

‘CONSIDERING COLDLY . . .’

*A Response to Franco Moretti*

**I**N HIS ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, Franco Moretti makes the bold suggestion, which he treats as if it were a law of literary evolution, that the literatures of the periphery arise ‘from the encounter of Western form and a local reality’.<sup>1</sup> In what amounts to a literary manifesto, Moretti proposes a programme in which world literature should essentially be studied as a set of variations on a Western theme: economic pressures of the centre on the periphery are, by and large, homologous to those in the literary field, and the response to these by writers in the periphery can only be a range of compromises with them. In a companion essay, ‘The Slaughterhouse of Literature’, Moretti explains why he gives pride of place to the novel in the study of world literature: ‘my model of canon formation is based on novels for the simple reason that they have been the most widespread literary form of the past two or three centuries and are therefore crucial to any social account of literature (which is the point of the canon controversy, or should be)’.<sup>2</sup> Moretti distinguishes an ‘academic canon’, which he dismisses as inconsequential, from the ‘social canon’ that he seeks to explain according to objective laws of literary evolution.<sup>3</sup> Academics, he maintains, can determine their own canon when the literary phenomena they study cease to matter in the social arena. Hence English professors and the like have a greater say in determining which poets survive, because the study of poetry is no longer of any moment.<sup>4</sup> Moretti is open to the possibility that in the future the novel may not matter much either, but in the meantime, this is the genre around which he sets out to organize the study of world literature for the last two or three hundred years.

Moretti's focus on the novel as crucial to any account of world literature is certainly well taken, and his hypotheses about it are both innovative and illuminating. But his dismissal of the social significance of other genres is less persuasive. Why doesn't poetry follow the laws of the novel, as Moretti proposes them? After all, does it really make sense to argue that T. S. Eliot's poetry had less of a cultural impact than Joyce's narrative fiction, or that it was any less read? Would it be possible to tell the story of the Russian contribution to world literature without Pushkin, Mayakovsky or Akhmatova? Even if, for the sake of argument, one were to accept that poetry is socially insignificant in Western Europe in the 20th century, Moretti would still need to explain why prior to this fatal date poetry does not appear to fit his model.

In what follows I would like to test Moretti's conjectures against the case of Spanish American literature, where poetry does matter.<sup>5</sup> In Spanish America poetry was the dominant literary genre, and the essay or sociological treatise was of far greater significance than the novel until at least the 1920s, if not later. It is emblematic that Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845)—a sociological treatise about a caudillo—had a greater bearing on the history of the novel of the Latin American dictator than any

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<sup>1</sup> 'Conjectures on World Literature', NLR 1, January–February 2000, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> See *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2000, p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> Moretti has advocated a programme for the study of literature along Darwinian lines for some years. See his essay 'On Literary Evolution', first published in 1987, and now in *Signs Taken for Wonders*, London and New York 1997, pp. 262–78.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature', p. 227.

<sup>5</sup> The case of Brazil would unnecessarily complicate my theme, so I will concentrate here on writers from Spanish America. There are clearly important commonalities between the literatures of Brazil and Spanish America. But there are also significant differences that would warrant special treatment, although without altering the substance of my argument. Unlike Spanish America, Brazil was the seat of an Empire (when the Portuguese court moved to Rio de Janeiro after the Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula); unlike Spanish America, it became a monarchy when it seceded from Portugal; and unlike Spanish America, the transition from aristocratic to republican rule took place without a war of independence. These historical contrasts account for a stronger sense of the nation earlier on than in any Spanish American country, and bear on many themes, events and structures in Brazilian literature. The result was several distinct literary phenomena in Brazil that do not have counterparts in Spanish America: a peculiar variant of Romanticism with indigenous themes; its own brand of *modernismo* (which emerged in the 1920s and has nothing to do with the movement of the same name in Spanish America); and highly influential narratives in which national identity is represented as a fusion of three races.

