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WHY WORLD LITERATURE NOW? ¹

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Abstract: How is the spectacular re-emergence of “world literature” since the turn of the third millennium to be explained? I suggest that ever since the coining of the term in the early nineteenth century, but especially so since the year 2000, world literature has been defined and redefined to fit the needs of particular times and places, in accordance with the shifting fates of specific linguistic and cultural entities on the world map. To this end I consider some recent European, American and Chinese discussions of world literature by a.o. David Damrosch, Pascal Casanova, Franco Moretti and Wang Ning. However, I first argue that world literature in fact is only the latest paradigm to be used to serve the ends of particular groups of scholars, with the study of modernism and postmodernism serving as my examples of earlier such paradigms, specifically in the United States.

I first want to express my profound gratitude to the authorities of the University of Bucharest for the honor they are bestowing upon me with this doctorate *honoris causa*. I also want to thank all of you present for being here and listening to me.

Romanian comparatists have played a distinguished role in the history of the discipline of comparative literature. The small country I come from shares with Romania a multilingual, and increasingly multicultural, past and present. Some of Belgium's most famous comparatists, like some Romanian ones, gained fame in the United States and thence in the world. To have the privilege of addressing you today on this special occasion therefore not only gives me great pleasure; I also feel that there is a special bond between our countries, especially now that we are both members of a larger European Union seeking its appropriate place in a fast-changing world. What then could be more fitting as a subject for my talk than world literature and what we comparatists do with it?

My central question reads as follows: why has “World Literature” come to occupy such a central place in literary studies, primarily in the US, but increasingly also elsewhere, since, roughly speaking, the turn of the millennium?

To arrive at an answer, one first has to see that ‘world literature’ is not, and in fact has never been, a ‘neutral’ concept, and that it always serves the needs of a particular time and place. This is true for Goethe, who after the havoc that the Napoleonic wars had wrought in Europe saw *Weltliteratur* as a means to further the cause of brotherhood and understanding among the peoples of the earth. But he also saw it as a means to promote

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the cause of German literature among the world's literatures, especially through what he deemed to be the German literary scene's unique ability for mediating the world's literatures through translation. It is likewise true for Richard Green Moulton, an English academic working at the University of Chicago, in his 1911 *World Literature, and Its Place in General Culture*. "This book," he says in his preface, "presents a conception of World Literature, not in the sense of the sum total of particular literatures, but as a unity, *the literary field seen in perspective from the point-of-view of the English-speaking peoples*" (my emphasis). In both cases, then, the definition and discussion of "world literature," along with a genuine ambition to enlarge one's native audience's understanding of the world's literatures, at the same time also involve a specific positioning of one's native literature within the larger field of the world's literature or literatures. As Stefan Helgesson reminds us in his "Going Global: An Afterword" to the volume he edited for the Swedish four-volume *Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective*, "to conceive of literature in a global context is no natural or neutral operation. Rather, the meaning of the global perspective is produced, performed and undermined in a force-field of contending needs and interests" (Helgesson 318). The recent prominence of world literature on the world literary scene, I suggest, fits the process of re-positioning a number of national literatures, or perhaps even the very notion of "national" literature, are or is undergoing in a changing global context. Concretely, I will focus at some length on the American case and then, much more briefly, offer some suggestions on the European and Chinese cases.

It is in the United States that world literature has been the hottest topic for debate over the last decade or so. Yet, I would argue, the emergence of world literature there as what one may legitimately call the new paradigm in literary studies, is in fact only the latest in a series of re-positionings that have occurred in American literary studies since WWII. Such re-positionings, I would contend, are on the one hand intimately tied to an ongoing struggle for disciplinary precedence within the US literary-academic field while on the other hand they reflect the changing relationships of the US to the world.

It is a critical commonplace that "modernism", as we traditionally conceive of it, is a construct in retrospect. It is my contention that this construct was conjured to serve a specific purpose in a specific place and at a specific time. As a catalyst, I am going to use Harry Levin's 1960 article "What was Modernism" which for various reasons can be called "seminal." First of all, it marks the take-off point for academic discussions of early twentieth-century literature under the summary terminological heading of "modernism," while at the same time firmly establishing the literary movement or current so defined as past. Second, under "modernism" it not only foregrounds a particular cross-section of European literature, but also valorizes that kind of literature over concurrent literary movements or currents. Third, it marks the emergence of a particularly contemporary American hegemony in literary matters.

