

## How to Study Literature

The books in this series – all written by eminent scholars renowned for their teaching abilities – show students how to read, understand, write, and criticize literature. They provide the key skills which every student of literature must master, as well as offering a comprehensive introduction to the field itself.

### Published

<i>How to Study Theory</i>	Wolfgang Iser
<i>How to Write a Poem</i>	John Redmond
<i>How to Read a Shakespeare Play</i>	David Bevington
<i>How to Read the Victorian Novel</i>	George Levine
<i>How to Read World Literature</i>	David Damrosch

## How to Read World Literature

*David Damrosch*

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2009  
© 2009 David Damrosch

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

*Registered Office*  
John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex,  
PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

*Editorial Offices*  
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA  
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK  
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at [www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell](http://www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell).

The right of David Damrosch to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Damrosch, David.

How to read world literature / David Damrosch.  
p. cm.—(How to study literature)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-6826-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)—ISBN 978-1-4051-6827-4  
(hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Literature—History and criticism. I. Title.

PN524.D36 2009  
809—dc22

2008013066

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10.5/13pt Minion by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong  
Printed and bound in Singapore by Utopia Press Pte Ltd

1 2009

*To my students*

## Acknowledgments

Teaching at Columbia University over the past quarter-century has not only given me the opportunity to refine ideas on reading world literature; it has brought the world into my classrooms. Just this past semester, a seminar on border-crossings and double identities included students from Australia, Croatia, Egypt, Finland, France, Israel, Italy, and Poland. This book is dedicated to Columbia's lively, argumentative, insatiably curious students, who have taught me at least as much as I've taught them.

These pages have gained much from the conversation in seminars co-taught with Wiebke Denecke, Orhan Pamuk, Sheldon Pollock, and Pauline Yu. I owe much as well to less formal conversations with colleagues at Columbia and elsewhere, including Emily Apter, Sandra Bermann, David Kastan, Pericles Lewis, Stephen Owen, Elizabeth Richmond-Garza, Haun Saussy, and Gayatri Spivak, and to the extended process of work on *The Longman Anthology of World Literature* with my friends April Alliston, Marshall Brown, Page duBois, Sabry Hafez, Ursula Heise, Djelal Kadir, David Pike, Sheldon Pollock, Bruce Robbins, Haruo Shirane, Jane Tylus, and Pauline Yu.

The impetus for this book came from Emma Bennett, who has offered valuable guidance throughout, admirably seconded by Louise Butler and Hannah Morrell. I have benefited as well from generous and insightful readings by Wiebke Denecke, Valerie Henitiuk, and Martin Puchner, and from the loving support of my wife, Lori Fisler Damrosch. Clearly, it takes a world to write a book on world literature.

## Introduction

Reaching back over nearly five millennia and extending today to almost every inhabited region of the globe, world literature offers its readers an unparalleled variety of literary pleasures and cultural experiences. Yet this very variety also poses exceptional challenges, as we cannot expect to approach all these works with the fund of cultural knowledge that readers share with writers within a single tradition. A reader of Balzac will come to know a good deal about Paris even without visiting the city, and as a result can better visualize scenes in Baudelaire and Proust; similarly, a good knowledge of the Qur'an is a prerequisite for a full appreciation of Arabic poetry. It can take many years to develop a close familiarity with even one culture; how are we to deal with the multitude of the world's literary cultures?

Apart from general context, literary traditions themselves are often highly culture-specific: the plays of Bernard Shaw and Tom Stoppard insistently recall Shakespeare, while the medieval Japanese *Tale of Genji* is filled with references to earlier Chinese and Japanese poetry, and modern Japanese novelists keep referring back to *Genji* in turn. Along with differing literary references, cultures develop distinctive assumptions about the ways literature should be created and understood. If we read a foreign text in ignorance of its author's assumptions and values, we risk reducing it to a pallid version of some literary form we already know, as though Homer had really wanted to write novels but couldn't quite handle character development, or as though Japanese haiku are would-be sonnets that run out of steam after seventeen syllables.

What is a non-specialist reader to do? If we don't want to confine our reading within the narrow compass of one or two of the world's literatures,

## Introduction

we need to develop ways to make the most of works from a range of distant times and places. This book is intended to meet this need, offering a set of modes of entry into the many worlds of world literature. The book's chapters highlight key issues that we encounter in confronting foreign material, showcasing conjunctions of major works that can exemplify fruitful approaches to reading world literature in the undergraduate classroom and beyond.

The challenges we face in dealing with the world's many literatures are very real, but I have written this book in the conviction that a work of world literature has an exceptional ability to transcend the boundaries of the culture that produces it. Certainly some works are so culture-bound that they can only be meaningful to a home-grown audience or to specialists in the area, and those texts remain within the realm of their original national or regional culture. Yet very many works find readers in distant times and places, speaking to us with compelling immediacy. No literary culture is more distant from us today, for instance, than the court of King Shulgi of Ur, the world's first known patron of literature, who reigned in southern Mesopotamia four thousand years ago. His very language, Sumerian, is unrelated to any other known language. It had already ceased to be spoken a thousand years before Homer, and its cuneiform script was unreadable for a full two thousand years until the late nineteenth century. Yet now that modern scholars have painstakingly deciphered the ancient language, no specialized knowledge whatever is required for us to respond to the charm of a lullaby written for one of Shulgi's sons:

Sleep come, sleep come,  
 sleep come to my son,  
 sleep hasten to my son!  
 Put to sleep his open eyes,  
 settle your hand upon his sparkling eyes –  
 as for his murmuring tongue,  
 let the murmuring not spoil his sleep.  
 ("Sulgi N," lines 12–18)

A great work of literature can often reach out beyond its own time and place, but conversely it can also provide a privileged mode of access into some of the deepest qualities of its culture of origin. Works of art refract their cultures rather than simply reflecting them, and even the most "realistic" painting or story is a stylized and selective representation. Even so, a great

deal is conveyed through literature's kaleidoscopes and convex mirrors, and our appreciation of a work can be enormously increased if we learn more about the things it refers to and the artist's and audience's assumptions.

This is already the case for music and visual art, and it is all the more true for verbal creations, which recode so much in differing languages: Japanese and English people don't see different colors, but they do have different names for colors, some of them even dividing up the spectrum differently. We can learn much about a culture from its art and its architecture, but we learn immeasurably more when we have written records as well. If we read more of the poems King Shulgi commissioned, we soon find ourselves surrounded with an entire pantheon of unfamiliar gods and goddesses and a plethora of historical and literary allusions. Shulgi's poems give us an important mode of access to his culture, and that cultural knowledge helps us appreciate the poems in turn.

Reading a work from a distant time or place involves a back-and-forth movement between the familiar and the unfamiliar. A view of the world is always a view from wherever the observer is standing, and we inevitably filter what we read through our experience of what we have read in the past. But then, if we don't simply overlay our prior expectations wholesale onto the new work, its distinctive qualities will impress themselves on us, enlarging our field of vision and giving us a new purchase on the things we knew before.

World literature may seem daunting in its sheer scope, but this is already an issue with any major national tradition. More novels were written in nineteenth-century England than any single person could read in an entire lifetime. There is always more to read, but we can only read onward if we have gotten successfully oriented, at least in a preliminary way, by the very first works we have read. Reading our way beyond our home tradition involves a more pronounced version of the part-whole dilemma or hermeneutic circle that we already encounter in a single tradition. We have to start somewhere and work outward to a broader view. We will better understand what Dickens was doing if we have a deep knowledge of Defoe, Fielding, Jane Austen, Walter Scott, Trollope, and George Eliot, and our understanding will be further enlarged if we can view Dickens comparatively in relation to Diderot, Hugo, Goethe, Gogol, and Dostoevsky. Further, our sense of classic narratives is also shaped by the books now being written around us, and so we read Dickens in part through lenses provided by A. S. Byatt, Salman Rushdie, Peter Carey, and a host of other contemporary novelists.

A wide and deep familiarity with novels is wonderfully helpful for the appreciation of Dickens in England or of the Nigerian Chinua Achebe or Japan's Yukio Mishima, but we can never achieve such familiarity unless we can make some real sense of the first novel we read, and then the second one, and on through the tenth and the hundredth. This hermeneutical process can begin into childhood with the works that circulate in our home tradition, including books that have taken root as imports. The Bible and the *Thousand and One Nights* may have been known from such an early age that their very foreignness may seem comfortably familiar. If we now start to read beyond the boundaries of already familiar texts, we experience the shock of the new, but we can respond by bringing to bear the skills we developed when we first began to read.

This book is organized around a set of skills that we need to develop – or recover and hone – in order to read world literature with understanding and enjoyment. We need to become aware of different literary assumptions made in different cultures, including assumptions as to what is literature itself – its modes of creation and reading, its social setting and effects. This is the subject of the first chapter, which draws its examples chiefly from lyric poetry. The second chapter treats the issue of reading across time, using the Western epic tradition as a case in point: how do we come to terms with an older work's distinctive methods and worldview, and how do we assess its afterlife in the later tradition it helped to shape? Building on the first two chapters, the third chapter turns to the problem of reading across cultures, now with case studies drawn from drama.

The fourth chapter discusses the fascinating problems raised when we read in translation, as readers of world literature must often do. I will argue that it is important to read translations in critical awareness of the translator's choices and biases, even if we have no direct knowledge of a text's original language, and such a critically attuned reading can help us to make the most of the reading experience, at times even discovering ways in which a work has gained in translation.

If the opening chapters focus on ways we can reach into the world of the foreign text, the fifth and sixth chapters discuss ways in which authors themselves can reach out beyond their own culture. The fifth chapter looks at works that are set abroad, while the sixth chapter discusses new modes of writing in today's globalizing world. Finally, the epilogue outlines ways in which interested readers can go farther in reading and studying world literature, from primary texts to critical readings to language study and time spent abroad.

This book can be read on its own or as an adjunct to a survey course. The focus on different genres in the opening chapters can dovetail with a genre-based course plan, though the issues raised in each chapter can equally be applied to works in any genre. There is also a movement over the course of the book from early periods to modern times, reflecting the progression typical of many courses, but I often counterpoint early and later materials; a chronological presentation is only one way to set up a course or a plan of reading. In the interest of keeping this book to a manageable length, I have discussed most works fairly briefly, and usually with only tacit relation to the large bodies of scholarship that have grown up around many of them. The discussions here are by no means intended as full-scale readings, but are given as examples of general issues and as portals into extended reading of these and comparable works.

This book aims to illustrate something of the extraordinary variety of world literature, and so it includes discussion of a wide range of writers, including Homer and Sophocles in ancient Greece, Kalidasa in medieval India, Murasaki Shikibu in Heian Japan, and onward to the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006. Yet I have tried to resist the temptation to pile example upon example: in each chapter, three or four key works form the centerpiece of discussion, with briefer treatments of several more. The examples given here are intended to highlight the problems raised and to suggest major strategies that have been employed by writers and that can be adopted by readers today.

This book treats many texts that have become standard in world literature courses, from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to Voltaire's *Candide* to Walcott's *Omeros*. Yet I take up less familiar works as well, both to find good examples for a given point and also to showcase writers whom I find particularly fascinating and want more people to read. It can be reassuring to realize that we can get a good first grounding in world literature by attending to the general issues presented by a reasonable number of works. Yet it is also exhilarating to know that a tremendous expanse of possibility opens out before us from that point onward, with field after field offering a far richer and more varied diet than any one literary landscape could possibly provide. James Joyce has a line in *Finnegans Wake* – perhaps the most global text ever written – envisioning an ideal reader with “an ideal insomnia.” Perhaps there is no better definition for world literature than the expanding universe of works that compel us to become that ideal reader, dreaming of that ideal insomnia.

## Chapter 1

# What Is "Literature"?

A first challenge in reading world literature is the fact that the very idea of literature has meant many different things over the centuries and around the world. Even in the English-speaking world today, the term can be applied very broadly or quite restrictively. At its most general, "literature" simply means "written with letters" – really, any text at all. In the examination room following a skiing accident, when your surgeon says "I've pulled up the latest literature on compound fractures," she means medical reports and statistics, not Thomas Mann's novels. In its cultural sense, "literature" refers first and foremost to poems, plays, and prose fiction – works of creative imagination written in heightened and pleasurable language. Yet even in this focused sense, literature's boundaries are blurry. Often readers only admit some poems and novels into the category of "real" literature, including Virginia Woolf but considering Harlequin romances and Stephen King thrillers as subliterate trash. Advertising jingles are rarely assigned in literature courses, even though they represent a minimal form of poetry.

Serious or artistic literature can be described by the term *belles-lettres*, a phrase suggesting that beauty of language matters more than a literary text's use-value or its direct statements. By contrast, a jingle is not meant to be savored for its beauty; its meter and rhyme are used purely instrumentally, helping the message lodge in your mind so that you'll remember to buy a particular brand of toothpaste. Even in the sense of *belles-lettres*, though, literature can be defined with varying degrees of breadth. A great essayist like Michel de Montaigne, and eloquent scientific writers such as Charles Darwin or Sigmund Freud, offer many rewards to a reader who gives close attention to their language and to the shaping of ideas and narrative in their works. Freud actually won a leading German

literary award, the Goethe Prize, in recognition of the art of his essays and case studies, and he is often taught in literature courses alongside Proust, Kafka, and Woolf.

The boundaries of literature were quite broad in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and though they contracted in the first half of the twentieth, they have steadily widened out again over the past several decades. Literature anthologies now regularly include religious and philosophical texts, essays, autobiographical writing, and examples of creative nonfiction along with poems, plays, and prose fiction. Literature has expanded even beyond its root sense of "written with letters" to include oral compositions by illiterate poets. Movies are often found on literature course syllabi today, even though the dialogue is only one part of the artwork, and often not the most important part. All the same, today's movies give many of the pleasures that novels gave nineteenth-century readers, and "literature" can appropriately be considered in its broad sense to include such works of cinematic narrative.

Many cultures have made no firm distinctions between imaginative literature and other forms of writing. "*Belles-lettres*" would be a good translation of the ancient Egyptian term *medet nefret*, "beautiful words," but *medet nefret* could refer to any form of rhetorically heightened composition, whether poetry, stories, philosophical dialogues, or political speeches. The classical Chinese term *wen* is translated as "literature" when it refers to poetry and artistic prose, but it carries a much wider set of meanings, including pattern, order, and harmonious design. In view of this variety, we need to prepare ourselves to read different works with different expectations. Primo Levi's haunting *Survival in Auschwitz* would lose much of its force if it ever turned out that Auschwitz had never existed, or that Levi had not been interned there, whereas for readers of Boccaccio's *Decameron* it hardly matters whether there was an actual plague in Florence that forced people to flee the city and start telling each other ribald stories in the countryside.

Within a given literary tradition, authors and readers build up a common fund of expectations as to how to read different kinds of composition, and experienced readers can approach a work with a shared sense of how to take it. Reviewers may praise a popular history of the French Revolution for being "as gripping as a novel," but we will still expect all the events in the book to be documented in sources that the historian has read and not made up. Conversely, the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges was famous for devising *ficciones* that often look like sober scholarly reports,

but readers soon discover that unlikely or even impossible events are taking place, while many of Borges's "sources" are entirely invented and are part of the fiction themselves. At a middle ground, when we read something subtitled "a historical novel," we assume that it will adhere to the general outlines of a real sequence of events, but we allow the author to take major creative liberties in supplementing historical figures and events with invented characters and scenes.

Writers sometimes deliberately push the envelope with genre-bending experiments, and confusions can arise when we mistake a work's genre or an author's intention, as when Orson Welles broadcast his dramatization of *The War of the Worlds* and some listeners panicked at what they thought was a genuine news report of an alien invasion. Usually, though, a work fits well enough within a form whose rules we know. A lover of Petrarch and Shakespeare can approach Wordsworth's sonnets with a good sense of what a sonnet is (fourteen pentameter lines, typically composed in one of two dominant rhyme schemes, the "Petrarchan" and the "Shakespearean"). With this background, readers can then appreciate Wordsworth's creative use of this classic form and his distinctive departures from it, as when he varies the rhyme scheme for dramatic effect. With world literature, however, we often encounter works that reflect very different literary norms and expectations than our home tradition employs. A close familiarity with Shakespeare's sonnets won't help us much in appreciating the distinctive drama of a *ghazal* – a lyric form popular over many centuries in Persia and north India, with its own set of rules for rhyme and its own assumptions about the ways in which poets experience love and longing and pour out their sorrows in highly ironic verse.

### The World of the Text

Quite beyond the varied norms associated with individual literary genres, different cultures have often had distinctive patterns of belief concerning the nature of literature and its role in society. A good deal – though by no means all – of Western literature during the past several hundred years has been markedly individualistic in its emphases. Many modern novels focus on the inner development of a hero or heroine, often in opposition to society as a whole, with the protagonist escaping from social restrictions – like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus – or tragically hemmed in by

them – like Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Much of Western literature, as Harold Bloom has put it in *The Western Canon*, is "the image of the individual thinking" (34).

Western lyrics have long taken the form of an individual thinking aloud, as with the following lyric by an anonymous sixteenth-century poet:

Western wind, when wilt thou blow,  
The small rain down can rain?  
Christ, if my love were in my arms  
And I in my bed again!  
(Quiller-Couch 20)

Here, we seem to be overhearing the complaint of an unhappy lover, but the speaker isn't addressing anyone, just the wind, and even the wind is absent from the scene. Nor is the scene itself fully present to us. We don't have any way to know whether the speaker is indoors or outside, pacing about the countryside or gazing through the window of an inn; the focus is strongly on his – or her? – interior state of mind.