straightforward work of narrative fiction written in the 19th century; or that Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude* was more influential than any Mexican novel until the publication of Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* in 1955. And it is not a coincidence that José Carlos Mariátegui—the first Latin American Marxist philosopher and literary critic—does not cite a single novel of significance in his essay on Peruvian literature, published in 1927.<sup>6</sup> The early Spanish American novel is certainly of historical interest, as symptomatic of cultural and political processes worthy of scholarly attention. But it would be misleading to pretend that it was the most widespread literary genre, or that it had many practitioners or readers. One would be hard-pressed to point to a single literary work, other than *María* (1867) by the Colombian Jorge Isaacs, as an example of a 19th-century Spanish American novel that was widely read within and beyond the national borders in which it was produced. The early Spanish American novel has mattered most to literary critics seeking to establish national canons, to literary historians of Spanish American literature in the second half of the twentieth century, and to academic specialists in the last two decades.<sup>7</sup> Its relative marginality as a social phenomenon may help to explain why Latin American literature, from Ricardo Palma to Jorge Luis Borges, was especially open to mixed genres.

In Spanish America, poetry was not only the dominant literary genre until the 1960s. Its practitioners and critics actually set the expectations and parameters—in effect, the course—of the practice of literature. The story of Spanish American narrative, most notably the influential novel of the 1960s—García Márquez, Cortázar, Fuentes, Vargas Llosa and others—cannot be told if one does not understand the story of the poets. Many Spanish American novels could serve as good illustrations of Moretti's thesis that the periphery has made instructive compromises

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<sup>6</sup> Mariátegui deliberately ignored the novel that gained its canonic status in the second half of the 20th century as Peru's most important novel of the 19th century, Clorinda Matto de Turner's *Birds Without a Nest* (1889). Matto de Turner's novel attempted to represent the social predicaments of the indigenous populations of Peru, but it lacked an ingredient Mariátegui demanded of narrative fiction of this kind: an engagement with indigenous culture. He pointed instead to Enrique López Albújar as 'the first to explore these paths': José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, Austin 1971, p. 275.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that the first literary histories of Spanish American literature written by Spanish Americans were not published till the end of the 1940s, and that the bulk of scholarship on the 19th-century Spanish American novel has been produced since the 1980s.

with forms conceived in the centre. An atlas of the novel in Spanish America along the lines Moretti has traced for the European case would surely be of great interest (an atlas of the reception of Latin American literature around the globe would also be highly instructive).<sup>8</sup> But it would be inaccurate to think that the early Spanish American novel was other than the most marginal of all literary genres, or that there was a significant internal market for it until very recently. In short, any discussion of Spanish American literature that neglects poetry, the hegemonic genre, must go astray.

The first major Spanish American literary manifesto was 'Alocución a la Poesía' (1823), a widely read poem by the Venezuelan Andrés Bello, which called for the autonomy of Spanish American literature in the aftermath of political independence from Spain. But it was the poetic movement called *modernismo* that was the first literary expression to transcend national boundaries, making it possible for histories of Spanish American literature to be envisaged by Spanish Americans themselves; and which set the tone for future developments in several genres, including the novel. To understand the significance of *modernismo* and of Rubén Darío—the poet most closely associated with it—a few words are necessary about the history of poetic form in the Spanish language.

The lyrical conventions of modern Spanish poetry were developed in the 16th century by Boscán and Garcilaso de la Vega, who fashioned the Spanish hendecasyllable, and other canonical forms which have been used in Spanish poetry ever since; even the most experimental of Baroque poets, including Góngora, wrote according to the parameters established by Garcilaso and Boscán.<sup>9</sup> The first signs of a reaction against the strictest conventions of Spanish prosody did not take place in Spain but in Spanish America in the 1830s, in the work of poets such