Of course, there are plenty of works before 1960 that in one way or another deal with one or more of the authors that eventually came to be included in the list of "modernists," but rarely if ever were these "figures" grouped together with regard to what they had "in common" (Levin 284) across the linguistic dividing lines, and as

“modernist.” The principal works detailing modernism, at least in English, all date from after Levin’s article. Levin’s comparative approach allows him to link a number of American authors of the early twentieth century to some of the most prestigious names from European literature of the same period. The gain is threefold. First of all, it establishes the discipline of comparative literature (Levin was professor of comparative literature at Harvard) as useful also to American learning by creating a continuum between what is, or has been, going on in Europe and the United States in the literary realm. On the rebound, it relocates American literature from the literary periphery, where as far as “orthodox” academe it had been lurking from its very first inception as a discipline in the 1920s, to being part of the center. Third, it recuperates American literature, which almost from its institution as a discipline had been under the sway of the more “sociologically” oriented so-called “myth and symbol” school, for the more technically oriented approach usually associated with more orthodox departments of literature, such as English. The respectability of “modernism” thus defined is even enhanced by declaring the movement in question definitively “past”, thereby carefully insulating it from tendencies then prevalent in American literature, but decidedly unpalatable to all advocates of orthodoxy – mainly the Beats and what Levin by way of the title of the poet Karl Shapiro’s then celebrated book of criticism calls “the rallying cry [of] *In Defence of Ignorance*” – but also the work of contemporaries such as Saul Bellow, John Updike, and J.D. Salinger in the United States, and in Europe that of Samuel Beckett, as well as the more commercial work characteristic of what Levin condescendingly calls “middlebrow” culture, all of which he labels, with a term borrowed from Arnold Toynbee, “post-modernist”.

The point I am intent on making is that what Levin serves us as “modernism” is in fact a very American take on twentieth-century literature in some of the major European languages. Specifically, it is a take inspired by mid-century American academe’s desire for the affirmation of a humanist culture in the wake of WWII and its inhuman excesses. In this respect, it is not a coincidence that Levin, when sneering at Shapiro’s *In Defence of Ignorance*, blights the latter in particular for his “patricidal attacks ... against modernism in general and Mr. Eliot in particular” (Levin 276). It is Eliot who had inspired the dominant academic approach or methodology to literature in the United States from, roughly speaking, the thirties through the sixties: the New Criticism. Levin’s article resounds with one of the favorite catchwords of the New Criticism: unity, in structure, but also, and perhaps even more so, in underlying world vision. The civilization Eliot, and modernism in the image fashioned after Eliot by the New Criticism and American academe of the mid-twentieth century, and as codified in Levin’s 1960 essay, hanker after is “high” European to the core: white, male, and upper- or at least upper middle-class. Modernism so defined embodies the “high humanist” values that segment of the American population hitherto dominant considered peculiarly its own, and which it sought to instill also in other segments – social, racial, gender – pushing up, specifically through programs of liberal arts education based on the methods of critical analysis and literature teaching associated with New Criticism, and the concomitant literary canon. By the same token, all European art supposedly not

subscribing to these same high humanist ideals – and in particular the more “radical” avant-garde movements linked to the political left – was kept outside the pale of “modernism”. This modernism, then, re-grouping under one summary heading authors of the first half of the twentieth century that did not consider themselves part of any specific movement or group, yet are branded “the best” of their generation, selectively refashions early twentieth-century European literature to make it fit a specifically American purpose answering to the ideology of the early decades of the Cold War, with the US as the bulwark of democracy, but also of humanist “European” values. Still, because of specific conditions pertaining around at least the western world ever since WWII, not least of which is the increasing hegemony of English as language of international communication, science, and scholarship, it is this “modernism” that has increasingly also become the matrix with which for instance most western European literatures have come to be overlaid. It is also this modernism that as of the 1970s will serve as foil to the then emerging theorizations of postmodernism.

