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WORLDLINESS, WORLDS, AND WORLDING OF LITERATURE

Recommended Citation: Juvan, Marko. “Wordliness, Worlds, And Worlding of Literature”. *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 8.1 (2022). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24193/mjcst.2022.13.01>.

Abstract: Based on Said’s understanding of literature’s worldliness, Hayot’s concept of literary worlds, and Cheah’s interpretation of worlding, the article – itself an example of “traveling theory” (Said) – proposes to treat world literature in a “secular” perspective, i.e., as an asymmetrical world-system that conditions a transcultural and translinguistic semiosis of literary worlds. The literary world-system, which arises from and is dependent on and responsive to the modern world-system of capitalism (see Warwick Research Collective) channels interliterary exchange in a way that is homologous to the economic inequality between the centers, which are capable of accumulating surplus value, and the peripheries, which enable the global dominance of the centers by providing the market, labor, and resources for the goods produced or distributed by the centers.

Keywords: world literature, literary world, worlding, world-system, peripheries.

The Traveling Theory of World Literature and Secular Criticism

The recent boom of the term *world literature* is an example of what is known as “traveling concepts” (Bal) or what Edward Said, years before Mieke Bal, called “the traveling theory” (226–47)¹. According to Said, every theory is “worldly”, i.e., historically circumstantial; thus, regardless of its claim to universality, the theory changes by moving to another place or time. Although transfers can reduce and

¹ The present paper is part of the research program *Studies in Literary History, Literary Theory and Methodology* (P-0024) financed by the Slovenian Research Agency. The last section is adapted from Chapter 7 of my book *Worlding a Peripheral Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), © Author.

institutionalize powerful ideas², Said believes that “no system or theory exhausts the situation out of which it emerges or to which it is transported” (Said 239, 241, 242). The currently growing field that has rediscovered Goethe’s notion of *Weltliteratur* to observe the phenomenon of literature on a global scale (see Tanoukhi) is a disciplinary corollary of globalization (see Gupta 123–48). Since globalization promises the boundless circulation of goods, people, and information regardless of their origin and national borders and at the same time reinforces Western-oriented hegemony, it is not surprising that the traveling theory of world literature has become location-sensitive in the course of its expansion.

Anglo-American academia and the Anglo-American publishing industry present themselves as the dominant originators of the worldwide debate on world literature. Despite their early critique of the male-white bias of the Western canon, world literature studies were unable to eliminate the inertia of Western-oriented normativity, because the Western canon had already materialized in translation policy, anthologies, media adaptations, and high school curricula. Thus, those who study the subject from a peripheral position typically oppose Western cultural hegemony with views that promote the equality and freedom of participants in global literary interaction.

They criticize the most prominent theories of world literature for strengthening the cultural model of modernity with which Western capitalism has conquered other parts of the planet. Besides, they accuse world literature of reproducing Western centrism by privileging global English as the language of translation, globalizing the aesthetic mode of reading, and imposing Eurochronology for the study of global literary history.

In my work *Worlding a Peripheral Literature*, I discuss various tendencies that have emerged as alternatives to the center/periphery model of world literature. They range from the substitution of the concept of world literature by other terms (such as transnationalism or cosmopolitanism), through the pluralization and decentralization of world literature, to the affirmation of the periphery. In my view, the approaches I have listed are reminiscent of Freudian denial in their verbal commitment to the symbolic elimination of global literary inequality. Multicultural

² His case is Lucien Goldmann’s 1955 adaptation of Lukács’s 1923 book *History and Class Consciousness*. Said criticizes Goldmann for having “removed from theory its insurrectionary role” and turned Lukács’s complex argument “into a simple reflection theory” (Said 235, 239).

humanism, textualism, and liberal cosmopolitanism hold the deceptive view that texts move freely and that global significance can be attributed to them regardless of their origin, the pressures of the economic and political system or the mechanisms of the multinational publishing industry (Juvan, *Worlding* 61–80). The Warwick Research Collective also rejects the understanding of world literature as “a ‘level playing field’, a more or less free space, in which texts from around the globe can circulate, intersect and converse with one another”. The Collective stresses that the inequalities of global capitalism provide the framework for interliterary circulation (Deckard et al. 22).

