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World Literature as Property*

Joseph R. Slaughter

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Canons . . . are but ploys, commercial ventures with which ‘someone’ corners a literary market, many of the authors being granted recognition on the basis of ethnicity, ideology, nationality and so on.

Nuruddin Farah, Address given at ALA Fonlon-Nichols Award Ceremony, 2001

If Elvis Presley were alive today, he would just be in the way. The contradictions and appetites of a living Presley would surely jeopardize the simplified image of Elvis that has come to sustain an entertainment empire: the “sanitized, drug-free, fat-free, all-white Elvis” that is owned and operated by Elvis Presley Enterprises, Inc. (Doss 223). Elvis™ is a relatively uncomplicated Elvis, one whose plainness is reflected in the formal simplicity of the trademark as described in the multiple applications that cover certain uses of the name Elvis Presley: “The mark consists of standard characters without claim to any particular font, style, size, or color.” In other words, trademark Elvis (unlike the performer himself) is a generic Elvis. Elvis Presley Enterprises needs Elvis Aaron Presley out of the way, which may be one reason why the company’s numerous trademark registrations since the 1980s repeatedly insist that “the name in the mark does not identify a particular living individual.” This is not a mere legal formality;

here, the trademark registration itself serves as a kind of death certificate for the man, even as it secures his (generic) afterlife in the lucrative realm of intellectual property. The king is dead, the mark mutters *sotto voce*; long live “The King”!

Elvis lives (on) in multiple forms of intellectual property that coordinate the institutional memory of the man. He is a copyrighted author and performer; his image, “vocal characteristics, . . . performance style, and mannerisms” (Coombe, *Cultural Life* 90) are reserved for exclusive commercial exploitation by Elvis Enterprises under the US Personal Rights Protection Act of 1984, a law passed with the intellectual property of Elvis especially in mind (Doss 229). After Elvis left the buildings at Graceland for the last time, Elvis Enterprises enclosed an intellectual estate called “Graceland.” Elvis, Inc. is famous for its vigorous legal (and extralegal) defenses of its intellectual properties, which is probably why the title on the cover of Nigerian-born writer Chris Abani’s 2004 novel *GraceLand*—the primary literary example of this essay—in no way resembles any of the drawings registered with the US Patent and Trademark Office.

Trademarks are one of the apparent “trademarks” of postmodern and postcolonial novels; they may be all that is left to us of the mystical aura of authenticity in the age of information and digital reproduction. As indexes of commercial consistency, they assume some of the classical author functions identified by Michel Foucault. These indicators arrest the mad proliferation of meaning and cheap knockoffs by promising to the consumer (*again and again*) “a constant level of value . . . a field of conceptual or theoretical coherence, . . . a stylistic unity” (151). Indeed, trademarks (certainly more than copyrights, which have limited shelf-lives) have the potential to fulfill the romantic fantasy of immortality through authorship. The life of a trademark is perpetual; as long as it remains active, it never dies. The death of the author, on the other hand, generally starts the clock on the expiration of his or her copyrights. Trademarks, copyrights, franchise licenses, image monopolies—these are the official forms of intellectual property in which Elvis still lives.

There is, of course, an entire world outside the (legal) purview of the official Elvis industry, where “Elvis impersonators and fans create an ever-evolving Elvis folklore” (Coombe, *Cultural Life* 99). This popular realm—where unlicensed images and unfranchised memories of Elvis circulate as part of the “collective cultural heritage”—exists alongside the regulated realm of official Elvis Culture (98). Although some

alarmist experts in international affairs have recently taken to lumping together intellectual property piracy, illicit economic activities, “organized crime, and terrorist networks” as similar fundamental threats to the private property foundations of our economic, social, and intellectual security, the informal world of illicit Elvis folklore is not entirely lawless (Naím 126). Despite their best efforts to police an Elvis monoculture, Elvis Enterprises cannot disrupt all derivative uses of Elvis. Their property claims are expressly limited by (among other things) the parody, pastiche, and caricature exception to Intellectual Property (IP) protection; these fair-use exemptions protect free speech by maintaining that parody—although derivative of another work—does not infringe on the original artist’s rights. In this world, Elvises proliferate.

My story of the legal consolidation of IP Elvis is an exemplum of what has been called the second enclosure movement—a process that accelerated at the international level in the 1980s, when the erosion of the industrial manufacturing base in the advanced Western economies sent governments (particularly the Reagan administration) “casting about for a politically painless way to address the growing trade deficit” between East and West (Alford 99).¹ The weight of this massive shift from “physical capital” to “cultural capital,” from industrial to information capitalism, as a basis of national wealth is reflected in the prioritization of IP issues in the World Trade Organization’s General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), where literary (and other traditionally “cultural”) matters were integrated with questions of commerce and security in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (commonly known as TRIPs).² From a certain slant, TRIPs represented an effort of the intellectual property-rich countries of the North to reorganize the global economy of the new world order to consolidate their own trade-related advantage by inventing and securing new streams of revenue in the international seas of stories. The effect of this dramatic shift in the basis and form of economic power and prosperity has, as Paul Saint-Amour notes, “concentrated intellectual property-based wealth in the first world and maintained a neocolonial imbalance in the international flow of intellectual property” (218). Indeed, in terms of patents (for which there seems to be the best accounting), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported in its *Human Development Report 1999* that 97% of the world’s intellectual property is held by the industrialized countries in the North; 80% of the patents registered in the Global South are held by alien residents of industrialized countries, which leaves a total of just 0.6% in the hands of developing nations (68). Copyright riches are less calculable and

the assessment metrics are less reliable, but similar imbalances in copyright holdings seem to follow the patent pattern of enclosure.

World Literature found renewed life with globalization and the second enclosure movement. It seems clear to me that such property lopsidedness is a problem for the new World Literature that is “[m]anufactured [and copyrighted] in the United States of America”—as *The Bedford Anthology* copyright page asserts—and other IP wealthy nations in the Global North. The copyright problem is not simply a difficulty for compiling anthologies of World Literature, which themselves in turn monopolize certain images and presentations of the world and its literatures, since “[n]o part of this book may be reproduced” without permission. The lopsidedness in IP riches (the tilt of the Earth towards the Global North) is reflected in the major institutions of World Literature, which is merely one manifestation among others of the fundamental property models of creative production that subtend the global culture industry and international law. If the global disparity in cultural capital is clearly a problem, what is less clear to me is how to talk about the property problems of World Literature, since the terms and metaphors commonly used to describe what Pascale Casanova calls (without irony) “the unequal distribution of literary resources” are themselves part of the problem, already caught in IP’s language and proprietary logic that increasingly treats culture as a resource (175). To understand the world (or the “World Republic of Letters”) in terms of literary resources and ownership is already to marginalize those who, by the very definition of the terms, are without intellectual property, just as genre-based mapping of “world literary space” (à la Franco Moretti) overlooks the presence of those who, again by definition of the terms, do not produce a recognizable literary species or genre; or, even more damningly, it banishes them to another world altogether—a sad world (almost) without literature and, for that matter, without republics.

The dominant property models of literary production (which, among other things, attribute “cultural property” to nations or peoples and “intellectual property” to individuals) predetermine the shape and scope of what can be imagined as World Literature. For the most part, World Literature discourse pretends as if intellectual property and the laws that regulate it do not exist, except when it comes to securing reproduction rights for compiling anthologies. In the name of collecting “the world’s literary heritage,” as the Preface to *The Longman Anthology of World Literature* puts it, these anthologies do more than trade in (and transmit) cultural capital (Damrosch and Pike xxi); they consolidate and distribute real property claims and benefits. We can

see some of the basic assumptions about literary property at work early in the editors' Preface, where they outline their purposes: "This anthology has been designed to help readers successfully navigate 'the sea of stories' — as Salman Rushdie has described the world's literary heritage" (xxi). This deceptively simple statement obscures a number of strange property claims that operate according to the dominant IP logic. "The sea of stories" does not belong to Rushdie, even if he is the most prominent recent literary figure to reanimate the image for his novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*; it is an ancient idea that circulates around the Indian Ocean, "a sea of territories rife with pearls not yet mined, stories . . . an ocean of them," as Nuruddin Farah has deployed the metaphor (26). The image also served as the title of an eleventh-century Sanskrit anthology, *Kathasaritsagara*, which itself compiled what must have seemed like "the world's literary heritage" as an "ocean of the streams of story" (Somadeva). The *Longman Anthology* places itself in this long tradition of compiling, but it does so by attributing an old and collectively authored idea to a living individual (a common phenomenon in the contemporary enclosure movement) and by submerging earlier versions and other visions of World Literature below the Longman sea of stories. In other words, the editors effectively convert the world's literary heritage into property by assigning the idea and the stories to the proper names of Rushdie and Longman. World Literature is thus branded: *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*, *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, *The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*.