Postmodernism, in fact, repositions America, and American literature, as, respectively, the ‘overcoming’ or the ‘waning’ of modernism. Elsewhere I have traced the dominant genealogy of literary postmodernism from Ihab Hassan in the 1970s, through Jean-François Lyotard’s *La condition postmoderne* (The postmodern condition) in 1979, Jürgen Habermas’s 1980 Frankfurt lecture “Modernity versus Postmodernity” published as “Modernity – An Incomplete Project” (Habermas 1992), and Fredric Jameson’s essay “Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” in 1984, to the latter’s re-use of this same essay as the title-piece to a 1991 volume gathering most of what he had written on postmodernism till then, and effectively proposing what amounts to an integrated theory of cultural postmodernism. Since 1991, Jameson’s view has largely dominated further discussion of postmodernism in the United States. However different they may finally have turned out to be, the opinions of Lyotard, Habermas, and Jameson arose from a close dialogue with one another, and genealogically they can all be traced back to the relatively small corpus of “experimental” American fiction from the 1960s and ‘70s which served as the starting point for Hassan’s early essays and monographs on postmodernism. Regardless of this initially geographically and temporally limited frame of reference, for Jameson postmodern literature serves as a symptom of the global disease affecting late twentieth century society: it is representative of contemporary society to the degree that it represents the gap that obtains between reality and representation, and ensnares the reader in the simulacral universe of late capitalism. As such, Jameson draws a sharp line between what he sees as the possibilities for a “radical cultural politics” in modernism and the impossibility of any such politics in postmodernism. At the same time, for Jameson (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 5) “this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror.” If the latter reminds us ominously of 9/11, this is of course no coincidence.

David Scott, in his “The Social Construction of Postcolonial Studies” in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005), situates the birth of postcolonialism and

multiculturalism in the wake of the emancipatory movements of the 1960s and '70s, and more specifically in the so-called "culture wars" resulting from them in the US. Scott sees the founding texts of postcolonialism as a spin-off of emerging multiculturalism American style. These texts, he implies, involve a transfer of multicultural thinking relative to the United States to the world outside. This transfer was aided by the so-called "linguistic" and "cultural turns" in the humanities, heavily influenced by French structuralist and poststructuralist thinking, and particularly that of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, whereby the emphasis came to lie on issues of representation, rather than on the analyses of actual policies. The cultural became political. In multiculturalism the cultural turn took the form of "deconstructing" the racial and ethnic prejudices at work in canonical American literature, and of promoting the work of minority authors. In a parallel movement, postcolonialism, Scott has it, "drew its identity from the (largely Foucauldian) program of unmasking Eurocentric essentialisms at work in the West's representations of non-European ideas and behaviors" (Scott 389). In addition, it promoted the work of "postcolonial" authors, that is to say of those non-European (and non-United States) authors that in their works were seen to subscribe to a similar process of unmasking. Postcolonialism, in Scott's reading of it, then, sprang into being as a strategy not so much for reading the past as for reading the present. Through its interpretation of the colonial past, both history and representation, and of the contemporary works thought to be directly related to that past, it served to position its practitioners in *their* present. In other words, it was a strategic move towards a cultural/political end, and hence an instrument along Foucauldian lines to wrest the power of the word from those that had traditionally held it. Scott's point is that just as postcolonial studies, and multiculturalism, were out to demonstrate the "social constructedness" of the "Eurocentric essentialisms" alluded to earlier, so postcolonial studies, like multiculturalism, is itself a socially constructed discourse fitting a particular constellation of time and place, to wit the 1980s and '90s. These, he argues, were decades when *all* theories and certainties hitherto valid were being challenged as being "constructed" – in fact, this came down to a translation into social science terms of what in literary and cultural studies used to be called postmodernism, and which likewise insisted on the ultimate "linguisticity" of all "realities." Multiculturalism and postcolonialism can then be seen as themselves "postmodern," in the sense of "poststructuralist," attacks upon what Jameson posited as the "emptiness" of postmodernism. As Stephen Slemon (4) remarks when he notes that Linda Hutcheon's (1988) analysis of intertextual parody as a constitutive principle of postmodernism closely resembles the post-colonial practice of "rewriting the canonical 'master texts' of Europe":

whereas a post-modernist criticism would want to argue that literary practices such as these expose the constructedness of *all* textuality, ... an *interested* post-colonial critical practice would want to allow for the positive production of oppositional truth-claims in these texts. (Slemon 5)

