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# The global process of thinking global literature: from Marx's *Weltliteratur* to Sarkozy's *littérature-monde*†

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## Abstract

This article outlines the history of research in global literature as a history that is itself global. This kind of global history of the theorization of global literature demands a departure from the existing accounts and their nascent gap between heated theoreticist debates and pacifying historicist anthologies. A global approach to the problematic can bridge this gap because it considers not only what the most influential studies on global literature say, but also where and when they say it. Whether these be Romantic assertions of world literature, post-war pleas for cosmopolitan literature, Cold War polemics about 'Third World' literature, or millennial theories of transnational, post-national, planetary, and, indeed, global literature, the article considers not only the object of these studies but also the studies themselves as an object; not only the text but also the context. Hence, a historicization of literary theories of globalization in effect bleeds into a historicization of globalization itself.

**Keywords:** global literature; globalization; literary studies; the global; world literature

## Introduction

The history of Western philosophy is often described, following an aphorism from almost a century ago, as 'a series of footnotes to Plato'.<sup>1</sup> Something similar can be said about the history of studies on world literature: this, too, is often treated as a series of footnotes to Goethe, and his use of the term *Weltliteratur*. As Adam Kirsch wrote in a recent contribution to Columbia Global Reports, 'There is a well-established rule for anyone writing about the increasingly popular, and surprisingly controversial, subject of world literature: Begin with Goethe.'<sup>2</sup> There is, however, another set of footnotes to world literature studies, and one that reveals the global as its ultimate focus: besides returning to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in a very explicit intertextual manner, scholars of world literature also tend to make an extra-textual gesture, and one that is as common as the intertextual one, but much less noticed, namely the gesture of addressing global events. Studies on world literature not only like to start with praise of Goethe's *Weltliteratur*; they also like to conclude with a critique of what they perceive as a global process. And, whereas their intertextual references to Goethe may not necessarily lead to the question of the global in

<sup>†</sup>This article was written at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts in the framework of the research project 'May '68 in literature and theory: the last season of modernism in France, Slovenia, and the world' (J6-9384) and the research programme 'Studies in literary history, literary theory and methodology' (P6-0024), both of which were financed by the Slovenian Research Agency.

<sup>1</sup>A. N. Whitehead, *Process and reality: an essay in cosmology. Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh during the session 1927–1928*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>Adam Kirsch, *The global novel: writing the world in the 21st century*, New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016, p. 10.

world literature, their extra-textual preoccupations with global crises and similar processes usually do.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, ever since the rise of globalization as both an academic and an extra-academic topic, world literature studies has become the main source of discussion about the global in literature as well as the most global variety of literary studies itself. In English, the lingua franca of contemporary literary studies, there is no companion to 'global literature', but there are many companions to 'world literature' in 'the age of globalization', on 'the agenda of globalization', or on 'the gathering momentum of globalization'.<sup>4</sup> (Those in the field who do not focus on globalization as this kind of condition of world literature see globalization mostly as a topic of recent literature.) In turn, this tendency to think about global literature through linking the old world literature to global events has an impact on another intertextual feature of investigations into world literature, namely the fact that they are informed not only by world literature studies proper and comparative literature studies, as one might expect, but also by such sources of globalization discourse as globalization studies, world-systems analysis, translation studies, sociology of culture, post-colonial studies, critical theory, and even political manifestos – including those from the subtitle of this article, where an activist as radical and removed from us in time as Karl Marx meets a politician as conservative and contemporary as Nicolas Sarkozy.

These and other disciplines, theories, and political programmes have helped world literature studies to add the globe to the nation-state, the world-system to the world, translations to the original, culture to the arts, colonialism to modernity, definitions of the world to mappings of the world, and politics to aesthetics. But, far from being reducible to these influences, the history of world literature studies began well before scholarly disciplines were even institutionalized, and continues into our age of inter-, trans-, and even post-disciplinarity. So, while there is no denying the influence of the global turn and the disciplines and theories that have contributed to it the most, it may be more interesting to trace the disciplinary history of world literature studies as a history of inventing, rather than applying, (sub)disciplines that in turn are applied in the later stages of world literature studies.

Goethe, for instance, definitely cannot be associated with any one discipline, and not just because he left his mark in fields as divergent as aesthetics, biology, and physics, but also because, in his time, not all of these fields had yet developed into scholarly disciplines in today's sense (which is one reason why he was able to work in all of them in the first place). Marx, the next canonical commentator of *Weltliteratur*, while obviously making use of many bodies of knowledge from Epicurean natural philosophy to Hegelian idealist philosophy and Ricardian political economy, critically reworked them to outline a discipline of his own, historical materialism, which in turn influenced such figures in world literature studies as Maxim Gorky, René Etiemble, Fredric Jameson, Franco Moretti, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Neil Lazarus with his colleagues at the Warwick Research Collective. But many of these names, too (notably Jameson with his 'poetics of social forms', Moretti with his 'distant reading', Spivak with her 'planetary Comparative Literature', the Warwick Collective with their 'theory of combined and uneven development'), have come to stand for subdisciplines of world literary studies that, moreover, have had

<sup>3</sup>In this issue, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel discusses a similar extra-academic source of the global turn in academic art history, namely the globalization of the art market itself. See Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, 'Art history and the global: deconstructing the latest canonical narrative'.

<sup>4</sup>Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir, eds., *The Routledge companion to world literature*, London: Routledge, 2012, p. ii; Wail S. Hassan, 'World literature in the age of globalization: reflections on an anthology', in P. Bayapa Reddy, ed., *Aspects of contemporary world literature*, New Delhi: Atlantic, 2008, p. 3; Theo D'haen, César Domínguez, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, 'Introduction', in Theo D'haen, César Domínguez, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, eds., *World literature: a reader*, London: Routledge, 2013, p. x; David Damrosch, 'Introduction: world literature in theory and practice', in David Damrosch, ed., *World literature in theory*, Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014, p. 2; and Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir, 'Preface: *Weltliteratur, littérature universelle, vishwa sahitya ...*', in D'haen, Damrosch, and Kadir, *Routledge companion to world literature*, p. xx.

considerable impact beyond literary studies (notably in cultural studies, digital humanities, spatial humanities, and postcolonial studies). Between Marx and these names, scholars such as Fritz Strich, Ernst Robert Curtius, and Erich Auerbach have used their embeddedness in German Romance philology to help establish the discipline of comparative literature; Auerbach's *Mimesis* in particular also entails an original way of doing world literature that much later enabled Edward Said to claim, and Emily Apter to criticize, Auerbachianism. And, again, both Said and Apter have used the approaches and findings of many disciplines (and sifted them through Foucauldian and Derridean epistemologies) to respectively invigorate postcolonial studies and translation studies in ways that world literature scholars simply cannot ignore.

Again, this is not to deny the crucial impact of the global turn on world literature studies. It is simply that world literature has always been considered in terms of global processes. Moreover, the notion of world literature is as old as global processes, insofar as these pre-date globalization in the narrow sense of postmodern post-industrialization by almost two centuries.<sup>5</sup> For, long before the global event of globalization talk led to someone like Sarkozy reacting to the academic debate about *littérature-monde* (of which more below), the global event of the bourgeois revolutions had led to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels responding to the salon discussion about *Weltliteratur*.