World literature appears ambivalent: on the one hand, it is the hegemonic system that conditions the exchange between unequal literatures, on the other hand, it promises a boundless and polycentric transnational semiosis of literary worlds³. Instead of denying the unequal influence of individual literatures, world literature studies need secularization. It must break away from the residual aesthetic ideology of Romanticism, which evaluates works of art according to their originality. Instead, it should focus on the global conditions of literary production and mediation.

As is well known, Said proposed “secular criticism” as an antidote to the formalist and aestheticist idealism of literary studies from the New Criticism to Deconstruction. In dealing with “local and worldly situations”, he said, secular critique possessed “some acute sense of what political, social, and human values are entailed in the reading, production, and transmission of every text” (Said 26). With the concept of worldliness, Said emphasizes the socio-historical circumstantiality of the literary text as a linguistic product that mediates between the acts of utterance and understanding. According to Said, texts “are worldly, (...) a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted” (4). They are “always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society” (35). For Said, texts are worldly because their apparent aesthetic autonomy and individual imagination reside in the world. Through their mode of production and consumption, literary texts are playgrounds for the historical-cultural forces that animate their context. As such, literary worlds react to the actual world and intervene in it.

³ The idea of world literature oscillates between the restricted and Western-centric concept of the world-system and the expansive, all-inclusive, and non-Eurocentric notion (Hayot, “On Literary Worlds” 129–32).

Said's proposal of secular criticism is a late case of secularization. While in bourgeois society literature, together with aesthetic and nationalist ideologies, played the role of secular religion, the task of critical consciousness is to bring literature back to ordinary life and social realities. This step is crucial in the case of world literature (see, for example, Arac) because of the universalistic, idealistic, aestheticist, and canonical tones that this concept has produced since its beginnings. Certainly, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the first internationally recognized advocate of the term, imagined world literature as a coming era in which the increased transnational exchange of works of art would rejuvenate national literatures, open the universal stage to them, and promote understanding between peoples. Goethe's cosmopolitanism, however, implied a canonicity based on the quasi-universal standards of aesthetic perfection and humanism. Until recently, among the meanings of the expression world literature, the idea of a hypercanon prevailed, consisting of "great books" of humanity, i.e., texts that go beyond their original language, tradition, and epoch and are treated as significant and exemplary throughout the world for decades, centuries, or even millennia. Even Spivak, Apter, Dimock, and others who are currently deconstructing the universality of world literature by unearthing its Western-oriented canonicity are adopting what the Warwick Research Collective calls "a militantly idealist transcendentalism that glories in literature for its civilizational ... capabilities, across ... and, indeed, in defiance of the boundaries ... of any actually existing social order" (Deckard et al. 42).

Wordliness of World Literature

The different views of world literature depend on pre-theoretical meanings of the adjective *world*. First, it denotes universality or canonicity: here, world literature boils down to a world-class repertoire of great books of humankind. Secondly, it refers to the global space, which contains the aggregate of literatures in all human languages. The third use of the adjective *world* emphasizes the global presence of literary works that circulate across national borders and are mainly written or translated in world languages.

In contrast to these pre-theoretical meanings, which are either normative or descriptive, Immanuel Wallerstein, who inspired Moretti's pioneering approach to world literature, defined the concept of the world within a coherent theory. For Wallerstein (*World-Systems Analysis*), the modern world-system is a name for the

capitalist mode of production at the interstate level. Such a system is a world in itself because it is autopoietic and has a specific structure, history, and function⁴. Even though Wallerstein repeatedly stresses that the capitalist economy is a world only if it is defined as an interstate system that does not encompass the entire earth, the system conquers the planet and all areas of humanity. The history of colonialism, imperialism, globalization, and the commodification of intellectual production prove its expansionist tendency⁵. Obviously, the expansionism of the world-system does not stop at literature, neither local nor global.

Thus, secular world literature studies primarily need to recognize that *Weltliteratur* since Goethe has been accompanied by the rise of capitalism and the industrial revolution. Franco Moretti asserts this by distinguishing between pre-modern and modern world literature – the latter has taken the form of a market-based world-system since the eighteenth century (Moretti 134–35). Furthermore, the character of the embedding of literature in the world-system requires a thorough investigation. As Moretti suggested, the literary world-system is reminiscent of the economic world-system in that it is one and unequal: while its centers export globally the forms and themes they have produced, translated, or rewritten, peripheries mainly import such material and combine it with local perspectives and themes (Moretti 43–62, 107–19, 121–35). In contrast to Casanova's (*The World Republic of Letters*) claims about the aesthetic autonomy of interliterary competition in the cultural market, Moretti draws the analogies between the globalized capitalist economy and the transnational literary circulation by emphasizing the dependence of the latter on the former. The Warwick Research Collective goes beyond this analogy and states that world literature is nothing other than “*the literature of the modern capitalist world- system*” (Deckard et al. 159). They argue that capitalism is “the substrate of world-literature”, while modernity constitutes its “subject and form – modernity is both what world- literature indexes or is ‘about’ and what gives world-literature its distinguishing formal characteristics” (159).