While multiculturalism and postcolonialism, then, explicitly attacked the canon of “Eurocentric” modernism, they implicitly also offered themselves as alternatives, and successors, to postmodernism. Their proponents and practitioners, mainly to be found in departments of American Studies (in the case of multiculturalism) and English (in the case of postcolonialism), then, claimed to be speaking for the “Rest” of the West, with the US serving as the ultimate “West.”

Although various relevant publications on world literature, notably Pascale Casanova’s *La république mondiale des lettres* (1999) and Franco Moretti’s “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000), appeared before the event, I think it is not a coincidence that the avalanche of American publications on the subject only starts after 9/11. The events of 9/11 forced “America” to come to grips with the world outside itself. In the most immediate terms this meant the nation going to war in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the literary studies realm this caused a turn to “world literature” as an alternative paradigm for dealing with America’s relationship to the world beyond itself. Not coincidentally, this repositioning originated in the departments of comparative literature at some of the US’s most prestigious universities. In her Wellek Library Lectures, given in 2000 at the University of California in Irvine, Gayatri Spivak lamented the “death” of comparative literature as she perceived it, and called for a “new” comparative literature. In her preface to the 2003 book based upon these lectures, *Death of a Discipline*, she argues that between the date of the lectures and their publication the discipline of comparative literature in the US underwent a “sea-change,” and that there arose a vast market for anthologies of world literature in translation. She does not go into the reasons for this sea-change, and one has the definite impression that she disapproves of what she sees as its “market-driven” origins. However, the fact that now at once there should be such a market is an unmistakable sign that things are happening “out there.”

The immediacy of the link between 9/11 and a renewed interest in world literature can perhaps best be seen from Emily Apter’s *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (2006), which in its subtitle unmistakably takes up Spivak’s call, and which starts off with a chapter titled “Translation after 9/11: Mistranslating the Art of War,” in which Apter laments the lack of adequate language training and knowledge, including the activity of translation, within American society, thus hypothesizing America’s relation to the rest of the world, and making the nation vulnerable to onslaughts that it did not sufficiently “understand,” in all meanings of that word, beforehand. Another proponent of world literature, and one of those academics that Spivak in her preface to *Death of a Discipline* undoubtedly obliquely is referring to as “busy putting... together” anthologies of world literature (with “big advances,” she adds...), is David Damrosch, then still a colleague of Spivak’s at Columbia. Damrosch too insists on the importance of translation for the propagation and proper study of world literature. In fact, his definition of world literature in his most celebrated work, tellingly titled *What is World Literature*, explicitly reads: “I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, whether in translation or in the original...” (Damrosch 4).

What Damrosch and Apter are in fact doing is to transcend the essentialisms, whether mainstream or oppositional, of national literatures, and particularly of American literature or of literature as studied in the US, predicating a body of work that, in the original spirit of Goethe's in *Conversations with Eckermann*, or at least in the spirit which has been ascribed to Goethe's scattered and actually rather vague utterances upon the subject by the likes of for instance Fritz Strich in his celebrated *Goethe and World Literature* (1949 English translation of the 1945 German-language *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*), posits a fraternity among peoples based upon a common humanity. This also involves a whole-scale re-interpretation of earlier critics and theoreticians, such as Edward Said, who in Apter's reading of his reading of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, but also of the latter's 1952 essay "Philology and Weltliteratur," which Said translated together with his wife in the late 1960s, is recast as a humanist in the Goethean tradition, and hence a proponent of world literature rather than of any polarizing version of postcolonialism. Or perhaps it would be better to say that Said is recast as a humanist in the "European" tradition of modernism as conjured in American literary studies in the 1950s and 1960s re-interpreted *after* the passage of multiculturalism and postcolonialism.