In their influential sketches of World Literature, both Casanova and Moretti acknowledge, at least rhetorically, the "huge power of being able to say what is literary and what is not" that is monopolized by a cosmopolitan "aristocracy" in the literary "centers" of the world of letters (Casanova 21-23). However, that cosmopolitan aristocracy begins to look more like an old colonial-style metropolitan plutocracy when we recognize that the power to say what is literary is also the power to say what is intellectual property and what is not.³ Indeed, if my account of the global imbalance in intellectual property sounded like a description of the condition of the novel in the "World Republic of Letters," that's because there is not only a relationship between literary forms and genres of intellectual property but also an overlap in world-literary and world-intellectual-property space. IP restrictions, relaxations, and considerations are part of the (normative) framework within which cultural production, exchange, and consumption take

place, “part of the context” within which modern writers create modern literature (Saint-Amour 217). Although the logic and regulation of intellectual property crosscut and conjoin the political, economic, and literary realms, we in world literary studies (at least compared to the natural sciences, where the stakes apparently seem higher) have largely ignored the implications of this latest transformation in the national and international contexts of creative activity that constitute and constrain the conditions for literature in the world today.

The contemporary project of capturing knowledge and classifying cultural production into an organized system of property almost rivals in scope Linnaeus’s taxonomical efforts to classify all known forms of life in the eighteenth century. Intellectual enclosure proceeds by converting intangibles into commodities, organizing abstractions into what legal scholars refer to as genres of property. Our contemporary IP regimes reward paperwork—I mean that in both the figurative and bureaucratic senses: Ideas become property when they are fixed in some kind of semi-permanent form and when they are registered with a state agency. Who can tell what to whom has always been a problem for literary authority, authorization, and authorship, but modern literature is not produced solely in the context of copyright regimes; it interfaces in all sorts of ways with the seemingly nonliterary intellectual property regimes (patents, trademarks, cultural heritage rights, and traditional knowledge protections). It is worth thinking about the constraining and catalyzing effects that these particular forms of intellectual property regulation have (and have had) on the historical development and dissemination of literary genres and traditions and on the compilation and composition of World Literature.

I am especially interested in how these regimes have inflected the development of the African novel and its marginalized place in World Literature across the span of the last two and a half centuries, so my examples are drawn from a particularly rich African vein of literature, but similar examples can be found elsewhere. What happens to the dominant (property) models of literary creation and world literary systems when we pay attention to illicit trafficking in textual goods outside the more official (that is, formally regulated) routes of economic and cultural globalization, when we pay attention to modes of cultural creativity that challenge (rather than fortify) the property models? What wrinkles and ruptures are revealed in world literary space when we consider the non-metaphorical “international literary law” that is already on the books in the form of trade-related international intellectual property agreements? (Casanova 11) What hap-

pens to our diffusionist and evolutionary schemes of cultural influence (and imposition) when we recognize the work of informal sectors in the formation and circulation (in, that is, the worlding) of the modern novel as the predominant form of literary expression in the world today? What modifications might we need to make to our ideas about the development and conventionalization of the norms and forms of the novel and World Literature when we consider the many ways they are regulated under IP law? In unraveling some of the deep intertextual entanglements of Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, I want to raise a few of the many questions and possibilities that appear when we confront directly the property assumptions and implications of literature in the world today and to point a way to thinking (world) literature beyond copyright.

Under-World Literature: An Elvis of Another Style, Size, and Color

"Take a form, follow it from space to space, and study the reasons for its transformations"—"This is what comparative literature could be," writes Franco Moretti, "if it took itself seriously as *world literature*, on the one hand, and as *comparative morphology*, on the other" (*Graphs, Maps, Trees* 90). Follow the forms, Moretti argues, and we will discover what he calls "a law of literary evolution": namely, "in cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system . . . the modern novel first arises . . . as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials"—between, that is, "foreign form" and "local reality," or what trademark applications might characterize as local font, style, size, or color ("Conjectures on World Literature" 58-60).⁴ Original literary forms, it seems, at least when it comes to the novel, are born in the West, from where they migrate and mutate as they enter what Casanova refers to variously as "literarily deprived territories" (116), "literarily least endowed countries" (177), "literarily disinherited countr[ies]" (183), "literarily impoverished spaces" (17), and "literary province[s]" (95). The analytical models of both Moretti and Casanova divide world literary space between those who bring newness into the world and those who recycle old ideas, between "those who, in a strict sense, make literature" (Casanova 21) and those who do not—between, that is, those who innovate and those who imitate.

GraceLand's protagonist is a young Nigerian Elvis impersonator, whose given name, Elvis Oke, already anticipates the many inversions and improvisations of identity that mimicry entails. Set in the eras of the Oil

Boom and bust of the 1970s and the Structural Adjustment Programs of the 1980s, the novel moves back and forth in time and space between the middle-class neighborhoods of small-town Nigeria (1970s) and the big-city slums (1980s), between the clean classrooms of formal schooling and the dirty lessons of the streets. Impoverished by the corrupt economics and politics of military rule, Elvis's family moves to the "informal settlements" outside Lagos, where he is forced to practice "the tactics of informal survivalism" among the area boys who take part in the illicit transnational trade in human body parts, cocaine trafficking, smuggling of porn films, and prostitution rings (Dawson 24).⁵ The plot involves multiple forms of informal economic activity, including the more apparently benign networks of circulation and duplication of Hollywood and Bollywood films, minor mail fraud, unlicensed touring musicians, and transient secondhand book stalls. The themes of formal and informal commerce are repeated in the form of Abani's novel itself, in its intertextual engagements with other people's literary goods that circulate (sometimes surreptitiously) throughout the text.

Abani introduces his young Nigerian mimic as he prepares to perform for an audience of uninterested tourists—an African Elvis under Western eyes:

[Elvis] ducked into a stall and shed his street clothes. He slipped into the white shirt and trousers, pulled on the socks and canvas shoes, and jammed the wig down on his head. . . . [H]e turned to the small tin of talcum powder . . . and applied a thick layer.

. . . [H]e walked over to the foreigners, . . . cleared his throat, counted off "One, two, three," then began to sing "Hound Dog" off-key. At the same time, he launched into his dance routine.

. . . "What d'ya think he's doing?" the gargantuan-bellied man asked, turning to the father prone in the sand.

. . . "I think he's doing an Elvis impersonation," the harried woman said.

"He doesn't look like any Elvis I know. Besides, ain't that wig on back to front? Do you think he speaks English?"

"Don't they all?" (11-12)

Here is an Elvis probably not anticipated even by the breadth of Elvis Inc.'s trademark claims. The beachgoers (Americans apparently) are unimpressed by Elvis's sad impersonation and shabby aspect; over the

course of the novel, Elvis attempts to improve his imitation by studying a curious combination of Hollywood musicals, Bollywood Bhangra, and a Nigerian troupe he once saw dancing to “Hound Dog.” To appreciate the qualities of Elvis’s imitation, one would want to be familiar not only with Elvis Presley routines but also with the transnational traditions of Elvis impersonation across the global Elvis-scape as well as with various local (Nigerian, Igbo, or Lagosian) modes of performance. This scenario might bring to mind the foreign form/local content dialectic that Moretti borrowed from Fredric Jameson for his conjectures on World Literature and amplified into the primary mechanism of generic diffusion and evolution, or we might read the scene as a national allegory of the subordinated place of the Nigerian intellectual (or cultural worker) in the “World Republic of Letters,” where African writing has often been dismissed as secondhand, fourth-rate, third-world copies of firsthand, first-rate, first-world “originals.” However, such readings would oversimplify the context and contingencies of the event, even if this sort of literary dependency model seems to be supported by the material and social constraints of Elvis’s impersonation and his own sense of inadequacy as an Elvis impersonator.

