Salman Rushdie’s *Fury* and *Shalimar the Clown*, Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, David Mitchell’s *Ghostwritten*, John Murray’s *a Few Short Notes on Tropical Butterflies*, Richard Flanagan’s *The Unknown Terrorist*, and John Updike’s *The Terrorist*. These works manifest a ‘literariness’ that is global, that which is oriented not toward an imagined ‘national’ community in the Herderian sense, but toward common world concerns refracted onto local, national or metropolitan spaces.

From this brief description it is obvious that this project, though global in scope, does not claim to account for a world literary system in any totalistic way. It is much less ambitious in terms of historical and archival range than Casanova’s book. It is also less focused on literary hierarchies than on literary alliances on a global scale, less economic and sociological in its assessment of the literary marketplace and more

oriented towards patterns of cultural and aesthetic exchange in a domain of palpable inequity and imbalance. What it shares with Casanova's book is an acknowledgement of the role of world languages, such as French and English, in worlding the literary canon in the post-War period. But it seeks to historicize the emergence of English as a global language of creative expression, not by just limiting it to Casanova's 'internationalization' model based on a nineteenth century imperial-national dynamic, but by tracing its links to the dominance of an Anglo-American worldview. What it resists, though, is reading this global literary archive in English deterministically as a sign of an Anglo-American form of cosmopolitanism – where America's vision for itself is the world vision. So when I talk of the geopolitics of Anglophone writing, I do not assert a structural dependence that subjects literary practices to global political authority networks; rather I explore how literary texts from 1989 to the present mediate crucial events and trends and constitute multiple, interconnected transnational responses to terrorism, ethnocentric tensions and religious fundamentalism, migrancy and globalization. My argument is that the literary fiction of this period both challenges and affirms the notion of a globalised new world order dominated by neoliberal capitalism and neoconservative US imperialism. At the very least, it articulates a vision of a 'world in crisis' that goes far beyond the myopic Anglo-American optic of Western culture being under 'siege' from powers of unreason.

In reading these works as witnesses to the fraught transitional decade into the new millennium, my project also invokes a geoethical domain. It affirms an engagement with a cosmopolitical ethics, no longer as choice but as necessity, in this age of global networks and interconnectivity and emergent fascist ethnocentrism with global consequences. The literary works of this period are inflected with an acknowledgement of crisis – the mass of stateless people, the plight of the refugees, the experience of war and terror, genocidal reprisals – and seek urgent strategies of affiliation. Written at the cusp of what has been a horrific century of wars and ethnic carnage and a new millennium that does not augur much better, such works express a new kind of humanist ethic, a new kind of 'internationalism' built on a shared dread of human capacity for evil coupled with a deep awareness of the ambiguities of sharing grief across large expanses of devastated humanscapes. They highlight the fact that the notion of the rights-bearing human has faced its most severe test ever in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the new millennium, when human beings have had to live through catastrophes that have destroyed entire social networks that define our moral universe. The literary works I study articulate, in short, a new humanism of common corporeal vulnerability, and ask after Judith Butler, 'what makes for a grievable life?' (2004, 20)

To read the 'world' in literature today is, thus, to confront both plurality and the prevalence of difference, and myriad, often unpredictable nodes of connectivity; it is also to confront the largeness of a world that ever so often surpasses the narratives and categories we have at hand. The project of imagining the world literary space is rendered futile if, in the final analysis, its locus of activity appears concentrated in the hands of a

few powerful cosmopolitan intermediaries in the publishing houses and salons of Paris, London and New York as it appears to be in Pascale Casanova's world republic of letters.

Notes

- 1 See, especially, Gayatri Spivak in *Death of a Discipline*: 85–87.
- 2 See Eagleton's review in *New Statesman*, 11 April, 2005, <http://www.newstatesman.com/200504110041/> (accessed 5 October 2007).
- 3 See Sunil Agnani's review of the book in *Postcolonial Studies*, 9(3): 332.
- 4 Daniel Archibugi and David Held, *Cosmopolitan Democracy: An Agenda for a New World Order*, Cambridge MA, Polity Press, 1995; Hafeez Malik ed. *The Role of the United States, Russia and China in a New World Order*, New York: St Martins Press, 1997.
- 5 Birthe Hansen and Bertel Huerlin, *The New world Order: Contrasting Theories*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000; Robert Kagan, *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in a New World Order*, London: Atlantic 2003; George Monbiot, *The Age of Consent: A Manifesto for a New World Order*, London: Flamingo, 2003.
- 6 See John Pizer, 'Goethe's world literature paradigm and contemporary cultural globalization', *Comparative Literature*, 52(3), Summer 2000: 213.
- 7 See Katie Trumpener, 'World music, world literature: A geopolitical view' in Haun Saussy, ed. *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalisation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006: 196, for a brief discussion of Scott's unusual work.

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