Andreas Huyssen wrote in 2005 that 'To celebrate global literature today as a new and expanded form of Goethe's *Weltliteratur* ignores the fact that literature as a medium of cultural production no longer occupies the privileged place it once held in Goethe's age.'<sup>6</sup> But what is said here about world literature can also be said about Goethe's chosen model for world literature, namely the world market: not only has literature lost the cultural relevance it had enjoyed when Goethe pondered about *Weltliteratur*, but the world market, too, functions differently from the *Weltmarkt* that he had in mind. According to Goethe, the world market is still a neutral field of exchange: 'He who studies German', he wrote in 1828, 'finds himself in the marketplace where all nations offer their wares. He plays the role of interpreter while enriching himself.'<sup>7</sup> Needless to say, this kind of benevolent free market has long been over-determined by capitalist production and its tendency towards monopolies and oligopolies, where it would be cynical to say that 'all nations offer their wares'. As Immanuel Wallerstein noted a year before Huyssen's remark, 'a totally free market, were it ever to exist, would make impossible the endless accumulation of capital'.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of *Weltliteratur*, the distance between Goethe and us is indeed no less than ontological: as far as literature is concerned, Goethe did live in a world different from ours. In the case of *Weltmarkt*, however, the difference between Goethe and us is merely epistemological: in Goethe's time, the market was the same as in our time, namely the capitalist market, but he seemed to have neglected it. This epistemological obstacle can be removed if we move from Goethe to Marx and Engels and their early acknowledgement of the capitalist character of the world market. Consequently, Huyssen's warning can now be supplemented with Nicholas Brown's claim, also from 2005, that 'the Marxian narrative, where particular cultural forms colonize territory along with economic ones, represents the truth of Goethe's metaphor'.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup>That the history of globalization spans a few centuries rather than a few decades is also stressed by Romain Lecler, Gustavo Lins Ribeiro, and Ralph Schroeder early on in their contributions to this issue.

<sup>6</sup>Andreas Huyssen, 'Geographies of modernism in a globalizing world', in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds., *Geographies of modernism: literatures, cultures, spaces*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>J. W. von Goethe, 'On Carlyle's German Romance', in J. W. von Goethe, *The collected works. Volume 3: essays on art and literature*, ed. John Gearey, trans. Ellen von Nardroff and Ernest H. von Nardroff, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 207.

<sup>8</sup>Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-systems analysis: an introduction*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup>Nicholas Brown, *Utopian generations: the political horizon of twentieth-century literature*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 6.

But if Goethe's use of the metaphor is not the most critical one, is it at least the first one, as many seem to think to this day? Again, the answer is no. The first German to use the term *Weltliteratur* was probably August Ludwig von Schlözer in 1773.<sup>10</sup> Both Schlözer's *Weltliteratur* and its mention in a 1920 book by Sigmund von Lempicki were discovered by Gaudi Kristmannsson in 2007 (and by Wolfgang Schamoni a year later, which quickly turned the question of the first use of *Weltliteratur* into the question of the first notice of the first use of *Weltliteratur*, which Schamoni did eventually attribute to Kristmannsson).<sup>11</sup> As for the most critical Germans to use the metaphor, these may very well be Marx and Engels. In their *Manifesto*, as we will see below, they turned Goethe's metaphor into a narrative of a global crisis, thereby setting the tone of the debate for the next two centuries.

It is this notion of *Weltliteratur* – world literature as the worldwide demise of national literatures – that went on to haunt Georg Brandes, Rabindranath Tagore, Maxim Gorky, and Zheng Zhenduo around the time of the fall of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg; Auerbach, Curtius, and Strich after the fall of the Reichstag in Berlin; and Aijaz Ahmad and Fredric Jameson just before the fall of the Berlin Wall. And it is the same critical notion of *Weltliteratur* that has been haunting most of literary studies ever since the fall first of the Twin Towers and then of the Lehman Brothers investment bank, both in New York, with books on world literature and related matters by, among many others, Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, John Pizer, Edward W. Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak being published around 2001,<sup>12</sup> and key essays (which all were soon developed into books) by Emily Apter, Alexander Beecroft, Pheng Cheah, Debjani Ganguly, Eric Hayot, B. Venkat Mani, Aamir R. Mufti, Rebecca L. Walkowitz, and the Warwick Research Collective appearing around 2008.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>August Ludwig Schlözer, *Isländische Literatur und Geschichte: erster Teil*, Göttingen: Johann Christian Dieterich, 1773, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>See, respectively, Gaudi Kristmannsson, 'The Nordic turn in German literature', *Edinburgh German Yearbook*, 1, 2007, pp. 63–72; Wolfgang Schamoni, "'Weltliteratur' – zuerst 1773 bei August Ludwig Schlözer', *Arcadia*, 43, 2, 2008, pp. 288–98; and Wolfgang Schamoni, 'Ein Postscriptum zu "'Weltliteratur' – zuerst 1773 bei August Ludwig Schlözer"', *Arcadia*, 46, 2, 2012, pp. 515–16. For Sigmund von Lempicki, see his book *Geschichte der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Rupprecht, 1920, p. 418.

<sup>12</sup>See, respectively, Pascale Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres*, Paris: Seuil, 1999 (translated as *The world republic of letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); David Damrosch, *What is world literature?*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003; Franco Moretti, *La letteratura vista da lontano*, Turin: Einaudi, 2005 (translated by the author as *Graphs, maps, trees: abstract models for literary history*, London: Verso, 2005); John Pizer, *The idea of world literature: history and pedagogical practice*, Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006; Edward W. Said, *Humanism and democratic criticism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004; and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a discipline*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

<sup>13</sup>See, respectively, Emily Apter, 'Untranslatables: a world system', *New Literary History*, 39, 3, 2008, pp. 591–8; Alexander Beecroft, 'World literature without a hyphen: towards a typology of literary systems', *New Left Review*, 54, 2008, pp. 87–100; Pheng Cheah, 'What is a world? On world literature as cosmopolitanism', *Daedalus*, 137, 3, 2008, pp. 26–38; Debjani Ganguly, 'Deathworlds, the world novel and the human', *Angelaki*, 16, 4, 2011, pp. 145–58; Eric Hayot, 'On literary worlds', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 72, 2, 2011, pp. 129–61; B. Venkat Mani, 'Bibliomigrancy: book series and the making of world literature', in D'haen, Damrosch, and Kadir, *Routledge companion to world literature*, pp. 283–96; Aamir R. Mufti, 'Orientalism and the institution of world literatures', *Critical Inquiry*, 36, 3, 2010, pp. 458–93; Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'Comparison literature', *New Literary History*, 40, 3, 2009, pp. 567–82; and Warwick Research Collective, 'Peripheral modernisms', 2008, [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/research/currentprojects/collective/wrec\\_papers/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/research/currentprojects/collective/wrec_papers/) (consulted 4 April 2018).

For the books based on these essays, see, respectively, Emily Apter, *Against world literature: on the politics of untranslatability*, London: Verso, 2013; Alexander Beecroft, *An ecology of world literature: from antiquity to the present day*, London: Verso, 2015; Pheng Cheah, *What is a world? On postcolonial literature as world literature*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016; Debjani Ganguly, *This thing called the world: the contemporary novel as global form*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016; Eric Hayot, *On literary worlds*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; B. Venkat Mani, *Recoding world literature: libraries, print culture, and Germany's pact with books*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2017; Aamir R. Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and world literatures*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016; Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Born translated: the contemporary novel in an age of world literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015; and Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and uneven development: towards a new theory of world-literature*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015.

Thus it seems that, whenever world literature criticism is about to rise to the level of theory, a pretender to hegemony is about to fall, be it the July Monarchy for Marx and Engels, the German, Habsburg, Russian, Ottoman, and Chinese empires for Brandes, Tagore, Gorky, and Zheng, the Third Reich and the Empire of Japan for Auerbach, Curtius, and Strich, the Soviet Union for Ahmad and Jameson, or the post-Cold War US for us, contemporaries of 9/11 and the Great Recession.

### Historicizing a concept

Theories of world literature may be the best source of a concept of global literature that we have at our disposal. The problem is that they disagree about almost everything. To begin with, there is the disparity between Goethe's praise and Marx and Engels' critique. Goethe's praise of world literature is so enthusiastic that it, paradoxically, produces its own downside as the only critical aspect of world literature: at one point, there is simply too much of this good thing, *Weltliteratur*: 'the world literature I have called for is deluging and threatening to drown me like the sorcerer's apprentice: Scotland and France pour forth almost daily, and in Milan they are publishing a most important daily paper called *l'Eco*'.<sup>14</sup> As Goethe's geographical references imply, his world literature is quite often simply European literature ('European, in other words, World Literature').<sup>15</sup> This adds to the disparity from the beginnings of world literature studies (when Goethe would praise what Marx and Engels would criticize) a marked difference between Goethe's part in these beginnings and one of the most recent stages, when Etiemble was one of the first to protest that we no longer have the right to derive world literature from Europe.<sup>16</sup>

But besides the rifts between the conservative and the progressive parts of German Romanticism, or those between Romanticism and, for instance, the kind of mid-twentieth-century Maoism that had informed Etiemble, there is also no lack of disparities within the era in which Etiemble was writing. The greatest of these differences, at least in terms of biography, must be the incredible gulf between, on the one hand, Curtius writing a post-war classic of world literature studies after taking the post of Leo Spitzer, a Jewish faculty member of the University of Cologne denounced in 1933, and, on the other hand, Auerbach, a Jewish pioneer like Spitzer of German comparative literary studies, writing a very similar classic after being invited by Spitzer himself to a position at the neutral University of Istanbul in 1936.<sup>17</sup> In other words, both the man who occupied the chair emptied by Spitzer's flight from the Nazis and the man for whom Spitzer secured a chair on his flight from the Nazis went on to write classics of comparative literature, both of which were translated in the post-war lingua franca and published in a prestigious series at Princeton as early as 1953.

