

Relocating Comparison

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“Locations of Comparison” offers an important perspective on the intertwined history of comparative and postcolonial literary studies, set against the context of today’s immigration crisis. Particularly striking is Slaughter’s portrayal of Harry Levin as a Fanon *après la lettre*, and this history can be extended farther back to the benefit of comparatists and postcolonialists alike. A border-crossing discipline by definition, comparative literature has always been shaped in major ways by immigrants, beginning at least with Madame de Staël, whose *De la littérature: considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) is a founding document of comparative study.¹ Her life and work can well be analyzed in the core-periphery terms that Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova have adapted from Immanuel Wallerstein. Daughter of a nouveau riche banker from semi-peripheral Geneva, young Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker had to make her way in Paris as a doubly peripheral figure—both a woman and a Protestant—to establish herself as a force to be reckoned with in the public sphere. In the process, she came into open conflict with Napoleon, suffering ostracism and then banishment back to Switzerland. In *Dix années d’exil* (1812, 1818) she dissects the moral and psychological effects of Napoleon’s manipulative authoritarianism as he transformed himself from first consul to emperor.² Her book is one of the most incisive portraits ever written of the psychosocial dynamics of imperial autocracy in terms that can well be connected to the work of Fanon a century and a half later.

In the following pages, I would like to expand on Joseph Slaughter’s analysis of the national and disciplinary locations of comparison by taking up de Staël’s emphasis on “institutions sociales” and specifically our academic institutions. The history of postwar American comparative studies has often been told, as Harry Levin did in 1968, as a kind of triumphant *translatio studii* from hidebound, war-torn Europe to an expansive New World of freedom and open academic borders. But as Slaughter says, a postcolonial perspective is needed to counterbalance this idealist account. In this connection, it may be noted that Slaughter’s surprising comparison of Harry Levin

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1 Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël, *De la littérature: considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales. Oeuvres complètes* 1.2, *De la Littérature et autres essais littéraires*, eds. Stéphanie Genand, et al. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), 67–388.

2 Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël, *Dix années d’exil* (Paris: Rivages, 2012), translated as *Ten Years of Exile*, trans. Avriel H. Goldberger (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000).

with Frantz Fanon would not have surprised Levin himself. He closed a 1976 essay, "Toward World Literature," by quoting Fanon's statement that "International consciousness must develop out of national."³ Citing Fanon's engagement with the anticolonial struggle in Algeria and also with developing the transatlantic concept of *Négritude*, Levin presented Fanon as a model for a world literature that would be at once local and global. Attending to the intertwined histories of comparative and postcolonial studies can help us improve on Slaughter's rather stark outline of the state of the discipline today, as he suggests a deep conflict between postcolonial and newer global perspectives, where I would instead see the basis for an ongoing and productive alliance.

In the very year of Levin's presidential address, American higher education was analyzed in anticolonial perspective in a seminal study, *The Academic Revolution*, by the sociologists Christopher Jencks and David Riesman. They were deeply aware of the revolutionary struggles underway around the country and in Indochina in 1968, and those struggles give a context for their study of the tremendous expansion and reshaping of American higher education in the previous several decades. They approached the academic revolution as a social phenomenon that both resulted from and enhanced seismic shifts in the American population and economy, as higher education became a significant vector of upward mobility, particularly for rural and working-class students and to a lesser but growing extent for ethnic minorities. With these emphases in mind, they studied not only elite private universities but also public, Catholic, and historically black institutions. In their book they are critical of the emphasis on research that was fueling much of the system's expansion. Here the actors would include the National Science Foundation as well as the NDEA, along with such private funders as the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. Jencks and Riesman saw these often technocratic initiatives as leading to the dominance of graduate education in academia, hindering the social revolution at the crucial undergraduate level. It is in this connection that their anticolonial perspective comes to the fore:

We are troubled by the fact that the graduate schools have an essentially imperial relationship with many of the institutions and subcultures on their borders, particularly the undergraduate colleges. Their apparent successes depend in many cases on exploiting these underdeveloped territories. First, the graduate schools import the colleges most valuable "raw material," i.e., gifted B.A.s. They train these men [*sic*] as scholars. The best of them they keep for themselves; the rest they export to the colleges whence they came, to become teachers. . . . We see little prospect that the graduate imperium will yield to outbreaks of unrest among the natives in the undergraduate colleges. If decolonization comes in our time—and we doubt that it will—it will come as a result of strong initiatives from dissidents within the graduate schools themselves.⁴

Jencks and Riesman's analysis applies to comparative literature with particular force. Many departments and programs in comparative literature were established purely at

3 Harry Levin, "Toward World Literature," *Tamkang Review* 6.2/7.1 (1975–1976): 21–30, esp. 30.

4 Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1968. 3rd ed., 1977), 515–16.

the graduate level, including at Harry Levin's Harvard and René Wellek's Yale, on the grounds that undergraduates simply didn't know enough to do serious comparative work. Once they had completed their undergraduate training in two or three languages and literatures, they could rise to the higher level of graduate study in comparative literature.

The discipline's elitism extended from students to colleagues in other departments. Very much in Jencks and Riesman's terms, the other language and literature departments were expected to provide the raw materials for comparative literature, both undergraduates and also languages and primary texts. Levin's 1965 ACLA "Report on Standards," and its successor the 1975 Greene report, emphasized that programs should only be established in institutions with "an existing strength in language departments and libraries to which not very many colleges, and indeed not every university, can be fairly expected to measure up."⁵ In both reports, comparative literature depends on commerce with its related—or tributary—departments, but the deal is based on a hierarchical division of labor.

Literary theory was becoming the crucible in which the raw materials of literary texts were to be refined and then sold back to purchasers in the many departments, colleges, and universities that couldn't "measure up" to the comparatists' high standards. A comparable elitism prevailed within the discipline itself, with a handful of departments in private East Coast universities setting the tone for the discipline as a whole. Thus the committees for both the Levin and the Greene reports consisted almost entirely not just of white men, but of white men trained or teaching (or both) at Yale, Harvard, or Columbia. A rare exception on the Levin committee was Toronto's Northrop Frye, whose *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), together with Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1949), had paved the way for the theory boom then getting underway. Reflecting this growing movement, the Levin report recommended that comparative literature programs give graduate students a common basis for their work in disparate literatures by offering "one or two basic courses—let us say, proseminars in theory of literature and in textual methods or technical problems."⁶ If those enticing courses in "textual methods or technical problems" were ever mounted at all, they were soon eclipsed by the theory proseminar as the central common requirement in many programs.

Slaughter sees Levin's address as doubling down on Eurocentrism as a means to establish hegemony over the European comparatists, but Levin was less concerned with Europe than with rival departments in the United States. The battle to establish American comparatists' authority vis-à-vis their European counterparts had been waged throughout the 1950s, and many of the Americans saw themselves as having won a decisive victory at the second meeting of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA), held at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill in September 1958. (Significantly, the ICLA conference was supported by funding from the Ford Foundation.) The American perspective was summed up in no uncertain terms by the Czech émigré René Wellek in his plenary speech, "The Crisis of

5 Harry Levin et al., "The Levin Report" (1965), in Charles Bernheimer, ed., *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 21–27, esp. 21.

6 *Ibid.*, 23.