Elvis Oke’s performance is not a frustrated “desire for acculturation” or an always imperfect effort at identitarian imitation; rather, it is, as Ashley Dawson has argued, a strategic mode of “informal labour” spurred by “the hope of economic self-sufficiency” (24). Oke’s song and dance is not simply a parody of Elvis Presley; whatever his intent in that direction, it is, in the impersonator’s own deflated estimation, a travesty of Elvis impersonation. Elvis Oke’s lament is that he does not look like a legitimate, income-earning Elvis *impersonator*. His is an impersonation of an impersonation (or of Elvis impersonations generically); the form being copied (if copying is the right word) is a form of copying—the appropriation of a particular form of appropriation, or mode of reproduction.

Like Elvis’s Elvis impersonation, Lagos is a chaotic jumble of contrasts and contradictions: a thoroughly contemporary cosmopolitan city that incorporates street children, slums, and dilapidated buses—only Nigerian “magic” keeps the things “from falling apart,” quips the narrator (8). These sit alongside “sprawling Spanish-style haciendas,” “elegant Frank Lloyd Wright-styled buildings,” and brand-name foreign luxury cars; “Name it,” the narrator says, “and Lagos had a copy of it, earning it the nickname ‘One Copy’” (7-8). This appellation might seem to confirm the common colonialist charge that the culture of the

imperial center repeats itself in the colonial province as farce, or, as Casanova characterizes James Joyce's assessment of the condition of Irish literature, that it produced nothing "other than a deformed copy of originals" (209). The novel seems to parody the colonial mentality (of both the colonized and colonizer) that cannot see postcolonial societies as anything other than "the imperfect imitators of imported forms" (Newell 46), because "One Copy" is not a bad epithet for the stylized, postcard Las Vegas that inspires Elvis's American dream—a four-paneled memento that features, in its third and fourth squares, photos of an Elvis impersonator and the Graceland chapel (Abani 167). The America that Elvis Oke imagines (and one that he refracts back to the American tourists) is not a land of opportunity that rewards ingenuity and originality; it is a land of glamorous frauds and sparkling reproductions, where improvisation and parody might be the rule, not the exception. Elvis Oke's America welcomes Elvis impersonators from everywhere and equally, "without any considerations for the individual's economic status, family pedigree, or social connections" (Adéèkó 18)—without, that is, prejudice against the individual's style, size, or color. At the end of the novel, Elvis flies off to the United States in disguise—not, however, as an Elvis impersonator but with the borrowed passport of his friend and coconspirator, Redemption.

The Inferior-Narrative Position in World Literature

Elvis Oke works in what must be the most informal sector of Elvis impersonation, but, as the story and success of Abani's novel might suggest, the formal and informal sectors are interdependent and coeval, occupying the same time and space—intersecting, interacting, collaborating, and disrupting each other at multiple interfaces; and they are not always easy to disentangle. Moisés Naím knows this, at least intuitively, when he asks: "Where does [counterfeit] cargo originate?" "Typically in Asia," he responds, "China, Taiwan, and Vietnam are likely sources, though far from the only ones. There the goods or their components often come off the same production lines that produce the brand-name items they copy" (110). The ironies here are quite unintended: That improper copies come off the same mass production lines, worked by the same ill-paid labor, as proper copies seems like a distinction without a difference. Of course, the difference between the fake and the genuine, the generic and the brand name, is not necessarily about the quality of the product—it is precisely about the aura conferred by the

“legitimate” reproduction of the “brand name,” about the author function of the trademark and the regulation of property. It is, we might conclude from Naím’s ironic lapse, not so much about “the nature of the economic activity but [about] an official limitation of access to legitimate activity” (as the International Labour Office [ILO] described the regulatory protectionism of the formal sector; 504). The informal sector has operating norms, but it functions largely outside the state’s regulatory framework, which (despite globalization’s triumphant claims) is still the primary entity through which intellectual property is registered and regulated and through which World Literature is joined.

Elivs Oke’s impersonation is a parody of a parody; it is, then, doubly derivative, if one maintains that the earliest American Elvis impersonators are “original.” The parody exception in IP law that permits parodic play and critique does so through a liberal free-speech logic that relaxes the standard of originality ordinarily required for intellectual property protection. The parody exception is ambiguous about what constitutes the genre, but the law (like literary theory) recognizes that parody is dependent upon its relation to the object it imitates. Parody is derivative, but in such a deeply essential (or politically important) way that, abiding by “the laws of genre” (that’s statutory language, not Derrida’s), an exception is made to the usual requirements of novelty and autonomy that protect creative productions. In other words, parody may effect an “ironic inversion” of another text, but such “transgression” is sanctioned by law and literature, “authorized,” as Linda Hutcheon writes, “by the very norms it seeks to subvert,” by its constitutional subordination to its enabling literary or cultural object (75).

The logic of dependency and subordination that characterizes the genre of parody has an interesting analogue at the level of international intellectual property relations in what is commonly referred to as the “developing nations exception” in TRIPs (World Trade Organization, Articles 65-66). That limited exception permits the temporary suspension of the usual derivative rights that an intellectual property owner has to control translation and reproduction while a developing (or “least-developed”) country builds a local IP economy and modernizes its IP infrastructure and jurisprudence to comply with international norms. What this means, in theory, is that especially for the purposes of teaching, scholarship, and research relaxed standards for copying, translation, and technology transfers should encourage the proliferation of knowledge and reduce the intellectual and cultural barriers to the “mutual respect and appreciation among nations” (in the idealistic words of UNESCO’s Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import,

Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property [UNESCO n. pag.]). In principle, the developing nations exception (a kind of third-world fair-use exemption) works to the short-term advantage of a developing nation by encouraging the free circulation of otherwise scarce imported intellectual resources, but it also tends to work to the long-term advantage of developed nations by introducing subsidized copies of “foreign” knowledge that can stem local competition and establish the seeds of a global monoculture.⁶ We quickly recognize this operation for what it is in other areas of intellectual property globalization—for example, the granting of patents on indigenous knowledge to large agrochemical corporations effectively reduces biodiversity in many parts of the world, and monopolies of industrial knowledge can bring IP compliance pressure to bear in such a way that standardization of technology (or parity) becomes an effective instrument of enforced parody.⁷

Under the most influential current abstract models of World Literature, or literary globalization, or comparative morphology, we have no real way to talk about (the force of) such things, and we have not begun to consider the real implications of things like the developing nations exception on the shape of “world literary space,” the survival of the “fittest” genres, World Literature anthologies and cosmopolitan canon formation, or the establishment and expansion of commercial literary monocultures with the encroachment on and procurement of once-remote literary markets. In any case, the parody and developing nations exceptions to IP rights seem to me to be two manifestations of the same deterministic assumption that underpins most of our theoretical models of world literary diffusion (and domination): that because two things share features, one must necessarily be derivative of the other; in other words, that resemblance implies dependence. This is the logic of parody. I do not mean that parody is actually the mode or mechanism of intellectual globalization, cultural dissemination, and development (there is some truth there, although it gets overstated in the world-systems models of literary space); rather, the systems of intellectual property law that are engineered to orchestrate the distribution (or accumulation) of intellectual and real wealth are based on models of dependency that will be familiar to students of literary parody.