What Damrosch and Apter are also doing is to recast world literature in the tradition of the typical American form of literary study ever since the New Criticism: by a form of close reading. This is also the form in which American literature departments have joined the game. I am thinking here of two books by Wai-Chee Dimock: *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, which she co-edited with Lawrence Buell in 2007, and *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*, that she authored in 2006. Like Apter in *The Translation Zone*, Dimock in *Through Other Continents* starts out with a reference to Iraq, this time to the burning of the Baghdad library in 2003, which she compares to the looting and burning of that same library by the descendants of Genghis Khan in 1248. In her "Introduction," Dimock argues that: "For too long, American literature has been seen as a world apart, sufficient unto itself, not burdened by the chronology and geography outside the nation, and not making any intellectual demands on that score" (Dimock, *Through Other Continents* 2-3).

"What we called 'American' literature," she claims,

is quite often a shorthand, a simplified name for a much more complex tangle of relations. Rather than being a discrete entity, it is better seen as a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures. These are input channels, kinship networks, routes of transit, and forms of attachment – connective tissues binding America to the rest of the world. Active on both ends, they thread American texts into the topical events of other cultures, while also threading the long duration of those cultures into the short chronology of the United States. (Dimock, *Through Other Continents* 3)

Dimock concludes her book with "while deep time continues, we know that for all races, all nations, and all species, there is only one world" (Dimock, *Through Other Continents* 195). With this last sentence, Dimock succeeds in reconciling the claims of postcolonialism, ecology, and America as a nation, while at the same time repositioning

American literature rather than, as has been customary throughout most of its history, or at least the history of its study, as “exceptional,” as “central” to an emerging world literature, precisely through its interconnectedness with the world’s other literatures.

For Goethe, German literature was especially well suited to serve the role of “mediator” of world literature because of its aptitude for translation, and hence for promoting the circulation of literary works among the nations, enhancing understanding, and furthering the cause of peace. At the same time, it would enhance the role of German culture, language, and literature in the concert of nations. Obviously, Dimock’s new American literature as well as the “new” comparative literature Apter has in mind, fuelling the new world literature propagated by Damrosch and others through an increased attention to translation, have a similar aim, and a similar role, in mind for American literature, and for American academe, and this precisely – and of course not by coincidence – at a time when “America” is losing the position of political, military, economic, and cultural “hegemon” it has held since WWII.

The moves of Damrosch, Apter, and Dimock underscore Franco Moretti’s parenthetical dictum in his 2000 “Conjectures on World Literature” that “the study of world literature is – inevitably – a study of the struggle for symbolic hegemony across the world” (Moretti 158). Yet, his own work, and that of Casanova, his fellow European (even though of course Moretti has for the longest time now been working in the US), is likewise an illustration of this same dictum. Instead of repositioning specific works of one specific literature, for example American literature, as the nodal point of a number of world currents flowing through it, or of repositioning the world literature approach as practised in one particular country, for instance the United States, as a way of reading that can “englobe” works from all of the world and of all times, Casanova and Moretti propose a “systematic” of world literature. Casanova insists on the role of French literature as pre-eminent “clearing house” for world literature during modernity. Moretti, tracing tree and wave patterns, and mapping them onto Immanuel Wallerstein’s world system theory, implicitly starts from the primacy, again at least under modernity, of what he calls the “core” literatures: French and English. In Wallerstein’s terms, France, or France and England, then, are the core of a world system of literature wherein the rest of Europe is the semi-periphery, or perhaps the semi-core, and the rest of the world the periphery. The distinction between semi-core and semi-periphery is important, as it marks the division between what belongs and what not, or at least less so... In fact, what Casanova and Moretti are doing is refashioning the literatures of Europe into a coherent system, transcending national literature paradigms, and finally emerging as “European” literature within world literature. That this should happen at a time when “Europe” is moving towards a closer union also in other matters is, again I think, not a coincidence. When European nations are each on their own no longer able to really make “a difference” in the world it is only as a newly constituted entity in its own right that “Europe” can compete with the new heavyweights. Moreover, Casanova and Moretti make their case on purely quantitative and structural grounds, thereby carefully side-stepping any residual tendency to claim European precedence on the humanist grounds that decidedly do play a role in American projections of world literature. In this way, I think, Casanova and Moretti are trying to safeguard European literature a place, on

objective grounds, amongst the future “major” literatures of the world, a place that no European national literature may well be able to hold on its own.