Comparative Literature.” There, Wellek mocked the “French school” as relegating itself to positivistic studies of the mere “foreign trade of literature,” far below the broad horizons of true comparative studies. As he says in a heartfelt peroration:

Once we grasp the nature of art and poetry, its victory over human mortality and destiny, its creation of a new world of the imagination, national vanities will disappear. Man, universal man, man everywhere and at all time, in all his variety, emerges and literary scholarship ceases to be an antiquarian pastime, a calculus of national credits and debts and even a mapping of networks of relationships. Literary scholarship becomes an act of the imagination, like art itself, and thus a preserver and creator of the highest values of mankind.⁷

Exploring man, universal man in all “his” variety, by the mid-1960s American comparatists were confident in their victory over the Europeans’ putatively narrow focus on “national credits and debts.” The Levin report even denies that there was any conflict with “the French school” at all, arguing that the discipline in America was characterized by its thoroughgoing internationalism and its friendly relations with comparatists abroad.⁸

A major factor in the eclipse of the French school was again institutional. In France, as in most other countries, the discipline was constrained by the hegemony of the national literature, whereas the wartime émigrés were pleasantly surprised to find that the American universities had no departments of American literature. Instead, in a ghostly vestige of British colonialism, Americanists were (and usually still are) folded into English departments dominated by British literature, often overworked, with few faculty despite their high enrollments. Like most specialists in British literature, the émigrés didn’t think that America had produced enough significant literature to require more attention. As Wellek declared in “The Crisis of Comparative Literature,” literary jingoism was rare in the United States, “which, on the whole, has been immune to it partly because it had less to boast of.”⁹ Thus American literature posed little threat, and comparative literature in the United States was on a roll, expanding at a rate unthinkable anywhere in Europe.

Directly anticipating Moretti’s terms, the Levin report concludes by tracing the discipline’s movement from periphery to center within academia. “A generation ago,” the report says, comparative literature “would have been looked upon as at best a supplement to the national literary histories, and as such a luxury for most academic communities. As the literary and linguistic disciplines have reconsidered their criteria and reorganized their curricula, however, it has been moving from the periphery toward a more and more centralizing role.” The report generously says that the relationship “should be one of close collaboration, rather than rivalry,”¹⁰ but this will now be a collaboration of the “more and more central” discipline with its ever more peripheral neighbors.

7 René Wellek, “The Crisis of Comparative Literature,” in *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 283–95, esp. 295.

8 Levin et al., “The Levin Report,” 25.

9 Wellek, “The Crisis of Comparative Literature,” 289.

10 Levin et al., “The Levin Report,” 25.

During the postwar years, as today, the discipline was home to sharply competing interests and views. Many comparatists accepted the nation-state as the basis for their work, as Slaughter says, but others decidedly did not. Few comparatists of either stripe actually held degrees in comparative literature; Harry Levin's was in English, and his first book was his study of a single author, James Joyce. Most comparatists held joint appointments that kept them actively engaged with a national tradition, but even so, many comparatists were strongly anti-nationalistic. Albert Guérard spoke for many when he condemned "the nationalistic heresy" in a lead article for the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* in 1958.¹¹ A good index to this countervailing current is an essay by Anna Balakian, "How and Why I Became a Comparatist" (1994). Balakian's family had fled Turkey in the wake of the Armenian genocide, eventually ending up in the United States. She majored in French at New York City's public Hunter College, then earned her doctorate at Columbia and began teaching French in upstate Syracuse. She would probably have stayed a professor of French if her former dissertation adviser hadn't secured her an invitation to the 1958 ICLA congress.

Balakian was surprised and flattered by the invitation, yet she was unsure whether she really belonged in such exalted company: "But was I a Comparatist? In fact what was a Comparatist? It was a man (I did not know of any women in the field) of infinite knowledge in literature and philosophy. . . . Could I call myself a Comparatist just because I had wandered across Europe at an early age?" She says that:

What really prompted me to explore my potential as a Comparatist was the fact that I had been nurturing a deep-seated pacifism—as I write the word I realize it is no longer in fashion—during my growing years between the two world wars. It consisted of a revulsion against all national confrontations and ethnic antagonisms . . . and although I adored French literature I was developing a certain disappointment with French chauvinism. . . . Naively and perhaps with the idealism of youth, I thought of Comparative Literature as an antidote to excessive nationalism, and surrealism was the one literature that was reacting against national divisions and even overcoming the barriers between the arts. I thought, innocently, that with the perspectives of Comparative Literature and the dissemination of the principles of surrealism we could change the world. So I bought a ticket and made a small financial investment that was to shape the rest of my life.¹²