Similar emphases can be seen in an otherwise very different poem, "Nombrarte" (Naming you), written four centuries later by the Chilean poet Alejandra Pizarnik:

No el poema de tu ausencia,  
sólo un dibujo, una grieta en un muro,  
algo en el viento, un sabor amargo.  
(Pizarnik 98)

[Not the poem of your absence,  
just a sketch, a crack in a wall,  
something in the wind, a bitter aftertaste.]

In many ways, Pizarnik's 1965 poem is radically different from "Western Wind." It has no rhymes and no set meter or number of syllables in a line; it lacks any completed sentences, with no verbs and only a few broken phrases. A sixteenth-century poet would probably not have recognized this as verse at all. The poem even begins by denying that it is "the poem of your absence" that an earlier poet might have composed; it offers no movement, no expected resolution. Instead of a fertile spring wind that can reunite the lovers, here we have an ill wind that blows no one any good and only brings a bitter aftertaste.

Despite these differences, "Nombrarte" resembles "Western Wind" in important respects. Like the sixteenth-century poet, Pizarnik gives us a speaker who is obsessed with an evidently absent lover, and we seem to be inside the speaker's head. The absent lover seems as far away as the western wind was for the earlier speaker. As in the earlier poem, the speaker may be indoors or outside. She – or he? – may only be thinking about walls and winds, or may be feeling a chill breeze while looking at a cracked wall that brings her situation home to her: there is no telling, as the focus once again is on the speaker's interior drama.

A far more social world opens up when we turn to the love poetry written in early India, as can be seen in the following short lyric dating from around the year 800:

Who wouldn't be angry to see  
his dear wife with her lower lip bitten?  
You scorned my warning to smell  
the bee-holding lotus. Now you must suffer.  
(Ingalls 102)

On first reading, this poem seems only a step removed from "Western Wind" and "Nombrarte." Once again, we are overhearing a single speaker, though now talking with someone else, apparently a close friend who has hurt her lip and is afraid that her husband will be upset by her spoiled looks. Though the scene has widened to include the wife, she is silent, and once again we have only the most minimal indications of where the scene is supposed to be set. The conversation may take place in a garden graced with blossoming lotus plants, but it could just as well be occurring indoors, hours later, as the speaker tends her friend's swollen lip.

If we read this poem as we would read the Western examples, we would see it as concerned with the wife's emotional state, taking our cue from the poem's conclusion, which emphasizes her suffering. Yet seen in these Western terms, the poem looks rather slender and unsatisfying, and the sudden introduction of the idea of suffering seems uncalled-for. A bee-sting should really only be a temporary annoyance, and it ought to inspire sympathy rather than anger in any reasonable spouse. Are we to imagine that the wife is married to an abusive husband? Instead of bringing her some lip balm, has he flown off the handle just because the swelling keeps her from kissing him? From Euripides to Joyce Carol Oates, there is a long tradition in the West of literature concerning abusive spouses, so this explanation

may come to a Western reader's mind, and yet it hardly seems relevant here. Far from condemning the husband, the friend begins by asserting that anyone would naturally be angry on observing his wife's swollen lip.

The riddle is soon solved if we read farther in Sanskrit poetry, for many Sanskrit *kavyas* or lyric poems concern illicit or adulterous passion. What is more, Indian poets often speak of tell-tale marks from bites or scratches made by lovers in the heat of passion. From the poem's opening couplet, then, a reader of *kavya* poetry would immediately be alerted to the underlying situation: the wife's lover has carelessly bit her in a place she can't conceal. The husband's anger, and the wife's suffering, follow naturally from this revealing mistake, and the poet's skill is seen in his playful use of a classic motif.

This much can be learned about the poem's context by reading a collection of Sanskrit love poetry, but it is also possible to avail ourselves of more explicit commentary, for in the Sanskrit tradition scholar-poets wrote elaborate treatises on poetic language. This poem was discussed in around the year 1000 by one of the greatest Sanskrit commentators, a scholar named Abhinavagupta. What his interpretation shows is how intensely social this poetry was seen to be. Abhinavagupta never considers that the poem features a pair of friends and no one else. Instead, what at first looks like a private conversation turns out to be overflowing with social drama:

The meaning of the stanza is as follows. An unfaithful wife has had her lip bitten by a lover. To save her from her husband's reproaches she is here addressed by a clever female friend, who knows that the husband is nearby but pretends not to see him. *Now you must suffer*: the literal sense is directed to the adulterous wife. The suggested sense, on the other hand, is directed to the husband and informs him that she is not guilty of the offense.  
(Ingalls 103)

Abhinavagupta's reading immediately opens out the poem beyond the individual or two-person focus we might expect from a Western lyric. At this point we may still find comparisons to European fiction and drama, in the kind of double dealing found in Boccaccio and Molière, whose adulterous heroines and sly servants often direct two levels of meaning at differing recipients. But Abhinavagupta is only just beginning to describe the scene as he understands it. "There is also a suggestion," he continues, "directed to the neighbors who, if they hear the wife being roundly abused by the husband, may suspect her of misconduct." And more than that: "There



is a suggestion directed to her fellow wife, who would be delighted by the abuse of her rival and by [the news of] her adultery. The suggestion lies in the word *dear* ('dear wife'), which shows that the wife addressed is the more attractive."

The garden is getting a little crowded by now, but there is more to come. "There is a suggestion to the adulterous friend of the speaker, informing her, 'You should not take on humiliation at the thought of being accused of bad character in front of your fellow wife; rather, you should take to yourself high esteem and now shine forth.'" And next, "To the wife's secret lover there is a suggestion, telling him that 'Today I have thus saved your heart's beloved who loves you in secret, but you must not bite her again in a place that is so obvious.'" And last of all, "To anyone clever who is standing nearby the speaker's cleverness is suggested, [as though she were to say,] 'This is the way I have concealed things'" (103). Clearly, we are in a different poetic world than the one in which the lonely lover plaineth in the spring.

Important though they are, the contrasts between the English lyric and the Sanskrit poem are differences of degree rather than reflections of some absolute, unbridgeable gulf between East and West. Some Western poems involve more than one or two characters, and not every *kyōka* depends upon a landscape as crowded as Abhinavagupta claims. Even for this poem, the key insight is that the jealous husband is within earshot, as this reveals the poem's fundamental drama. It is far from certain that an entire crowd is ringing the garden, ears aflutter. When Abhinavagupta goes so far as to interpret the word "dear" as indicating that there is a less-beloved second wife at hand, he may be indulging in a perennial scholarly temptation – the drive to find some special meaning in every single word of a poem. This urge already surfaced two thousand years ago in rabbinical interpretations of the Bible, whose every grammatical particle was mined for some deep truth, while in modern times professors at Oxford and Yale excel at unfolding surprising meanings in the slightest turn of phrase in Keats. Perhaps the Sanskrit poet was not referring to polygamy at all, but called the wife "dear" in order to underscore the depth of the jealous husband's concern. Perhaps the poet just needed a word to fill out the line.

Even if we take Abhinavagupta's interpretation with a grain of salt, his reading shows that the social world is far more fully present in the poem than a Western-trained reader might have thought. Realizing this difference enables us to make sense of elements that otherwise would seem inconsistent or pointless, and allows us to appreciate the poem as a

fascinating elaboration of its tradition's resources. When reading world literature we should beware of the perils of exoticism and assimilation, the two extremes on the spectrum of difference and similarity. We won't get very far if we take the Sanskrit poem as the product of some mysterious Orient whose artists are naïve and illogical, or whose people feel an entirely different set of emotions than we do. On that assumption, we might experience the poem as charming but pointless, either lacking any real focus or else oddly over-dramatizing a minor annoyance as a cause for suffering. Equally, though, we should be wary of assuming that the medieval Sanskrit poet and his audience were *just like us*, playing by the same rules and with the same sorts of cultural assumptions we might find in a contemporary poem about spousal abuse. We need to learn enough about the tradition to achieve an overall understanding of its patterns of reference and its assumptions about the world, the text, and the reader.

Reading the Sanskrit poem can illustrate one basic means of coming to terms with the difference of a foreign work: to pause at moments that seem illogical, overdone, or oddly flat, and ask what is really going on. Not all such moments will yield dramatic insights, of course, either because the confusion can only be cleared up with some detailed specialized knowledge that we lack, or else because the poet has actually stumbled; even Homer sometimes nods, as Alexander Pope famously remarked. Yet with any new work, and particularly with those from a distant time or place, a good assumption is that moments that seem puzzling or absurd on first reading can be windows into the writer's distinctive methods and assumptions. Pausing over the surprising emphasis on the husband's anger, and looking for comparable moments in other works in the same tradition, can reveal the real trouble with the wife's swollen lip. Then we can see how beautifully the poet has modulated the traditions available in that culture, in order to give a unique expression to concerns that can appropriately be described as universal.

### The Author's Role

If different cultures have different understandings of the world that a literary text engages, they also diverge in their conception of the ways in which texts are created to begin with. In the Western tradition going back to Plato and Aristotle, literature is something a poet or writer *makes up* – an

assumption built into our very terms "poetry" (from Greek *poiesis*, "making") and "fiction" (from Latin *facere*, "to make"). This conception can involve celebrating the writer's supreme creativity, but it can also place literature on a spectrum shading over toward unreality, falsehood, and outright lying. This is why Plato wanted poetry banished from his Republic, whereas Aristotle celebrated poetry as more philosophical than historical writing, able to convey higher truths free from the accidents of everyday life.

By contrast, various cultures have seen literature as deeply embedded in reality, neither above nor below the audience's own physical and moral world. Writers are regarded not as making things up but as observing and reflecting on what they see around them. Stephen Owen has emphasized this difference in discussing the poetics of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), often considered the greatest period of Chinese poetry. In his book *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, Owen quotes a poem by the eighth-century poet Du Fu:

Slender grasses, breeze faint on the shore,  
Here, the looming mast, the lone night boat.  
Stars hang down on the breadth of the plain,  
The moon gushes in the great river's current.  
My name shall not be known from my writing;  
Sick, growing old, I must yield up my post.  
Wind-tossed, fluttering – what is my likeness?  
In Heaven and Earth, a single gull of the sands.

(Owen 12)

Unlike the Sanskrit poem, Du Fu's lyric presents the soliloquy of a solitary observer, and in this respect it resembles many Western poems. Yet the speaker is part of the natural world around him; far from fading away before the poet's interior drama of illness, aging, and political regrets, the landscape is shown in detail, its physical features corresponding to the poet's private concerns and memories. As Owen comments, Du Fu's lines "might be a special kind of diary entry, differing from common diary in their intensity and immediacy, in their presentation of an experience occurring at that very moment" (13). Responding to this immediacy of observation, the poem's readers would have taken the speaker to be Du Fu himself, not an unknown, invented persona. Tang Dynasty poets understood their task as conveying to their readers their personal experiences and reflections, artistically shaped and given permanent value through the resources of the poetic tradition.

Very differently, Western writers have often asserted their artistic independence from the world around them. They have regularly insisted that their works do not make declarative statements, sometimes even claiming that they don't say anything at all: "A poem should not mean / But be," as Archibald MacLeish declared in his "Ars Poetica" in 1926 (MacLeish 847). Three and a half centuries earlier, Sir Philip Sidney expressed a similar view in his *Defense of Poesy*: "Now, for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth" (Sidney 517). By contrast, Du Fu's readers were sure that the poet was affirming the truth of his experience; he had indeed written his poem late in life, in exile, on a night when he observed slender grasses swaying and a single gull on the sand, lit by the light of the moon. In his *Apology*, Sidney speaks of the poet's task as "counterfeiting," whereas Du Fu's contemporaries saw him as perceiving the deep correspondences linking heaven, earth, grasses, seagull, and poet.

Like the Sanskrit tradition, Chinese poetry presents a difference in degree rather than a difference in kind from the Western tradition. Du Fu's readers knew that poets never simply transcribed whatever caught their eye; classical Chinese poems are elaborate constructions, in which the poet very selectively weaves elements from the world around him into poetic forms that employ long-cherished images, metaphors, and historical references. Equally, despite all the emphasis on counterfeiting and artifice, Western writers have rarely gone as far as Archibald MacLeish in asserting that their works have no cognitive meaning – a paradoxical stance even for MacLeish, after all, since his poem is making a meaningful statement when it asserts that poems should not mean but be.

There have always been poets in the Western tradition who seem to be recounting their own experiences as Du Fu does. As early as the seventh century BCE, the great Greek poet Sappho certainly wrote as though she was describing just what she felt when she saw a woman she loved flirting with a handsome young man:

To me it seems  
that man has the fortune of gods,  
whoever sits beside you, and close,  
who listens to you sweetly speaking  
and laughing temptingly;  
my heart flutters in my breast,  
whenever I look quickly, for a moment –  
I say nothing, my tongue broken,  
a delicate fire runs under my skin,

my eyes see nothing, my ears roar,  
 cold sweat rushes down me,  
 trembling seizes me,  
 I am greener than grass,  
 to myself I seem  
 needing but little to die.

(Caws 304-5)

Even here, though, Sappho is mixing literal observations with artifice-laden metaphors. She may be green with envy, but surely she has not turned greener than the grass. She has lost her voice, but her tongue isn't physically "broken"; she feels flushed and hears a ringing in her ears, but she isn't actually bursting into flames.

### Modes of Reading

The contrasts between Du Fu and Sappho partly reflect differences in the way poets pursued their vocation in their respective cultures, but they are also differences in modes of reading and reception. In comparing Chinese and Western poetic assumptions, Stephen Owen contrasts Du Fu's evening scene with William Wordsworth's sonnet "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802." Like Du Fu, Wordsworth contemplates an outdoor scene:

Earth has not anything to show more fair:  
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
 A sight so touching in its majesty:  
 This City now doth, like a garment, wear  
 The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
 Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.  
 (Wordsworth 1:460)

Despite the specificity of the poem's title, though, Owen proposes that "it does not matter whether Wordsworth saw the scene, vaguely remembered it, or constructed it from his imagination. The words of the poem are not directed to a historical London in its infinite particularity; the words lead

you to something else, to some significance in which the number of vessels on the Thames is utterly irrelevant. That significance is elusive, its fullness eternally out of reach." Whether the poem concerns the force of solitary vision, or nature versus an industrial society, or some other theme, Owen says, "the text points to a plenitude of potential significance, but it does not point to London, at dawn, September 3, 1802" (Owen 13-14).

But why couldn't the poem be read as pointing to London on September 3, 1802? It is true that Wordsworth isn't inviting us to count the number of masts on the Thames, but neither was Du Fu counting blades of grass. The closing lines of Wordsworth's sonnet insistently proclaim the uniqueness of the moment that he is recording:

Never did sun more beautifully steep  
 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;  
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
 The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
 Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
 And all that mighty heart is lying still!  
 (Wordsworth 1:460)

In these lines, Wordsworth invites his reader to share the scene that lies before his eyes. While he could certainly have recorded his impressions long afterward, or even invented the scene outright, Du Fu too could have dreamed up his evening scene, or written about it the next day. The difference concerns the reader's assumptions as much as the poet's own practice.

These assumptions can shift over time within a culture as well as varying between cultures. During the nineteenth century, readers regularly regarded the Romantic poets' verses as closely reflecting their personal experiences. Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," written in 1819 when "half in love with easeful Death" (Keats 97), was understood as expressing the melancholy of the consumptive poet as he sensed the approach of his early death. More recent readers have sometimes preferred to emphasize the poem's artifice – the ode closes with the speaker unsure whether he has really heard a nightingale or instead has had "a vision or a waking dream" – but Keats's contemporaries did not doubt that he was moved to reflect on beauty and mortality by the sound of a real nightingale pouring forth its soul in ecstasy in the fading light of dusk.

Chinese poets often composed their verses for social occasions, but "occasional verses" have long been written in the West as well. Byron

recorded many of his experiences in verses with titles such as "On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year: Missolonghi, Jan. 22, 1824" – a poem whose impact depends on the reader's awareness that Byron really was writing from the Greek town named in his subtitle, where he had gone to fight in the cause of Greek independence. Even when Byron wrote about medieval knights or Spanish seducers, his "Byronic heroes" were thinly disguised versions of their creator. Childe Harold's musings and Don Juan's sexual escapades were seen as virtual entries from Byron's journal, a viewpoint encouraged by many ironic asides within the poems.

For much of the twentieth century, on the other hand, literary critics often preferred to regard literary works as what William Wimsatt labeled "verbal icons": self-contained artifacts whose meaning ought to be wholly expressed within the work itself, independent of biographical knowledge. Since the 1980s, however, literary studies have increasingly striven to return literary works to their original social, political, and biographical contexts, and in such readings it can once again make a difference whether Wordsworth's sonnet was or was not truly written on September 3, 1802.

As a matter of fact, it probably wasn't. William's sister Dorothy accompanied him on the trip during which he was struck by the sight of early-morning London from Westminster Bridge. She recorded the event in her diary for July 31, 1802, five weeks before the date given in Wordsworth's title:

After various troubles and disasters, we left London on Saturday morning at ½-past 5 or 6. . . . We mounted the Dover Coach at Charing Cross. It was a beautiful morning. The City, St Pauls, with the River and a multitude of little Boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. . . . there was even something like the purity of one of nature's own grand spectacles. (Darbishire 194)

The shifting of the date suggests that the sonnet is not after all an "occasional poem" composed when Wordsworth had the perception he describes; even if the poem was first drafted in July, Wordsworth later brought its date forward in a significant way. For in late July, he was taking the Dover Coach on his way to spend a month in France, where he had lived for a year in 1791–2 during the heady early days of the French Revolution and had shared the revolutionaries' hopes for a radical remaking of society – hopes later dashed in the Reign of Terror and its imperial Napoleonic aftermath.