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<sup>8</sup> See his *Atlas of the European Novel*, London and New York 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Although Moretti is essentially interested in the period from the late 18th century to the present, it is worth noting that the parameters of literary practice in Spain, where poetry was also the dominant genre, involved the creative adaptation of Italian models to the Spanish language at the very moment that Spain was exercising its hegemonic military might over Italian territories. Garcilaso de la Vega was himself a soldier who had fought in the Italian campaigns of Charles V.

as Esteban Echeverría in Argentina, and José María Heredia in Cuba.<sup>10</sup> The fact that Spanish Americans anticipated the rise of Romantic poetry in Spain, however, was only a prelude to the most significant development in the literary history of Spanish poetry in the last three hundred years: the appearance of the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío in the late 19th century. Darío was as far away in the periphery as it was possible to be: he was born an illegitimate child in a Nicaraguan village. Yet he had a transforming effect on the poetry of the Spanish language. Before Darío, Spanish prosody was so codified and petrified that even the most daring of the Romantics in Spain and Spanish America were limited to a handful of poetic forms. Darío was acutely conscious of these limitations, and single-handedly expanded the possibilities of Spanish prosody by writing in a myriad unprecedented poetic forms. But he did more than enlarge the possibilities of Hispanic poetry. He undermined the widespread assumption, in both Spain and Spanish America, that the study of Spanish prosody was the study of appropriate norms.<sup>11</sup>

### *Darío's revolution*

With Darío, Spanish prosody ceases to be normative and becomes descriptive, as poets assume responsibility for inventing the forms as well as themes of their works. It has been argued that Darío's poetic revolution involved the transfer of French trends, such as symbolism, to Spanish America. But this is a deceptive claim, for Darío's poetic innovations bred new forms that are unique to the Spanish language. Darío found harmonies and dissonances in his poetic lines that revolutionized the way in which poetry could be written in the idiom. His impact was felt far and wide in Spanish America: it gave rise to the first literary movement generated locally, yet diffused widely throughout the Spanish speaking world. After Darío, Spanish American poets such as Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriela Mistral, Octavio Paz and many others shared the Nicaraguan writer's confidence that European literature could no longer fix the parameters of their creativity. One consequence of this 'wave'—to use a helpful metaphor

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<sup>10</sup> Esteban Echeverría wrote after independence from Spain, but before Argentina was established as a nation within its current borders; José María Heredia while Cuba was still a Spanish colony.

<sup>11</sup> Darío's *Prosas profanas* (1896) was studied by many Spanish American poets as a virtual manual of poetic forms, but more importantly as an example of a poetic work that did not depend on the rules of the past.

from Moretti—was that Spanish poetry itself entered a rich period of renewal, in which poets such as Juan Ramón Jiménez, Pedro Salinas, Jorge Guillén or Federico García Lorca acknowledged their debt to developments in Spanish America.

In his own time Darío was both praised and criticized by the influential Uruguayan essayist, José Enrique Rodó, who recognized in 1899 that the poet's formal innovations had achieved Spanish America's emancipation from European literary norms. Yet Rodó categorically denied that Darío was 'the poet of America' (*el poeta de América*), because he held that a mastery of literary form was not a sufficient condition for a writer to become representative of the continent.<sup>12</sup> For that, a writer had to be able, above all, to give expression to a 'feeling of social solidarity' which the early poetry of Darío lacked. Darío took Rodó's criticism to heart, and responded by writing poetry that attempted to address the spiritual and political predicaments of the continent. He became the first poet to write anti-imperialist poetry, condemning American military interventions in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>13</sup> In response to the invasions of Cuba and Puerto Rico by the US during the Spanish–American War, Darío wrote an article entitled 'The Triumph of Caliban', in which the characters of *The Tempest* were for the first time used to fashion political allegories for the predicaments of Latin America.<sup>14</sup> Rodó's interactions with Darío set the horizon for the reception of Spanish American literature down to the present. Since Darío, virtually every Spanish American writer has felt the pressure to write works of literary significance that at the same time address political imperatives of social solidarity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See 'Rubén Darío', in José Enrique Ariel Rodó, *Liberalismo y jacobinismo. Ensayos: Rubén Darío, Bolívar, Montalvo*, Mexico City 1989, pp. 137–70.