As for more conceptual differences, few are as pronounced as the dispute between close reading and distant reading, which has brought with it even the difference between talking, like Moretti, about metropolitan centres and global peripheries, on the one hand, and, on the other, redefining these two antagonistic notions as non-antagonistic hosts and guests, as Francesca Orsini does in her response to Moretti's plea for distant reading.<sup>18</sup> With the ongoing rise of digital humanities, this dispute over close reading and distant reading has been reframed in technological terms, where Moretti's initiative to quantify the archive of world literature has received many more followers than

<sup>14</sup>Quoted in Fritz Strich, *Goethe and world literature*, trans. C. A. M. Sym, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949, p. 350.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>16</sup>See René Etiemble, *Essais de littérature (vraiment) générale*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup>See Emily Apter, 'Global translatio: the "invention" of comparative literature, Istanbul, 1933', *Critical Inquiry*, 29, 2, 2003, pp. 260–1.

<sup>18</sup>See, respectively, Franco Moretti, 'More conjectures', *New Left Review*, 20, 2003, p. 80, n. 15; and Francesca Orsini, 'India in the mirror of world fiction', *New Left Review*, 13, 2002, pp. 81–2.

his initial distant reading, but also many more critics – beginning with such influential figures of the renewed world literature studies as Emily Apter, the author of the book *Against world literature*.<sup>19</sup>

Many of the disagreements have to do with that between translatability and untranslatability. This is the antinomy separating, on the one hand, the position that ‘the world literature [*Weltliteratur*] of the future, that is to say *literature*, will merit, even more than does the *Weltliteratur* of which Goethe dreamed, Mr. Árpád Berczik’s reproach that it largely depends upon translations’ (because one should ‘read Saikaku in translation rather than Péladan in the original’);<sup>20</sup> and, on the other hand, the view that world literature cannot rely on translations and should in effect be reduced to comparative literature (as in Hugo Meltzl’s infamous ‘Dekaglottismus’ of German, French, English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Swedish, Icelandic, and Hungarian<sup>21</sup>), if not in many ways aborted (as in *Against world literature*’s ‘speed bumps of untranslatability’).<sup>22</sup>

This leads to what can only be the final dispute between theories of world literature: is world literature something to be for, or something to be against? Is it something that ‘everybody must endeavor to hasten’, as Goethe did in the early days,<sup>23</sup> or instead something that by now can trigger only the kind of uneasiness that Apter expressed recently ‘in the face of the entrepreneurial, bulimic drive to anthologize and curricularize the world’s cultural resources, as evinced in projects sponsored by some proponents of World Literature’?<sup>24</sup>

But there is one thing that theories of world literature do agree upon almost universally, albeit (if not because) unwittingly. They almost without exception do whatever they do while commenting on the global, or nearly global, conditions of their own positions of enunciation. In fact, theories of world literature tend to theorize world literature precisely in response to what they perceive as an imminent or ongoing global event.

To give a first example, one whose otherworldly optimism may seem at odds with the examples that follow. In his 1907 essay on world literature, the future Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore elevated ‘comparative literature’, the English term he was invited to address, to the status of a collectivity of letters, as Spivak noted recently.<sup>25</sup> So, whereas most of the examples that follow are concerned with some kind of global crisis while commenting on world literature in terms of *Weltliteratur*, *world(-)literature*, or *littérature-monde*, Tagore chose to devote his essay on ‘comparative literature’ to world literature in the sense of a collectivity of letters, ‘*Visva Sahitya*’.<sup>26</sup> This level of argument enabled him to express unprecedented optimism about worldly matters, optimism that he would be able to stay true to up until the years preceding the Second World War.<sup>27</sup> And yet, towards the end of Tagore’s essay, the characteristic philosophical style of passages like

In the many veils of the world the glutton often escapes notice but to place him in the concentrated light of literature is to make of him an object of derision. Consequently, that

<sup>19</sup>See, respectively, Franco Moretti, *Distant reading*, London: Verso, 2013, p. 122, and Apter, *Against world literature*, pp. 54–6.

<sup>20</sup>René Etiemble, ‘Do we have to revise the notion of world literature?’, trans. Theo D’haen, in D’haen, Domínguez, and Thomsen, *World literature*, pp. 99–100.

<sup>21</sup>Hugo Meltzl, ‘Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Literatur, III: der Dekaglottismus’, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, 2, 10, 1878, pp. 494.

<sup>22</sup>Apter, *Against world literature*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>J. P. Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe*, ed. Hans Kohn, trans. Gisela C. O’Brien, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964, p. 94.

<sup>24</sup>Apter, *Against world literature*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>David Damrosch and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Comparative literature/world literature: a discussion with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and David Damrosch’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 48, 4, 2011, p. 483.

<sup>26</sup>Rabindranath Tagore, ‘*Visva Sahitya*’, trans. Rijula Das and Makarand R. Paranjape, in Debashish Banerji, ed., *Rabindranath Tagore in the 21st century: theoretical renewals*, New Delhi: Springer, 2015, pp. 286.

<sup>27</sup>See Makarand R. Paranjape, ‘Tagore’s idea of “world literature”’, in Banerji, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 63.

expression of humanity which is not insignificant, that which the human heart in its mercy or heroism, wrath or peace, considers without inhibition to be a worthy representation of itself, that which while standing within the girdle of artistic craftsmanship can withstand the continuous stare of eternal time – that is what man naturally places in literature. Otherwise its oddity becomes painful to us. Our hearts rebel to see anyone but the rightful emperor seated on the throne.<sup>28</sup>

is interrupted by this nugget of both literary and political critique:

But not all men have broadness of feeling or discretion, neither do all societies, and there comes a time when fleeting and small desires diminish man. In that hour of crisis the distorted mirror magnifies the small and in the literature of such a time man augments his pettiness, floods his own shortcomings with audacious light. Then craftiness takes the place of art, pride substitutes glory and Tennyson is replaced by Kipling.<sup>29</sup>

If this criticism seems rather mild, it is only because it comes from a speech that is indeed much more optimistic and elevated than what people usually have to say about world literature. And this is despite the fact that those who will have something to say in what follows, while not being acknowledged by the Nobel Committee like Tagore, nonetheless include hyper-canonized writers (from Goethe to Gorky), globally influential political figures (from Marx to Sarkozy), and world-renowned humanities scholars (from Auerbach to the likes of Spivak, Jameson, Said, and Moretti). The few who remain are some of the main figures in world literature studies (from Brandes, Curtius, and Strich to Casanova, Damrosch, and Apter), most of whom also rank among the key names in literary studies in general. Finally, as the *Weltliteratur* that Marx metonymized in his manifesto is echoed in the *littérature-monde* that Sarkozy reacted against with his own manifesto, the piece that caught Sarkozy's attention was signed by no fewer than forty-four superstars of contemporary Francophone literature. The exercise in name-dropping that therefore inevitably follows will be overshadowed, and hopefully explained, only by the magnitude of the inter- and extra-textual matters that converge in these names: the matter of global literature and the matter of global crisis.