During his stay in revolutionary France, Wordsworth had plunged into an intense love affair with a Frenchwoman, Annette Vallon; their liaison had produced a daughter, Caroline, before Wordsworth's family had insisted

he return home. In July 1802, engaged to be married in England, he was making a trip back to France to settle affairs with Annette; he would be seeing his daughter for the first time since her infancy a decade before. During this trip he wrote a series of sonnets filled with regret about the course of the Revolution and – less obviously – about his failed romance with Annette Vallon and his brief reacquaintance with their daughter. Caroline appears, for instance, as the unidentified child in his sonnet "It Is a Beautiful Evening, Calm and Free," set on the beach at Calais:

Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,  
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,  
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:  
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;  
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,  
God being with thee when we know it not.  
(Wordsworth 1:444)

Read biographically, this poem expresses Wordsworth's ambivalent relief that Caroline is doing well without him, and if he can only visit very infrequently, she can have the patriarch Abraham holding her all year round.

The visit with Annette before his impending marriage cannot have been easy, and Wordsworth was ready to get away after a decent interval. In a sonnet "Composed by the Sea-side, near Calais, August, 1802," Wordsworth thinks longingly of returning home: "I, with many a fear / For my dear Country, many heartfelt sighs, / Among men who do not love her, linger here" (Wordsworth 2:40). A companion piece, "Composed in the Valley near Dover, on the Day of Landings," expresses his feelings on his return to England: "Here, on our native soil, we breathe once more," the sonnet begins. In place of the daughter left behind in France, Wordsworth comforts himself with the sight of English boys at play: "those boys who in yon meadow-ground / In white-sleeved shirts are playing; and the roar / Of the waves breaking on the chalky shore; — / All, all are English." Home from the brief reunion with the lover of his youth, Wordsworth now experiences "one hour's perfect bliss" with a different woman – his sister, Dorothy:

Thou art free,  
My Country! and 'tis joy enough and pride  
For one hour's perfect bliss, to tread the grass  
Of England once again, and hear and see,  
With such a dear Companion at my side. (2:43–4)

## What Is "Literature"?

Wordsworth, then, can be read like Du Fu as conveying his personal experiences and observations, rather than as representing the imaginary thoughts of an invented persona. Admittedly, Wordsworth refers only very obliquely to his romantic entanglements; though he specifies dates and places, the sonnets never mention Annette, Caroline, or even his sister by name. Instead, Wordsworth develops his private drama into a contrast of English peace and freedom versus French turmoil and tyranny. Yet Du Fu also was typically indirect in alluding to his major source of unhappiness, the failure of his political ambitions and his banishment from the imperial court: he never names the Emperor or his political rivals, any more than Wordsworth is prepared to name Annette and Caroline.

The fundamental difference between the poet's role in the Chinese and English traditions, then, involves ways of reading as much as poetic practice. Yet the resulting poems do read quite differently, making different demands and assuming different habits of reading on our part. Du Fu's poems are inseparable from his life, whereas to read Wordsworth's sonnets against his biography is to make a choice that the poems sometimes hint at but never openly invite. In referring to a "dear Child" and a "dear Companion" in place of Caroline and Dorothy, Wordsworth may be offering an obscure half-confession, but he can also be giving his readers a purposefully limited view into his life. The sonnets' themes require him to have a child and then a contrasting adult companion at his side, but the reader is not meant to be distracted by an overabundance of personal detail, which Wordsworth would have regarded as egotistical self-display.

By leaving the identities open, Wordsworth hopes to make his sonnets resonate more strongly for his readers, who can insert the faces of their own beloved children and companions in place of his. The shifting of the date of the Westminster Bridge sonnet, then, was something other than an act of autobiographical bad faith. Wordsworth's redating of the poem enabled him to place it at a time appropriate to the sonnet's poetic mood, the period of relieved return rather than the anxious point of departure. Altering the facts of his life even as he builds on them, Wordsworth is still working within the Western tradition of the poet as the maker of fictions.

Among the most famous of Du Fu's poems is a sequence of lyrics known under the overall title of "Autumn Meditations." These poems contain lines that could come from Wordsworth's sonnet cycle: "A thousand houses rimmed by the mountains are quiet in the morning light, / Day after day in the house by the river I sit in the blue of the hills. / . . . My native

country, untroubled times, are always in my thoughts" (Graham 53). Closely though Du Fu and Wordsworth may converge in such observations, their methods are sharply different. Wordsworth served his poetic purposes by transposing "Westminster Bridge" from summer to autumn, but such a shift of timing would be nearly inconceivable in the Chinese tradition. It never would have occurred to Du Fu to write an autumn sequence in mid-summer, or to take a summer experience and place it in the autumn. Such a transposition would almost certainly have produced poetic absurdities if he had attempted it, as Chinese poetry is closely attuned to the passing seasons. Flowers, migrating birds, seasonal occupations, and more would have to change. Even with such changes, the very tone of a summer poem would have seemed jarring in an autumn setting, so a summer scene simply could not be passed off as an autumn event.

---

### What Is a Novel?

Different expectations about literature vary the relations among genres in different cultures' literary ecosystems. Western readers, for example, have long been accustomed to think of poetry and prose as clearly distinct modes of writing; the very terms "prosaic" and "poetic" are typically regarded as polar opposites. In the later nineteenth century, various writers began to push against this distinction, writing more self-consciously poetic prose and sometimes composing "prose poems." Yet these experiments have been the exception rather than the norm, and it can take some adjustment to read works from cultures that mix poetry more openly into prose than is usually the case in the West.

One of the greatest of all prose fictions is *The Tale of Genji*, written shortly after the year 1000 by a woman in the Japanese imperial court writing under the pen name "Murasaki Shikibu." She interspersed nearly 800 poems through her book's fifty-four chapters, and Western readers have not always known what to make of the mixed result. Arthur Waley, who first translated *Genji* into English in the 1920s, excised most of the poetry outright, and translated the surviving lyrics as prose. In so doing, Waley made the *Genji* look more like a European novel and helped keep attention focused on the unfolding story. Yet his choice went dramatically against the work's traditional reception, for Murasaki's poems were always regarded in Japan as central to her text. As early as the twelfth century, the great poet Fujiwara

no Shunjei asserted that every would-be poet must read the *Genji* (Murasaki xiii). Often people didn't bother with the sprawling narrative as a whole, but read excerpts centered on particularly well-loved poems.

The predominance of poetic values in Japanese literary circles had major consequences for Murasaki's practice as a writer of prose. Not only is her story built around poetic moments, but Murasaki shows relatively little interest in such staples of Western fiction as character development and plot. Her lead characters, Genji and his child-bride Murasaki – from whom Murasaki Shikibu took her own pen name – die two-thirds of the way through the book, which then starts up again with a new set of characters in the next generation. The story reaches a kind of tentative stopping-point in its fifty-fourth chapter, but it does not end in any way that readers of Western novels would expect. Even if Murasaki might have intended to carry the story further, it does not appear that a climactic "novelistic" ending was ever an integral part of her plan.

Murasaki also presents her characters more poetically than novelistically. The characters are usually not even identified by name but by shifting series of epithets, often derived from lines in poems they quote or write. Not a proper name at all, for instance, *murasaki* means "lavender," a key word in several poems associated with Genji's love affairs. Indeed, "Murasaki" actually first appears as the epithet for Genji's first love, Fujitsubo, and only later is transferred to the tale's principal heroine. Most translators from Waley onward have settled on fixed names for the characters, but in the original it is only minor, lower-ranking figures who have set names. "The shining Genji" is mostly referred to by a series of different epithets, and the very name "Genji" merely means "bearer of the name" (of Minamoto), a surname bestowed on him – as an illegitimate child – by his emperor father. Genji, in short, is a *genji*, a son who is recognized but excluded from the imperial family. As vividly as Murasaki develops her major characters, they continue to suggest general qualities as they play out recurrent patterns that emerge in generation after generation, in a narrative unfolding of poetic moments of fellowship, longing, rivalry, and reverie.

\*

Reading Wordsworth, Du Fu, Sappho, and Murasaki Shikibu together, we can explore the distinctive ways in which these writers transmuted social and emotional turmoil into reflective works of art. Different traditions locate writers differently along the sliding scale between independence from society

and integration within it, and a given tradition's writers will be found at various places on their culture's bandwidth on the spectrum, distinctively expressing fundamentally common concerns – political upheaval, romantic loss – that they link to elements from their lived environment: rivers, boats, birds, sunlight, and moonlight.

Even on a first reading, we can appreciate many of these commonalities and be intrigued by the differences we perceive. The challenge as we read and reread is to enter more deeply into the specificity of what each poet is doing. We can do so by attending to formal statements on literary art when a culture has produced critics and poetics like Aristotle or Abhinavagupta, but even when such explicit statements are lacking, we can read around within a tradition to gain a sense of its coordinates – its writers' characteristic forms, metaphors, and methods. It is much better to begin by reading two or three dozen Tang Dynasty poems than just one or two, seeing Du Fu more clearly, for example, by comparison and contrast to his great contemporaries Li Bo, Wang Wei, and Han Yu. It is not necessary, though, to read hundreds and hundreds of poems in order to get our bearings and develop an intelligent first appreciation of a tradition. Our understanding can always be refined and deepened through further reading, but the essential first step is to gain enough of a foothold in a tradition that an initially flat picture opens out into three dimensions. When this happens, we can pass through the looking-glass and enter into a new literary world – the first and greatest pleasure of the encounter with world literature.

ancient Chinese capital of Kin-sai, notable for “the bridges arching over the canals, the princely palaces whose marble doorsteps were immersed in the water, the bustle of light craft zigzagging, driven by long oars, the boats unloading baskets of vegetables at the market squares, the balconies, platforms, domes, campaniles, island gardens glowing green in the lagoon’s grayness” (85). As any Italian reader (and many a foreign tourist) would recognize, Kin-sai is a double of Venice.

Marco insists that he has never seen any such place, but Kublai presses him, asking why he never speaks of his native city. “Marco smiled. ‘What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?’” (86). Calvino highlights the traveler’s projection of the patterns established at home, and he extends Conrad’s bold equation of the Congo River and the Thames. On the far side of the European imperial adventure, Xanadu and Kin-sai are no longer Coleridge’s exotic otherworld where an Abyssinian maid will captivate the traveler with her dulcimer; just as Abyssinia (Ethiopia) is no longer a colony of fascist Italy. Instead, Kublai’s empire becomes an image of a post-imperial Europe: “an endless, formless ruin” (5), typified in Venice’s tilting campaniles and slowly sinking palaces.

Marco’s beloved city is crumbling more swiftly in memory: “Memory’s images, once they are fixed in words, are erased,” he tells the Khan. “Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little” (87). His loss, however, is Kublai’s gain: “Only in Marco Polo’s accounts was Kublai Khan able to discern, through the walls and towers destined to crumble, the tracery of a pattern so subtle it could escape the ternities’ gnawing” (5–6). Like Conrad’s Marlow a century ago, and like Gilgamesh four millennia before, literary travelers continue to voyage along pathways set down by older migrants and earlier authors, making themselves at home abroad and returning to see their homeland with new eyes.

## Chapter 6

### Going Global

Over the centuries, writers have usually written for audiences at home, even if they sent their characters around the world. Jonathan Swift located Lilliput off the coast of Sumatra, but his satire was squarely aimed at the British Isles. Even a French or German readership was beyond his immediate concern, and he would no more have expected to be read by actual Indonesians than by Lilliputians or Houyhnhnms. Yet literary relations have long been incipiently global. Already in antiquity, writers and their works readily circulated around the Roman Empire’s far-flung domains. Apuleius of Maduros grew up speaking a local North African language, Punic, but was sent as a boy to study in Greece. He wrote his *Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass* in Latin, so as to entertain Roman readers with his asinine hero’s adventures in Thessaly and Egypt. Comically apologizing at the outset for his unconventional Latin style, Apuleius compares himself to a circus rider who jumps from one galloping horse to another. He asserts that his linguistic metamorphosis mirrors his hero’s physical transformation, and promises his readers delight if they will attend to “a Greekish tale” written “with the sharpness of a reed from the Nile” (Apuleius 3–5).

Looser cultural configurations have outlasted empires and have extended past the boundaries of any one region. The classical Arabic poet Abu Nuwas was read across a wide swath of Islamic cultures from Morocco and Egypt to Persia and North India. In the late nineteenth century, a century after the American colonies had achieved their independence from England, a brisk transatlantic trade gave Mark Twain a market in England and brought Oscar Wilde to America on a lecture tour. While still in his twenties, Rudyard Kipling — “the infant monster,” as an envious Henry James called him — was being read on five continents.

The ongoing acceleration of economic and cultural globalization has brought the scope of world literature to a new level today. In the older imperial networks, literature usually flowed outward from the metropolitan center to the colonial periphery, with Dickens assigned as required reading in India as was Cervantes in Argentina. Colonial writers would rarely if ever see their works assigned in turn in London or Madrid, though older texts such as the *Mahabharata* and *The Thousand and One Nights* might be taken up abroad as representing the changeless societies of “the timeless East.” Dramatic imbalances persist today in translation between more and less powerful countries, but literature now circulates in multiple directions, and writers even in very small countries can aspire to reach a global readership.

Paris, London, and New York remain key centers of publication, and as Pascale Casanova has argued in *The World Republic of Letters*, writers from peripheral regions typically need to be embraced by publishers and opinion makers in such centers if they are to reach an international audience. Yet many works find multiple publishers at the Frankfurt Book Fair, an annual event not tied to any former imperial capital, a venue where publishers and agents from around the world look for exciting new work wherever it can be found. In the late 1980s, several foreign publishers bought up translation rights for Milorad Pavić’s *Dictionary of the Khazars* while it was still in manuscript, though this was a first novel by a little-known Serbian poet. Pavić’s novel was published in 1988 not only in the original Serbo-Croatian but also in French, English, German, Italian, and Swedish. The next year it came out in Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, Danish, Bulgarian, and Dutch, and within a few years it began to appear in non-European languages as well, including Hebrew, Turkish, Japanese, and Chinese. Pavić’s international readership by now may exceed the entire adult population of his native Serbia.

Such successes represent a fundamentally new situation, affecting every aspect of literary production, from the outlook of writers to the selections publishers make and the choices available to readers. The new global literary market offers writers great opportunities, but it poses dangers as well. The meteoric rise of an internationally acclaimed writer like Salman Rushdie can set off a stampede of agents and publishers seeking more works in a similar vein. Milorad Pavić’s sudden success was remarkable, but it wasn’t exactly random. His *Dictionary of the Khazars* was aided by a confluence of two market forces: a vogue in the 1980s for Eastern European writing, plus the broad popularity of the “magical realism” associated with writers like Gabriel García Márquez. Rushdie had been the next García

Márquez, and now publishers were looking for the next Rushdie. If Pavić’s book had come on the market a decade or two earlier, it would have been regarded as an eccentric work from an obscure country, lucky to get even one or two translations in small print runs.

The *Dictionary of the Khazars* benefited from the vagaries of the international market, but not every trend-fitting book proves to have any lasting interest. Second-rate knock-offs will be touted as masterpieces, while much better books can be ignored if they don’t sound enough like last year’s literary darling. Writers themselves may find it hard to resist going with the global flow, producing work that fits foreign stereotypes of what an “authentic” Indian or Czech novel should be. Alternatively, watered-down versions of trendy approaches can proliferate, written in a superficial international style divorced from any vital cultural grounding. As the novelist and cultural critic Tariq Ali has gloomily observed, “From New York to Beijing, via Moscow and Vladivostok, you can eat the same junk food, watch the same junk on television, and, increasingly, read the same junk novels. . . . Instead of ‘socialist realism’ we have ‘market realism’” (Ali 140–4).

Real though these dangers are, they are surely no greater internationally than in national literatures. Publishers look to build on the latest successes in their home markets, whether these concern arctic explorers, plucky racehorses, or quirky Belgian detectives. J. J. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* spawned an entire industry of fantasy books set in imaginary worlds, complete with maps showing the way to the obligatory wizard’s retreat. British publishers today are trawling Edinburgh’s cafés for the next J. K. Rowling, whose own Albus Dumbledore owes much to Tolkien’s Gandalf the Grey. Whether they address a national or an international audience, the writers who prove to be of real importance are those who negotiate most creatively the tensions as well as the possibilities of their cultural situation. This chapter will explore a variety of strategies writers have developed for reaching audiences in a globalizing world.

### The Glocal and the Delocalized

---

Writers in metropolitan centers do not necessarily need to adapt their methods in order to be accessible to readers beyond their home country, since many of their literary assumptions and cultural references will be understood abroad on the basis of readers’ past familiarity with earlier classics in their



tradition. Balzac and Victor Hugo have already introduced Paris for most new readers of Proust, who paves the way in turn for the Parisian scenes of Djuna Barnes and Georges Perec. Audiences around the world will have definite images of Manhattan and Los Angeles, thanks to the global reach of American film and television, however selective and stylized those images may be. Writers in Jakarta or São Paulo cannot assume any such general familiarity with their cities, and internationally inclined writers there and elsewhere have had to devise strategies to overcome the problem of cultural distance.