Let me be a bit more explicit and specific. The logic of dependence and derivation found in the law and in Moretti’s and Casanova’s models of world literary systems is familiar to any student of postcolonial theory. Moretti and Casanova seem to have rediscovered mimesis as the primary device of cultural development and diffusion that has been so often iden-

tified as an engine of world cultural mechanics. In a sense, these models take us back to the early days of postcolonial studies, in their systematization of an “empire-writes-back” paradigm of literary production that once read (post)colonial literature as largely responsive to (if also subversive of) metropolitan literature; that model probably illuminates the work of writers like Salman Rushdie (who is credited with the term), J. M. Coetzee, V. S. Naipaul, and others granted all-access passes to the cosmocanon of World Literature. However, the authors of the postcolonial studies classic *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) essentially imagined a parodic relationship between the (settler) outposts of “Empire” and its center, rather than between a generalized “periphery” and an aesthetic “capital.” A trio of young Nigerian literary scholars calling themselves *Bolekaja* critics—or “Come down let’s fight”—already challenged this approach to postcolonial cultural studies in their polemic *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1980), where they condemned “the preoccupation of eurocentric critics with meticulously documenting the European pedigree of African novels . . . [and] spending an inordinate amount of time and effort insisting that a work by an African is patterned on some novel or other by Conrad, Dostoevsky, or Kafka” (Chinweizu et al. 16-17). Postcolonial studies largely dispensed with this sort of dependency theory and analysis some time ago. Nonetheless, afflicted by some kind of obsessive-compulsive disorder, our discipline resurrects these hierarchical, ethnocentric models of cultural formation and transformation under new names (World Literature and global modernisms are probably the biggest at the moment) to plat world literary space all over again in terms of powerful, ostensibly “autonomous,” centers and weak, reportedly dependent (and parodic), peripheries—a dynamic whose recurrence suggests to me that there is a kind of (post)imperial anxiety of a *lack of influence* at work in much Euro-American literary criticism. Such models of world literary systems relegate all postcolonial writing to what Gérard Genette calls “the inferior-narrative” position, the quadrant within Aristotle’s schema of literary genres reserved for parody.⁸

I want to reconsider the ambitious models of Moretti and Casanova from an intellectual property perspective, where literary goods are most fungible and ideas most liquid. In Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory, the core-periphery model of economic relations and resource extraction explains a certain mode of wealth production and accumulation that defined the era of high industrial imperialism, in which the (so-called) fringes of formal empire supplied raw materials to an industrial center where they were con-

verted into consumer goods and, in many cases, sold back to the periphery in order to capture the surplus value; in other words, everything was arranged to the greedy advantage of the center, which acted as a sort of middleman in the system and was itself, in very real ways, dependent upon its peripheries. The center-periphery models revived by Casanova and Moretti are less precise and more unstable than Wallerstein's analytic, even in their own terms: At times, they seem economical, ecological, or political; at others, purely metaphorical. If, however, a world literary system works as they describe, then the economics and (cultural) capital accumulation of World Literature are structured along the lines of an old imperial resource extraction industrial model organized to the benefit of the metropolitan "literary capital[s]" (Casanova 24). If World Literature consists of those "works that gain in translation" (Damrosch and Pike xxv), with English being the most lucrative language of currency, the profit is extracted in the metropolitan publishing capitals, "the locus of production and consumption that drives the [anthology] trade" (Brouillette 58).

The explanatory power of these models for World Literature is limited because, among other things, they assume (excuse the term) a center-centric position that imagines itself as a survey of the global literary landscape from the heights of the land(s) of original forms. Indeed, most models of World Literature seem to assume that World Literature anywhere looks like World Literature everywhere. What both Casanova and Moretti know (but then seem to forget as they elaborate their schemes) is that the core defines the norms and forms that make it the core; it defines itself as center, defines its periphery as that which necessarily but incorrectly copies it, and then denigrates it for doing so. We should remember, here at the center, that the core (like literary anthologies) is the core not because it is the *source* of things, but because it is a *collection* of things. And, like the novel genre itself (which, not incidentally, sits at the generic center of most of these models), the center absorbs everything; it (again like the novel) treats everywhere else and everything else as raw materials to be extracted, exploited, accumulated, and privatized. Through its powers of attraction and compulsion, the center centers itself, and we should never lose sight of the verb form of "center" that hides behind the noun, in the same way that the action of the verb "to world" is obscured by the apparent nounness of "the world" (Kadir 2). Like the world (in World Literature and elsewhere), the center is never simply a given or merely an object; it is the effect of a certain way of seeing and speaking, of gathering and analyzing data—of anthologiz-

ing the world's literatures as brand name World Literature. One of the problems with appropriating the economic core-periphery description of international relations and globalization as a *metaphoric* model for contemporary World Literature is that the abstraction too quickly obscures the real property relations that support it—forgetting that intellectual capital is never merely cultural or symbolic and that distance from power is never simply “aesthetic,” as Casanova describes it (12).

Between Knowing and Owning

At their most reductive, these models reinscribe an old orientalist division of the globe that separates peoples (or cultures) who own and produce property from peoples who do not, a separation that the UNDP *Human Development Report* I have cited refers to bluntly as “the global gap between haves and have-nots, between know[s] and know-not’s” (57). The slippage here between property and knowledge is telling. In IP terms, this world is split between those who produce and those who reproduce: the intellectually propertied peoples of the Global North and the intellectually propertyless peoples of the Global South. Such mapping of the IP terrain might seem simply to reflect the facts on the ground (the property imbalances I have noted), but World Literature and our international IP regimes overlay private property conceptions of creative expression onto messy, and largely informal, networks of worldly literary relations and production that cannot be so neatly enclosed. When we follow the circulation of language and ideas to the points where they get fixed in recognizable (or, more accurately, recognized) property forms—when original ownership claims are made for them—we get a somewhat different view of a world literary system, one in which the gristly roots of ideas and forms of expression seem to ignore or violate most conventional property lines.

The law distinguishes among many genres of intellectual property, but I want to look closer at the broadest categorical distinction international law recognizes: the division between intellectual and cultural property. Regulations of these two genres of created property are divided between the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (1886) and UNESCO’s Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970). The Berne Convention deals with individualized kinds of intellectual property: literary, scientific, and artistic works. By contrast, the UNESCO Convention defines “cultural property” as the collective “heritage” of a peo-

ple—“the basic elements of civilization and national culture” (culture is resolutely national in this document)—and it urges states to protect this property, which includes, among its more nebulous categories of heritage, singular literary artifacts (UNESCO n. pag.). In the Western tradition, cultural property may be what becomes of some literary texts and their creators after copyrights run out (for example, when Proust becomes French, Goethe German, Joyce Irish, Dickens British, Melville American—which is also when they become most profitably anthologizable); but historically the distinction between cultural and intellectual property has generally (once again) been mapped onto the divide between the developing and developed world, trailing behind it a long series of old familiar colonial/anthropological oppositions: individual versus collective, private property versus group commons, formal versus informal knowledge, and so forth. Accordingly, we (authors) in the West produce spontaneous original intellectual property; they (storytellers) in the rest of the world have a rich collective legacy of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge that is, so the logic goes, part of what keeps their societies underdeveloped. This is one aspect of the property bias built into the system of World Literature: individual intellectual property for us; collective cultural property for them.⁹ Interestingly, literature falls within the legal purview of both property rubrics, and I want to use that opening to leverage the genre of the novel against the categorical assumptions of IP law and to disrupt the dominant theoretical models of World Literature that largely take for granted a radial flow of intellectual goods from centers to peripheries. The novel is particularly useful here because, like literary anthologies, it is a technology of appropriation, especially good at converting common cultural property into private intellectual property.

Geographical Indications, the African Novel, and Centers that Cannot Hold

Chris Abani launches each chapter of *GraceLand* with two unattributed epigraphic fragments that explain the socio-cultural significance of the kola nut ceremony in traditional Igbo society—a ceremony, it is important to note, that has no role in the novel’s storyline. These opening statements are a combination of bland anthropological accounts of Igbo customs and manners and spiritualist (almost new-ageist) revelations about the esoteric cosmology behind the ceremony: “*The Igbo believe that if one does not follow the life pattern determined by their energy grouping, they are living outside the dictates of their chi, or personal god*” (98).