<sup>13</sup> His most famous political poem, which in effect inaugurated anti-imperialist literature directed at the United States in Latin America, is 'A Roosevelt', in his book *Cantos de vida y esperanza*, Madrid 1905.

<sup>14</sup> 'El triunfo de Calibán' can be found in Iris Zavala, ed., *Rubén Darío: el modernismo y otros ensayos*, Madrid 1989, pp. 161–66.

<sup>15</sup> In the view of the leading literary critic of post-revolutionary Cuba, the most significant aspect of *modernismo*, even if it was not always clearly articulated, was a consciousness 'of what would later be called the underdeveloped character of our world, and the beginnings of an anti-imperialist attitude': Roberto Fernández Retamar, 'Intercomunicación y nueva literatura', in César Fernández Moreno, ed., *América latina en su literatura*, Mexico City 1972, p. 328.

The Uruguayan Angel Rama—arguably the most important Spanish American socialist literary critic of the second half of the 20th century—wrote a book to demonstrate that the advent of Darío corresponds, in political terms, to the rise of a liberal mindset in Spanish America: of an unprecedented kind of individualism in accord with the incorporation of Latin America in an international capitalist system. But unlike others who have equated the poet's brand of individualism with bourgeois decadence, Rama insisted that Darío's role in the liberation of Spanish American poetry from European norms was a development of the highest literary, social and political significance. 'The end that Rubén Darío set himself was . . . the poetic autonomy of Spanish America as part of the general process of continental liberation'.<sup>16</sup>

### *Literary emancipation*

In his analysis of Darío, some of Rama's assumptions are quite similar to Moretti's. Like Moretti, Rama is not interested in the uniqueness of texts, but in their social function. He praised Darío for

founding a literature based on a modern conception of life and art. A literature understood, not as a series of valuable works, but as a coherent system with its own repertoire of themes, forms, means of expression, vocabularies, linguistic inflections, possessed of a real public of consumers linked to creators, and of a set of writers attentive to the needs of that public, who as such must come to terms with the salient literary and socio-cultural issues of the day.<sup>17</sup>

Rama shares, too, Moretti's regard for the world-system school of economic history that conceives international capitalism as a core and a periphery, bound together in a relationship of growing inequality. He is also just as interested in understanding literary relations in their connexion to social and economic realities. But Rama would not expect that an economic relationship of inequality between the centre and the periphery would necessarily translate into compromising reception by the

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<sup>16</sup> *Rubén Darío y el modernismo*, Caracas and Barcelona 1985, p. 5. Even critics who read Darío's poetry as expressive of 'bourgeois decadence' acknowledge Darío's transformative significance for literary form and, in some of his works, a way out of decadence. See Françoise Pérus, *Literatura y sociedad en América Latina: el modernismo*, Mexico City 1978, especially pp. 62ff and 138ff.

<sup>17</sup> *Rubén Darío y el modernismo*, p. 11.

periphery of literary forms developed in the centre. On the contrary, in Rama's view, the incorporation of Latin America in the world-economic order created the conditions for a literary emancipation—the production of forms that chart the course of a literary history internally, if not indeed with external effect.