One method has been to write in a delocalized mode, free of any direct reference to the home country's customs, places, people, or events. A Renaissance writer could do this almost as a matter of course, adopting international norms of form and content. A Polish poet writing sonnets to his beloved Agneszka and a Dutch poet writing in praise of his Anneke could draw on a common set of Petrarchan rhyme schemes and metaphors. If they encountered their lovers' poems in French translation, even Anneke and Agneszka might have found it hard to guess which sonnet had been written for whom, particularly if both poets referred to them simply as "Cynthia."

The rise of novelistic realism in the nineteenth century led to a more pervasive emphasis on local detail and national concerns, making demands on readers to acquire a growing degree of local cultural literacy, an implicit barrier to reading new works from an unfamiliar region. In the twentieth century, however, a variety of writers broke with the norms of realism and began to set their stories in mysterious, emblematic locales. Franz Kafka's Castle and penal colony, Jorge Luis Borges's circular ruins, and the stark landscapes of Samuel Beckett's plays could really be set anywhere, or at least in any country peopled with arbitrary authorities (Kafka), melancholy linguists (Borges), and senior citizens in garbage cans (Beckett). Authors anywhere might choose this approach, but it is notable that the three writers just named were all born in peripheral cities (Prague, Buenos Aires, Dublin) traditionally overshadowed by the imperial powers that had long dominated their countries. All three chose to move beyond a provincialism they found stultifying.

To take the example of Borges, he began by writing realistic stories set in Buenos Aires, but he found this localism to be a dead end. In a 1951 essay on "The Argentine Writer and Tradition," Borges writes, "For many years, in books now fortunately forgotten, I tried to compose the flavor, the essence, of the outskirts of Buenos Aires; naturally I abounded in local words such as *cuchilleros*, *milonga*, *tapia*, and others, and in such a manner I wrote those

forgettable and forgotten books" (*Selected Non-Fictions* 424). He came into his own as a writer when he realized that for Argentines, "our tradition is the whole of Western culture. . . . we must believe that the universe is our birthright" (426–7).

Far from feeling disadvantaged by his distance from metropolitan Europe, Borges asserted that Argentine writers benefit from this distance, gaining a special freedom and originality in using European forms and motifs. Interestingly, he supports this claim by comparing Argentines to European Jews, who "are prominent in Western culture because they act within that culture and at the same time do not feel bound to it by any special devotion." He argues that "Argentines, and South Americans in general, are in an analogous situation; we can take on all the European subjects, take them on without superstition and with an irreverence that can have, and already has had, fortunate consequences" (426). Imbued with this sovereign irreverence, Borges set his mature stories wherever it suited him, and collectively they span the globe.

A very different strategy can be described as "glocal." This term first became popular in the early 1990s among non-governmental groups seeking to "think globally, act locally." In literature, glocalism takes two primary forms: writers can treat local matters for a global audience – working outward from their particular location – or they can emphasize a movement from the outside world in, presenting their locality as a microcosm of global exchange. Some works display a movement in both directions, well expressed in *Omeros* when Derek Walcott's father assigns him his poetic life's work:

Measure the days you have left. Do just that labour  
which marries your heart to your right hand: simplify  
your life to one emblem, a sail leaving harbour

and a sail coming in.

(72)

To write for a global audience involves a conscious effort of cultural translation, and often entails direct linguistic translation as well. Unlike the early Borges, who expected his Argentine readers to beware of *cuchilleros* (troublemakers) while doing the tango to the syncopated beat of a *milonga*, Walcott writes largely for non-Caribbean readers who will not come to his poems with any knowledge of his island's environment, customs, or history. Walcott nevertheless embraces St. Lucia's history and the local features of its landscape, but does so in such a way as to teach his readers what they need to know to understand his lines. The opening pages of *Omeros*

are dotted with italicized Creole terms for local trees (*laurier-cannelles*, *bois-campêche*, *bois-flot*), but these terms are unobtrusively explained or contextualized for non-Creole speakers, and the poem gradually teaches us a good deal about the island's history.

Walcott's linguistic and cultural self-translations build on a century's worth of experiments in globalized writing, often refining techniques that were most influentially developed by Rudyard Kipling. Perhaps the first global writer in a modern sense, Kipling made a rapid transition from writing for a purely local audience to addressing a readership that spanned the globe. Born in India in 1865, as a child he became fluent in Hindi as well as English. He was sent when he was six to England for schooling, then returned to India at age sixteen. He soon found work as a newspaper reporter for the *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore. His first poems and stories – published to fill empty column space – were written for the Anglo-Indian community. They often leave place names and Hindi terms unexplained, and in general assume a good deal of local knowledge.

Yet Kipling was already writing as both an insider and an outsider. On his return to India in 1881 he had quickly recovered his fluency in Hindi, but he now saw his boyhood haunts with an "England-returned" perspective. As his works caught on abroad, it was only a further step for Kipling to translate his local knowledge for distant readers. He became adept at folding explanations and outright translations into his narrative, particularly after he left India for good in 1889, living first in London, then in Vermont, then finally settling in England again. His 1901 novel *Kim*, for instance, begins with a lively scene that sets the stage politically and linguistically for foreign readers:

He sat, in defiance of municipal orders, astride the gun Zam-Zammah on her brick platform opposite the old Ajaib-Gher – the Wonder House, as the natives call the Lahore Museum. Who hold Zam-Zammah, that "fire-breathing dragon," hold the Punjab; for the great green-bronze piece is always first of the conqueror's loot.

There was some justification for Kim, – he had kicked Lala Dinanath's boy off the trunnions, – since the English held the Punjab and Kim was English. (*Kim* 5)

Within a few pages, Kipling goes on to give a number of Hindi terms (*jadoo*, *faquirs*, *ghi*, *parhari*, and more), sometimes translating them in parentheses, sometimes defining them in a following paraphrase, sometimes shaping the context to suggest the meaning.

*Kim* is filled with colorful local details which Kim is constantly asking about or assessing for himself, very much to the reader's benefit. Thus when he encounters an old woman riding in "a gaily ornamented *ruth* or family bullock-cart," accompanied by eight servants, Kim observes them with almost the eye of a professional ethnographer:

Kim looked over the retinue critically. Half of them were thin-legged, gray-bearded Ooryas from down country. The other half were duffle-clad, felt-hatted hillmen of the North; and that mixture told its own tale, even if he had not overheard the incessant sparring between the two divisions. The old lady was going south on a visit – probably to a rich relative, most probably a son-in-law, who had sent up an escort as a mark of respect. The hillmen would be of her own people – Kulu or Kangra folk. It was quite clear that she was not taking her daughter down to be wedded, or the curtains would have been laced home and the guard would have allowed no one near the car. A merry and a high-spirited dame, thought Kim, balancing the dung-cake in one hand. . . . (68)

Kipling multiplies opportunities to explain local customs to his readers. Kim is alternately a knowledgeable Indian-raised insider and an Anglo-Irish outsider. On the cusp of adolescence, he is both a child of his country and a neophyte in the adult world who needs to be taught the ins and outs of political intrigue. For much of the book he accompanies an aged Tibetan lama, who is adept at explaining ancient Oriental ideas but is also a foreigner in his own right, frequently clueless concerning Indian customs, which Kim can then explain. Still more clueless are many of the Europeans who appear in the story, not only Englishmen but also rival French and Russian agents, all jockeying for power in "the Great Game" to control the Indian subcontinent and surrounding lands.

The most interesting player of the game in Kipling's novel is Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, a "Babu" or Indian employee of the colonial British government. Kipling had used the name in "What Happened," a jokey early poem about the unwisdom of allowing trusted natives to put on airs and European weapons:

Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, pride of Bow Bazaar,  
Owner of a native press, "Barrister-at-Lar,"  
Waited on the Government with a claim to wear  
Sabres by the bucketful, rifles by the pair.

(*Departmental Ditties* 8)

Hurree falls victim in a scuffle with less savory natives who have also been granted too ready access to European guns. A decade and a half later, the Hurree Babu of *Kim* is an altogether more complex character. If Kim is a virtual ethnographer of Indian society, Hurree actually makes ethnographic observations at every opportunity. He pursues this hobby with scientific zeal, his highest ambition being to become a Fellow of the British Royal Society. Given his colonial position, this dream is unrealizable, even absurd. Yet instead of mocking Hurree for his pretensions as he had done in his earlier poem, Kipling makes this unlikely dream a bond between him and the British Colonel Creighton, for “deep in his heart also lay the ambition to write ‘F.R.S.’ after his name. . . . So Creighton smiled, and thought the better of Hurree Babu, moved by the like desire” (175–6).

Hurree Babu’s ethnographical skill aids him in his work as a government agent, giving him insight into the manners and motives of Indians and Europeans alike. He is particularly adept at disguising his own motives from Europeans by playing the role of the hapless, excitable Oriental. In a key episode, he gets the better of a pair of foreign agents who are completely taken in by his act:

“Decidedly this fellow is an original,” said the taller of the two foreigners.  
 “He is like a nightmare of a Viennese courier.”  
 “He represents *in petto* India in transition – the monstrous hybridism of East and West,” the Russian replied. “It is we who can deal with Orientals.”  
 (239)

Too often regarded simply as the poet of the “White Man’s Burden,” Kipling here stands firmly on the side of cultural hybridism, which appears monstrous only to the smug Russian agent who is falling victim to his own stereotypes.

\*

Whereas Kipling wrote of the local for a global audience, other writers have chosen an opposite mode of glocalism: to bring the global home. Coming of age in Turkey in the 1960s, Orhan Pamuk found in this mode of glocalism a way to address modern Turkey’s ambiguous situation in the world. Long the center of a great empire dominating much of the Middle East and Eastern Europe, by the later nineteenth century Turkey had lost its colonial possessions, and Turkish political leaders and intellectuals

began to rethink Turkey’s situation. In a process of Westernization that culminated under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the 1920s, Turkey adopted Western-style military, governmental, and educational systems, even shifting its writing system from Arabic script to a modified Roman alphabet. Literary changes accompanied these cultural revolutions, among them the introduction of the Western novel as a newly prominent form. An increasing number of Turkish writers began writing novels, adapting European modes of modernism and of socialist realism to explore Turkish society and the nation’s engagement with the wider world.

No Turkish writer has been more centrally concerned with the ambiguities of this engagement than Orhan Pamuk, a novelist who is thoroughly international in outlook and literary reference and yet resolutely local in his choice of material. Pamuk found in his native Istanbul – physically divided between a European half on one side of the Bosphorus and an Asian half on the other – the perfect emblem for Turkey’s double identity. In a series of novels and in his memoir *Istanbul*, he has probed what he describes as the Turkish desire to be someone else, often embodying this theme in characters who shift, merge, or lose identities.

In his 1990 novel *The Black Book*, a journalist named Celal has disappeared; he may have been murdered by someone angry at his writing – his essays ironically probe Istanbul’s traditions and its troubled modernity – or he may have run off with the elusive Rüya, wife of his cousin Galip. Seeking clues to the disappearances, Galip pores over Celal’s newspaper columns, one of which concerns a visit to a basement filled with uncanny mannequins. Their maker is a master craftsman named Bedi Usta, whose son shows the mannequins to Celal, remarking that “‘the special thing that makes us what we are’ was buried inside these strange and dusty creatures” (*The Black Book* 61). No ordinary mannequins, Bedi Usta’s creations portray gangsters, seamstresses, scholars, beggars, and pregnant women, but what truly makes them stand out are their gestures. Bedi Usta had spent long hours in cafés memorizing all the small gestures of Istanbul’s daily life, and he infused his characters with them: the mannequins are posed nodding, coughing, putting on their coats, or scratching their noses in precisely rendered Turkish ways.

Bedi Usta’s trompe-l’oeil masterpieces gather dust in the basement workshop because no department store would have them: “For his mannequins did not look like the European models to which we were to aspire; they looked like us” (61). One window dresser admires Bedi Usta’s mastery, but is firm in his refusal:

the reason, he said, was that Turks no longer wanted to be Turks, they wanted to be something else altogether. This was why they'd gone along with the "dress revolution," shaved their beards, reformed their language and their alphabet. Another, less garrulous shopkeeper explained that his customers didn't buy dresses but dreams. What brought them into his store was the dream of becoming "the others" who'd worn that dress. (61)

Even at Harrods or Macy's, of course, window dressers might balk at displaying coughing beggars and depressed housewives weighed down with string bags; Western consumers too respond to dreams of elegance. What makes the mannequins truly uncanny to Celal is something much more specific: the people he knows no longer *use* the gestures preserved years earlier by Bedi Usta. In the intervening time, a flood of imported Western films so captivated Istanbul's residents that they abandoned their old gestures and adopted the ones shown on film. Now, "each and every thing they did was an imitation," as a nation of moviegoers practiced "all the new laughs our people had first seen on celluloid, not to mention the way they opened windows, kicked doors, held tea glasses, and put on their coats" (63-4). Shocked by this realization, Celal comes to see the dusty mannequins as "deities mourning their lost innocence . . . ascetics in torment, longing but failing to be someone else, hapless lovers who'd never made love, never shared a bed, who'd ended up killing each other instead" (64).

Pamuk expands on the theme of Turkish identity in an essay entitled "What Is Europe?": "For people like me, who live uncertainly on the edge of Europe with only our books to keep us company, Europe has figured always as a dream, a vision of what is to come; an apparition at times desired and at times feared; a goal to achieve or a danger. A future – but never a memory" (*Other Colors* 190). Pamuk's books explore the challenges to identity and cultural memory brought about by Westernization, most eloquently in *My Name Is Red* (1998). Set in the 1590s, this novel centers on struggles between miniaturists loyal to the stylized traditions of Persian art and those who seek to adopt a Western mode of perspective-based realism. Constantinople is tensely balanced – like Calvino's city suspended from a web – between Asia and Europe. People sit on carpets from India, drinking tea in Chinese cups imported via Portugal, poised between a Middle Eastern past and a Western future.

In this swirling matrix of competing cultures, Italian-style painting is starting to supplant the great traditions of Islamic art, as people are

captivated by the idea that portraits can convey their individuality (a new, Western-style value) instead of more general qualities of character and status. Traditionalists object – one local storyteller has a painted tree declare its satisfaction that it has escaped being shown in the new realistic style: "I thank Allah that I, the humble tree before you, have not been drawn with such intent. And not because I fear that if I'd been thus depicted all the dogs in Istanbul would assume I was a real tree and piss on me: I don't want to be a tree, I want to be its meaning" (*My Name Is Red* 51).

History is on the side of the Westernizing realists, and yet they will never succeed if they simply try to be more Italian than the Italian painters they admire. *My Name Is Red* involves a search for a murderer among the Sultan's miniaturists, who proves to be a Westernizer who kills rivals opposed to the new style. Yet at the book's end, he realizes that his secret masterpiece – an Italian-style self-portrait of himself as the Sultan – is a failure, a clumsy imitation of a poorly grasped technique. "I feel like the Devil," he confesses, "not because I've murdered two men, but because my portrait has been made in this fashion. I suspect that I did away with them so that I could make this picture. But now the isolation I feel terrifies me. Imitating the Frankish masters without having attained their expertise makes a miniaturist even more of a slave" (399).

Like the mannequins of *The Black Book*, the would-be Westerner has ended up an outcast, torn between two worlds he can never fully join. Yet *My Name Is Red* is an exuberant book, filled with high and low comedy amid the aching loneliness of unfilled romantic and cultural desires. Pamuk's novel is, in fact, the best answer to the problem it so trenchantly poses: it is a vibrant hybrid that re-creates a vanished Ottoman past using all the techniques of the Western novel. Pamuk uses them and also transforms them in new ways; his book is divided into fifty-nine short chapters, each titled to announce its speaker: "I am Black," "I am Shekure," "I am a Tree," "I will be called a murderer." These miniature self-portraits link together to form a sweeping historical novel.

Like Borges, Pamuk approaches Western culture and his own nation alike with a sovereign freedom. An essay on "Mario Vargas Llosa and Third World Literature" reads like a portrait of Pamuk himself: "If there is anything that distinguishes Third World literature, it is . . . the writer's awareness that his work is somehow remote from the centers where the history of his art – the art of the novel – is described, and he reflects this distance in his work." Yet far from being a disadvantage for the writer,

this sense of being an outsider frees him from anxiety about originality. He need not enter into obsessive contest with fathers or forerunners to find his own voice. For he is exploring new terrain, touching on subjects that have never been discussed in his culture, and often addressing distant and emergent readerships, never seen before in his country – this gives his writing its own sort of originality, its authenticity. (*Other Colors* 168–9)

Pamuk's emphasis here is on the local use to which the writer can put the techniques he imports from outside, opening new paths not forged by the national writers before him. In this way, a localized globalism informs the shape of the work as well as the themes within it.

In the process, Pamuk transcends the either/or choices perceived by the Westernizing murderer and the traditionalist tree. He lives at once in the Ottoman past and in the postmodern present, just as he lives both within Istanbul and beyond it, within and outside the pages of his fiction. In a direct expression of this doubled identity, Pamuk includes in the novel a young boy named Orhan, son of the book's heroine, Shekure, which is also the name of Pamuk's mother. In the novel's closing lines, Shekure bequeaths her story to her son, hoping that he will make it into an illustrated tale, but she warns us not to take the result too literally: "For the sake of a delightful and convincing story, there isn't a lie Orhan wouldn't deign to tell" (413).

### The Binational and the Multinational

The global is often contrasted to the local, paralleling the dichotomy of life at home and life abroad. A major effect of contemporary globalization, however, has been to complicate the very idea of "home." Increasingly, migrant individuals and groups maintain active ties in two widely separated communities, keeping in close touch via cell phones, the internet, and jet travel. There are still writers who emigrate permanently, as did James Joyce, Marguerite Yourcenar, and Vladimir Nabokov before them, making a permanent home far from their homeland. Yet a growing number of writers divide their time between two or more locations, actively participating in widely separated communities and often writing for and about both of them.