### From *Weltliteratur* to world literature

As mentioned above, the proximity of global events and key developments in the discussion of world literature – far from being limited to the co-existence of the global spread of the notion of globalization, on the one hand, and the emergence of the notion of global literature, on the other – goes back at least to the global event of the bourgeois revolutions and its impact on Marx and Engels' comment on *Weltliteratur*. Just a year before the bourgeois revolutions of 1848, the first of only two 'world revolutions' according to Giovanni Arrighi, Terence K. Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein,<sup>30</sup> Marx and Engels took the Goethean metaphor of *Weltliteratur* and turned it into a metonymy, a link (even the final link) in a long metonymical chain of world-historic processes. Instead of simply metaphorically likening world literature to the world market as Goethe had done, they saw both as parts of the same bourgeois society and its crisis-ridden mode of production. The result was a literalization of Goethe's metaphor, a gesture that Pheng Cheah pointed out recently, if only to criticize it – and the contemporary theories of world literature that repeat it – for reducing the unmappable world of phenomenologists to the mappable globe of geographers.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Rabindranath Tagore, 'Visva Sahitya', pp. 285–6.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>30</sup>Giovanni Arrighi, Terence K. Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein, '1968: the great rehearsal', in Terry Boswell, ed., *Revolution in the world-system*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1989, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup>See Cheah, *What is a world?*, p. 63.

Here is the paragraph, with both the famous Goethean metaphor and the much less well-known string of global processes that ties the metaphor down to the literal level:

All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse (*Verkehr*) in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.<sup>32</sup>

The string of metonymies of globalization begins with ‘old-established national industries have been destroyed’; the final metonymy, literalizing Goethe’s metaphor, declares that ‘from numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature’. In between, we find ‘And as in material, so also in intellectual production’, which suggests that the two should be read together to imply that what has been destroyed are not just old-established national industries but also old-established national literatures.<sup>33</sup> That is something hardly imaginable to Goethe only two decades earlier, when he saw in world literature not a product of capitalist destruction, but an epoch whose coming ‘everybody must endeavor to hasten’.

This is how Marx and Engels updated Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* for the world revolutions of 1848. In that year, however, Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* entered not only the *Communist manifesto*, but also, much less famously, the title of Johannes Scherr’s three-volume anthology of literature worldwide, *Bildersaal der Weltliteratur* (*Gallery of world literature*). Written ‘in a time that had no time for the beautiful because it was completely used up by half-revolutions and full-reactions’, as Scherr would note in 1885 to introduce the third edition,<sup>34</sup> this 1848–49 anthology was, according to Scherr’s 1869 introduction to the second edition, ‘the first attempt to materialize a thought which Goethe was the first to name – “world literature” (“Weltliteratur”)’.<sup>35</sup>

This rash attribution of the term to Goethe was repeated exactly thirty years later, in 1899, by Georg Brandes, the Danish critic who famously introduced Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche to Europe. As if to measure the global impact of Scherr’s ‘half-revolutions and full-reactions’ from half a century back, Brandes closed his German-language essay on *Weltliteratur* by warning against the ‘jealous national sentiment’ that had caused Goethean cosmopolitanism ‘to recede almost everywhere’<sup>36</sup> – a fear previously expressed in quite similar terms (the ‘unhealthy

<sup>32</sup>Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The communist manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore, London: Verso, 1998, p. 39.

<sup>33</sup>Romain Lecler also cites Marx and Engels’ paragraph in this issue, suggesting no less than a profound analogy between it and some of the key definitions of the current stage of globalization. See Romain Lecler, ‘What makes globalization really new? Sociological views on our current globalization’, p. 358.

<sup>34</sup>Johannes Scherr, *Bildersaal der Weltliteratur: dritte, neu bearbeitete und stark vermehrte Auflage: erster Band*, Stuttgart: Kröner, 1885, p. 5 (my translation).

<sup>35</sup>Johannes Scherr, *Bildersaal der Weltliteratur: zweite, umgearbeitete, vervollständigte und bis zur Gegenwart fortgeführte Auflage: erster Band*, Stuttgart: Kröner, 1869, p. 5 (my translation).

<sup>36</sup>Georg Brandes, ‘World literature (1899)’, trans. Haun Saussy, in David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi, eds., *The Princeton sourcebook in comparative literature: from the European Enlightenment to the global present*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 66.



“national principle”) by Meltzl in his introduction to the first issue of the first journal of comparative literature, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1877–88).<sup>37</sup>

Precisely twenty years after Brandes’ ‘Weltliteratur’, writing in the aftermath of a world war and a communist revolution, Maxim Gorky in effect measured the outcome of Brandes’ worldwide ‘jealous national sentiment’ in his own brief yet strategic essay on world literature. The essay introduced the plan to translate 1,500 masterpieces of world literature written between the French and Russian revolutions, a centrally planned project whose scope the founder of socialist realism praised as ‘the first and sole one in Europe’:

The honour of realising such a scheme belongs entirely to the creative powers of the Russian Revolution, that same Revolution which is considered by its enemies as an ‘Outbreak of Barbarians’. . . .

After the criminal, accursed slaughter so shamefully brought about by people intoxicated with passionate worship of the Yellow Fiend – Gold, . . . it is opportune to give a wide illustration of spiritual creative power, that – in the midst of this festival of the Beast and Devil – people should remember . . . all that the world has been taught by Talent and by Genius.<sup>38</sup>

Another thirty years later, in 1949, in the aftermath of yet another world war and yet another communist revolution, that revolution entrusted its central Literary Research Institute to Zheng Zhenduo, who had helped start the May Fourth Movement in Beijing the year that Gorky’s brief essay appeared and who soon went on to use another Gorky piece as the main reference of his own essay on world literature.<sup>39</sup>

Still in 1949 but back in Goethe’s Germany, Ernst Robert Curtius said the following about Goethe’s legacy in a talk that he later appended to *European literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, the English edition of his classic work of post-war comparative literature from 1948:

The middle of the eighteenth century witnessed not only the beginnings of that great economic change which is termed the Industrial Revolution. It saw also the first powerful revolt against cultural tradition, which is marked by Rousseau. This tradition was restated by the universal genius of Goethe. But it was restated for the last time. . . . Viewed in the light of the present, he seems to be nearer to Dante and to Shakespeare than to us. He is the last link of that golden chain.<sup>40</sup>

Three years before Curtius’ talk, his compatriot Fritz Strich published a book on Goethe and *Weltliteratur*. In his ‘Preface’, Strich traced the conception of his pioneering study back to a series of lectures he had given in London immediately after the First World War with the aim to use ‘his

<sup>37</sup>Hugo Meltzl, ‘Present tasks of comparative literature (1877)’, trans. Hans-Joachim Schulz and Phillip H. Rhein, in Damrosch, Melas, and Buthelezi, *Princeton sourcebook*, p. 46.

<sup>38</sup>Maxim Gorky, ‘World’s literature’, in *Katalog izdatel’stva ‘Vsemirnaya literatura’ pri Narodnom komissariate po prosveshcheniyu: vstupil’naya stat’ya M. Gor’kogo / Catalogue des éditions de la ‘Littérature mondiale’ paraissant sous le patronnage du Commissariat de l’instruction publique: préface de M. Gorky*, St Petersburg: Vsemirnaya literatura, 1919, pp. 21–2 (English translation in original publication).

<sup>39</sup>Zheng Zhenduo, ‘A view on the unification of literature (1922)’, trans. Guangchen Chen, in Damrosch, *World literature in theory*, pp. 58–67.