Among such future major literatures will undoubtedly feature Chinese literature. China’s increasing profilation as a major, perhaps in future *the*, world power, leads to a re-thinking in China of world literature in line with China’s commercial and political ambitions. What this may imply rather clearly appears from some of the more recent essays of Wang Ning, professor of English and director of the Center for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies at the prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing. Wang Ning as of the early 1990s has been one of the most prolific interpreters of the relation of Chinese literary scholarship to western theory and practice. In a 2010 article he reflects on the size of the Chinese population, its wide and increasing spread to all corners of the earth, China’s rising economic might, how the Chinese language is therefore bound to gain a greater purchase on the world, and what the implications are for Chinese literary historiography. Unabashedly he compares Chinese to English in its wide diffusion, but also in how this implies a certain measure of hybridization. “Quite a few scholars are greatly worried about this phenomenon,” he notes, but to him, “if it really achieved the effect of being inclusive and hybridized like English, Chinese would become the second major world language next to English, for it could play the unique role that English cannot play, and in more aspects, it could function as a major world language in an interactive and complementary way to English” (Ning, “Global English(es)” 167). He points out the growing role of government efforts and institutionalization, and compares the hundreds of Confucius Institutes the Chinese government has been setting up worldwide over the last decade or so to the British Council institutes that until a short while ago spread Britain’s language, culture, and influence abroad. With the “rise of ‘Chinese fever’ in the world,” he asks, “what shall [Chinese] literary scholars... do to remap world literature?” (Ning, “Global English(es)” 170). Just as English literature has been transformed from “a national literature to a sort of world literature since English literature is more and more ‘postnational’,” so too “Chinese literature: also from a national literature to a sort of transnational and postnational literature” (Ning, “Global English(es)” 172).

International Chinese literature studies will become, Ning says,

like its counterpart of international English literature, a sub-discipline in the broader context of comparative literature and world literature... since to Spivak, a new Comparative Literature must be encountered within area studies, international Chinese literature studies will have both characteristics and, therefore, will undoubtedly have a bright prospect along with the popularization of Chinese worldwide. (Ning, “Global English(es)” 173-174)

Literature in Chinese, then, as a world literature, similar to literatures in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese. Only bigger. Although Ning is careful to invoke the fate of English and literature(s) in English as an example, it is clear that he is seeing the new Chinese literary historiography also, and perhaps in first instance, as rival to this example.

In another 2010 article Ning posits “that the globalization of material, cultural, and intellectual production, accompanied by the dissolution of Eurocentrism and ‘West-

centrism' and by the rise of Eastern culture and literature, has assisted at world literature's birth from the ashes of comparative literature" (Ning, "World Literature" 2). World literature, Ning argues, implies translation, and translation in Chinese literary history has mostly served foreign literatures to colonize Chinese literature and culture. However, Ning opines, "the recent trend of cultural globalization in the Chinese context by no means augurs the further colonization of Chinese culture; instead, it will help promote Chinese culture and literature worldwide" (Ning, "World Literature" 13).

Perhaps this most recent Chinese vision of world literature entails the realization of what Rey Chow in 2004 envisaged as a "new" form of East/West comparison, in which Asian literatures would be freed from what she calls the "post-European and..." complex in which the implicit awareness of "the European" (and by extension the American) as the original term of comparison always haunts the term after the "and," thus allowing in its stead for "other possibilities of supplementarity, other semiotic conjunctions mediated by different temporal dynamics, ... as yet unrealized comparative perspectives, the potential range and contents of which we have only just begun to imagine" (Chow 307). One wonders though whether this particular new perspective is necessarily more equal than the European one that she so eloquently criticizes. In the Chinese case, as in the American and European ones, "world literature" emerges as glocalization.

If a neutral world literature then seems indeed impossible, we may at least be consoled that the different ways in which Americans, Europeans, and Chinese, and undoubtedly before long also Indians, Africans, and Latin Americans, reflect upon world literature offers marvellous material for what Moretti, again, calls "comparative morphology," by which he means "the systematic study of how forms vary in space and time" as shaped by local conditions (Moretti 158) – food perhaps for another "new" comparative literature?

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