For many years, Derek Walcott has maintained residences both in the United States and in the Caribbean, and by now should probably be

considered an African-American as well as Caribbean writer. In key scenes of *Omeros* set in Massachusetts and on St. Lucia, the poet finds himself both at home and out of place in his birthplace and in his new country alike – a common theme in what can be called binational world literature. On his regular visits to St. Lucia he often feels like a tourist, his native island looking "like the print / of a postcard" (Walcott 69). Even as the ghost of his father gives him his life's mission to write about his island's people and history, an ocean liner looms ahead of them in the harbor. The cruise ship not only brings wealthy strangers who see the local residents simply as servants or as local color; it is also a troubling image of the poet's own escape into international fame and fortune, "its hull bright as paper, preening with privilege. / . . . Fame is that white liner / at the end of your street" (72). Living much of the year in Boston, the poet is ambiguously absorbed into the local scene there: leaving the Museum of Fine Arts at dusk, he cannot get a cab, as the cabbies take him for an inner-city African-American and refuse to stop for him (184).

Though this binational life is a constant source of uncertainty and unease for Walcott (or the character of that name in *Omeros*), it is ultimately a source of poetic strength, as he gains a breadth of experience and vision that his father never had. Though Warwick Walcott was a talented amateur painter and poet, his provincial life in colonial St. Lucia cut him off from the wider world, and his literary experience was largely confined to the old set of *The World's Great Classics* in the local barbershop (71). Living half the year in Boston, by contrast, his son can develop his poetic vocation far more fully, and when visiting Ireland he even has the ghost of James Joyce for his tour guide (201). Warwick Walcott himself makes this point later in the poem: appearing unexpectedly to his son on a Massachusetts beach, Warwick declines his son's offer that "We could go to a warmer place" (187). He can return home in due course, Warwick replies; but first, "you must enter cities / that open like *The World's Classics* . . . / Once you have seen everything and gone everywhere, / cherish our island for its green simplicities" (187).

A binational perspective is expressed in the very structure of Julio Cortázar's pathbreaking novel *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*, 1963). First is a section entitled "Del lado de allá" (From the other side), set in Paris, where Cortázar lived for many years; this is followed by the second section, "Del lado de acá" (From this side), set in Buenos Aires, where Cortázar grew up. A final section is entitled "De otros lados" (From other sides), a set of "expendable chapters" of uncertain status in the narrative. This divided structure is

crisscrossed by a second, alternative structure. While the book's 155 untitled, numbered chapters can be read sequentially, a prefatory note also invites the reader to skip around in the text, reading in a very different order outlined at the start, one that reveals the progress of Cortázar's migratory characters in a different way.

Three decades later, Salman Rushdie adopted an equally binational structure for his story collection *East, West* (1994). The volume is also divided into three sections: three stories under the heading "East" are set in India; three stories under the heading "West" are set in Europe; and three stories under the heading "East, West" involve movements back and forth between continents. The central story of this final section, for example, "Chekov and Zulu," implies dual nationality in its very title. Yet the story does not treat of Russians and South Africans at all. Rather, the title characters are two Indian employees of the British secret service – modern versions of Kipling's Hurree Babu – who like to imagine themselves as enacting roles from *Star Trek*, though they have modified the name of the Japanese Mr. Sulu: "Zulu is a better name for . . . a suspected savage. For a putative traitor," as Chekov remarks (Rushdie 153). He and Zulu regularly translate their experiences into *Star Trek* terms. When Zulu gets into a tight spot with a group of Sikh separatists he has infiltrated, he sends Chekov an urgent message: "Beam me up" (166).

Prior to this point, Zulu had disappeared during undercover work in Birmingham. As the story opens, India House has sent Chekov to Zulu's house in suburban London to make an inquiry. Chekov's conversation with "Mrs. Zulu" is a comic masterpiece of Indian-English dialogue, but it also reveals a suspicion that her husband has been involved in some shady dealings with his fellow Sikhs:

"Fixed the place up damn fine, Mrs Zulu, wah-wah. Tasteful decor, in spades, I must say. So much cut-glass! That bounder Zulu must be getting too much pay, more than yours truly, clever dog."

"No, how is possible? Acting Dipty's tankha must be far in excess of Security Chief."

"No suspicion intended, ji. Only to say what a bargain-hunter you must be."

"Some problem but there is, na?" (149)

The free intermixture of English and Hindi syntax and vocabulary – no longer italicized or translated as Kipling would have done – plunges the

reader into the characters' bicultural life. As the conversation unfolds, we learn that the two men had adopted their nicknames as schoolboys in India, closely identifying with the multinational *Star Trek* crew as inter-global explorers: "Intrepid diplomats. Our umpteen-year mission to explore new worlds and new civilizations. . . . Not the leaders, as you'll appreciate, but the ultimate professional servants" (151). In their adult lives, the two shuttle back and forth between England and India, engaged in political work and espionage. By the story's end, Chekov has been fatally caught up in repressive complicity between the British and Indian governments, while Zulu – outraged at the Indian government's use of terror threats as an excuse to oppress Sikhs – has resigned from governmental service, settling in Bombay as head of a pair of private security companies. These he calls Zulu Shield and Zulu Spear, now directly honoring the Zulus who had resisted the expansion of Dutch settlement in South Africa in the late eighteenth century. Thus futuristic fantasy and imperial history – *Star Trek* and the Boer Trekkers – come together in Mr. Zulu's bicultural Bombay.

\*

Binational fictions often reach outward toward a multinational scope. In "Chekov and Zulu," American science fiction helps characters come to terms with their Indian/English world; in Walcott's *Omeros*, experiences on St. Lucia and in the United States are mediated by memories and dreams of Africa and England. Other writers construct fully multinational works. The action may cross many borders, or a single locale can be imbued with a multitude of ethnicities or else be inundated with the consumer products marketed worldwide by multinational corporations. Older national and imperial rivalries reverberate in these new global relations; understanding their dynamics can help us orient ourselves in the often disorienting worlds of global fiction.

The formerly military and now economic rivalry of Japan and the United States shadows Ryu Murakami's 1997 novel *In the Miso Soup*, whose lead character is an interpreter and guide for an international clientele of sex tourists, mostly Americans. In contrast to Orhan Pamuk's Istanbul, Murakami's Tokyo is a city whose inhabitants have no desire at all to become someone else; indeed, "Japan is fundamentally uninterested in foreigners" (10). The narrator, Kenji, notes that this isolationism may be regrettable, but it provides the basis for his living: the thriving Japanese

sex industry is geared toward local consumption, and foreigners who don't speak Japanese need help in finding their way around. Kenji provides this service, for a hefty fee.

Though the Japanese may pay little attention to foreigners, Japan is awash in global consumerism, in both the production and the consumption of goods. America is a predominant focus of emulation and exchange; the Japanese media report every game the Japanese baseball star Hideo Nomo plays for the Los Angeles Dodgers, and even provide up-to-the-minute reporting on Michael Jordan's recreational golf outings (Murakami 13). In the novel, Japanese consumers think of America as the shopping mall of their dreams, as a prostitute tells a visiting American who compliments her on her English:

"No! I want to speak better, but difficult. I want to get money and go America."

"Oh really? You want to go to school there?"

"No school! I am stupid! No, I want to go Niketown. . . . One big building, many Nike shops! . . . My friend said to me. She go to shopping Niketown and buy five, *ano* . . . ten shoes! Oh! It's my dream, go to shopping Niketown!" (20)

The pervasive presence of American culture is announced as early as the title of the novel, which is given in Japanese phonetic script in the original; transliterated, it reads *In za miso supu* – a colloquial Japanese rendering of an English expression ("in the soup") which has already been given a Japanese inflection in the naming of the soup as miso. Tokyo abounds with American and French names, plastered on stores regardless of the names' original meaning or context. The only person in the novel who finds this odd is Kenji's American client, Frank, who is puzzled that a department store is named "Times Square." He protests, "But Times Square is Times Square because the old Times Tower was there. The *New York Times* doesn't have a building in Shinjuku, does it? . . . Japan may have lost the war, but that was a long time ago now. Why keep imitating America?" (28). Kenji is baffled by this question and changes the subject.

In contrast to Orhan Pamuk's theme of Turkish ambivalence toward a culturally and politically dominant West, Ryu Murakami sees Japan and the United States as parallel societies. Japanese consumers may be trying fruitlessly to imitate Hollywood stars, as Pamuk's Turks do, but so do the Americans themselves. Arranging to meet Kenji for the first time, Frank says that he can be recognized by his close resemblance to the actor Ed Harris, but

when they meet up at a hotel bar, Kenji finds that Frank doesn't look like Ed Harris at all – "he looked more like a stockbroker or something. . . . I just mean he struck me as sort of drab and nondescript" (6).

Murakami's multinational world is a culturally and emotionally flattened space in which Japan and America, former imperial rivals, have come to resemble one another. The apolitical Kenji learns this lesson from Frank, who recounts an analysis that a Lebanese journalist had told to a Peruvian streetwalker, who told him in turn – an aptly transnational circulation of information. The gist is that "the Japanese had never experienced having their land taken over by another ethnic group or being slaughtered or driven out as refugees," whereas "a history of being invaded and assimilated is the one thing most countries in Europe and the New World have in common, so it's like a basis for international understanding. . . . According to the Lebanese man, Japan's just about the only country in the world that's been untouched, except for the U.S." (171). Their once separate histories converging, Japan and the United States have become prime players in the new Great Game of the multinational corporations, turning people into consumers with comparable results of isolation, loneliness, and lurking madness. Frank is the book's prime case in point: he pretends to be a businessman who imports Toyota radiators to the United States from Southeast Asia, but he is in fact a murderous drifter who preys on prostitutes, modeling his actions partly on the movie *The Silence of the Lambs*.

Over the course of the novel – an edgy mixture of noir thriller and social satire – Murakami prods his Japanese readers to rethink their place in a global world. Frank appears at first to be a particularly ugly American, but as the story unfolds he comes to represent the bleak truth about a dehumanized modernity at large: "with all this social surveillance and manipulation going on," Frank remarks near the book's end, "I think you'll see an increase in people like me" (204). As he observes Frank with fascinated horror – a Marlow to his client's Kurtz – Kenji shifts roles from guide to the one being guided. "I can't deny that my body and mind were being dragged into unfamiliar territory," he admits late in the novel; "I felt like I was listening to the tales of a guide in some unexplored country" (202). The foreign visitor reveals the heart of darkness hidden beneath the bright neon lights of metropolitan Tokyo.

Set entirely within a few Tokyo neighborhoods, *In the Miso Soup* is a multinational narrative in a "glocalized" mode. It is equally possible, however, for a multinational work to take a delocalized approach, multiplying border crossings to the vanishing point – a perspective comically expressed

in the title of a 1969 film, *If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium*. A striking fictional treatment of multinational blurring is Christine Brooke-Rose's novel *Between*. Its unnamed heroine works as a simultaneous translator, and she spends much of her time in the air, flying from one conference to another. She is always between countries, relationships, and identities, a fact the novel embodies linguistically: the verb "to be" never appears in the book in any form, and the heroine never uses the pronoun "I."

In contrast to a purely delocalized work by Kafka or Beckett, *Between* includes scenes in specific countries, including England, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Greece, Turkey, and the United States. Yet the pace of the heroine's multinational life is such that actions repeat themselves again and again, and one hotel room merges into another:

At any minute now some bright or elderly or sour no young and buxom chambermaid in black and white will come in with a breakfast-tray, put it down on the table in the dark and draw back the curtains unless open the shutters and say Buenos días, Morgen or kalimera who knows, it all depends where the sleeping has occurred out of what dream shaken up with non merci nein danke no thank you in a long-lost terror of someone offering etwas anderes, not ordered. (Brooke-Rose 396)

Christine Brooke-Rose goes far beyond Kipling or even Rushdie in her use of foreign languages. Instead of an admixture of a single foreign language such as Hindi, her text presents a kaleidoscope of phrases and snatches of conversation in more than a dozen languages. Often, as above, a string of terms all reflect a single archetypal situation and so can serve as mutual translations. At other times, though, the heroine recalls snatches of conversation in other languages, most often French or German. When she began working as an interpreter just after the end of the Second World War, her first boss (and soon lover) was a German – ironically named Siegfried – working with the victorious Allies on denazification and the resettlement of refugees, and from then on she moved in multilingual circles.

The blizzard of languages brings the heroine's disorientation home to the reader, but the novel has a firm linguistic base in English, and gradually we become acclimated to this vertiginous world. We begin to take pleasure in the often hilarious slippage from one language to another – in Spain *la leche* turns lecherous, while an absent lover's loins are *loin* in France – as our heroine proceeds from the Congress of Acupuncturists to

the Conference of Gnostics. As she dozes during her incessant airplane flights, multilingual memories swirl around in her consciousness, as when a Slovenian foreign minister's speech in French merges into a Dutch airline's instructions for inflating a life vest, and then morphs into a remembered elevator ride in Germany – or France? Italy? – in search of a toilet:

— Mesdames messieurs. Aujourd'hui nous allons discuter la problème de la communication, du point de vue which reveals een bewusteloos persoon blowing hot air into the mouthpiece all enclosed in a glass booth going down, after having pulled red toggle. . . . But R turns out to mean Restaurant in studded black plastic cushioned walls not Rez-de-chaussée at all.

Kein Eintritt. Privat. Que cherchez-vous madame? Ah, au fond à gauche, in fondo a sinistra geradeaus dann links according to the theme the time the place with a flared-skirted figurine on the door. Or a high-heeled shoe perhaps as opposed to a flat foot. (409–10)

Brooke-Rose's heroine struggles to locate herself within a consumerist world. An ad for an Italian detergent prompts her to a skeptical reflection: "Lava ancora più bianco! Gut-gut. Più bianco than what? We live in an age of transition, perpetually between white and whiter than white. Very tiring. Zoom" (419). As her travels continue, gradually she sorts out her memories of growing up caught between combatant nations in war-torn Europe, and she finally disentangles herself from a series of problematic men. Her continually in-between state is often confusing, but it enables her to escape the fixed female roles (office girl, wife, mistress) that the men in her life keep expecting her to play, even as she transcends the limitations of any single national identity.

Contemporary novels treat globalization as a powerful force with ambiguous effects. Globalization blurs national borders and unsettles moral codes, even as repressed conflicts continue to well up in uncanny ways. Yet it fosters freedom and self-invention, dissolving provincialisms and shaking up all routines. In the closing pages of *Between*, Brooke-Rose's heroine has achieved a new contentment as a self-sufficient or "alleinstehende Frau" (565) – literally, a "free-standing woman," in contrast to her unstable previous mixture of dependency and free-floating anxiety. Abandoning the constant life of mass transit by air, she buys a compact French car for journeys on her own. She makes sure to pack her British passport and a Turkish phrasebook, for her first destination will be Istanbul, here as often an emblem of life in-between (564). As she leaves the book's final



conference, she hears the global babble fading away behind her, “as the members of the Congress on Tradition and Innovation unless perhaps The Role of the Writer in the Modern World burble on” (574).

\*

Christine Brooke-Rose’s resilient heroine can model for us the adaptive process of coming to terms with the expansive landscape of the world’s languages, literatures, and cultures. In writing this book, I have sought to create a road map for explorations into our ever-widening literary world. The Epilogue will offer some initial directions for routes to consider, but whatever your choice of pathways – courses, anthologies, clusters of writers in whichever periods and regions most attract you – the issues raised in the preceding chapters can help you get your bearings and make sense of your discoveries. I will have succeeded in my endeavor if you are now well launched on your way, ready to carry on with the endless challenge and pleasure of world literature: to read, and read, and read still more.

## Epilogue

### Going Farther

And so, what to read?

The preceding chapters have offered guidance on major issues we face in reading world literature, and the examples discussed can suggest modes of entry into these works and into many more. Yet there remains the large question of how to go about choosing what to read, among the innumerable works written around the world during the past five thousand years. Serendipity always has a valuable role, of course: great finds can result from a friend’s recommendation, or an intriguing book review, or an hour’s browsing in a bookstore. Yet purely random reading – as when the Autodidact in Jean-Paul Sartre’s novel *La Nausée* plows through the library shelves in alphabetical order – will rapidly become bewildering. A fuller exploration of world literature will benefit from some more organized approach.

One good way to proceed is to take hints from a favorite author. We will probably love works that have been important to a writer we love. Laurence Sterne speaks in *Tristram Shandy* of “my dear Rabelais, and dearer Cervantes” (169), and anyone who has been captivated by Sterne’s self-reflexive hijinks and moved by the underlying melancholy of Uncle Toby’s war-wounded life will be primed to enjoy *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and *Don Quixote*. Tracing lines of influence and adaptation can also provide a coherent way to explore a broad literary movement or tradition. Primo Levi or James Joyce may lead us back to Dante, and Dante to Virgil, Virgil to Homer. The very title of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* announces a commonality of theme and feeling between the Nigerian novelist and the anticolonial Irish poet; Achebe underlines the link by setting the relevant lines of Yeats’s “The Second Coming” as the epigraph to his book.