In Rama's view of Spanish American history, political emancipation of the colonies from Spain occurred before their literary emancipation. But he also argued that literary emancipation was a precondition for economic emancipation. He shared Rodó's conviction that literary liberation should go hand in hand with the development of a social consciousness that would be heralded by creative writing, but he linked this imperative to the promise of socialism, and to the cultural priorities of the writers and intellectuals who welcomed the Cuban revolution. Much the same view of their own work was expressed by Mario Vargas Llosa (in his socialist period), Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes, once they gained prominence as world-class novelists. In the 1960s these writers passionately argued that Latin American fiction had finally come of age, and that literature would play a significant role in the social and political transformation of the Western hemisphere. In a recent interview published in this journal, Subcomandante Marcos, the leader of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), expresses the same view: 'We went out into the world in the same way that we went out into literature. I think this marked us. We didn't look out at the world through a news-wire but through a novel, an essay or a poem'.<sup>18</sup> One can trace the gestures of Marcos and the novelists to the dilemmas faced by Darío when he was reprimanded by Rodó for neglecting issues of social solidarity. It is not a coincidence that Vargas Llosa wrote his thesis at the University of San Marcos on Rubén Darío, or that Darío was considered the cultural icon of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua.

In *The Origins of Postmodernity*, Perry Anderson rightly points to the 1890 encounter between Rubén Darío and Ricardo Palma in Lima as a significant moment for the 'self-conscious current that took the name of *modernismo* [as] a "declaration of cultural independence" from Spain that set in motion an emancipation from the past of Spanish letters themselves, in the cohort of the 1890s'.<sup>19</sup> One could expand this observation

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<sup>18</sup> 'Punch Card and Hourglass', NLR 9, May–June 2001, p. 78. Marcos cites novels by García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa to illustrate his point.

<sup>19</sup> *The Origins of Postmodernity*, London and New York 1998, p. 3.

by noting that in the writings of Palma and Darío, the basis for many of the developments of the new Spanish American novel were already in place. Palma, for example, had already invented a short-lived but influential genre, the *tradición*, which blurred the boundaries between history and fiction, in a dialogue with poetry and folklore. His *tradiciones* included tales in which the fantastic and the magical are narrated with the conventions of realism, as when a local Peruvian prelate turns a scorpion into gold and back to its natural form, in a story that underscores the inequalities between Spaniards and creoles under the Viceroyalty.<sup>20</sup> Several of Gabriel García Márquez's most famous conceits—both the military man who takes a young boy to see the ice in the opening of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and the story, told as an event witnessed by a community, of a woman who flew away never to return—are episodes from Rubén Darío's autobiography.<sup>21</sup>

### *Native solutions*

In his *Modern Epic*, Moretti concedes that, with the new Latin American novel, 'for the first time in modern history, the centre of gravity of formal creation leaves Europe, and a truly worldwide literary system—the *Weltliteratur* dreamed of by the aged Goethe—replaces the narrower European circuit'. He goes on to argue that a novel like García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* succeeded in 'solving symbolic problems that European literature was no longer able to work through'.<sup>22</sup> Moretti's account here offers a salutary antidote to his unguarded suggestion in 'Conjectures on World Literature' that writers in the periphery invariably respond to Western forms with compromise solutions, since compromises can be made in several directions, and in some cases they do not have to be made at all.

Moretti would no doubt retort that in cases like this the centre has 'selected' a form generated by the periphery. Even so, Spanish American literature still stands in contradiction to his postulate of a general homology between the inequalities of the world economic and literary systems. For the forms that Moretti acknowledges as new in this fiction

<sup>20</sup> See 'El alacrán de Fray Gómez', in Raimundo Lazo, ed., *Tradiciones peruanas*, Mexico City 1991, pp. 42–45.

<sup>21</sup> See Rubén Darío, 'Autobiografía', in Arturo Ramoneda, ed., *Rubén Darío esencial*, Madrid 1991, pp. 41–42.

<sup>22</sup> *Modern Epic*, London and New York 1996, p. 233.

were developed in the periphery, not as a compromise with forms from the centre, but as a self-conscious literary project that addressed local imperatives, and produced native solutions whose international impact transformed the repertoire of literary possibilities in Spanish quite early in the 20th century, and in due course expanded them for world literature as a whole.