<sup>40</sup>Ernst Robert Curtius, *European literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013, p. 589.

special knowledge in the cause of better international understanding'.<sup>41</sup> This cause seemed all but lost by 1932, when Strich gave a lecture in Weimar on the centenary of Goethe's death, as 'even then, even in Weimar, ominous signs were to be seen' of the catastrophe that soon thereafter 'broke upon the world' and 'Everything that Goethe had proclaimed as the aim of world literature fell in ruins; and it was his own people that had brought this upon the human Race!' After that it seemed to Strich 'pointless to attempt to drown the discords and the thunder of the cannon with Goethe's voice', until the end of the Second World War brought about 'a moment in world history when everything [could] be lost or everything won'.<sup>42</sup> At that point he decided, nonetheless, to publish a book on Goethe that 'deals exclusively with matters of scholarship and history, and yet is not intended to be a work of scholarship for its own sake',<sup>43</sup> or, as he would say in 1957 to introduce the second edition of the book, 'a strictly scholarly work in itself' to which he wanted to give 'a mediatory, reconciliatory purpose in a horribly torn time and world'.<sup>44</sup>

Three years after Curtius' talk, his farewell to Goethe's age was echoed by Erich Auerbach, the author of yet another German classic of post-war comparative literature studies, the 1946 book *Mimesis*. In his 1952 essay on the philology of *Weltliteratur*, Auerbach assessed the post-war conjuncture as one of standardization and went on to say that

this contemporary situation is not what Goethe had in mind. For he gladly avoided thoughts about what later history has made inevitable. . . . By the example and the stimulation of his work Goethe himself . . . contributed decisively to the development of historicism and to the philological research that was generated out of it. And already in our own time a world is emerging for which this sense no longer has much practical significance.<sup>45</sup>

In Auerbach's age of standardization, the *Weltliteratur* of Scherr, Meltzl, Brandes, Curtius, Strich, and even Auerbach himself had to make way for the world literature of North American comparative literature departments.<sup>46</sup> It is no surprise, then, that even Harold Bloom, who to this day stubbornly defends the kind of western Eurocentric humanism embodied by Auerbach or Curtius, felt the need to distance his epoch from Goethe's in his own classic comparative study, the 1994 tome *The Western canon*, in which he stated that, within that canon, 'Goethe now seems the least available to our sensibility', and suggested that 'this distance has little to do with how badly his poetry translates into English', insofar as 'a poet and wisdom writer who is his language's equivalent of Dante can transcend inadequate translation but not changes in life and literature that render his central attitudes so remote from us as to seem archaic'.<sup>47</sup>

### From world literature to world-literature

As mentioned above, the Spring of Nations in 1848 was the first of two 'world revolutions' according to Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein. May '68 was the other one. Just as 1848 was a failed but world-scale return to the French Revolution, so too 1968 was a failed but world-scale return to the Russian Revolution; and just as 1848 succeeded in institutionalizing the original Left as a rehearsal for the Russian Revolution, so too 1968 managed to institutionalize the New Left as a rehearsal for

<sup>41</sup>Strich, *Goethe and world literature*, p. vii.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. viii.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. viii–ix.

<sup>44</sup>Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*, Bern: Francke Verlag, 1957, p. 9 (my translation).

<sup>45</sup>Erich Auerbach, 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*', trans. Maire and Edward Said, *Centennial Review*, 13, 1, 1969, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup>Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel notes in this issue how, in Auerbach's time, his kind of understanding of *Weltliteratur* found a way both into North American literary departments and into French state policies of art history. See Joyeux-Prunel, 'Art history and the global'.

<sup>47</sup>Harold Bloom, *The Western canon: the books and school of the ages*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1994, p. 203.

the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>48</sup> Wallerstein, the surviving co-author of this thesis from 1989, reiterated his position on May 1968 as recently as 2010, when he wrote that the ‘Revolutionaries . . . attacked the role of the Soviet Union, which they saw as a collusive participant in US hegemony.’<sup>49</sup>

This kind of 1968 critique of the Warsaw Pact as well as of NATO is preserved both in content and in style in a 1974 book written by René Etiemble against the Eurocentrism of ‘a Europe flouted, crossed out by the imperial greediness of the Pentagon in its alliance with the Russians’.<sup>50</sup> This echo of May ’68 in a comparative literature book from 1974 is even more remarkable given the fact that Etiemble was no 1968er; quite the contrary: introducing the third edition in 1975, the lapsed Maoist from the Sorbonne even accused the ‘intellectual Left’ of denying ‘the biological nature of the human species’ and thus somehow ‘preparing the ground for Hitler’s babies’.<sup>51</sup> It was then not as a leftist but as a much more abstract humanist that Etiemble placed at the beginning of the book, even before the first numbered section, his critique of the Eurocentrism of *Weltliteratur*, a paper that he had already presented at the International Comparative Literature Association in 1964 and published in the proceedings in 1966,<sup>52</sup> the year that the revolution of 1968 actually started according to Wallerstein.<sup>53</sup>

Writing in 1992 with Arrighi and Hopkins, Wallerstein also saw 1968 as ‘the harbinger of 1989’, the year that the fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized the spread of post-industrialization from the capitalist West to the socialist East.<sup>54</sup> This spread of capitalism entered discussions about literature and globalization in 1986, when Fredric Jameson accompanied his famous critique of postmodernism with an essay pleading, ‘In these last years of the century’, for ‘the reinvention . . . of what Goethe long ago theorized as “world literature”’.<sup>55</sup> For the pioneering Marxist critic of Western postmodernism this demanded ‘some specific engagement with the question of third-world literature’,<sup>56</sup> which he went on to conceptualize as the literature of national allegories, narratives whose protagonists incarnate the histories of their respective nations. Jameson saw the national allegory as a politically emancipatory narrative device regrettably absent from ‘First World’ postmodernism. Aijaz Ahmad, reading his admired Western Marxist colleague as ‘a Pakistani citizen’ writing ‘poetry in Urdu’, disagreed.<sup>57</sup> While saluting Jameson’s plea ‘that the teaching of literature in the US academy be informed by a sense not only of “western” literature but of “world literature”’,<sup>58</sup> Ahmad argued that ‘Third World’ nationalism, even in a version less essentialist than Jameson’s, cannot replace genuine socialism in the struggle against imperialism. Mainstream critics of the time were quick to appropriate this Marxist critique of a fellow Marxist in their effort to reject Marxism *tout court*, which by 1992 Ahmad felt the need to protest in his introduction to the book that included his essay.<sup>59</sup>

At least as far as Jameson’s initial Goethean motivation is concerned, however, *Weltliteratur* did make a comeback. A year after his essay on ‘Third World’ literature, when, as Theo D’haen

<sup>48</sup>See Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein, ‘1968: the great rehearsal’, pp. 19–30; and Giovanni Arrighi, Terence K. Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein, ‘1989, the continuation of 1968’, *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 15, 2, 1992, pp. 221–42.

<sup>49</sup>Immanuel Wallerstein, ‘Structural crises’, *New Left Review*, 62, 2010, p. 136.

<sup>50</sup>Etiemble, *Essais de littérature (vraiment) générale*, p. 13 (my translation).

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup>René Etiemble, ‘Faut-il réviser la notion de Weltliteratur?’, in François Jost, ed., *Actes du IVe Congrès de l’Association internationale de la littérature comparée / Proceedings of the IVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, 2 vols., The Hague: Mouton, 1966, vol. 1, p. 5–16; for the English translation, see Etiemble, ‘Do we have to revise?’, pp. 93–103.

<sup>53</sup>See Wallerstein, ‘Structural crises’, p. 135.

<sup>54</sup>Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein, ‘1989, the continuation of 1968’, p. 221.

<sup>55</sup>Fredric Jameson, ‘Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism’, *Social Text*, 15, 1986, p. 68.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup>Aijaz Ahmad, ‘Jameson’s rhetoric of Otherness and the “national allegory”’, *Social Text*, 17, 1987, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup>See Aijaz Ahmad, *In theory: classes, nations, literatures*, London: Verso, 1992, pp. 10–11.

notes, ‘comparative literature’ was at an absolute low in the United States’,<sup>60</sup> Sarah Lawall organized a summer school on teaching world literature in the US and beyond, which in 1994 resulted in the edited collection *Reading world literature*.<sup>61</sup> But Jameson might very well be even more interested to see a translation of a Slovak-language book published in 1993 (the birthyear of the Slovak Republic) by Dionýz Ďurišin.<sup>62</sup> Ďurišin was a former student of Jan Mukařovský, the famous proponent of the Prague Linguistic Circle whom Etiemble referenced sympathetically back in 1964 for saying that, ‘for the first time in the history of human culture, we now witness the birth of a truly universal literature’ born from the October Revolution, a literature that finally condemns ‘the subordination of the overwhelming majority of national literatures to that of some (so-called) *great literatures*’.<sup>63</sup>

Lawall did mention Jameson’s ‘Third World’ literature in her collection, but his essay was not, of course, the main reason for the comeback of *Weltliteratur*. As D’haen continues, ‘A true comeback for world literature . . . in the United States only happened with 9/11 and its aftermath, waking Americans up to a wider and multilingual world’.<sup>64</sup> And, whereas the US is obviously not the whole world, it is a good start as far as a global history of thinking global literature is concerned.