Quite apart from direct literary references, if you have been struck by a writer from a given time and place, you will likely want to see if there are more where that one came from. Sometimes a masterpiece stands almost alone in its time and place, but more often a great writer is the product of a vibrant literary culture. Anyone drawn to Sophocles will be deeply moved by Aeschylus and Euripides, and a lover of Du Fu's lyrics has a host of pleasures to explore in other Tang Dynasty poets such as Han Yu and Li Bo. Such further reading within a culture can also bring one's initial favorite into sharp relief, clarifying what is most distinctive about Sophocles or Du Fu as well as revealing what is broadly characteristic of their wider literary culture.

One convenient way to gain a broader sense of possibilities is to read around in collections and anthologies, which can give a manageable overview of a major tradition and a basis for further exploration thereafter. The six-volume survey anthologies of world literature published by Norton (Lawall et al.), Bedford (Davis et al.) and Longman (Damrosch et al.) each contains a wealth of judiciously selected works. More focused anthologies present examples of a genre; particularly useful are several excellent poetry anthologies, including Washburn, Major, and Fadiman's *World Poetry*, J. D. McClatchy's *The Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry*, and Jeffrey Paine's *The Poetry of Our World*. Other collections have a regional focus, such as Bassam Frangieh's *Anthology of Arabic Literature, Culture, and Thought from Pre-Islamic Times to the Present*, Robert Irwin's *Night and Horses and the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature*, Donald Keene's *Anthology of Japanese Literature from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, Haruo Shirane's *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology, 1600–1900*, and Stephen Owen's *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*. Even the early literatures of the ancient Near East, formerly widely dispersed in specialized publications, can now be read in excellent translations in paperback editions: W. K. Simpson's *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, Benjamin Foster's *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, and Stephanie Dalley's *Myths from Mesopotamia*. Beyond anthologies, the Penguin Classics series gives an unparalleled range of works from around the world, while the Heinemann African Writers Series includes more than sixty writers from some two dozen African countries.

Heinemann's website provides biographies for their authors, and the Longman, Norton, and Bedford anthologies also have websites that offer a great deal of contextual information, readily accessed through the publishers' websites. An ambitious website devoted to contemporary literature is *Words*

*without Borders: The Online Magazine for International Literature*. The print journal *World Literature Today* is also an excellent place to become acquainted with new writers from around the world.

A growing number of colleges and universities offer courses in world literature. Often a one-semester or year-long survey course provides an initial introduction, a gateway to a range of comparative and world literature courses thereafter. Survey courses can be organized in a variety of ways, and sometimes different instructors at the same school will employ very different approaches. A survey course can proceed chronologically, often also focusing in turn on several "major cultures" in the premodern period and then taking a global view for more recent literature; other courses are organized by genre or by theme. Some courses pair premodern and modern works, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Within any of these approaches, a course can focus on a few works read at length or can present briefer selections from a greater range of writers. Where more than one of these options is available, it is worth looking into them to see which best suits your needs and interests.

Anyone wishing to explore ways to organize a world literature course will find very useful discussions by three dozen teachers in Damrosch (ed.), *Teaching World Literature*, and there are also several valuable earlier collections: Barbara Stoler Miller's *Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective: A Guide for Teaching*, Sarah Lawall's *Reading World Literature*, and Michael Thomas Carroll's *No Small World: Visions and Revisions of World Literature*. The Modern Language Association (MLA) also publishes many volumes devoted to teaching individual works or clusters of works in their series "Approaches to Teaching World Literature." The MLA also has several other relevant series: Options for Teaching; Texts and Translations; Teaching Languages, Literatures, and Cultures; and World Literatures Reimagined.

Students as well as teachers may want to delve into scholarly discussions of world literature. A good starting-point is John Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature*, which traces the heritage of Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* in German intellectual history and in American classrooms. A lively, sometimes polemical series of essays can be found in Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Debating World Literature*, several of whose contributors respond to Pascale Casanova's study *The World Republic of Letters*. Another influential methodological study is Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*, while issues of the production and circulation of world literature are explored in Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*

Those wishing to follow up on the crucial issue of translation can consult a range of important contributions to translation studies. The best place to start is with Lawrence Venuti's capacious collection of classic essays, *The Translation Studies Reader*. Mona Baker's *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* is an excellent reference work, while Susan Bassnett-McGuire's *Translation Studies* gives an overview of the history of the field. Some valuable studies of different aspects of translation are: Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (eds.) *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*; Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (eds.) *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*; Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation*; Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler (eds.), *Translation and Power*; and Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*.

Several important recent books address the history and ongoing development of Comparative Literature, the field most centrally concerned with world literature. Recent works of note include Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, and Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World*. Collections of classic essays in the field can be found in Damrosch, Melas, and Buthelezi (eds.), *The Text and the World: A Comparative Literature Sourcebook*, and in Hans-Joachim Schultz and Phillip H. Rhein (eds.), *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*.

As much as there is to read, there are other ways to deepen our understanding of world literature as well. One prime method is to get to know other art forms from the cultures whose literature we read. The major anthologies now come with many illustrations and with accompanying audio CDs; their companion websites offer many more artworks and audio links. Then there are the major benefits to be gained by studying works in the original language whenever possible. As valuable as translations are, they achieve their best results if they inspire readers to go and learn the language. It can take a great deal of time to achieve near-native fluency, but even an intermediate knowledge of a language is enormously liberating, freeing us from complete dependency on translations and allowing us entry into the many pleasures of a writer's style that can only be glimpsed in translation. Ideally, every serious reader of world literature should know at least two foreign languages, one from one's home region and one from a very different part of the world and an unrelated language family. It is fascinating to discover how very differently languages can organize such basic categories as time and gender, and such linguistic differences can have profound literary effects. Further language study beyond those two will be all the better.

Finally, reading world literature should stimulate us to get out into the world. Though no literary work is a direct mirror of its society, all writers come out of a culture and respond to it in many ways, even if they choose to respond by fleeing their home environment. The more we know about the culture of origin – its peoples and daily customs, its landscape, its architecture, its flowers and birdsongs – the more fully we can understand the transformations that a writer has wrought. Spending time attentively abroad can tell us a good deal about Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg or Murasaki Shikibu's Kyoto, despite all the changes since those authors' time. Studying abroad can tell us far more. Study abroad is particularly valuable in programs and places that foster full immersion in the culture, rather than merely providing a bubble of visiting students or expatriates. We can then return home with deepened understanding and new possibilities for enjoyment, as we continue reading our way into the literary legacies of the past and the multiple worlds opening out before us today.

## Bibliography

- Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." *The Massachusetts Review* 18:4 (1977), 782–94.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Penguin, 2001.
- Ali, Tariq. "Literature and Market Realism." *New Left Review* 199 (1993), 140–5.
- Apter, Emily. *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Apuleius. *Metamorphoses*, ed. and tr. J. Arthur Hanson. Loeb Classical Library 44. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2 vols., 1989.
- Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*. In *Four Comedies*, tr. Dudley Fitts. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959, 1–68.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lysistrata*, tr. Douglass Parker. New York: New American Library, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lysistrata*, tr. Jeffrey Henderson. Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lysistrata*. In *The Complete Plays*, tr. Paul Roche. New York: New American Library, 2005, 415–78.
- Aristotle. *The Poetics of Aristotle*, tr. Preston H. Epps. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.
- Baker, Mona. *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Baraka, Amiri. *The System of Dante's Hell*. In *Three Books by Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones)*. New York: Grove Press, 1967, 5–154.
- Bassnett, Susan, and Harish Trivedi, eds. *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Bassnett-McGuire, Susan. *Translation Studies*. London and New York: Methuen, 1980.
- Behn, Aphra. *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave: A True History*, ed. Joanna Lipking. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1969, 69–82. Repr. in Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2d ed., 75–85.
- Bermann, Sandra, and Michael Wood, eds. *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Bierhorst, John, ed. and tr. *Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York: Riverhead, 1994.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Collected Fictions*, tr. Andrew Hurley. New York: Viking, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Selected Non-Fictions*, tr. Eliot Weinberger, Esther Allen, and Suzanne Jill Levine. New York: Viking, 1999, Penguin, 2000.
- Brooke-Rose, Christine. *Between*. In *The Christine Brooke-Rose Omnibus: Four Novels*. Manchester and New York: Carcanet, 1986, 391–575.
- Burton, Richard F., ed. and tr. *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainment, Now Entitled the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*. Benares (Stoke Newington), 10 vols., 1885.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Supplemental Nights to the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*. Benares (Stoke Newington), 6 vols., 1886–8.
- Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*, tr. William Weaver. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Presentazione." *Le città invisibili*. Milan: Mondadori, 1993, v–xi.
- Carroll, Lewis. *The Annotated Snark*, ed. Martin Gardner. New York: Bramhall House, 1962.
- Carroll, Michael Thomas, ed. *No Small World: Visions and Revisions of World Literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996.
- Casanova, Pascale. *La République mondiale des lettres*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1999. *The World Republic of Letters*, tr. M. B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Caws, Mary Ann, et al., eds. *The HarperCollins World Reader*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
- Chikamatsu Mon'zaemon. *Love Suicides at Amijima*. In *Major Plays of Chikamatsu*, tr. Donald Keene. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Ross C. Murfin. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2d ed., 1996.
- Cortázar, Julio. *Rayuela*, ed. Andrés Amorós. Buenos Aires: Catedra, 3rd ed., 1986. *Hopscotch*, tr. Gregory Rabassa. New York: Pantheon, 1966.
- Dalley, Stephanie. *Myths from Mesopotamia*. London and New York: Oxford, 1989.
- Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_, David L. Pike, et al., eds. *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. New York: Pearson Longman, 6 vols., 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Teaching World Literature*. New York: Modern Language Association, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi, eds. *The Text and the World: A Comparative Literature Sourcebook*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

- Darbishire, Helen, ed. *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Davis, Paul, et al., eds. *The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 6 vols., 2003.
- Dawood, N. J., tr. *Tales from The Thousand and One Nights*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, rev. ed., 1973.
- Dryden, John. Preface to Ovid's *Epistles*. In Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2d ed., 38–42.
- Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce*. New York: Oxford, rev. ed., 1982.
- Foster, Benjamin. *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2005.
- Frangieh, Bassam K. *Anthology of Arabic Literature, Culture, and Thought from Pre-Islamic Times to the Present*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Genesis*. In *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, with the Apocrypha*. Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 1–66.
- George, Andrew, ed. and tr. *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation*. London: Penguin, 1999.
- Graham, A. C., ed. and tr. *Poems of the Late T'ang*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965.
- Haddawy, Husein, ed. and tr. *The Arabian Nights*. New York and London: Norton, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Arabian Nights II: Sindbad and Other Popular Stories*. New York and London: Norton, 1995.
- Hartley, L. P. *The Go-Between*. London: Hamilton, 1953.
- Homer, *The Iliad*, tr. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Odyssey*, tr. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking, 1996.
- Hutner, Heidi, ed. *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993.
- Ingalls, Daniel H. H. et al., ed. and tr. *The Dhvanyāloka of Anandavardhana with the Locana of Abhinavagupta*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Irwin, Robert. *Night and Horses and the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature*. New York: Anchor, 2002.
- Johnson, John William, ed. and tr. *The Epic of Son-Jara: A West African Tradition*. Text by Fa-Digi Sisòkò. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler. New York: Random House, 1986.
- Kalidasa. *Śakuntalā and the Ring of Recollection*, tr. Barbara Stoler Miller. In *Theater of Memory: The Plays of Kālidāsa*, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller et al. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- Keats, John. *Keats*, ed. Howard Moss. New York: Dell, 1959.
- Keene, Donald. *Anthology of Japanese Literature from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. New York: Grove Press, 1955.

- Kipling, Rudyard. *Departmental Ditties*. In *The Works of Kipling*. Roslyn, New York: Black, n.d., 1–14.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Kim*. New York: Dell, 1979.
- Lane, Edward William, tr. *Stories from The Thousand and One Nights*. Rev. by Stanley Lane-Poole. The Harvard Classics. New York: Collier, 1937.
- Lawall, Sarah, ed. *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_, et al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton, 6 vols., 2003.
- Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 3 vols., 1973–80.
- Lukács, Georg. *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, tr. Anna Bostock. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973.
- MacLeish, Archibald. "Ars Poetica." In Robert Hass et al., eds., *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century*. New York: Library of America, 1:846–7.
- McClatchy, J. D., ed. *The Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry*. New York: Vintage, 1996.
- Melas, Natalie. *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Miller, Barbara Stoler, ed. *Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective: A Guide for Teaching*. Armonk, New York and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1994.
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962.
- Molière, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin. *The Miser and Other Plays*, tr. John Wood. Baltimore: Penguin, 1953.
- Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. London and New York: Verso, 2005.
- Murakami, Ryu. *In the Miso Soup*, tr. Ralph McCarthy. New York: Penguin, 2003.
- Murasaki Shikibu. *The Tale of Genji*, tr. Royall Tyler. New York: Viking, 2 vols., 2001.
- Ortega y Gasset, José. "La Miseria y el esplendor de la traducción," tr. Elizabeth Gamble Miller as "The Misery and the Splendor of Translation." In Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, 1st ed., 49–63.
- Owen, Stephen. *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997.
- Paine, Jeffrey, ed. *The Poetry of Our World: An International Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2001.
- Pamuk, Orhan. *The Black Book*, tr. Maureen Freely. New York: Vintage, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *My Name Is Red*, tr. Erdağ M. Göknar. New York: Vintage, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Other Colors: Essays and a Story*, tr. Maureen Freely. New York: Knopf, 2007.

- Pindar. *Pindar's Victory Songs*, tr. Frank J. Nisetsch. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Pizarnik, Alejandra. *Obras completas: poesia y prosa*, ed. Cristina Piña. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1994.
- Pizer, John. *The Idea of World Literature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006.
- Polo, Marco. *The Travels*, tr. Ronald Latham. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958.
- Prendergast, Christopher, ed. *Debating World Literature*. London and New York: Verso, 2004.
- Pritchard, James B. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3rd ed., 1969.
- Quiller-Couch, Arthur. *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250–1900*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919.
- Ronsard, Pierre de. *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. M. Prosper Blanchemain. Paris: Jannet, 8 vols., 1857–67.
- Rushdie, Salman. *East, West*. London: Vintage, 1995.
- Schultz, Hans-Joachim, and Phillip H. Rhein, eds. *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973.
- Seferis, George. *Collected Poems (1924–1955)*, tr. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, 46–8.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*, ed. Northrop Frye. Baltimore: Penguin, 1970.
- Shirane, Haruo, ed. *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology, 1600–1900*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Sidney, Sir Phillip. *The Defense of Poesy*. In Michael Payne and John Hunter, eds., *Renaissance Literature: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, 501–26.
- Simon, Sherry. *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Simpson, William Kelly, ed. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 3rd ed., 2003.
- Song of Songs* (The Song of Solomon). In *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, with the Apocrypha*. Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 815–21.
- Sophocles. *Oedipus the King*, tr. David Grene. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942.
- Soyinka, Wole. *Death and the King's Horseman*, ed. Simon Gikandi. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Sterne, Laurence. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. New York: Modern Library, n.d.

- "Šulgi N." Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature ([www.etcs.orient.ox.ac.uk](http://www.etcs.orient.ox.ac.uk)), text 2.4.2.02.
- Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Robert A. Greenberg. New York: W. W. Norton, 1970.
- Tibullus. *Elegies*. In *Catullus, Tibullus, and Pervigilium Veneris*, ed. G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2d ed., 1988.
- Tymoczko, Maria, and Edwin Gentzler, eds. *Translation and Power*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ed. *The Translation Studies Reader*. New York and London: Routledge, 2000. Rev. ed., 2004.
- Virgil. *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid, the Minor Poems*, ed. and tr. H. R. Fairclough. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2 vols., 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Aeneid*, tr. Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Random House, 1983.
- Voltaire, François-Marie Arouet de. *Candide; or, All for the Best*. London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1759.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Candide*. Anonymous Victorian-era translation. Repr. in *The Complete Romances of Voltaire*, ed. G. W. B. New York: Walter J. Black, 1927, 121–85.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Candide ou l'optimisme*. In *Romans et contes*, ed. René Pomeau. Paris: Garnier, 1966, 179–259.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Candide, or Optimism*, tr. Robert M. Adams. New York: W. W. Norton, 2d ed., 1991. Repr. in Sarah Lawall et al., eds., *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2d ed., 2002, vol. D: 520–80.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Candide, or Optimism*, tr. Daniel Gordon. Boston: Bedford / St. Martin's, 1998. Repr. in Davis et al., eds., *The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, 2003, vol. 4: 275–338.
- Walcott, Derek. *Omeros*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990.
- Washburn, Katharine, John S. Major, and Clifton Fadiman, eds. *World Poetry: An Anthology of Verse from Antiquity to Our Time*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1998.
- West, M. L. *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- Wisdom of Solomon, The*. In *The Apocrypha*. Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 102–27.
- Words without Borders: The Online Magazine for International Literature*. [www.wordswithoutborders.org](http://www.wordswithoutborders.org).
- Wordsworth, William. *The Poems of William Wordsworth*, ed. Nowel Charles Smith. London: Methuen, 3 vols., 1908.