The literary world-system thus integrates itself into the globalized capitalist mode of production. At the same time, the works of world literature narrate and

⁴ Capitalism is autopoietic because it maintains itself through economic cycles, the changing forms of capital, and flexible modes of production. Its primary function is a limitless accumulation of capital by the ruling class of dominating economies, while its structure resides on the antagonism between the core countries that appropriate the globally produced surplus value and peripheries or semi-peripheries, which, in turn, figure as markets and resources of raw-material and low-cost labor.

⁵ Thus, it is not only a *world-system* but also “a *world system*” (Deckard et al. 8).

respond to the particular local phenomena imposed by what Fredric Jameson characterizes as “singular modernity” of capitalism as a universal phenomenon⁶. Based on Moretti’s assertion of a single unequal world literary system and Jameson’s singular modernity thesis, the Warwick Research Collective explains the relationship between the economic and esthetic order with Trotsky’s idea of “combined and uneven development”, which involves the contradictory “amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms” (Deckard et al. 17). Evolutionary unevenness is not an accidental feature of world literatures, but the essential tendency of the world-system in its boundless accumulation of surplus value. Because of this systemic drive, the world-system must maintain the contradiction between the developed core economies and the underdeveloped societies on the margins. The seemingly aesthetic difference between modern, original, and influential literatures of global metropolises and archaic, belated, and receptive peripheries thus results from socio-political, economic, and institutional inequality. By exploiting the peripheries, capitalist modernity imposes its advanced modes and relations of production on less developed or even pre-modern societies. Accordingly, the aesthetic forms taken over from the core literatures are combined in the periphery with the asynchronous temporality of native models. For this reason, hybridity can become a place of resistance against cultural hegemony and “enslavement to monoculture” (Deckard et al. 17–22, 49–56).

In response to the sharp criticism of Moretti and Casanova’s opposition between center and periphery, it is important to stress that it does not imply any literary value in the sense of originality or artistic excellence. It certainly happens that innovative forms and themes flow from the peripheries to the centers, while interliterary contacts between peripheries can bypass global metropolises, which in turn are diverse and transient. What makes a particular literary system central, however, is above all its global dominance in the role of the currently most influential producer and mediator of literary texts circulating worldwide. As Moretti, Casanova (*The World*) and the authors of the volume *Institutions of World Literature* (see Helgesson and Vermeulen) explained, the temporary world-systemic dominance of individual literature results from its developed and prosperous publishing infrastructure, a mass of available literary producers and consumers, the international use of its language, and the generally acknowledged prestige of its tradition. Moreover, all these materializations of cultural power through which core

⁶ For more on this, see Juvan, “Peripheral Modernism” 170–82.

literature exports its products result from the conversion of the economic and political forms of capital accumulated in the community where the core literary system resides. As a rule, the communities that are home to world languages and centers of the literary world-system are or were empires. The concentration of capital in the core states of the modern world boosted their economic expansion, accelerated their development, and stimulated innovative breakthroughs in all fields. At the level of cultural production, metropolises thus emerged, the nodal points of global intellectual circulation and social networking. Metropolises spread throughout the world both the art forms they import or remake and the cultural goods they produce from the abundant local resources. Global cities attract cultural producers from peripheral regions and use their artifacts as raw material for the production of aesthetic added value through cultural branding (e.g., claiming priority in the invention of an influential trend).