Balakian went on to become a major scholar of surrealism and to play a leading institutional role in comparative literature, first at NYU and then nationally and internationally. She served as ACLA's president in 1977–80, and then as a vice president of ICLA she hosted the association's triennial conference at NYU in 1982, now with hundreds rather than dozens of participants.

She did her part to change the world, but she and her fellow comparatists found academic institutions harder to change. Most scholars of literature were ensconced

11 Albert Guérard, "Comparative Literature?" *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 7 (1958): 1–6, esp. 4.

12 Anna Balakian, "How and Why I Became a Comparatist," in *Building a Profession: Autobiographical Perspectives on the History of Comparative Literature in the United States*, eds. Lionel Gossman and Mihai I. Spărosu (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), 75–87, esp. 77–78.

within national literature or area studies departments, and they didn't take kindly to being offered the role of native informants—or compradors—for an imperial comparative literature. Few would have read with pleasure the 1975 ACLA Report on Standards, chaired by Yale's Thomas Greene, which was explicit in its hegemonic enthusiasm:

When the Comparative Literature movement gathered strength in the U.S. during the two decades following World War II, it was dedicated to high goals. It wanted to stand, and in large part did stand, for a new internationalism: for broader perspectives, for larger contexts in the tracking of motifs, themes, and types as well as larger understandings of genres and modes. . . . Within the academy, it wanted to bring together the respective European language departments in a new cooperation, reawakening them to the unity of their common endeavor, and embodying that unity in various ways, both customary and creative. . . . This vision of a fresh and central academic discipline was ambitious in the noblest sense. It remains our common inheritance.¹³

It is a wonderful thing for comparatists to enjoy broader perspectives, larger contexts, and larger understandings as they develop a fresh, central, noble, and ambitious discipline, but few outside the circle of the elect could have relished their characterization, by implication, as narrower, smaller, staler, peripheral, plebian, and unambitious.

Many of the foreign literature faculty in the United States were immigrants themselves, but often they weren't too pleased to have carpet-baggers touch down in their well-tended fields to pick up some new supplies. Then, too, even émigré scholars weren't always hospitable to immigrants of the wrong sort. Writing at age eighty-eight in 1994, René Wellek vividly recalled arriving in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1928 to be interviewed for a lectureship teaching German at Smith College. He was met at the train station by the department chair, Ernst Heinrich Mensel, a German-born medievalist:

When I left the train Mr. Mensel saw me getting out and walked up to me with his hands stretched out and said (I swear that these were his first words): "I see you are not a Jew." . . . If I had been a Jew, Mr. Mensel would have taken me on a tour of the campus but sent me back to New York.¹⁴

Faced with the skepticism of their narrower, less ambitious, but far more numerous colleagues, the 1965 and 1975 "Standards" committees sought to defend their grounds of comparison and to secure their borders, fearing that the very success of their programs risked dilution of the entire enterprise and the erosion of its elite status. As the Greene report darkly remarked:

There is cause, we believe, for serious concern, in transforming our discipline, that we not debase those values on which it is founded. The slippage of standards, once allowed to

13 Thomas Greene et al., "The Greene Report" (1975), in Charles Bernheimer, ed., *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 28–38, esp. 28.