Moretti has argued, with some ingenuity, that the reception of the new Latin American novel in Europe is to be explained by its serviceability for post-imperial sensibilities. The secret of the success of 'magical realism', he suggests, is to be found in 'a complicity between magic and empire'. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* absolves the West of the guilt of colonial violence by recounting 'those hundred years of history as an adventure filled with wonder'.<sup>23</sup> But even if Moretti were correct that the principal effect of García Márquez's novel is to assuage the bad conscience of Western readers, his picture would be incomplete, since it offers no account of the social significance of 'magical realism' in its local contexts—and still less of the other forms developed in Spanish America which have had a major literary impact both at home and in the world at large. Jorge Luis Borges's many innovations, including his unprecedented fusion—in the 1940s—of detective, metaphysical, and fantastic literature, not only transformed the development of Spanish American narrative, but also led to much later works, such as Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose*, in Europe; just as Julio Cortázar's experiments with time lie behind depictions of social alienation in the films of Michelangelo Antonioni or Jean-Luc Godard. *Blow Up* is directly based on a story by him.<sup>24</sup>

In short, magical realism is not the only Latin American genre 'selected' by writers and readers around the world, and the forms of Latin American fiction cannot be understood merely as compromises with metropolitan norms. As Gerald Martin has put it, 'the celebrated "boom" of the 1960s is actually a climax and consummation, not a sudden emergence from nowhere'. He pointedly adds:

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<sup>23</sup> *Modern Epic*, pp. 249–50.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Fernández comments on Antonioni's reconception of a device he discovered in a story by Cortázar: 'the tension between photography and the written narrative in Cortázar becomes a tension between photography and cinematography in Antonioni'. See 'From Cortázar to Antonioni: Study of an Adaptation', in Roy Huss, ed., *Focus on Blow-Up*, Englewood Cliffs 1971, p. 166.

Influences exist everywhere, and the question is only raised as a problem with regard to ex-colonial regions. Indeed, whereas most important Latin American fiction between the 1940s and the 1960s is recognizably 'Joycean' or 'Faulknerian', it is equally arguable that since the 1960s many of the most important writers—Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, Umberto Eco—have had to become 'Latin American' novelists. Nevertheless, it seems clear that not until the emergence of César Vallejo and Pablo Neruda in the 1920s did Latin American poetry become truly self-generating (thanks to the continental thrust of Darío's *modernismo* in the previous thirty years), and not until Andrade, Asturias, Borges and Carpentier did Latin American fiction truly reach that stage (thanks to the continental thrust of the regionalist-Americanist fiction of the 1920s).<sup>25</sup>

Reminding us that Spanish American poets began to determine the course of their own literary history early on, he also identifies significant narrative antecedents of later innovations in the fiction of the 1920s. Moreover, as we have seen, even before the Latin American novel began to inform developments in both the centre and other peripheries, native poets were already inventing their own literary forms, and altering those of Spain and elsewhere. In short, as Latin American culture moved towards modern poetry, writers in the West began to come to terms with forms developed in Latin America.

### *Beckett and Vallejo*

I would like to take, as an example, the case of Samuel Beckett. When writing *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett was working as a translator for UNESCO in Paris. One of his assignments was to translate Latin American poetry into English for Octavio Paz. Beckett's encounter with this poetry was a transforming event. One of the most visible consequences of it is Lucky's philosophical speech in *Waiting for Godot*, the form and content of which owe much to the poetry of César Vallejo. Here is an extract:

Given the existence of a personal God who from the heights of divine apathia loves us dearly with some exceptions and suffers with those who are plunged into torment . . .

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<sup>25</sup> *Journeys Through the Labyrinth, Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, London and New York 1989, p 7.

And considering that as a result of labours left unfinished that man in spite of strides in alimentation and defecation is seen to waste and pine and to shrink and dwindle . . .