The literary world system, which results from, depends on, and reacts to the modern world-system of capitalism, channels interliterary exchange in a way that corresponds to the economic inequality between the centers capable of accumulating surplus value and the peripheries that enable the global domination of the centers, by providing the market, labor, and resources for the goods produced or distributed by the centers. Seen in its worldliness, world literature consists of infra- and superstructure⁷. Infrastructure includes the means of literary production, distribution, and consumption. According to the systems theory proposed by Siegfried J. Schmidt, the structure of individual literary systems such as national literature consists of actors (individual, collective, or institutional) and media involved in the actions of production, mediation, reception, and processing of literary texts. The literary world-system, which integrates the individual literatures, intensifies the role of mediation to enable the global dissemination of texts. In addition to translation and the international regulation of copyright, the literary world-system requires the multinational publishing system, which functions as an interface between the economic, linguistic, and literary world order and shapes the position of the author or national literature in the world republic of letters. The superstructure comprises the semiosis of literary texts and the meta-level, which reflects the existence of the literary world-system itself. While Goethe's *Weltliteratur*

⁷ On the complexities of the Marxist base/superstructure opposition see, e.g., Althusser 87–128; Williams 75–82.

marks the beginning of this meta-discourse, its current versions range from the traveling concept of world literature to the notions of global literature, cosmopolitanism, or transnationalism. As I argue elsewhere, the historical moment of Goethe's introduction of the aforementioned meta-discourse and the periods of its boom coincide with the cycles of world capitalism from the industrial revolution to the current crisis of globalization (Juvan, *Worlding* 7, 25–27).

In summary, the literary world-system conditions the transcultural and translingual semiosis of the literary worlds. With its infra- and superstructure, it sets limits to the universality ascribed to the texts of world literature.

Worlds of World Literature

Eric Hayot accuses the theorists of world literature of not having theorized the concept of the world (*On Literary Worlds* 40). In the humanities, theoretical concepts generally presuppose the ordinary meanings of the word. The meanings of the English noun *world* result in four semantic clusters that are relevant to the study of literature. The first is spatial and ontological: it is about the planet Earth with everything that exists on it. The second is social and historical: it refers to communities with a shared experience (e.g., medieval, proletarian, or academic world). The third is conceptual and epistemic: it refers to a specific class of phenomena (e.g., the world of sport, the world of toys, the dream world). Finally, the existential cluster of *world* semantics is about the totality of existence (*Dasein*; e.g., my world). Common to all meanings is the totality of the interconnected entities⁸.

Consequently, the concept of the world can refer to the broadest area of existence of literature, its environment – as if literatures were species that populate the planet. Such an understanding informs Alexander Beecroft's recent "ecology of world literature", which includes the state of language development, geography, population, political structure, economy, or religion. Beecroft's approach shows that the spatial aspects of the concept of the world are closely related to the socio-historical ones. As a communicative phenomenon, literature establishes a virtual community. In the case of national literature, we are used to talking about the imagined communities of nations. Accordingly, world literature, with its cosmopolitan horizon, should establish the imagined community of humanity.

⁸ As an adjective, *world* means not only world-wide spatial extension but also universally recognized status or quality; both meanings pertain to literature. See above.

Furthermore, literary discourse also constitutes a world of its own in the epistemic sense of the term. It figures as a coherent field of phenomena guided by quasi-autonomous principles. In her essay “Literature as a World”, Pascale Casanova transforms the epistemic metaphor into a theoretical concept that aims to bridge the gap between the intrinsic (formalist) and extrinsic (socio-historical) approaches to literary texts. She postulates the existence of a

mediating space ... between literature and the world: a parallel territory, relatively autonomous from the political domain, and dedicated as a result to questions, debates, inventions of a specifically literary nature. Here, struggles of all sorts – political, social, national, gender, ethnic – come to be refracted, diluted, deformed or transformed according to a literary logic, and in literary forms (Casanova, “Literature” 71–72).

The concept of literature as a world invites us to rethink literature in any particular language as linked to other literatures on the continent and participating in the global spread of themes and forms. However, Casanova does not answer the question of why “world literary space” is only “*relatively* independent of political and linguistic borders” (Casanova, “Literature” 72; emphasis added). Literature may have “its own laws, its own history, its specific revolts and revolutions” and “a market where non-market values are traded” (72), but, as the previous sections have shown, this world is embedded in the capitalist mode of production.

The textual world, as discussed in text linguistics and the theory of possible worlds, is another concept derived from epistemic and existential meanings of the noun *world*. Constituted by the enunciative perspective of a coherent sequence of utterances, textual worlds are verbal representations of a spatio-temporal unity of interdependent entities. By recalling models of extra-textual worlds, entities of the text world seem to exist, change, or act as a whole in front of their virtual observer. They are either in the information focus of the text or are reduced to the background circumstantials⁹. Represented worlds are inseparable from linguistic forms such as narration, description, or dialogue. They are elaborate versions of possible worlds, whose possibility we, in turn, measure against available models of the actual world.