In an acknowledgments section at the end of the novel (which, as a generic feature of modern World Literature, speaks volumes about the weight of the formal international property regimes under which contemporary writers write), Abani cites sources for some of the historical information he relies on in the text, but he does not seem to cite anything that contains this formulation of traditional knowledge. The epigraphs appear to provide cultural background and local texture for the more universal tale of the trials of coming of age; they serve, then, as exposition. All narrative literature has to deal with the problem of “introduc[ing] the reader into an unfamiliar world,” and exposition is one of the ordinary devices to establish the backstory to current narrative events and “the canons of probability” that hold sway over them (Sternberg 1). In this regard, the last four words in Abani’s sentence are especially interesting: They not only supply a quick gloss (or translation) of the word “*chi*”; they also gesture to the extratextual situation of their appearance, to their own backstory. The conjunction “or,” establishing at least a notional equivalence between “*chi*” and “personal god,” marks some distance and difference between the narrator and the implied reader—between the cultural knowledge of the narrative voice and the projected cultural ignorance of a reader in the literary sectors where the novel anticipates circulating. We usually think of this distance as the location of culture or as the textual mark of cultural difference, but exposition is not the peculiar burden of writers from unprivileged “cultures” (or positions) in the formal arena of World Literature, although that burden is often felt acutely in such situations to be a cultural or, more precisely, an ethnic one.¹⁰

To the best of my knowledge, the phrase “*chi*, or personal god” first appears in African literature in Chinua Achebe’s 1958 classic, *Things Fall Apart*; variants of it can be found in earlier British anthropological studies of the Igbo and in many later works written by Igbos, where it has become an icon of the Igbo novel.¹¹ Here are the first two appearances in Achebe: “Unoka was an ill-fated man. He had a bad *chi* or personal god, and evil fortune followed him to the grave, or rather to his death, for he had no grave” (13);

If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo. At an early age he had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land. That was not luck. At the most one could say that his *chi* or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his *chi* says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his *chi* agreed. (19)

After early pairings, the term *chi* and its gloss appear independently in the novel. This necessarily reductive translation (“personal god”) of a complex concept (“*chi*”) has been the subject of some controversy in African literary studies, representing, in the opinion of some critics, a “blasphemous” lack of respect or esteem for traditional Igbo religion (see especially Shelton; Chigbo 94-98). The narrative tone of Abani’s passage echoes the ethnographic attitude of the narrator in *Things Fall Apart*; but whereas the cultural information is presented as unincorporated prologue to the chapters in Abani, it is assimilated into the narrator’s running commentary in Achebe, drawing attention to the problem of mediation “between two spatial/temporal source languages, the Igbo and the English at their late nineteenth-century colonial interface” that is not only the thematic subject of the novel but also the difficulty faced by Achebe himself in writing for his “postcolonial readers, an English-speaking readership of Western scholarly and literary training” (Granqvist 63). *Things Fall Apart*, as Achebe says, “explain[s] its vocabulary as it goes,” providing a soft cultural landing for readers new to the strange world of this African novel (Moore et al. 22). Compared to Achebe’s almost seamless synthesis of Igbo idea and English gloss, Abani’s method creates a sharp contrast between the serene cultural background materials and the rough modern story of Elvis’s misadventures.

These sorts of moments of cultural translation—what the *Bolekaja* critics derided as “introducing ‘anthropological’ or ‘sociological’ material into fiction”—have typically been taken as indications of the contingent condition of the novel genre in Africa and of the subordinate position of African literature in the “World Republic of Letters” (Chinweizu et al. 264).¹² Indeed, the extensive catalogue of such textual features has been routinely cited as evidence of the apparent double bind of the African author writing in a colonial language in the early postcolonial period—the “frequent problem,” as Charles Larson described it in the 1970s, of the “Third World” writer’s “double audience”: “one often willing to accept him for what he is trying to say from within his own culture, the other willing to accept him if he can be placed into a Western framework” (40), or, we might say after Casanova, absorbed into the world literary system. If the erstwhile postcolonial double audience has become something of a virtue in the market discourse of World Literature in our era of globalization—“Works of world literature engage in a double conversation,” write the editors of the *Longman Anthology of World Literature*, “with their culture of origin and with the varied contexts into which they

travel away from home” (xxii)—at the moment of its production such double talk was generally regarded as a liability, a mark of World Literature’s inferiority to traditional national literatures.¹³

The presence of two audiences at the birth of the Anglophone African novel implied, of course, a double and differential circulation of the literary texts—one in the formal sector of British (or Commonwealth or World) literature; the other in a still-underdeveloped reading circle of Africans on the continent. The existence of this double audience was, for the most part, accepted as a historical fact of colonialism and its literary and literacy legacies. Lately, however, that sociological fact has been challenged and the idea of a double audience deconstructed in a number of ways. Simon Gikandi and Apollo Amoko, for instance, suggest that the double audience is something of a fable that depends upon suspect essentialist ethnological distinctions between African and non-African novel readers that ignore the great overlap in their historical formations (see Amoko; Gikandi, “Globalization”). Indeed, as readers of African novels, the American literary tourist might be difficult to distinguish from the Nigerian or Igbo expatriot (in Elvis Oke’s terms); of common transnational class and education, these two parts of the international novel-reading stratum may both require a gloss of the word *chi*.¹⁴ In “The Extroverted African Novel,” Eileen Julien also suggests that the double audience is something of a mirage (685), and (if I can push her argument further than she herself does) that it is a kind of wishful projection on the part of well-meaning, multiculturally minded readers who want to imagine themselves as cultural interlopers in an African text—armchair anthropologists who gain privileged access to radical difference in the comforting form of the familiar novel. The bystander position is obviously an ideological one, not only because it falsifies an ahistorical image of what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o described as a phantom “European-language-speaking-peasantry and working class” in Africa (22); it also involves the self-deception of non-African readers who imagine themselves as incidental to the content, quality, and form of the African novel when they are, in fact, instrumental (though not singularly so) and implicated in the construction and consecration of official African literature. Indeed, the construction of any national, ethnic, or regional literature is always an effect of innumerable international, interethnic, and interregional literary transactions.

If the so-called double audience is something of a (marketing) myth, this is not because globalization and information capitalism have done away with cultural difference, but because most of what carries the label “African novel” (inside and outside Africa) is, as Julien (and Ngũgĩ before her) has argued, “a particular type of narra-

tive characterized above all by its intertextuality with hegemonic or global discourses” (681)¹⁵—the invocation of Yeats in Achebe’s title is usually cited as an example of this intertextual engagement. However suspect the idea of a double audience may now be (sociologically speaking), the *address* of the double audience, with the doubling of the narrative voice, has become a relatively stable feature of the generic conventions of African novels. Indeed, as Brian Larkin has shown in the case of the development of aesthetic and “formal qualities” of modern Nigerian video, the early modes of circulation—systems of reproduction and networks of distribution—have left their traces in the generic conventions of *the* African novel—what we also might call the “World African Novel.”

Chi, or personal god: the phrase works differently today in Abani’s novel than it did fifty years ago in Achebe’s, and it must work differently in the multiple reading circles where it travels, not least because the concept of *chi* does not matter to the plot and themes of *GraceLand*. The phrase seems as historical a literary artifact as the idea of the double audience it invokes—part of the cultural heritage of the novel’s emergence in Nigeria, which carries some of the literary genetic information about its original production and reproduction. Units like “*chi*, or personal god” become common tropes in brand name African literature, where (according to the double-audience theory) such things should go without saying. Such devices once solved a historical literary problem; now they often seem ornamental. These moments of expository translation (the narrator acting as native informant) once suggested to attentive readers not so much the strangeness of African culture, but the strangeness of the novel form in Africa (its dislocated condition), but they may now be (or so it seems for many readers) precisely the marks of genuineness for the official African novel, hallmarks of its ethnic cultural difference at a moment when the formal sector of World Literature has reduced textual cultural difference and the number of commercially viable world literary forms. In seeming to point to possible alternative cultural frameworks or canons of probability, they now signify the authenticity (rather than the adulteration) of the cultural narrative. I am suggesting, then, that they no longer mark the gap of cultural difference; instead, they mark the mark of the gap. In other words, the conceit of trying to bridge a cultural divide in the African novel no longer signifies cultural difference as such, but *the category* of cultural difference (to modify Roland Barthes’s observation on the reality effect).