And considering that in the plains in the mountains the air is the same and the earth, the earth abode of stones . . . the tears the stones so blue so calm . . . on the skull alas abandoned unfinished the skull the skull . . . alas the stones . . .<sup>26</sup>

Lucky's speech is patterned after one of Vallejo's most celebrated poems, that starts:

Considering coldly, impartially  
that man is sad and coughs

and which is organized with some of the same grammatical constructions.<sup>27</sup> The topics of Lucky's philosophical reflections are among the central themes of Vallejo's poetry, and his way of expressing them echoes Vallejo's images. The poignant metaphor of the human skull as a blue suffering stone with which Lucky's speech comes to an abrupt end when he is brutally beaten by Vladimir, Estragon and Pozzo, comes from 'Las Piedras', a poem in *Los Heraldos negros* (1918). Even the situation of Lucky, pulled by a rope and beaten with it by others who punish him without cause, comes from lines in Vallejo:

. . . they beat him,  
everyone, without him doing anything to them;  
they gave it to him hard with a stick and hard

also with a rope; witnesses are  
the Thursday days and the humerus bones,  
the loneliness, the rain, the roads . . .<sup>28</sup>

It is appropriate that Beckett should have turned to the forms and themes of a Latin American poet in his attempt to compose a speech that includes words of compassion for the miserable fate of man exploited by

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<sup>26</sup> *Waiting for Godot*, New York 1982, pp. 28–29.

<sup>27</sup> See 'Considering coldly, impartially', in César Vallejo, *The Complete Posthumous Poetry*, translated by Clayton Eshleman and José Rubia Barcia, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1980, p. 73.

<sup>28</sup> 'Black stone on a white stone', *The Complete Posthumous Poetry*, p. 57.

man. José Carlos Mariátegui offered a précis of the poetry of Vallejo that could serve as a gloss to Lucky's philosophical outburst:

the pessimism is full of tenderness and compassion, because it is not engendered by egocentricity and narcissism, disenchanted and exacerbated, as is the case almost throughout the Romantic school. Vallejo feels all human suffering. His grief is not personal. His soul is 'sad unto death' with the sorrow of all men, and with the sorrow of God, because for the poet it is not only men who are sad.<sup>29</sup>

Vallejo's God, like Lucky's, alternates between sorrow, indifference and impotence.

### *Traffic of the new*

In short, the case of Latin American poetry shows that Moretti's schema of world literature needs to be corrected: the assumption that literary and economic relationships run parallel may work in some cases, but not in others. Moretti's model is designed to show how the periphery comes to terms with Western forms, but it falls short on the other side of the equation, where what we have seen is, firstly, an emancipation of the periphery from Western forms, even in situations where Western political or economic hegemony is still operational; and secondly, the interplay of forms and genres across literatures in ways that have little to do with the centre.

Goethe, Marx and Engels, as Moretti reminds us at the beginning of his essay, coined the term 'world literature' as a rebuke to national narrow-mindedness or cosmopolitan monotonies. They were probably more interested in writers, all over the world, who had new things to say or new ways to say them, than in variations on the themes they knew all too well. My remarks here are not intended to question Moretti's contention that compromises between Western formal influences and local materials (or forms) are often of great significance, or to imply that the relationship between markets and forms is irrelevant. I am arguing, however, in favour of a view of world literature in which the novel is not necessarily the privileged genre for understanding literary developments of social importance in the periphery; in which the West does not have a monopoly over the creation of forms that count; in which

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<sup>29</sup> *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, p. 254.

themes and forms can move in several directions—from the centre to the periphery, from the periphery to the centre, from one periphery to another, while some original forms of consequence may not move much at all; and in which strategies of transfer in any direction may involve rejections, swerves, as well as transformations of various kinds, even from one genre to another.

I fully embrace Moretti's suggestion that the promise of comparative literature is impoverished if we confine its scope to the literatures of Western Europe or North America. But I find it equally restrictive to limit the study of writing in the 'periphery' to local compromises with metropolitan norms. Writers in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and elsewhere can do exactly what Moretti would readily allow writers in the centre: create forms—'self-generating' as Gerald Martin has described them in the case of Latin American literature—that have decisively transformed the course of literary history at large.