14 René Wellek, "Memoirs of the Profession," in *Building a Profession*, 1–11, esp. 3.

accelerate, would be difficult to arrest. . . . In at least some colleges and universities, Comparative Literature seems to be purveyed in the style of a smorgasbord at bargain rates.¹⁵

For her part, the Armenian immigrant Anna Balakian used a startling analogy in making a similar complaint in 1994: “The barriers have come down completely and there is total permissiveness in declaring oneself a Comparatist. We have arrived on dangerous ground. We are threatened,” she warned, “with a host of scholars crossing over without union cards.”¹⁶

Carefully policing their members’ union cards and green cards, the ACLA remained a small organization for thirty years after Harry Levin’s presidential address. As Slaughter says, its annual meetings typically featured only a hundred or at most a hundred and fifty papers, very few by scholars based outside the United States. This attenuated institutional picture began to change in 1997, for an interlocking set of intellectual, institutional, and political reasons. In that year, the association’s board resolved to become international not just in theory but in practice, and we held our first meeting abroad, in Mexico. At the same time, we shifted to what has become ACLA’s ongoing format of three-day seminars, which give the opportunity for sustained discussion from multiple perspectives. People started inviting friends from other departments and other countries, whether they were card-carrying comparatists or not.

At a disciplinary level, the rise of postcolonial studies in the 1980s had stimulated a growing interest in non-European literatures, an interest that has expanded and diversified since the mid-nineties in global, transnational, and world literary studies. Above all, the growth of the association’s meetings over the past two decades has come about because the barriers between comparative literature and its disciplinary neighbors have opened up, including the connection to area studies pioneered by Andreas Huyssen and Gayatri Spivak with Columbia’s Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. Many more people, languages, and literatures are now present at our annual meetings than when Harry Levin could speak of comparing “the” literature—or when Thomas Greene, my director of graduate studies in 1976, warned me that with my studies of Nahuatl and of ancient Egyptian, “some” hiring committees “might think” I was only doing “arabesques around the literary tradition.”

It should be said that in the postcolonial studies of the eighties and nineties, it was still common for scholars focused on Africa, or India, or Latin America to work largely if not entirely in the old imperial languages, unless they had native fluency in another language themselves. When Sheldon Pollock was developing his compendious collection *Literary Cultures in History* (2003), he had considerable difficulty finding scholars equipped to work on several of India’s literary languages, two of which he ended up learning himself for the purpose. “The old Orientalists had a lot to answer

15 Greene, “The Greene Report,” 31.

16 Balakian, “How and Why I Became a Comparatist,” 84.

for,” he remarked one day, “but at least they learned the damn languages.” (Possibly my memory has added that final adjective, but this is how I recall the conversation.) Harry Levin wasn’t simply protecting Europe by raising the issue of language, which is crucial for the close engagement with literary texts. One of the most salutary features of the best work today, both in postcolonial and world literary studies, is that more people are studying more languages. Both fields will be strengthened when it becomes the norm, rather than the exception, for scholars to move outside the hegemonic sphere of the few languages of the old European great powers—and the heavy concentration on that most European of forms, the novel.

Slaughter’s essay stands in the tradition of ACLA presidential addresses that have exhorted the membership to do their work better, and to take up neglected periods, materials, or approaches. He is certainly right that comparatists need to reflect on the politics of their comparisons and that scholars who venture into areas that are new to them need to engage fully with the work already done by people in those locations and by specialists in the material. His critique of poorly grounded scholarship resonates with Levin’s and Greene’s warnings against a slippage of the standards then expected for work in the European traditions themselves, or Anna Balakian’s assertion in 1994 that too many comparatists had become “content with rapid name-droppings that reinforce the collage character of the juxtapositions . . . you do not need Comparatists to play literary hopscotch.”¹⁷

No serious scholar should favor rapid name-dropping, and perhaps only devotees of Cortázar’s *Rayuela* should play literary hopscotch. Even so, it is unfortunate that Balakian’s dislike of scholarly collage-work—coming somewhat oddly from a leading scholar of André Breton—led her into wholesale attacks on post-structuralist and postcolonial theory.¹⁸ Equally, we can well share Slaughter’s regret that Levin’s principled insistence on linguistic and cultural grounding caused him to exclude the entire non-Western world. Yet I sense a similar wholesale dismissiveness in Slaughter’s own account of new trends today. It appears from his essay that following “the heyday of postcolonialism” in the nineties, the era of neoliberal globalization has yielded a series of retrograde movements, “fields such as Global Modernisms, World Literature, and Transnational American Studies,” which revive the repressive liberalism of Levin’s era. Apparently en masse, their adherents create “global positioning systems” that map the world for its inhabitants, and they assert their authority by blindly reinventing what area-based intellectuals and postcolonial scholars had already done long before them.