TRANSLATION | TRANSNATION  
SERIES EDITOR EMILY APTER

*Writing Outside the Nation* BY AZADE SEYHAN

*The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel*  
EDITED BY MARGARET COHEN AND CAROLYN DEVER

*Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing*  
BY KIRSTEN SILVA GRUESZ

*Experimental Nations or, the Invention of the Maghreb* BY REDA BENSMALIA

*What Is World Literature?* BY DAVID DAMROSCH

DAVID DAMROSCH

---

## **What Is World Literature?**

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS  
PRINCETON AND OXFORD



Figure 12. The Great Sphinx at Giza, 1798

## CONCLUSION

### World Enough and Time

And so, what *is* world literature? I have conceived this book as a demonstration as much as an essay in definition, seeking to show the kinds of work now in our view and some of the ways they can be approached. I have dwelt on some of the texts that have obsessed me over the years and that seemed particularly suggestive on issues of circulation, translation, and production. In the process, much as Eckermann gives us *his* Goethe, I have given you my world literature, or at least a representative cross-section of it, while recognizing that the world now presents us with material so varied as to call into question any logic of representation, any single framework that everyone should adopt and in which these particular works would all have a central role. A leading characteristic of world literature today is its variability: different readers will be obsessed by very different constellations of texts. While figures like Dante and Kafka retain a powerful canonical status, these authors function today less as a common patrimony than as rich nodes of overlap among many different and highly individual groupings.

Amid all this variety, family resemblances can be found among the different forms of world literature circulating today, emergent patterns that lead me to propose a threefold definition focused on the world, the text, and the reader:

1. *World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.*
2. *World literature is writing that gains in translation.*
3. *World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time.*

Each of these points merits discussion.

*Elliptical refraction of national literatures.* For the past half-century, world literature in its North American guises has usually been opposed to national



literature. A genial disregard, if not outright hostility, often obtained between the devotees of the two. With most literature faculty based in departments organized along national lines, in many schools "world literature" was treated as an introductory course, suitable for beginning students but fundamentally vague in conception and unrigorous in application, a preliminary stage prior to serious work in a literature major based on close study of a culture and its language. Even the most elaborate comparative scholarship often raised serious reservations among committed specialists. No less a book than Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946), probably the most ambitious and impressive synoptic study of its generation, was roundly criticized by reviewers based in one or another of the specific areas his book traversed. The classicist Ludwig Edelstein, for example, noted that Auerbach had dramatically foreshortened Greco-Roman literary history, ignoring the findings of classical scholarship to produce his stark contrast of Hebrew and Greek cultures, whereas "in the historical view, even the fifth century is not a unity" (431). Similarly, the medievalist Helmut Hatzfeld criticized Auerbach for reading the *Chanson de Roland* "with the eyes of an enlightened pacifist" rather than with an understanding of what the medieval author would have believed (335). Even René Wellek, in a review filled with faint praise, felt that Auerbach's results were "peculiarly shifting and disconcertingly vague" (305). *Mimesis* won this battle, but it lost the war. Widely admired and discussed to this day, it has had few, if any, successors: Auerbach's own students became specialists in a much more limited range of languages and eras.



Comparatists in the postwar era often returned the specialists' disregard, holding out messianic hopes for world literature as the cure for the ills of nationalistic separatism, jingoism, and internecine violence—and, by implication, advancing the comparatist as the transcendent heir to the narrowness of monolingual specialization. Comparative literature was to be the grand corrective for "the nationalistic heresy," as Albert Guérard put it in a lead article in the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* in 1958. Looking ahead to European unification, Guérard anticipated that "Comparative Literature will disappear in its very victory; just as 'foreign trade' between France and Germany will disappear in the Common Market; just as the 'foreign relations' between these two countries will be absorbed by a common parliament" ("Comparative Literature?" 4). For Guérard, the overriding question in 1958 was "How and When Shall We Commit Suicide?" His answer: "Not just yet: we are needed so long as the nationalistic heresy has not been extirpated" (5).

We can no longer proceed as though this heresy is about to disap-

pear. The European Parliament in Brussels is unlikely to supplant Europe's national governments during our lifetimes, and in an academic context the very great majority of teachers and scholars of literature continue to be located in nationally based departments. What does the ongoing vitality of national literary traditions mean for the study of world literature? An understanding of world literature as an elliptical refraction of national literatures can help to clarify the vital, yet also indirect, relation between the two. With the possible exception of a few irreducibly multinational works like *The Thousand and One Nights*, virtually all literary works are born within what we would now call a national literature. The modern nation is, of course, a relatively recent development, but even older works were produced in local or ethnic configurations that have been subsumed into the national traditions within which they are now preserved and transmitted. A "nation" itself, in early modern English, could designate an ethnic group or culture: in the King James Bible, "the nations" translates the Hebrew *ha-goyim*, the Sep-tuagint's *hoi ethnoi*. Understanding the term "national" broadly, we can say that works continue to bear the marks of their national origin even after they circulate into world literature, and yet these traces are increasingly diffused and become ever more sharply refracted as a work travels farther from home.

This refraction, moreover, is double in nature: works become world literature by being received *into* the space of a foreign culture, a space defined in many ways by the host culture's national tradition and the present needs of its own writers. Even a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two different cultures. The receiving culture can use the foreign material in all sorts of ways: as a positive model for the future development of its own tradition; as a negative case of a primitive, or decadent, strand that must be avoided or rooted out at home; or, more neutrally, as an image of radical otherness against which the home tradition can more clearly be defined. World literature is thus always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture; hence it is a double refraction, one that can be described through the figure of the ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone.

I advance the image of an elliptical refraction as a convenient metaphor, but I don't mean to imply a scientific precision that the extremely varied phenomena of world literature would not support. For those who would prefer a more literary image, I might suggest the two-headed "pushmi-pullyu" from the Doctor Dolittle books. The pushmi-pullyu is an

appropriately multicultural animal, related "to the Abyssinian gazelles and the Asiatic chamois, on my mother's side," as he tells the doctor, adding that "my father's great-grandfather was the last of the unicorns" (*The Story of Doctor Dolittle*, 76). He seems well suited for a multitemporal comparatism as well, as he has two ancient precursors: Janus, the Roman guardian of portals, whose two-headed image Hugh Lofting would certainly have known, and also an older, more exact analog that Lofting probably did not know: the Egyptian hieroglyph , determinative for the verb *khns*, , "to go in two directions at once."

Still, the pushmi-pullyu suggests a divided or splitting self that is at odds with the coming together from separate worlds that I take to be the essence of the circulation of texts into the ambient of world literature. A better image for this elliptical process might be what takes place around nine o'clock in the evening at Disneyland, when a crowd gathers along the shoreline of Rivers of America, seeking something more magical than the androidal simulacrum of Main Street, U.S.A. Street lights dim; music swells; then a sheet of water jets up from a phalanx of nozzles hidden in the sand out on Tom Sawyer's Island. From the opposite shore powerful beams of light shoot across the river and converge on the screen of mist, where they project a moving image: Mickey, the Sorcerer's Apprentice, introducing the evening's son-et-lumière extravaganza, formed in the shimmering conjunction of projected light and refracting water.

In literature proper, the complex process of elliptical refraction means that the circulation of world literature is much more than what René Wellek disparaged as merely "the foreign trade of literature" ("The Crisis of Comparative Literature," 283), and it doesn't lead to a transcendent universalism in which cultural difference is a mere "heresy" that should wither away as Marx and Engels expected the state to do. At the same time, recognizing the ongoing, vital presence of the national within the life of world literature poses enormous problems for the study of world literature. It is far from clear how to proceed if we want to broaden our focus beyond one or two periods or national traditions: who can really know enough to do it well? Bad enough that there are many more works of literature than anyone can read—must we really learn all about their home cultures too? The ellipse of world literature may seem comprehensible enough when we are thinking of only a single text or group of texts, but as we begin to look more widely we soon find ourselves amid a multitude of partially overlapping ellipses, all sharing one focus in the host culture but with their second foci distributed ever more widely across space and time.

The specter of amateurism haunts comparative literature today.

Lacking a deep knowledge of more than a very few cultures, are comparatists doomed either to stay within a limited range of material or else to succumb to the scholarly tourism I began by criticizing? Students of world literature increasingly experience what Djelal Kadir has described as "the simultaneously productive and melancholy precariousness of the comparatist's existence" ("Comparative Literature Hinternational," 245). The situation was very different when Auerbach and Wellek came to the United States: then it was supposed to be the *national* traditions that were in a precarious state, but this no longer seems to be the case. Much recent literary study has taken a dim view of nationalist ideologies and their imperial projections, and yet in an odd way the critique of nationalism has turned out to coexist quite comfortably with a continuing nationalism in academic practice. The more one needs to know, say, about the courts of Queen Elizabeth and King James I in order to understand Shakespeare, the less time one has available to learn much about the cultural underpinnings of French drama or Greek tragedy, and one tends to downplay the importance of what one doesn't know.

Moving beyond a regionally linked set of traditions becomes harder still. The more committed today's Shakespeareans become to understanding literature within cultural context, the less likely they are to feel comfortable in comparing Shakespeare and Kalidasa. Indeed, even within a single region a range of disparate literatures can seem too daunting to tackle. Several years ago I was on a search committee looking to hire a junior medievalist; one of the hottest topics we found among our applications was the dissection of the origins of nationalism in the medieval kingdoms that were struggling for mastery in the British Isles. The several writing samples on aspects of this theme all took a critical attitude toward the efforts of Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Normans to promote themselves culturally and extend their sway politically, and yet none of the scholars who furnished these samples was doing any work in Irish or Welsh literature. Not on principle, surely, as the richness of both traditions in the medieval period is widely recognized: the medievalists simply hadn't had *time* to learn those languages along with everything else they were studying. Rather than include material they could read only in translation and without a close cultural knowledge, they left it out of account altogether. Yet works like the Irish *Táin* and the Welsh *Mabinogi* would be full of interest for explorations of cultural identity, while poets like Dafydd ap Gwilym have fascinating satirical things to say about Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Normans alike. Deconstructing nationalism in theory, these medievalists had succumbed to it in practice.

How to do better? A logical but too rarely chosen way to study an

extensive range of material is to work collaboratively, as Henry H. H. Remak already argued forty years ago in a pointed article called "Comparative Literature at the Crossroads: Diagnosis, Therapy and Prognosis." Even so great a scholar as Erich Auerbach lacked world enough and time for his European-based study of the representation of reality, but two or three people working together can collectively encompass more of the world than any one person can do. Collaborative work can help bridge the divide between amateurism and specialization, mitigating both the global generalist's besetting hubris and the national specialist's deeply ingrained caution.

There are encouraging signs of a growth in such work. For thirty years now the International Comparative Literature Association has been sponsoring an ambitious multivolume comparative literary history project, latterly headed by Mario Valdes of Toronto, each of whose volumes has been produced by national and regional specialists working in collaboration. World literature anthologies today are often the product of extended collegial interaction among a dozen or so broad-minded specialists, and all of us who have been working on such projects can testify to the intellectual excitement they entail. Team teaching is also more and more common both in world literature survey courses and in courses covering more focused cross-cultural topics. Yet it also has to be said that our graduate programs really have yet to begin to adapt to this shift. We essentially do nothing to encourage doctoral students to work together, still less to train them to work together well. While individual scholarship and teaching will always remain important, those who work on world literature are increasingly going to find that a significant share of their work is best done in collaboration with other people. Our graduate programs have some serious rethinking to do.

Equally, whether it is pursued individually or collaboratively, work on world literature should be acknowledged as *different in kind* from work within a national tradition, just as the works themselves manifest differently abroad than at home. This does not mean that we should simply ignore the local knowledge that specialists possess, as literary theorists of the past generation often did when developing their comprehensive theories (neither Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* nor Roland Barthes in books like *S/Z* and *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* made any serious use at all of scholarship on the authors they chose as illustrations of their elegant conceptual schemes). A student of world literature has much to gain from an active engagement with specialized knowledge.

At the same time, though, this knowledge is best deployed selectively, with a kind of scholarly tact. When our purpose is not to delve into a culture in detail, the reader and even the work itself may benefit by being

spared the full force of our local knowledge. The need for selectivity can be seen especially clearly in the case of works that come from a different era and from outside the usual norms of literary discourse, such as Mechthild's *Flowing Light of the Godhead*. Her book has acquired an extensive secondary literature, most of it written by specialists in medieval theology and church history. Much of what they have to say is only tangentially relevant to a literary analysis, particularly one focused not on Mechthild's relations to her precursors and contemporaries but on more general issues of gender or of poetics. Of course, Mechthild develops her poetics and expresses her gender position in part through her engagement with theologians like Bernard of Clairvaux and poets like Walther von der Vogelweide and Neidhard von Reuenthal, but for most purposes it's sufficient to demonstrate such relations at a few key points; not all of her known intertexts need to be elucidated.

While writing on Mechthild for this book, I several times had to resist digressing into discussions of Walther, Bernard, or Hildegard of Bingen. I finally felt that these digressions really weren't furthering the discussion so much as reflecting my own insecurity (the need to show specialists that I really had read these writers) or, worse yet, my vanity (the wish to impress my nonspecialist readers, who would probably not have been entranced in any event by displays of irrelevant erudition). While I did have good reasons to take direct account of Mechthild's treatment of the Virgin Mary, I said nothing about her Christology. A full contextual reading of her book would require extended treatment of all these aspects and more, but a comparative study is a much more selective enterprise.

Selective, but not merely reduced from the plenitude of full local knowledge. Intimately aware of a work's life at home, the specialist is not always in the best position to assess the dramatically different terms on which it may engage with a distant culture. Looking at such new contexts, the generalist will find that much of the specialist's information about the work's origins is no longer relevant and not only can but should be set aside. At the same time, any work that has not been wholly assimilated to its new context will still carry with it many elements that can best be understood by exploring why they came to be there in the first place. The specialist's knowledge is the major safeguard against the generalist's own will to power over texts that otherwise all too easily become grist for the mill of a preformed historical argument or theoretical system.

When I distinguish "specialists" from "generalists," I mean to characterize approaches as much as individuals. Just as a work can function either at home or abroad, so too any given person can be both a specialist in

some areas and a generalist in others. When we are employing a generalist approach, we should not simply cast off our specialist selves—or our specialist colleagues. Generalists have much to learn from specialists, and should always try to build honestly, though selectively, on the specialists' understandings, ideally even inspiring the specialists to revise their understandings in turn. Too often, a generalist who alludes dismissively to the narrow-minded concerns of specialists merely ends up retailing a warmed-over version of what specialists had been saying a generation earlier. Instead, the generalist should feel the same ethical responsibility toward specialized scholarship that a translator has toward a text's original language: to understand the work effectively in its new cultural or theoretical context while at the same time *getting it right* in a fundamental way with reference to the source culture.

This brings us to my second point: *World literature is writing that gains in translation*. There is a significant difference between literary language and the various forms of ordinary, denotative language, whose meaning we take to be largely expressed as information. A text is read as literature if we dwell on the beauties of its language, its form, and its themes, and don't take it as primarily factual in intent; but the same text can cease to work as literature if a reader turns to it primarily to extract information from it, as when George Smith read *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to confirm the biblical history of the Flood, regretting that the account had been "disfigured by poetical adornments." Informational texts neither gain nor lose in a good translation: their meaning is simply carried over with little or no effective change. Treaties and contracts can be complex documents, but if well drafted and well translated, they are understandable to all parties concerned. They may be breached from the pressure of changing circumstances or through misinterpretations that apply to all the document's versions, but treaties rarely fail because of problems arising from translation per se.

At the other extreme, some works are so inextricably connected to their original language and moment that they really cannot be effectively translated at all. Purist views of literary language often take all poetry as "what is lost in translation," in Robert Frost's famous phrase, since whatever meaning a new language can convey is irretrievably sundered from the verbal music of the original. "A poem should not mean / But be," as Archibald Macleish wrote in 1926 in his "Ars Poetica," in lines that convey their own declarative meaning with surprising success.<sup>1</sup> Much poetry, including Frost's

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Poems*, 107. Frost and Macleish alike are rejecting elaborate interpretations.

and Macleish's, has been translated with great effect into many languages. It is more accurate to say that *some* works are not translatable without substantial loss, and so they remain largely within their local or national context, never achieving an effective life as world literature.

It is important to recognize that the question of translatability is distinct from questions of value. A work can hold a prominent place within its own culture but read poorly elsewhere, either because its language doesn't translate well or because its cultural assumptions don't travel. Snorri Sturluson's dynastic saga *Heimskringla* is a major document in medieval Nordic culture, but it only makes compelling reading if you are fairly knowledgeable about the political history of Norway and Iceland, and it remains unknown abroad outside specialist circles. By contrast, Norse mythological texts like the Elder Edda and Snorri's own *Prose Edda* have been widely translated and much appreciated. They are actually harder to understand than the *Heimskringla*, but they treat themes of broad interest in striking, if often mysterious, language. Equally, a work's viability as world literature has little to do with its author's perspective on the world. There can be no more global work, conceptually speaking, than *Finnegans Wake*, yet its prose is so intricate and irreproducible that it becomes a sort of curiosity in translation. *Dahliners*, a far more localized work, has been much more widely translated and has had a far greater impact in other languages.

Literary language is thus language that either gains or loses in translation, in contrast to nonliterary language, which typically does neither. The balance of credit and loss remains a distinguishing mark of national versus world literature: literature stays within its national or regional tradition when it usually loses in translation, whereas works become world literature when they gain on balance in translation, stylistic losses offset by an expansion in depth as they increase their range, as is the case with such widely disparate works as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Dictionary of the Khazars*. It follows from this that the study of world literature should embrace translation far more actively than it has usually done to date. This is not to argue, though, for a return to the kind of ungrounded cosmopolitanism seen a century ago in world literature collections. Too many world literature courses have tended to assume that undergraduate courses should be the last refuge

as well as translations, of their immutable, self-identical poems. When Frost told Louis Untermeyer that poetry is what is lost in translation, he was dismissing critical efforts to unfold the implicit meanings of his poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." As he told Untermeyer, "You've heard me say—perhaps too often—that poetry is what is lost in translation. It is also what is lost in interpretation. That little poem means just what it says it means, nothing less but nothing more" (Untermeyer, *Robert Frost: A Backward Look*, 18).

for a high-minded amateurism, a busman's holiday from any real engagement with the works' cultures of origin. Committed teachers of world literature are increasingly finding ways to give students access to cultural context, via corollary readings and through collaborative student explorations of websites and print resources. At the opposite end of the university spectrum, scholars have often feared to touch a work in translation at all as they develop critical analyses for publication. In her article on *Dictionary of the Khazars*, N. Katherine Hayles notes with regret that few people outside Slavic studies have ever written about Pavić, and she urges more to do so, even if they don't know Serbo-Croatian. Admirable as this plea is, it is regrettable that Hayles took her own ignorance of the original language as a license to ignore the book's cultural context outright, even though much information about that context is available in English.