We can see a text being marked up in such fashion for World Literature in *The Longman Anthology's* presentation of *Things Fall Apart*. Not only is the novel prepared with an introduction and a map of colonial Nigeria, but prepended to the text is a list of “Principal Characters in the Novel” and a Glossary, enhancing, of course, the reader’s expectation of cultural difference and ethnic authenticity. The glossary largely follows the glossary of Igbo words that Heinemann added to the very end of the novel in 1963 (see Moore et al.), which itself mostly repeats the narrator’s glosses from within Achebe’s text—glosses that will be familiar to the reader by the time s/he discovers the largely unnecessary glossary at the back of the book. The list of characters, however, comes with a bizarre explanatory footnote in the anthology—“Achebe prefaces his novel with this list of characters” (768)—which takes the individualist principle of literary property creation to an extreme, attributing to the “author” all of the intentions and artifacts of a collective production process, adding the list of characters to the inventory of literary properties registered under the proper name of Achebe. Of the dozen or so editions of *Things Fall Apart* that I have studied, I have never encountered a single one with a list of principal characters, and the 1958 edition included none of this extra cushioning material to ease the novel into the global marketplace. In the original publication, the narrator does all of the work of mediating between the world of Achebe’s text and the other worlds in which its readers reside.

Italics, glosses, and glossaries are formal marks of the passage of minority ethnic, regional, and national literatures into World Literature. The specific forms of such devices (beyond their particular font, style, size, or color) become iconic marks of origin, guarantees of a novel’s African or Nigerian or Igbo legitimacy and provenance.¹⁶ These literary marks function like appellations of origin or geographical indications that authenticate “culturally distinctive export goods” (Coombe, “The Expanding Purview” 394) whose “quality and characteristics . . . are due exclusively or essentially to the geographical environment, including natural and human factors,” as the Lisbon Agreement for the Protection of Appellations of Origin and their International Registration put it in 1958 (World Intellectual Property Organization, Article 2). “Made in Africa,” the text reminds the reader of contemporary World Literature as it goes, capitalizing “on the symbolic resource that authenticity holds in a global market, where some consumers value the heterogeneous in a field of homogeneity and seek out difference in a sea of sameness [stories]” (Coombe, “The

Expanding Purview” 403). Indications of origin are intellectual properties that are collectively owned, part of a group’s cultural heritage used to protect “local conditions of production” and “traditional methods and practices” (402). In Abani’s case, “*chi*, or personal god” assures the reader that s/he is reading a genuine Nigerian novel (whose form and story are not, therefore, quite as familiar as the novel genre may make them seem), and it does so by a gesture of intertextual affiliation that places Abani and Achebe under a common mark of geographical origin. By putting tiny fragments of *Things Fall Apart* in the place established for exposition and cultural heritage, *GraceLand* stages its ethnic authenticity, nodding to Achebe while, in Graham Huggan’s phrase, “commenting ironically on the material conditions” of contemporary African literary production, circulation, and consumption (30). Perhaps most interestingly for my argument, the intertextual transaction between Abani and Achebe (ordinarily taken to be a sign of a vibrant and vital national literary tradition) is largely routed through the formal sector of World Literature, where a space (albeit a small one) has been reserved for African literature (or Nigerian national literature) that dutifully honors *Things Fall Apart* as its *urtext* (see Gikandi, “Chinua Achebe”). In other words, the mark says this is Nigerian literature—as World Literature has it.

Active Principles, Dulcificant Properties, and the Patenting of Cultural Knowledge

Under modern copyright regimes almost three centuries old, the novel is an object of intellectual property, but it also contains in its pages other intellectual properties. We tend to talk about the novel as the product of an individual mind—at work on common cultural, social, and historical materials, but, in the final literary product, that collective material has supposedly been transformed “into the private property of the speaker’s intentions,” in Bakhtin’s formulation (294), or impressed with the distinct personality of its author, in the French *droits d’auteur* tradition.¹⁷ This is the logic behind modern copyright law, and it is the root of the individualist principle of intellectual property creation enshrined in the major international treaties (Berne, GATT, TRIPS, etc.) that cross-cut world literary space and inflect the conditions of possibility for the novel’s rise and circulation anywhere. The center-periphery models of world literary systems also seem to reify the author as the individual creator of intellectual property and, thereby, to reinforce the power

imbalances of the current international IP regimes. The intertextual and intergeneric intellectual property entanglements of Abani's novel suggest to me that we might need to remind ourselves (against the prevailing pressures of IP regimes to privatize and personalize the ownership of ideas and their fixed forms of expression) that novels—like all creative productions—are also carriers of cultural knowledge.

As a technology that converts traditional knowledge to intellectual property, the novel is an exceptionally hungry genre that has a taste especially for cultural property; it may be the greediest of literary genres, picking up everything in its way (including other genres) and calling it all novelistic. (This is one good reason why a map of world literary space surveyed through the novel may not, in the end, tell us all that much about the world but might tell us something about the operations of World Literature.) *GraceLand* offers many good examples of this; the chapters are punctuated by recipes for traditional dishes and records of native medicinal uses for plants, two genres of (traditional) knowledge that are ostensibly being passed down to Elvis as entries in his dead mother's journal. These sorts of textual objects (which share qualities with the geographical indications I discussed in the previous section) are common in postcolonial and ethnic-minority literatures that circulate as World Literature, spicing the text with a dash of local flavor and the color of a rapidly disappearing traditional world order and view. In Abani's novel, they signify the category of cultural difference in a particularly ironic (or parodic) mode: Not only can Elvis not remember anybody in his family ever cooking, but the forms of presentation for the traditional knowledge are highly mediated—old ideas in modern genres.

To modify slightly one of Moretti's observations about the modern novel, "When a culture starts moving towards the modern [recipe book], it's *always* as a compromise between foreign form and local materials" ("Conjectures on World Literature" 60); true enough, perhaps, but the terms are loaded to the advantage of the genre (*modern* novel; *modern* recipe book), just as the ingredients are distorted to conform to the formal units of measure required for routinization—that is, for quantification, documentation, anthologization, transportation, and duplication. The novel genre eats such things up, appropriating common cultural property and converting it into intellectual property that is then protected by a legal fence of private property rights. In a sense, most novels (like recipe books) are registers of cultural property, repositories—or "anthologies," as the Ugandan cultural critic Peter Nazareth described Elvis Presley's relationship to African American culture—of

collective heritage. This may be most clear in contemporary novels from cultures and literatures that are recognizably under threat from the forces of globalization, but *Robinson Crusoe* is not simply a story of the emergence of economic and protestant individualism (the kind of man who can own ideas and enclose intellectual properties); it is equally a catalogue of common preindustrial British methods for the production of basic human necessities and the survival of mankind.

The novel is a vehicle of both intellectual and cultural property, although our ordinary vocabulary tends to speak about the novel in individualist creative terms, and to obscure that knowledge. I want to give this rather banal insight about the novel in world literary space some urgency within the current world IP systems because it suggests a different set of uses for (or services of) literature than we ordinarily contemplate; perhaps it gives the minority novel a different brief not only in World Literature but also in the world beyond literature, where knowledge is being privatized and pirated all the time. At the end of Abani's novel, after suffering all sorts of dreadful abuse at the hands of too many people with too many financial interests at stake in his small economic activities, Elvis is spirited off to "America," under the assumed name and passport of his friend Redemption. Elvis's exit is bittersweet because it appears to confirm the judgment of his colleague that "your type no fit survive here long" (318). However, Elvis's redemption is sweetened somewhat not only by thoughts of Las Vegas and his aunt Felicia already in America but also by what is commonly known in English as "miracle fruit" (*Synsepalum dulcificum* Daniell): "an oval, purplish fruit," the pulp of which "is sweet and has the lingering after-effect of making acid substances consumed within three hours of it taste sweet" (298). Abani's description of the miraculous berry appears on a page by itself, in the generic position already established for cultural exposition and geographical indication, simple background to the chapter that follows it; but, in this case, the "lingering after-effect" may help to render more palatable what is essentially an acrimonious exile from Nigeria in the chapter that follows the reader's consumption of (the description of) the miracle fruit.