This is a genuine and serious problem when it occurs, but it isn’t confined to the latest approaches or to the literatures of the global south. Given the ACLA meeting’s 2017 location, a good example would be the occlusion of Dutch literature throughout the history of comparative studies. As Werner Friederich remarked in 1960, “Sometimes, in flippancy 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

17 Ibid., 85.

18 Ibid., 82. Balakian details her negative views in *The Snowflake on the Belfry: Dogma and Disquietude in the Critical Arena* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994). In her essay on becoming a comparatist, her impatience with postcolonial perspectives surfaces in an insistence on regarding Aimé Césaire purely “as a francophone surrealist who happened to be born in Martinique.”

fourth of the 15 NATO-Nations.”¹⁹ Today, as Theo D’haen has noted, far more attention is finally being given to non-hegemonic countries and populations, but now Dutch literature is ignored because the Netherlands isn’t located in the global south. On the rare occasions when a Dutch author is mentioned, it is likely to be the anticolonial Multatuli, whereas an equally valuable writer such as the modernist poet—and friend of Balakian’s surrealists—J. J. Slauerhoff remains almost unknown outside the country.²⁰ One postcolonialist begins an essay on Multatuli himself with a note of exasperation: “Must everything in modern Dutch literature begin and end with Multatuli?”²¹ Zook is actually criticizing an overemphasis within Dutch studies; local scholarship isn’t free of its own tendentious and exclusionary map-making. Worldly comparatists today can open up modes of mapping that will feature many neglected languages and their literatures, from the Low Countries to highland Guatemala, and from Eastern Europe to Southeast Asia.

I would propose that Slaughter’s critique of tendentious global positioning applies to any approach that is poorly grounded in local knowledge and scholarship or that is driven by a preformed thesis that leaves countervailing evidence or materials off the map. This applies to some work in the fields he singles out, but it also applies to superficial, hopscotching work in European studies, or literary theory, or postcolonial studies. It is indeed unfortunate that essays in Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough’s *Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* discuss Chinese modernism, for instance, with no use whatsoever of Chinese scholarship.²² It is equally regrettable that in *Combined and Uneven Development* the Warwick Research Collective, spearheaded by the postcolonialists Neil Lazarus and Benita Parry, discuss Tayeb Salih and several other non-Anglophone writers at length without working with any of their texts in the original, and without citing even a single work of scholarship in any language other than English.²³ Their admirable project of interfusing postcolonial and world-literary perspectives would gain traction by attending to the languages and local scholarship that the best work in comparative and world literature regularly emphasizes.

Slaughter sees the tendency toward reductive mapping as exemplified by Moretti’s “Conjectures on World Literature” in 2000 and still prevalent today. Certainly, Moretti loves to draw maps, and he makes very broad claims for the global processes they are said to illustrate. Yet Slaughter seems to me to give a one-sided reading of Moretti’s essay, such as when he says that “Where Obiechina finds politics and history, Moretti finds aesthetics and morphology.” In attending to the locations of comparison, it would be useful to recall that Moretti published his “Conjectures,” and also his corrective “More Conjectures,” in the *New Left Review*.

19 Werner Friederich, “On the Integrity of Our Planning,” in *The Teaching of World Literature*, ed. Haskell Block (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 9–22, esp. 15.