We can even narrow the US itself down to just one Ivy League literary department. During the semesters leading to Y2K (to use an abbreviation that, unlike that of 9/11, was expected in advance, designating even mere expectation of a non-event, the coming of the year 2000), Columbia’s Department of English and Comparative Literature was in the middle of ‘re-thinking its structure’,<sup>65</sup> which led Franco Moretti, a faculty member at the time, to write his ‘Conjectures on world literature’ for the inaugural issue of the new series of the New Left’s main scholarly outlet. The immediate global influence of that essay is easily demonstrated by the rejoinder, ‘More conjectures’, that Moretti had to give to numerous critiques only three years later. But some of the other indirect results of that departmental debate at Columbia include Gayatri Spivak’s Welles Library Lectures in 2000, published as *Death of a discipline* in 2003; David Damrosch’s book *What is world literature?* from the same year; and Edward Said’s inclusion in his Harvard book series of Pascale Casanova’s 1999 study *La république mondiale des lettres*, translated as *The world republic of letters* in 2004, the year of the publication of Said’s own book on literature and globalization after 9/11.<sup>66</sup>

If we start with this last book (‘the last completed book he wrote’<sup>67</sup>), *Humanism and democratic criticism* is Said’s defence of Auerbachian historicist philological humanism fifty years after the first English-language edition of Auerbach’s *Mimesis* and ‘more than ten years after the end of the Cold War, as the global economy is going through major transformations, and a new cultural landscape seems to be emerging, almost beyond the precedents of our experiences to date’.<sup>68</sup> Based on lectures given at Columbia in 2000 and then revised at Cambridge in 2003, the book

<sup>60</sup>Theo D’haen, *The Routledge concise history of world literature*, London: Routledge, 2011, p. 68.

<sup>61</sup>See Sarah Lawall, ed., *Reading world literature: theory, history, practice*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994.

<sup>62</sup>See Dionýz Ďurišin, *Čo je svetová literatúra?*, Bratislava: Obzor, 1992; see also Dionýz Ďurišin, ‘World literature as a target literary-historical category’, *Slovak Review*, 2, 1, 1993, pp. 7–15.

<sup>63</sup>Quoted in Etiemble, ‘Do we have to revise?’, p. 94.

<sup>64</sup>D’haen, *Routledge concise history of world literature*, p. 68. For the impact of 9/11 on the methodological globalization of art history, see Joyeux-Prunel in this issue, ‘Art history and the global’.

<sup>65</sup>Moretti, *Distant reading*, p. 43.

<sup>66</sup>For an extreme example of how a single academic unit can impact an entire scholarly discipline, see, in this issue, Katja Naumann’s discussion of the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago in ‘Long-term and decentred trajectories of doing history from a global perspective: institutionalization, post-colonial critique, and empiricist approaches, before and after the 1970s’.

<sup>67</sup>Akeel Bilgrami, ‘Foreword’, in Said, *Humanism and democratic criticism*, p. ix.

<sup>68</sup>Said, *Humanism and democratic criticism*, p. 7.

measures, according to Said's 'Preface', the 'changed political atmosphere' that after 9/11 had 'overtaken the United States and, to varying degrees, the rest of the world'.<sup>69</sup>

Casanova, writing a couple of years before 9/11, was less explicit about the global framework of her position of enunciation, even if her book retraces the emergence of the modern, relatively autonomous literary space as a field that, as her conclusion reads, 'may be said to be "international" in the sense that it has been constructed and unified by means of struggles and rivalries among national spaces – to the point that today it covers the entire world'.<sup>70</sup>

Casanova's *La république mondiale des lettres* was 'about to be published'<sup>71</sup> while Moretti was writing his 'Conjectures on world literature', a reminder to his colleagues at Columbia and beyond that 'world literature is not an object' but 'a *problem*, and a problem that asks for a new critical method', namely 'distant reading' as 'a patchwork of other people's research, *without a single direct textual reading* ... where distance ... is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems'.<sup>72</sup> Needless to say, the colleagues were not amused, not least because, as he himself admitted in advance, 'The United States is the country of close reading'.<sup>73</sup> So when he returned in 2003 with 'More conjectures', he tried to explain that the 'Conjectures' of early 2000 had been written 'against the background of the unprecedented possibility that the entire world may be subject to a single centre of power – and a centre which has long exerted an equally unprecedented symbolic hegemony'.<sup>74</sup>

'More conjectures' secured Moretti more critics, and more responses from the existing ones. These included Moretti's by now former colleagues at Columbia, Spivak and Damrosch. Spivak downgraded distant reading to a source of reference tools for, and hence a potential object of critique of, close reading.<sup>75</sup> Her *Death of a discipline* was composed between her Welles Lectures in May 2000 and the final revision in May 2002, at a time when, as her acknowledgements read, 'the discipline of comparative literature in the United States underwent a sea change' as 'Publishing conglomerates ... recognized a market for anthologies of world literature in translation'.<sup>76</sup> It argues for a 'planetary Comparative Literature', a 'new Comparative Literature' that 'will touch the older minorities' but also 'take in its sweep the new postcoloniality of the post-Soviet sector and the special place of Islam in today's breaking world ... a Comparative Literature format – historical and linguistic – possible, for any slice chosen from any of these places, the background filled in by new reference tools on Franco Moretti's model'.<sup>77</sup>

As for Damrosch's 2003 book, *What is world literature?*, it too, 'though not explicitly referring to Moretti',<sup>78</sup> defends the practice of close reading, arguing that 'World literature is not an immense body of material that must somehow, impossibly, be mastered; it is a mode of reading that can be experienced *intensively* with a few works just as effectively as it can be explored *extensively* with a large number'.<sup>79</sup> But there is no critique here of publishing conglomerates or any other contemporary global phenomenon. Whereas Spivak and Said positioned themselves in the post-9/11 discussion about world literature as one would expect from pioneering theorists of postcolonial literature, Damrosch (the only participant in the debate at Columbia to be born

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>70</sup>Casanova, *World republic of letters*, p. 351.

<sup>71</sup>Moretti, *Distant reading*, p. 43.

<sup>72</sup>Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on world literature', *New Left Review*, 1, 2000, pp. 55, 57, emphasis in original.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>74</sup>Moretti, 'More conjectures', p. 81.

<sup>75</sup>See Spivak, *Death of a discipline*, pp. 107–9, n. 1.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>78</sup>Eric Hayot, 'World literature and globalization', in D'haen, Damrosch, and Kadir, *Routledge companion to world literature*, p. 226.

<sup>79</sup>Damrosch, *What is world literature?*, p. 299, emphasis in original.

and raised in the United States) chose to try to improve institutions such as publishing conglomerates. He went on to edit or co-edit anthologies of world literature for Longman, HarperCollins, and Pearson Longman; companions on the topic for the Modern Language Association, Peking University Press, Princeton University Press, Routledge, and Wiley Blackwell; an academic book series for Metzler; and an academic journal for Brill. He also founded an institute of world literature for Harvard, his new employer.

A year after the outbreak of the Great Recession, and as if to conclude the series of replies to Moretti that the *New Left Review* published following the publication of Moretti's own 'Conjectures', Alexander Beecroft de-hyphenated Moretti's (and also Casanova's) literary world-system, literature as a quasi-economic system that forms a world of its own. He de-hyphenated world-literature in order to sketch literature not as a world but as a part of the world, thus historicizing what Moretti and Casanova had described and criticized as the literature of the bourgeois world.<sup>80</sup> He tackled Casanova and Moretti by tackling their common source, Fernand Braudel, the leader of the second, mid-century generation of the *Annales* school of social history. Beecroft saw Braudel's legacy in two major points shared by Casanova and Moretti: first, world literature is not all the literature in the world, but a world of its own; and second, this world is as asymmetrical as the world of economy. Beecroft wanted to conceptualize the entire literature of the world, as well as to show that the asymmetry of modern world literature is just the latest feature of world literature. To this end, he looked both beyond literature-as-a-world and beyond literature-as-a-system.