The formulaic description of *Synsepalum dulcificum* has a relatively complex genealogy. The text printed in *GraceLand* follows very closely that of the "miraculous berry plant" found in R. C. Agoha's *Medicinal Plants of Nigeria* (1973), which Abani cites in his acknowledgments. Agoha's "booklet" follows quite closely its own sources, indicated in a footnote that directs the reader to J. M. Dalziel's *Useful Plants of West Tropical Africa* (1928) and F. N. Hepper's revised edition of vol-

ume 2 of J. Hutchinson and J. M. Dalziel's *Flora of West Tropical Africa* (1963)—surveys of (economically) important African plants. Their sources track back to an article published in the *Pharmaceutical Journal and Transactions* in 1852, authored by William Daniell, where the “peculiar properties” and “dulcificant virtues” of the miraculous berry are elaborated in detail and fully documented (445). Daniell himself sits at the end of a chain of less formal sources that cross multiple languages and go back to colonial travelogues, botanical surveys, taxonomical indices, and slave-trade reports from the early eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. The language describing the miracle berry changes at each link in the chain of citations—the color of the fruit even turns from *rouge*, to dusky red, to reddish purple, to purplish—as the language settles; but, for the most part, the phrases in Abani's novel are already present in Daniell's colonial sources, and they are stabilized in the form we read in *GraceLand* with Dalziel's description written in 1937.

Quotation marks are rather rare in this chain of intertextual transactions and the bibliographies of sources consulted and cribbed are often incomplete, which demonstrates at least two things: The “facts of nature” cannot be personally owned, at least not in the Western intellectual tradition of the last few centuries, and different norms of citation and forms of property obtain in different literary sectors. Nonetheless, we could have gone straight to Daniell's 1852 journal article as the originary source of Abani's description since, by the conventions of binomial nomenclature, the formal Latin name of the plant within the world-botanical system carries its own bibliography—that is, it carries the name(s) of those who named it and, sometimes, of those who misnamed it: *Synsepalum dulcificum* (Schumach & Thonn.) Daniell. In other words, the formal botanical name of the plant identifies the first person to have put into print (or authored) its current Linnaean taxonomy, which means, generally, the first European to have identified the genus to which the plant belongs and thereby earned (according to the center's rules of the game) the right to name the species, making it fit for the classification system and for inclusion in surveys of world plants. This is the literary lineage of the cultural heritage that prepares the closing scene of Abani's novel for Elvis's international flight—the elaborate bibliographic transactions that craft seemingly simple traditional knowledge in its recognizable (classifiable) form. If we were to sketch the intertextual links between these sources, we would have the image of a tree with a massive root system, grounded at the trunk with Daniell's essay; the “miracle berry”

tree looks like one of Moretti's (or Darwin's) trees only if we cut it off at the ground (or property line, where original proprietary claims are successfully made) and ignore what lies buried underneath. Such deracination is precisely what happens in that other realm where descriptions of *Synsepalum dulcificum* circulate: patent applications.

In the multiple patent applications (some successful) filed over the last forty years that seek to capitalize on traditional West African knowledge of the "miracle fruit," the same formulaic descriptions of the plant and its uses reappear. The emphasis in the scientific literature is slightly different than in the literary chain that leads to *GraceLand*, because (ironically perhaps) the scientists show more interest than does Abani in the very specific (and apparently limited) uses that "the natives" or "the locals" made of the plant. The phrase most often repeated—with very little variation—in the scientific documents is sometimes attributed to Daniell, who expanded on an observation found in the 1793 memoir of the ex-governor of the Cape-Coast Castle, Archibald Dalzel:

The purposes for which the natives of the Gold Coast usually reserve them, are but few, the principal consisting in rendering their stale and acidulated kankies more palatable, and in bestowing a sweetness on sour palm wine and pitto. . . . In other respects they would seem to be eaten more for the novelty of the sensations they induce than for any particular object. (Daniell 448; see also Dalzel v)

It is not surprising that this particular formulation would find favor in the scientific literature and patent applications, since to receive protection, patentees are supposed to be able to demonstrate the novelty and nonobviousness of their ideas (although no such standard apparently holds for the language in which a patent claim is made, which may be copied with apparent impunity). From the scientific literature, it seems that not only do the natives have no real sense of property (and therefore no possible proprietary claim to the "miracle berry" as a product of culture or cultivation); they also have no good sense of what to make of the natural fortune that surrounds them. Indeed, the trifling local uses of the "miracle berry" that scientists cite appear quite parochial and unimaginative compared to the grand global claims the international patentees make for the salutary benefits of its dulcificant properties for world health.

Intellectual property protection cannot be granted to the facts of nature (which is what the natives supposedly know), only to the recog-

nizable work of man on nature—that is, to the products of “formal (but not informal) innovation” (Roht-Arriaza 262). However, when the locals evidently do know what to do with their own stuff, one of the ways to turn traditional knowledge into intellectual property, or the facts of nature into art, is to make it new (like good modernists) by uprooting information from its location of origin, where it may be obvious, and moving it to a jurisdiction where it may be considered (locally) novel, nonobvious, and, therefore, patentable. This mode of translation complements the more specialized scientific method of separating knowledge from its traditional context. Over the course of the scientific literature, *Synsepalum dulcificum* becomes completely deracinated: The plant is separated from its native and imperial histories; the berry is separated from the bush; the “active factor” (miraculin) is identified and is isolated from the berry. Thus, the knowledge for which the patents are sought is not “traditional knowledge” per se; it is the “active principle” in traditional knowledge or its application—that which can be isolated, documented, translated, transported, and duplicated.¹⁸

Like texts of World Literature, *Synsepalum dulcificum* is figuratively “engaged in a double conversation: with [its] culture of origin and with the varied contexts into which [it] travel[s] away from home” (Damrosch and Pike xxii). Indeed, the differential circulation of traditional and scientific knowledge means that the same description of the miracle berry can appear simultaneously in a literary context as cultural heritage (where it cannot be owned, except as one small part of a copyright that covers the novel as a whole) and in an industrial context where it may be privately owned. What might matter most about this intertextual and intergeneric entanglement, from a world intellectual property perspective, is that the novelty and non-obviousness requirements for patent applications cannot be met if there is evidence of what the law calls “prior art,” and “prior art” is demonstrated by a published description of the knowledge under patent consideration.¹⁹ The traditional knowledge reprinted as cultural exposition in the recipes and plant descriptions in *GraceLand* shows just such evidence of prior art—and of well-handled prior art at that: cultural knowledge mediated multiple times and worked into the generic forms of entries in a modern recipe book and pages from an encyclopedia of comparative botanical morphology. If the novel is a genre of prior art—of other individuals’ prior art and a technical record or anthology of cultural knowledge—then it simultaneously partakes of and (potentially) protects against the progressive individualization and privatization of knowledge.

Towards a Literary Anti-Trust

As system, institution, or aspiration, World Literature seems to be one more way of not talking about the world, especially when it fails to recognize the material inequalities and imbalances that subtend creative production and the monopoly model of copyrighted culture that are the conditions of its own contemporary possibility. Like any discourse, as Foucault repeatedly illustrated, World Literature propagates the institutions, specialties, and specialists that legitimate its existence, and in our contemporary era of IP globalization this process of academic enclosure has real material implications. Young scholars of postcolonial, ethnic, and third-world literatures in the US academy now feel the pressure of market forces to make their work legible in terms of World Literature; the irony, of course, is in what that means: to make non-metropolitan literatures ready for metropolitan readers of World Literature in the metropolitan centers. If World Literature revives the old imperial fantasy of collecting the world's literary heritage in order, in its best spirit, to give back to the world what is the world's, it does so at a moment when knowledge that would have been inconceivable to own in the age of high imperialism is now routinely enclosed for business. Cultural capital has probably never been more concretely aligned with real capital and power.