In his book *On Literary Worlds*, Eric Hayot develops the concept of the literary or aesthetic world, which always functions in correlation with the actual

⁹ Hayot terms the foreground/background ratio “the aesthetic amplitude” (*On Literary* 55–60).

world or, more precisely, the idea of the real world. According to Hayot, the aesthetic world is

the *diegetic totality* constituted by the sum of all aspects of a single text or work-part, constellated into a structure or system that amounts to a whole. Such a diegetic unity need not be diegetic in a purely conventional sense ... It is enough that this unity emerges from the interior representational content of the work and that it thus belongs as a *formal concept* most properly to the arrangement of the work's content, of which it is the formal expression. Aesthetic worlds, no matter how they form themselves, are among other things always a relation to and theory of the lived world, whether as largely preconscious normative construct, a rearticulation, or even an active refusal of the world-norms of their age (Hayot, *On Literary* 44–45).

The question arises on how literary worlds evoke the planetary social space and the world of literature. Texts such as Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* depict distant cities, exotic landscapes, and long-distance traffic routes. They narrate about foreign places and peoples or focus on travel and border crossings, thus suggesting wide horizons. On the other hand, writers can connect representations of their immediate cultural environment with global networks, what Hayot calls "connectedness", i.e., "the degree to which structures ... in the diegesis (protagonist, setting, and so on) relate to exteriors or interiors that swathe or puncture them" (Hayot, *On Literary* 75). To this end, text worlds feature motives of migrants, imported goods, communication, and mental spaces of memory or imagination. They can also punctuate their discourse with traces of the global ensemble of languages (e.g., Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*).

Birgit Neumann has recently underlined the connectivity of text worlds that are considered to belong to world literature. She argues that "worlds of world literature (...) translate between transcultural connectivity and topographical singularity, between the particular and the cosmopolitan" (Neumann 241–42). She lists contemporary Anglophone literary texts in which transcultural relativity collides with local situatedness, such as Samuel Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners*, published in 1956. Neumann points out that Selvon's "London is remeasured on a planetary scale, which spans the distance to the Caribbean islands ... [It] brings together a multiplicity of stories of its immigrant characters" (247).

While Selvon projects global spaces and languages onto a Western metropolis, the lyrical poetry of the Slovenian poet Srečko Kosovel (1904–26) interweaves human planetarity with a place that is considered peripheral. Nevertheless, Kosovel was interested in dealing with global literary-artistic and political conflicts. In addition to his native space, his poetry internalized chronotopes of the emerging crisis of capitalism that spanned India, Russia, the Balkans, and America. Using fragments of quotations from politics, science, art, and business, Kosovel’s literary worlds mix the local sense of place with global scenes marked by the proximity of the October Revolution, the rise of totalitarianism, and the crisis of the capitalist democratic order.

Only in poetic fiction does Kosovel’s literary world transcend the periphery in which the poet was trapped. His imagined cosmopolitan horizon takes shape through the information that Kosovel draws from locally available media. Each node connected to the global media circuit can provide a valve for processing current information. Kosovel visited libraries, where he studied the available coverage of the European avant-garde, especially the Balkan Zenithism, Italian Futurism, Russian Constructivism, German Expressionism, and transnational Dadaism. Libraries, with their collections and their “bibliomigrancy” (see Mani), typically function as heterotopias of world literature (see Nethersole). In Kosovel’s poetry, the world spaces taken from the global circuit of information and mediatized representations enter into a singular perspective of a particular text. Intertextual links to print media mark the worldly extension of his literary world.

The literary forms that represent the world spaces themselves come from the world of literature; they circulate through works of art written in different languages and different countries. In his studies on the international dissemination of the novel, Moretti first proposed a controversial formula on the formation of a literary world produced in peripheral literature. For him, such a world results from a compromise between a form taken from globally influential literature and a local subject matter or perspective (Moretti 50–61, 116–17). Pressed by objections to his formula, Moretti improved his theory by taking into account a politically charged aesthetic struggle between the core and the periphery. He replaced “compromise” with the postcolonial concept of hybridity as a symptom of “dissonance, disagreement” between the imported and the endemic form. Ultimately, Moretti sees the “*form as a struggle*”, moreover, “the crystallization of an underlying *political* tension” (134). As already

mentioned, the concept of combined and uneven development also emphasizes peripheral resistance to dominant metropolitan forms.