As a result, however, six concepts had to be proposed instead of a single one, and the very notion of literature had to be projected onto times and places that simply did not have a clear-cut concept of literature. In this way, Casanova's and Moretti's world-literature, literature as a field with relative autonomy, covers only the last two of the six modes of world literature that Beecroft described: the national (which 'is now clearly inadequate') and the global ('as it now exists in an age of proliferating media'),<sup>81</sup> which Beecroft saw as being preceded by the epichoric (in a local language), the panchoric (in a regional language), the cosmopolitan (in a literary language), and the vernacular (in a proto-national language).

Beecroft was not the only one to read Casanova's millennial account of global literature together with Moretti's. The same synoptic reading was offered by most of the people mentioned above who, like Beecroft, contributed influential essays on global literature around 2008 that have now all been developed into no less important books.<sup>82</sup> However, focused as it was on Braudelian economic historiography as the common source of the world-systems analysis in Moretti's 'Conjectures' and of the structuralist sociology in Casanova's *The world republic of letters*, Beecroft's reading was perhaps more justified than many other attempts, where Casanova and Moretti were 'unfairly lumped together' owing to 'the accidents of publishing history', as Eric Hayot noted in his own piece on world literature and globalization.<sup>83</sup>

In that essay, Hayot's note is to be read as a self-reflexive apology for his own synoptic reading of Casanova and Moretti. But if this is so, Hayot would do well to extend his apology to include his equally commonplace move to Damrosch's notion of global literature as a possible alternative to both Casanova's and Moretti's.<sup>84</sup> Discernible even in such recent publications with textbook ambitions as *Globalization and literature* and *Literary studies in reconstruction*,<sup>85</sup> this gesture usually aims to supplement the global perspective of Casanova and Moretti with Damrosch's much less

<sup>80</sup>Beecroft, 'World literature without a hyphen', pp. 87–91.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>82</sup>Besides Beecroft and Hayot, see especially Cheah, *What is a world?*, pp. 31–7; Ganguly, *This thing called the world*, pp. 22, 78; Mufti, *Forget English!*, pp. 32–4; and Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and uneven development*, pp. 6–10.

<sup>83</sup>Hayot, 'World literature and globalization', p. 225.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>85</sup>See Suman Gupta, *Globalization and literature*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009, pp. 142–5; and Marko Juvan, *Literary studies in reconstruction: an introduction to literature*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 73–86.

theoretical insistence that the vast scope of world literature simply prevents all systematization of that same world literature.<sup>86</sup>

A rare exception where Casanova and Moretti are read synoptically to counter Damrosch rather than endorsing him is the work of the Warwick Research Collective. Conceptualized in a time when, in their own words, ‘the coherence of the disciplinary object of study itself is being challenged ‘everywhere’,<sup>87</sup> their world-literature is a world arising out of and registering the combined and uneven development of the capitalist world-system – a Trotskyist theory that Damrosch was quick to reject by noting that English translations comprise the only textual sources of these ‘materialist critics without diacritics’.<sup>88</sup>

### From world-literature to *littérature-monde*

Finally, the debate triggered in 2000 by Moretti’s ‘Conjectures’ yielded a book of theory and a book of history, both published on the same day in 2013, as Moretti would note in interviews: his books *Distant reading* and *The bourgeois*.<sup>89</sup> What Moretti did not mention is that, on the same day, the same publishing house (the one launched by the *New Left Review*) also put out Apter’s book *Against world literature*, a volume in which Moretti’s world-literature is not merely de-hyphenated but more or less crossed out.<sup>90</sup>

In the decade between her 2003 essay on ‘Global *translatio*’ and her 2013 book, *Against world literature*, Apter suggested transnational philology as a counterweight to Moretti, before going on to defend him in her 2008 piece ‘Untranslatables’ – only to denounce him again in the book.<sup>91</sup> So, between Moretti’s ‘Conjectures on world literature’ and Apter’s *Against world literature*, critique of mainstream close readings of national masterpieces itself became the object of critique; Moretti’s critique of nationalist literary studies became the object of Apter’s critique. Needless to say, Apter’s critique of Moretti’s critique of methodological nationalism is not the same as methodological nationalism: Apter criticized not Moretti’s critique *per se*, but that which his critique ultimately defends, namely world literature. Far from defending nationalism, she criticized world literature as something that could be grasped by Moretti’s distant reading and by digital humanities in general. This, in a way, brings us all the way back to the *Communist manifesto*, where, as we have seen, world literature is simply a final link in a long chain of processes that are precisely criticized. Indeed, Apter does at one point translate Marx and Engels’ *Weltliteratur* as ‘*verkehrte Weltliteratur*, or screwed-up literature’.<sup>92</sup> In this sense, and in this translation, Apter’s *Against world literature* could be read not only as an early critique of the digital turn in literary studies, but also as the book-length unpacking of Marx and Engels’ famous punchline from the beginning of world literature criticism.

*The communist manifesto* was written in the months preceding the Spring of Nations of 1848. In the months preceding the Great Recession of 2008, world literature appeared in a manifesto once again, and even in a particular political campaign. But whereas the manifesto might appeal to fans of Marx and Engels’ contribution to the genre, the same cannot be said of the political campaign that reacted to it, namely the presidential campaign of Nicolas Sarkozy. Sarkozy, the head of

<sup>86</sup>Damrosch, *What is world literature?*, pp. 4–6, 281.

<sup>87</sup>Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and uneven development*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>88</sup>David Damrosch *et al.*, ‘First responses’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 53, 3, 2016, p. 528.

<sup>89</sup>See, for instance, Melissa Dinsman, ‘The digital in the humanities: an interview with Franco Moretti’, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2 March 2016, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-digital-in-the-humanities-an-interview-with-franco-moretti/> (consulted 4 April 2018); and Arno Widmann, ‘Vom Lesen ohne zu lesen: Interview Franco Moretti’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 5 February 2015, <https://www.fr.de/kultur/literatur/lesen-ohne-lesen-11688754.html> (consulted 27 June 2019).

<sup>90</sup>Apter, *Against world literature*, pp. 45–56.

<sup>91</sup>See, respectively, Apter, ‘Global *translatio*’, pp. 255–6, 280–1; Apter, ‘Untranslatables’, pp. 590–7; and Apter, *Against world literature*, pp. 52–6.

<sup>92</sup>Apter, *Against world literature*, p. 18.

the French right-wing party Union pour un mouvement populaire (Union for a Popular Movement), published in March 2007 a critique of a six-day-old manifesto of French literature as a global literature. Titled 'Pour une "littérature-monde" en français' ('Towards a "world-literature" in French'), the manifesto was a joint effort by forty-four distinguished writers to counter the tradition of francophone literature administered from Paris with the idea of a decentralized and decolonized literature in French:

in autumn 2006, five of the seven French literary prizes . . . were awarded to foreign-born writers. A random coincidence, among publishers' fall catalogs, uniquely concentrating talent from the 'peripheries', a random detour before the channel returns to the riverbed? A Copernican revolution, rather, in our opinion. Copernican because it reveals what the literary milieu already knew without admitting it: the center, from which supposedly radiated a franco-French literature, is no longer the center. Until now, the center, albeit less and less frequently, had this absorptive capacity that forced authors who came from elsewhere to rid themselves of their foreign trappings before melting in the crucible of the French language and its national history: the center, these fall prizes tell us, is henceforth everywhere, at the four corners of the world. The result? The end of 'francophone' literature – and the birth of a world literature in French.

. . .

Let's be clear: the emergence of a consciously affirmed, transnational world-literature in the French language, open to the world, signs the death certificate of so-called francophone literature. No one speaks or writes 'francophone.' Francophone literature is a light from a dying star. How could the world be concerned with the language of a virtual country? Yet it was the world that invited itself to the fall prize banquets, and we now understand that it was time for a revolution.<sup>93</sup>

The interest in this short piece was such that it took the organizers of the manifesto, Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud, no more than two months to edit and publish a book-length version.<sup>94</sup> By then, however, Sarkozy was already President of France.