I have tried in this essay to make visible some of the ways in which literary texts and World Literature are entangled with the international legal regimes designed to regulate intellectual property creation, accumulation, and circulation. With Abani's *GraceLand*, I have been especially interested in exploring some of the ways in which a single novel is intergenerically and intertextually engaged with other forms of intellectual and cultural property and some of the implications of this for thinking about the shape and shaping of world literary space and constructions of World Literature. Admittedly, in that case I have made much of a little exposition, but that, in fact, is the point: to appreciate the disruptive effects that tiny textual details have on the texture of world literary and property systems. It is only at the level of abstraction of "distant reading" (see Moretti, "Conjectures") or a "World Republic of Letters" that literary space and time look so smooth, so regular, so manageable—in a word, so predictable. The literary problems of international intellectual property law and the property problems of World Literature are both relatively understudied, partly, I believe, because both projects share the same assumptions about the origins and ownership of literary resources and both orig-

inate from the same locations of cultural and economic advantage, which they are, in fact, designed to protect and promote. At this point, it may be rather trite to say that World Literature is a friend of globalization, but we need to pay more attention to the specific intellectual and economic terms of the alliance between the new World Literature and the New World Order if we are to have what Wallerstein would term a literary world system without monopolies. And yet, it may be that there is a hidden and productive ambivalence at the bottom of World Literature, where (like the differential circulation of traditional knowledge I looked at through Abani) there is a persistent double quality to the texts enclosed within the canon, a doubleness whose tension has the capacity to undo the project, to undermine the center-periphery terms of its own production, and to challenge the property regimes that currently maintain the privileges of those already part of the monopoly sector of World Literature.

Notes

- * An earlier version of this article was delivered at the 2009 meeting of The English Institute. *Alif* gratefully acknowledges permission to publish the author's revised text.
- ¹ For a good discussion and bibliography of the "second enclosure movement" argument (the rapid privatization of intangible intellectual and cultural products that traditionally were regarded as the common property of a group), see Boyle.
- ² Good studies of the cultural implications of this shift include Coombe's *Cultural Life*, Matsushita, Halbert, and Shiva.
- ³ This assertion has more than metaphorical value, particularly if we accept the implications of Vandana Shiva's account of the history of modern patents, which were the legal mechanisms by which colonial charter companies were granted monopoly rights to the land, resources, and labor of Africa, Asia, and the Americas in the high-imperial Age of Discovery (11-13). The patent process of conquest and capital accumulation created much of modern Europe's wealth and consolidated the trade-related advantages (which are also cultural and military advantages) that are protected today under the guise of intellectual property law. This is another way of demonstrating Said's provocative assertion that "without empire . . . there is no European novel as we know it" (82).
- ⁴ To follow the novel is to predetermine, at least in some way, the shape of world "literary" space—perhaps it tells us something about the novel, or world-novelistic space, but why be so grand with it and make claims about the literary, or World Literature, based on the novel? Moretti proposes his

various methods of analysis as investigative tools for the study of world/comparative literature, but the conclusions to be drawn are almost always foregone; so, for example, here is what “a literary criticism finally transformed into a *comparative historical morphology*” will “one day” find “in the geographical variation and dispersal of forms”: “the power of the center over an enormous periphery” (*Atlas of the European Novel* 195).

- ⁵ For more on *GraceLand*, see also Adélékè Adéèkó, Chris Dunton, Sarah Harrison, Matthew Omelsky, and Chris Ouma.
- ⁶ This is the basic logic of intellectual property imperialism, which advances throughout the globe by dispersed systems of diffusion and dissemination of (cultural) forms that sometimes “out-compete,” and often reduce the diversity of, “local” cultural forms. In the wake of British decolonization in Africa, Alan Hill, the director of Heinemann Educational Books, triumphantly proclaimed that the Empire “which British soldiers and administrators had lost was being regained by British educators and publishers” (93).
- ⁷ Might something similar be at work in the “World Republic of Letters,” abetted by the current regimes of IP law that protect only some kinds of intellectual creations and knowledge? As property regimes push further across the globe, do the resource-rich societies and cultures of the Global South become more condensed? Are they condensed in the same way in which when a monoculture in crops expands it concentrates biodiversity in ever-smaller spaces, in the shrinking tropical rain forests, for example?
- ⁸ In Genette’s diagram of the “four [classical] classes of imitation” in the “Aristotelian genre system,” he places parody in the “inferior-narrative” location: “The superior-dramatic defines tragedy; the superior-narrative defines epic; the inferior-dramatic corresponds to comedy, the inferior-narrative corresponds to a genre that is less clear-cut—one that Aristotle leaves unnamed and illustrates sometimes by the ‘parodies.’ . . . This slot, therefore, is obviously the one for comic narration” (12-13).
- ⁹ This distinction might be illustrated by the different claims of corporate authorship and modes of distribution between Disney’s *The Lion King* and one of its apparent sources, the Malian epic of Sundiata. The distinction is also often upheld in World Literature anthologies, where Greek epics are assigned to the singular genius (of) Homer, while the Sundiata epic is attributed to the Malinke people as a group, represented by a griot.
- ¹⁰ If “we have come to invoke ‘culture’ as the name for the gap between us here and them there”—quite problematically, as Anthony Appiah suggests—then we might think of exposition as always a narrative expression of cultural difference (212). When a lab technician on a current TV crime drama explains how DNA identification works to an investigator who surely already knows,

having brought, for the umpteenth time, some piece of evidence for DNA analysis, the writers are addressing a perceived cultural difference between the show's up-to-date staff and its potentially out-of-date viewers.

- 11 The phrase likely appears in one of "the records of the despised British anthropologists" that Iris Andreski had in mind when she chastised Achebe (whom she called a "rural African novelist") for supposedly working from colonial source materials rather than from "the memories of his grandfathers" (qtd. in Achebe, "Colonialist Criticism" 71). The phrase does at least appear in a review of P. A. Talbot's *Tribes of the Niger Delta* (1932) (see J. M.).
- 12 For an overview of these critical discussions, see Owomoyela.
- 13 If the "double conversation" is a defining quality of World Literature, then the foundational texts would seem necessarily to be those produced under conditions of imperialism, diaspora, exile, slavery, and other forms of domination. That is, the subordinated, subaltern voice would seem to be the primary voice of World Literature.
- 14 This is not to mention the seemingly obvious fact that non-Igbo Anglophone readers in Nigeria and across Africa would also need such glosses.
- 15 The editors of the *Longman Anthology* make a similar statement about their "principles of selection": "our overall selections have been made with an eye to fostering connections across time and space . . . to create an exceptionally coherent and well-integrated presentation of an extraordinary variety of works from around the globe" (xxiii).
- 16 Abani's *GraceLand* presents an interesting case. Written and revised in the United States, it is almost always read as an African novel, part of the new production by the third generation of Nigerian writers.
- 17 For a nuanced discussion of the similarities and differences between the dominant British and French traditions of authors' rights that formed the basis of the current international agreements, see Strowel.
- 18 This process has something in common with the "decontaminating" process of abstraction by which African masks were made into modern art in the early nineteenth century that I have described elsewhere. See Slaughter, "'It's Good to Be Primitive': African Allusion and the Modernist Fetish of Authenticity."
- 19 This is one of the biases in the IP regime against traditional knowledge, where much of the information has been transmitted for centuries in the oral mode. It permits biopiracy, and means that researchers in pharmaceutical companies may now be the biggest single readership of old colonial travelogues. A couple of patents on the Neem tree have been successfully challenged by an Indian NGO that produced evidence of "prior art" in old Sanskrit manuscripts (McLeod 176; Shiva).

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