An example of this is the incipit of the first Slovenian novel with the title *Deseti Brat* (The Tenth Brother, 1866). Here the author Josip Jurčič (1844–81) reveals to his Slovenian readers his belated and socially weaker implementation of Scott's genre model. With a touch of metafictional irony, the narrator tries to balance the inequalities between the originality of the writer of European format and his unknown imitator:

As the *renowned novelist* Walter Scott points out, narrators have an ancient right to begin their stories in an inn, i.e., at the meeting point of all travelers, where different characters are revealed directly and openly to each other, and the proverb *In vino veritas* is confirmed. We, too, have made use of this right because we believe that *our Slovenian* inns and hosts are no less *original* than the old English ones described by Scott, although they are much simpler in the countryside (Jurčič 141; emphases added).

The case of Jurčič shows the impulse of authors from the periphery to overcome their feeling of dependence on metropolitan forms. Moreover, they do not have to resort to distant places in order to network their literary worlds globally. Instead, they can project the world associated with an influential genre scheme as the implicit background of their respective locale. The globally dominant form assumed by peripheral text worlds thus leads to the identification of equivalencies with and differences from the foreign background world. The adaptation of cosmopolitan forms consequently leads to their transformation and hybridization (e.g., Machado de Assis' 1880 *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, see Deckard et al. 63–66).

Worlding

In his essay “Die Entstehung des Kunstwerks” (The Origin of the Work of Art) from 1935–36, Martin Heidegger reinterpreted the modern understanding of the world and attributed to the work of art the ability to create the world. In contrast to contemporary concepts of space, Heidegger saw the world as emerging from the temporality of “worlding”, which relates our existence to coexisting natural, social, and cultural units. Always in the making, the world is a meaningful whole; literary works of art are the settings for the creation of such a world. Heidegger says: “To be a work means to set up a world. ... The world is not the mere collection of the countable

or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are at hand ... The *world worlds*, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home” (Heidegger 170).

It seems ironic that Heidegger’s idea of “worlding”, to which the advocates of postcolonial literature from Spivak to Cheah appeal so much, dates from the time of Heidegger’s collaboration with the Nazis. On closer inspection, it turns out that the creator of the concept of *welten* must have suffered from a sense of subordination comparable to that, which frustrates representatives of the global South. With its militant imperialism, German Nazism was arguably the excessive acting-out of the inferiority complex resulting from comparisons with Western colonial empires. Such a reaction reshaped the ideology of German romantic nationalism, and in response, Goethe promoted his *Weltliteratur*. The logic underlying Goethe, Heidegger, and their followers, reduced to the political core, suggests that if superpowers hegemonize the world in which we live, we should change our interpretation of the world.

In 1985 Gayatri Spivak was probably the first to introduce Heidegger’s “worlding” into the postcolonial field. Conscious of her conceptual “vulgarization” (Spivak 260), she adopted the term to criticize Western narratives that construct the colonized as dependent on the imperial cultural mission. The Third World as being “worlded” by the First World thus figures as the subjugated other, whose otherness is to be discovered and appropriated through the colonial language. Sarah Lawall also referred to the dialectic of the self-other in her interpretation of “worlding”. In her discussion of how to teach world literature in the wake of the US-American “culture wars”, Lawall explained “worlding” as an intercultural reading of other worlds constructed beyond the Western horizon (Lawall 11–12).

Recently, Heideggerian ideas of world and worlding were evoked to counteract the uniformity imposed by US-led globalization. In a kind of synthesis, Christian Moraru makes a distinction between the terms *world*, *globe*, and *planet*. In line with the postcolonial critique of the globalists’ appropriation of the Earth, Moraru recalls Spivak’s planetarity, which implies inclusiveness, openness, multiplicity, and the responsibility to be with others. Starting from the premise that the formation of every subject, whether individual or collective, is indebted to the other, Moraru anchors worlding in cultural indebtedness. For him, the ethics of debt reevaluates what comparative literature treats as influence, interliterariness, or the literary world-system: “What makes this planetary ensemble ethical is the fundamental credit-debt

nexus subtending it. Planetically minded cultural analysis is a ‘thick description’ of the indebtedness that goes into the ecumenical manufacturing of originality” (Moraru 130)¹⁰.