Sarkozy titled his swift response 'Pour une francophonie vivante et populaire' ('For a living and popular francophonie'), alluding to the titles of both the manifesto and his own party. 'La Francophonie isn't dead', he declared at the outset, adding that 'the decline of French over against English is not an inevitability' as long as France can persuade the literary stars born in her former colonies but educated in Paris not to exile themselves to the United States.<sup>95</sup> He was ready to admit that 'we must do away with a Jacobean idea of a francophonie that crushes and suppresses: it is pointless to oppose the French language to "the languages of France." How can we claim our cultural distinctiveness over against English and not admit it for our own regional cultures, threatened to disappear?' He concluded, 'From the local to the global, francophonie happily crosses all borders, but without always knowing where she's going. We have to view this as a means for the French language to stand up to English without embarrassment.'<sup>96</sup>

If the manifesto had let writers writing in French outside France into the sphere of world literature as long as they represented French, then Sarkozy's sudden and unexpected reply left them with a hope that they would be able to resist the lure of the New World. In either case – as contributors to the 'world republic of letters' whose place of residence is irrelevant, or as contributors to francophonie residing anywhere as long as it is within the former French empire – it seems that people writing in French outside France ought to contribute to literature in French.

<sup>93</sup>Toward a "world-literature" in French', trans. Daniel Simon, *World literature today*, 83, 2, 2009, pp. 54, 56.

<sup>94</sup>Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud, eds., *Pour une littérature-monde*, Paris: Gallimard, 2007.

<sup>95</sup>Nicolas Sarkozy, 'For a living and popular francophonie (2007)', trans. Delia Ungureanu, in Damrosch, *World literature in theory*, pp. 276, 277.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 277.



In an introductory note to the English translation of Sarkozy's critique, Damrosch points out that 'His response to the manifesto probably represents the first occasion when theories of world literature have figured in a presidential campaign'.<sup>97</sup> This may or may not seem strange, given that traffic in the opposite direction (from ideas about world literature to concerns about presidents) was established no less than 180 years earlier, with Goethe's hopes that the devastation wrought by the French president-turned-emperor Napoleon would be healed by the age of world literature.

## Conclusion

The debate about global literature has a history that is itself global. Since the rise of globalization discourse, literary studies have revised the old question of world literature in terms of the global. This globalized world literature is the most debated notion of contemporary literary studies. The debate, however, struggles to find common ground either in its current state or in its long history. Such common ground is arguably to be sought in the global character of the debate itself. If we focus on the global dimension of the debate's form as well as content, and context as well as text, we can gradually provide a much-needed starting point to a theory of global literature that will finally be able to satisfy the most heated debate in literary studies today.

As we have seen, the conceptual differences between the most influential approaches to the global dimension of literature concern such key issues of literary studies in general as those of value, geography, politics, reading, translation, and potential. Is literature at the level of the globe something to be welcomed in the name of Goethe, or something to be suspicious of along the lines of Marx and Engels? Does it have a European home as in Goethe's rendition, or is it instead a chance to tackle Eurocentrism and follow the tradition inaugurated by critics like Etiemble? Can it be developed both from Auerbach, whom Spitzer gave refuge from the Nazis, and from Curtius, who took over the chair that Spitzer himself had to abandon? Does global literature yield only to Derridean close reading or only to Morettian distant reading? Does it thrive only in translation, as Etiemble thought, or only in the original, as Meltzl insisted? Finally, do we want it or not?

As stark as these divergencies may be, none of them seems more persistent than the one between *Weltliteratur* as the texts of the world, *littérature-monde* as the world of texts, and world literature as either one or the other, depending on whether it is hyphenated or not. In less elegant terms, the difference here is the one between world literature as the ultimate horizon of Auerbachian comparative literature studies (*Weltliteratur*), world literature as the symbolic dimension of Braudelian *longue durée* history of the world market (*littérature-monde*), and world literature as the aesthetic supplement to either Saidian post-Auerbachian postcolonial theory (world literature) or Wallersteinian post-Braudelian world-systems theory (world-literature).

And, as Auerbach is read by Said, and Braudel is followed by Wallerstein, the difference between the unhyphenated world (but also *Welt*) and the hyphenated world- (as well as *-monde*) no longer pertains only to literature but also, for instance, to cinema, art, music, history, sociology, and anthropology. For, as part of the global turn, which is a shift towards the global perspective across the humanities and social sciences, Saidian postcolonial theory and Wallersteinian world-systems analysis (and their respective critiques) have profoundly propelled the rise, not only of world literature studies, but also of world cinema studies, global art history, global musicology, global history, global sociology, and global anthropology.

If one were to further simplify the triad of *Weltliteratur*, *littérature-monde*, and world(-)literature into an opposition, one could speak of the distance between theories that see in world literature an empirical object made up of texts (*Weltliteratur*, world literature) and theories that approach world literature as an object of knowledge made up of one or more approaches to texts

<sup>97</sup>David Damrosch, introduction to Sarkozy, 'For a living and popular francophonie', in Damrosch, *World literature in theory*, p. 276.

(*littérature-monde*, world-literature). This is how the editors of a recent reader of world literature studies chose to simplify matters when they wrote the following:

One crucial difference between the formerly dominant definitions of world literature and more recent attempts to redefine the concept could be summed up as a move from seeing world literature as an *object*, either as a small canon or a vast ocean of texts, to a *paradigm* for approaching texts from, or within, diverse contexts and making connections between them.<sup>98</sup>

The historical peaks of the debate about global literature tend to coincide with those of modern global history, from the bourgeois revolutions, to the two world wars, to the fall of the Berlin Wall, to the global rise of globalization talk itself. This tendency to respond to the global situation even informs many contributions to the debate in very literal ways, adding to them crucial appendices (like Curtius' 1949 essay), prefaces (like those by Strich or Said), introductions (like those by Scherr, Meltzl, Strich, Etiemble, Ahmad, and Apter), acknowledgements (like Spivak's), and conclusions (like Casanova's), or even structuring them from the outset as salon conversations (like those between Goethe and Eckermann), prestigious lectures (Tagore's, Etiemble's, Spivak's, Said's, and more), inaugural essays (like those by Gorky and Moretti), closing paragraphs (as in Brandes and Tagore), or, indeed, political manifestos (from Marx and Engels to Sarkozy). Hence, finally, the global spread of these texts originating from pre-state Germany and the French Fifth Republic, real-socialist Russia and the neoliberal United States, the British Raj and pre-Brexit Britain, the Republic of India and the Slovak Republic, the Austro-Hungarian empire and post-imperial Turkey, the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of China. If this map is not quite global in itself – the whole of Africa is missing, for instance – the ambition of the notion of global literature pursued in these places is – as Africa receives ever more attention the more this pursuit becomes part of the explicitly global turn across the humanities and social sciences.

In Michel Foucault's reading of Immanuel Kant, the Enlightenment brings about a reflection on the present as the present of this reflection, a reflection that, moreover, explicitly perceives itself as the kind of reflection that defines Enlightenment.<sup>99</sup> And in Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of another German commentator on the Enlightenment, namely Goethe, the novel as the literary genre of modernity returns to the dethroning genres of Menippean satire and the Socratic dialogue in order to open up the epic and its enthronement of what Bakhtin, building on Goethe, calls the 'absolute past'.<sup>100</sup> All the disputes between theories of world literature aside, world literature is, first and foremost, this kind of trope used dialogically – setting *Das kommunistische Manifest* in polemical dialogue with *Gespräche mit Goethe*, and 'Pour une littérature-monde en français' with 'Pour une francophonie vivante et populaire' – in order to open up linguistic, aesthetic, and political boundaries between literary texts and thereby offer a reflection on the global present.

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<sup>98</sup>D'haen, Domínguez, and Thomsen, 'Introduction', p. xi, emphasis in original.

<sup>99</sup>Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', trans. Catherine Porter, in Foucault, *The Foucault reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Donald F. Bouchard et al., New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, pp. 37–9.

<sup>100</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp. 13–38.