20 Theo D’haen, “J. J. Slauerhoff, Dutch Literature, and World Literature,” in *Literature e cultura: do nacional ao transnacional*, ed. José Luis Jobim (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: EdUERJ, 2013), 143–57.

21 Darren C. Zook, “Searching for Max Havelaar: Multatuli, Colonial History, and the Confusion of Empire,” *Modern Language Notes* 121.5 (2006): 1169–89, esp. 1169.

22 Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

23 WReC (Warwick Research Collective), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

Moretti is loyal to his Italian Marxist formation, and in these essays he directly asserts the political importance of discerning a world system that is “simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*, with a core and a periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality.”²⁴ Moretti’s study of morphology is political in intent: “Forms are the abstract of social relationships; so formal analysis is in its own modest way an analysis of power.”²⁵ Perhaps Slaughter simply doesn’t agree with Moretti, but it would be good at least to acknowledge his claims. These are claims that the Warwick group, in fact, takes very seriously, devoting several pages to refining Moretti’s world-systems analysis to bolster their own studies of the politics of form in works that oppose the neoliberal world system.

A rapidly evolving field often produces tentative conjectures that need elaboration and correction. Like Fredric Jameson’s “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multi-national Capitalism” in postcolonial studies, Moretti’s “Conjectures” has been intensively debated by world literature scholars ever since it appeared eighteen years ago. Attending to these ongoing debates could lead to a more nuanced assessment of Moretti’s ideas and would certainly yield a more accurate account of the state of the discipline today than Slaughter offers. Useful summaries of the first decade of responses can be found in Mads Rosendahl Thomsen’s survey essay and in the volume on Moretti edited by Godwin and Holbo.²⁶ Close at hand in ACLA circles is Alex Beecroft’s *An Ecology of World Literature* (2015), while farther afield is the important early response by Istanbul’s Jale Parla (2004).²⁷ Eileen Julien and Nirvana Tanoukhi have both used and revised Moretti in the context of African literature, while Mariano Siskind takes up Moretti in his book on world literature in Latin America.²⁸ Readers of Arabic (now frequently found in our programs) will want to consult Samia Mehrez’s judicious overview of Moretti’s work.²⁹ Her essay is part of a special issue on debates over world literature in the Cairo journal *Alif*, which as it happens includes an essay by Slaughter himself.

Precisely as Slaughter says, doing justice to one’s material should involve attending to the work already done before, whether on the African novel or on Moretti’s theory of the novel. The best comparative studies today fulfill his desiderata

24 Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54–68, esp. 56.

25 *Ibid.*, 66.

26 Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, “Franco Moretti and the Global Wave of the Novel,” in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D’haen, et al. (Abingdon, VA: Routledge, 2011), 136–44; Jonathan Goodwin and John Holbo, eds., *Reading “Graphs, Maps, Trees”: Critical Responses to Franco Moretti* (Anderson, SC: Parlor Press, 2011).

27 Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (London: Verso, 2015) and Jale Parla, “The Object of Comparison,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 41.1 (2004): 116–25.

28 Eileen Julien, “Arguments and Further Conjectures on World Literature,” in *Studying Transcultural Literary History*, ed. Gunilla Lindberg-Wada (Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter, 2006), 122–32; Nirvana Tanoukhi, “The Scale of World Literature,” *New Literary History* 39.3 (2008): 599–617; Mariano Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

29 Samia Mehrez, “Khāriṭat al-riwāyah: Frānkū Mūrīṭī wa-i’ādat rasm al-ta-riḫ al-adabī” [“Mapping the novel: Franco Moretti and the remaking of literary history”], *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 34 (2014): 67–92.

for ethical, politically engaged, and culturally grounded work. Yet probably none of us always lives up, or measures up, to these high ideals. Whether we identify as scholars of the global south or of world literature, as transnationalists or as post-heyday postcolonialists, comparatists of all varieties should keep Slaughter's concerns fully in mind, as our migrant discipline seeks to locate and relocate itself in a complex and troubled world.