In his remarkable book *What Is a World?*, Pheng Cheah continues Hayot’s search for the theory of the world. He argues that the general understanding of world literature as the circulation of goods merely reflects the existing economic order. Cheah questions the mainstream, drawing on Heidegger, Arendt, Derrida, and the postcolonialists to support his insight that world literature has a world-making and world-changing potential. Based on Heidegger’s thesis that art, through its unique structure, reveals the truth of being and overcomes the instrumental reason of modernity, Cheah believes that world literature has the power to conceive of another world, free from all subordination and exploitation. Admittedly, Cheah knows only too well that today’s global Empire is far from the aforementioned ideal. Nevertheless, he formulates his high expectations of postcolonial texts in Heidegger’s vocabulary:

In the current conjuncture, where capitalist globalization has cast doubt on the feasibility of grand teleologies of universal human progress toward freedom, the phenomenological idea of worlding is a more powerful way of understanding world literature’s normative force than the idea of teleological time underwriting spiritualist and materialist accounts of the world. ... ‘Literature’ discloses and enacts this unerasable promise of the opening of other worlds (Cheah 97).

In my view, the secular understanding of world literature as circulation (criticized by Cheah) answers the question of how and to what extent literary texts can become normative agencies of world-making at all. While they do produce possible worlds to *interpret* extratextual worlds, it is unlikely that the mere accumulation of alternative worlds appearing all over the planet can really *transform* the Empire into a multitude of coexisting *Umwelts*. In order to become engines of change, world-conceiving textual worlds should have a global impact on the masses divided by class, race, ethnicity, or gender. Literary works should be transformed into a revolutionary ideology. Since literature is only subject to ideology or works on it, but cannot become

¹⁰ This eulogy may seem cynical when read against the background of the current debt economy (see Graeber 4–8, 368–69; Stimilli).

one itself (see Macherey; Balibar and Macherey), the literary worlding in Chea's understanding turns out to be another utopia.

The question of why it is so difficult to actualize possible worlds can be answered with a theory that explains how the actual world is structured so that it repeatedly prevents every local utopia from being fully realized. This structure has a name: the world-system (see Frank and Gills; Wallerstein). As the recent failure of the Greek left-wing party Syriza shows, even political alternatives that are advancing locally will soon become victims of the system's repression. Things become even more complicated when it comes to literary worlding. If an artistic vision of the future world appears in a literature that occupies a marginal position, it has practically no chance of initiating change on a global scale.

On the basis of these considerations, the term *worlding* in the secular sense indicated by Djelal Kadir seems to have a more significant theoretical potential. Bearing in mind that the literary is a product of practice, Kadir considers world literature as a concept introduced by accountable agencies who, in response to a particular historical conjuncture, invest the concept with their interests. He reminds us that Goethe's invocation of world literature in the post-Napoleonic era was an attempt to create a kind of "cosmopolitan agora whose promising ecumenism" would keep literature away from chauvinism (Kadir 5). Kadir argues that "world literature may be nothing more than a product of our engagement in notional or narrative acts of worlding" (6). The universality ascribed to world literature therefore arises from "the universalizing impulse" of worlding as practiced by cosmopolitan writers (such as Goethe) and comparatists (7).

While Kadir names Goethe and the comparatists as the subjects who world the literary, Hayot's expansion of the concept allows for the inclusion of many other agencies:

If worlding named a process, however, it would be a process of orientation or calibration; to world (a person, or a place) would be to locate it "as is" in relation to the whole, to think the whole as that which includes "on loan". Worlding is ... an attitude, by which one adjusts oneself, symmetrically, to one's inclusion in a whole that does not belong to one. Worlding creates worlds because it bespeaks the part's relation to the whole, but also because in that speaking it imagines (or recreates) the whole that opens to the part (Hayot, "World Literature and Globalization" 228).

In my understanding, it is through the acts of worlding that actors in a particular literary field perceive the transnational literary traffic, understand the universal aesthetic space of literature and imagine their position within it, relate their particular “literary ecology” (see Beecroft) to the global one, and finally try to participate in the worldwide circulation of texts, for example by promoting the translation of their native literature into the major languages. The perspective of worlding inherent in every literary field is confirmed or negated by an external perspective. Agencies of transnational literary circulation often do not perceive authors who appear universal from a particular internal perspective at all, unless the perspective in question is located in a dominant literary system or makes its way into it.

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