The fullest response to this problem would, of course, include learning more languages. Only a very few foreign languages are presently studied in North America for general academic purposes: French, German, Spanish, and Latin about exhaust the list. Most of the world's other languages are only learned by native speakers or by specialists in a given area: even world languages like Chinese and Arabic are mastered mostly by Sinologists and Arabists, while less commonly spoken languages like Irish or Serbo-Croatian are taught only in a handful of small programs and are studied almost exclusively by people who want to connect to their ethnic roots or who plan to specialize in the area. This situation needs to change. Just as the literary canon has opened up and become less unified, there is no longer a set canon of languages that any educated comparatist ought to know. Twenty-five years ago, it is safe to say that the true mark of a serious comparatist, prior to any substantive knowledge, was a really good *accent* in three major Continental languages. There is little logic now in requiring a common set of languages for all students, and very good reasons to encourage all students to develop a serious knowledge of at least one culture beyond their own. The learning of languages provides a crucial mode of access to other cultures, the best way to ensure that the student will become more than a cultural ecotourist. Indeed, there is much to be said for everyone involved with world literature, students and faculty alike, to see language study as an ongoing activity. Language study should not be a preliminary to literary study but a partner for life: a powerful stimulus to learning a language can be to fall in love with its literature in translation, and such encounters can happen at any time.

Even with a major improvement in the breadth of language study, and even with a substantial increase in collaborative projects, it will be nec-

essary to make active scholarly use of translation if we are not to continue cutting our topics down to the size of whatever linguistic bed is available to us at a given moment. Understanding world literature as writing that gains in translation can help us to embrace this fact of contemporary intellectual life and to use translations well, with a productively critical engagement.

It is only possible to engage critically with works in translation if we can allow that literary meaning exists on many levels of a work. Translation can never really succeed if a work's meaning is taken to reside essentially in the local verbal texture of its original phrasing. José Ortega y Gasset gave a classic expression to this view in his 1937 dialogue "The Misery and the Splendor of Translation"—an essay that, in its reference to Balzac's novel *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, links translation with prostitution. Ortega y Gasset began from the assumption that style is everything in a literary work, and he had a modernist's view that a writer's style is achieved precisely by its difference from all other styles, just as languages are defined by their difference from all other languages:

An author's personal style, for example, is produced by his slight deviation from the habitual meaning of the word. The author forces it to an extraordinary usage so that the circle of objects it designates will not coincide exactly with the circle of objects which that same word customarily means in its habitual use. The general trend of these deviations in a writer is what we call his style. But, in fact, each language compared to any other also has its own linguistic style. . . . Since languages are formed in different landscapes, through different experiences, their incongruity is natural. It is false, for example, to suppose that the thing the Spaniard calls a *bosque* the German calls a *Wald*, yet the dictionary tells us that *Wald* means *bosque*. . . . an enormous difference exists between the two realities. It is so great that not only are they exceedingly incongruous, but almost all their resonances, both emotive and intellectual, are equally so. (51)

A silence ensues after the dialogue's lead figure makes this claim, and one of his interlocutors comments that "this silence that has risen among us has a funereal character. You have murdered translation, and we are sullenly following along for the burial" (52). Ortega y Gasset's narrator replies that he really means to present translation as the emblem of the noble futility of all human endeavors, but this is a resolution that takes away as much as it gives.

Ortega y Gasset's stark view of language reflects a modernist emphasis on radically isolated individuals. "What have I in common with

Jews?" Kafka famously asked himself in a mood of dark irony, "I have hardly anything in common with myself" (*Diaries*, 252). At the extreme, from this point of view even a single language may disintegrate within the fragmented consciousness of a single user, and different speakers of the same language are doomed to mean different things with every word they say. For someone who grew up in Maine, as I did, the term "forest" includes many more evergreens than it would for people raised in Maryland, and many fewer eucalyptus trees than for a southern Californian. Yet such idiosyncratic differences are not eternally given and insurmountable: two friends from different countries could take a walk together in what one of them would call a *Wald* and the other a *bosque*, but they would both be referring to precisely the same surroundings. The modernists surely exaggerated the extent of stylistic novelty in literature: even a distinctive voice will usually ring a marked but finite series of changes on a common literary language.

It is often said that quite apart from individual innovation, literary language is particularly hard to translate since so much of the meaning depends on culture-specific patterns of connotation and nuance. Yet one could equally make a very different argument: after all, literature is often distinguished from film and television by the fact that the reader is *required* to fill in the scene, which is not given outright as it is on the screen. As Wolfgang Iser argued in *The Act of Reading*, literary narratives work less by communicating fixed information than by creating suggestive gaps that the reader must fill in. Iser further emphasized (against Roman Ingarden) that different readers will necessarily, and productively, fill in these gaps in different ways.

What is true of any literary work is doubly true of world literature. A book read in one language and within one cultural context presents a situation in which, as Iser says, readers will differ but "the text itself cannot change" and exerts a powerful limiting force on the variability of readerly response (167). Traveling abroad, though, a text does indeed change, both in its frame of reference and usually in language as well. In an excellent translation, the result is not the loss of an unmediated original vision but instead a *heightening* of the naturally creative interaction of reader and text. In this respect a poem or novel can be seen to achieve its lasting effect precisely by virtue of its adaptability to our private experience. Readers in Seville and in Berlin may well cover Thomas Mann's magic mountain with rather different flora, but so may two different readers in Berlin itself, just as different readers will likely visualize our Egyptian poem's tunic differently and would continue to do so even if all translators made a common pact to call it an overcoat or a *ghalabiyah*. Far from being short-circuited in translations from *Wald* to *bosque* or from New England to New Mexico, literary mean-

ing gains its full resonance when it is completed according to the reader's individual imagination and circumstances.

Of course, some elements of a literary work are more freely variable than others, and a large part of a translator's interpretive responsibility lies in determining which particular patterns of sound, imagery, or implication are important to carry over as directly as possible. Yet even elements that cannot be directly reproduced in the new language can often be conveyed at a different level of the text. Some of Kafka's self-deconstructing sentences really can't be rendered in English without a substantial loss of ironic play, and yet the irony we label "Kafkaesque" is fully conveyed at the levels of the paragraph and of the scene, even if not always at the level of the individual sentence.

Acutely aware of the difficulties entailed in translation at the level of the word and the phrase, translation theorists have sometimes gone so far as to see the essence of language itself as entailing a basic incommunicability. Thus George Steiner argued in *After Babel* that human societies have multiplied languages not so much to communicate as to *conceal* their secrets and maintain their individual identities against the surrounding world:

I am suggesting that the outwardly communicative, extrovert thrust of language is secondary. . . . The primary drive is inward and domestic. Each tongue hoards the resources of consciousness, the world-pictures of the clan. . . . a language builds a wall around the "middle kingdom" of the group's identity. It is secret towards the outsider and inventive of its own world. There have been so many thousands of human tongues, there still are, because there have been, particularly in the archaic stages of social history, so many distinct groups intent on keeping from one another the inherited, singular springs of their identity, and engaged in creating their own semantic worlds, their "alterities." (231-32)

Such a view might seem to make translation impossible, but Steiner offers us a qualified hope: the abyss between languages can indeed be overcome, but it takes a heroic interpretive leap to do so. It takes, in fact, Steiner himself. He proposes an intense focus on style, on the historical and cultural resonances of individual words, producing readings that are often exhilarating but that also begin to edge over into bibliomania:

No semantic form is timeless. When using a word we wake into resonance, as it were, its entire previous history. . . . To read fully

is to restore all that one can of the immediacies of value and intent in which speech actually occurs. There are tools for the job. A true reader is a dictionary addict. . . . Without such quarries as Champion's *L'Argot ancien* and Eric Partridge's lexica of underworld usage, much of Western literature, from Villon to Genet, is only partly legible. . . . A demanding reader of mid-eighteenth-century verse will often find himself referring to the Royal Horticultural Society's *Dictionary of Gardening*. (24)

You will note the silent shift by which "a true reader" becomes "a demanding reader."<sup>2</sup> Steiner's book crystallizes the moment of the apotheosis of close reading in the midseventies, reinforced by hermeneutic theory, when the greatness of a work could be measured by its ability to retain its power even after a barrage of critical assaults: "only great art both solicits and withstands exhaustive or willful interpretation" (27).

Steiner's approach involves a politics as well as a hermeneutics. In his theory the work of art becomes a stand-in for the individual who stubbornly resists the seductions of sociability:

There can hardly be an awakened human being who has not, at some moment, been exasperated by the "publicity" of languages, who has not experienced an almost bodily discomfort at the disparity between the uniqueness, the novelty of his own emotions and the worn coinage of words. It is almost intolerable that needs, affections, hatreds, introspections which we feel to be overwhelmingly our own, which shape our awareness of identity and the world, should have to be voiced—even and most absurdly when we speak to ourselves—in the vulgar. Intimate, unprecedented as is our thirst, the cup has long been on other lips. (175)

Steiner goes so far as to see this realization as a psychic trauma we encounter early in life: "One can only conjecture," he soberly concludes, "as to the blow which this discovery must be to the child's psyche" (175). Steiner here echoes Jacques Lacan in seeing language as a form of crystallized alienation, and

<sup>2</sup> Steiner's scholarly demands may even surpass those of actual specialists in the period. Intrigued by his somewhat implausible evocation of the Royal Horticultural Society's dictionary, I surveyed four eighteenth-century specialists whose work I particularly admire: April Alliston, Jenny Davidson, Stuart Sherman, and my brother Leo Damrosch. I asked them how often they found themselves consulting the *Dictionary of Gardening*, offering the options of "often," "occasionally," "rarely," and "never." All four opted for "never."

Steiner's world-weary child is closely related to the antiheroes of Lacan's "mirror stage," toddlers distraught at the revelation that the entire world is not simply a projection of their own ego.

Too bad, toddlers: you *do* belong to a wider society, and if you grow up to become professors you can never master even a local field so fully as to be free from reliance on a range of other specialists who know things you don't, including other languages. To use translations means to accept the reality that texts come to us mediated by existing frameworks of reception and interpretation. We necessarily work in collaboration with others who have shaped what we read and how we read it. Indeed, any works written in an earlier period in our own country reach us in much the same way that Walter Benjamin describes translation itself: "a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life" ("The Task of the Translator," 71). A specialist equipped with ample research materials can do much to approximate a return to the world in which an old or foreign poem was composed. The generalist, concerned with the poem's worldly afterlife, doesn't have that luxury, or even that necessity.

Its relative freedom from context does not require the work of world literature to be subjected to anything like an absolute disconnect from its culture of origin. Anyone involved in translating or teaching works from other cultures must always weigh how much cultural information is needed and how it should be presented. One healthy consequence of the increasing acknowledgment that a translation is a translation has been a greater openness in providing contextual information. Often in the past, translators gave no such information at all, or folded it silently into the translation itself so as to preserve the seeming purity of the text—though in reality they had to distort the text in order to avoid disrupting a supposedly direct encounter of reader and work. Especially when the text in question was both old and foreign, translations were forced either to become very loose paraphrases (Burton's *Arabian Nights*) or to assimilate closely to host-country norms (Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*).<sup>3</sup> Scholarly readers, by contrast, would be given heavily annotated bilingual editions, full of cultural information but with the translation often only marginally readable.

<sup>3</sup> Fitzgerald was quite open about his assimilative program. As he wrote to a friend in 1857, "it is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians, who, (as I think) are not Poets enough to frighten one from such excursions and who really do want a little Art to shape them" (quoted in Bassnett, *Comparative Literature*, 18).

This either/or choice is increasingly breaking down. Arthur Waley's classic translation of *The Tale of Genji* bathed the story in the warm glow of an Edwardian prose; in the process, he also suppressed what he apparently regarded as the disruptive effect of the hundreds of poems scattered through the text, deleting most and translating the remainder as prose. Waley also freely paraphrased and expanded passages in order to insert clarifying information for the Western reader. Even his assimilative translation, though, employed footnotes to explain literary and cultural references that couldn't readily be folded into the text itself. Fifty years later, Edward Seidensticker's 1976 translation gave a far more literal (and far less Edwardian) translation, openly setting the text's poems as poetry. Seidensticker also went further than Waley in framing his translation, with an extensive introduction (more than twice the length of Waley's) and with fuller literary references in his footnotes. In his introduction, Seidensticker notes that he had written many more notes than appear in the published translation; his editor at Knopf pressed him to prune them back substantially, evidently fearing that full annotations would put off the general readers for whom the translation was intended, and so the net result is only a small increase over Waley's level of annotation.

The *Genji* has recently been translated once again, by Royall Tyler (2001). Though this translation too is clearly intended for a general audience, Viking has allowed Tyler about three times as many footnotes as Seidensticker was permitted twenty-five years before: many pages have six or more footnotes, offering a stream of cultural information that at once emphasizes the text's foreignness and supplies information to bridge the distances between Japanese and English, medieval and modern worlds. Tyler's translation also concludes with more than fifty pages of explanatory back matter, including maps, house diagrams, and extensive glossaries, not only of names but also of colors, clothing, titles, and offices, all elements that have intricate vocabularies in Japanese which can only be partially suggested in English. The new translation has been widely reviewed in the general press, and the reviewers have specifically praised the wealth of annotation along with the eloquence of the prose.

As André Lefevere has written, a direct presentation of cultural context is often essential if we are to avoid an assimilation to our own norms, and this requires us as readers to accept the translation's mediating role:

When we no longer translate Chinese T'ang poetry "as if" it were Imagist blank verse, which it manifestly is not, we shall be able to begin to understand T'ang poetry on its own terms. This means,

however, that we shall have to tell the readers of our translations what T'ang poetry is really like, by means of introductions, the detailed analysis of selected texts, and such. We shall, therefore, have to learn to skip the leap we often call "of the imagination" but which could be much more aptly called "of imperialism."<sup>1</sup>  
The question is whether Western cultures are ready for this. ("Composing the Other," 78)

The sequence of *Genji* translations indicates that more and more readers are indeed becoming ready for just this sort of contextual framing.

At the same time, when we read in the elliptical space of world literature, we don't exactly understand the foreign work "on its own terms," and a leap of the imagination is still needed. Intended for readers of world literature, Royall Tyler's new *Genji* translation still presents much less contextual information than specialists possess. To read scholarly studies, such as Ivan Morris's *The World of the Shining Prince* or Haruo Shirane's *The Bridge of Dreams: A Poetics of "The Tale of Genji,"* is to be introduced to a wealth of historical and intertextual information that far surpasses anything dreamed of even in Lefevere's philosophy of translation. Yet to read Shirane, or to go further and read the older romances and poetry collections that Murasaki Shikibu was raised on, is to take a significant step in following the *Genji* back into its home culture. An endlessly rewarding and fascinating pursuit—but it is an approach that shifts one's understanding into the realm of Japanese literature. By contrast, when we read the *Genji* as world literature, we are fundamentally translating it out of its home culture and into a new and broader context. We can make this translation far more effectively if we attend to the insights that specialists possess, but we will use this information selectively and for different purposes. Whereas the specialist attempts to enter as fully as possible into the source culture, the student of world literature stands outside, very much as Benjamin describes translation itself standing outside a work's original language, facing a wooded ridge that each of us will forest with our own favorite trees: "Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one" (76).

And so to the final part of my definition of world literature: *not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading, a detached engagement with a world beyond our own.* At any given time, a fluctuating number of foreign works will circulate



actively within a culture, and a subset of these will be widely shared and enjoy a canonical status, but different groups within a society, and different individuals within any group, will create distinctive congeries of works, blending canonical and noncanonical works into effective microcanons. As Bruce Robbins says of a locally inflected cosmopolitanism, it involves not an ideal detachment but "a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance" (*Cosmopolitics*, 3). World literature's attachments are multiplied by the fact that it is at once a collective and an individual phenomenon. A large and multilayered group of foreign works that circulate in a given culture, it is also experienced as a private pleasure by individual readers, in ways that may diverge dramatically from the social goals that usually underlie the defining and formal transmission of a literary heritage. The texts themselves exist both together and alone: when we read Dante, we are aware that we are encountering a major work of world literature, one that draws on a wealth of previous writing and that casts its shadow ahead onto much that will follow it. Yet even as we register such connections, we are also immersed within Dante's singular world, an imagined universe very unlike any envisioned by Virgil or by Saint Paul, and one that Milton, Gogol, and Walcott will radically revise in turn for very different purposes of their own.

The individual text's appeal is beautifully expressed by James Joyce in the lines that form the second epigraph to this book: "(Stoop) if you are abcedminded, to this claybook, what curios of signs (please stoop), in this allaphbed! Can you rede (since We and Thou had it out already) its world?" (*Finnegans Wake*, 184). We forget ourselves in reading (the double sense of "abcedminded"); like Hormuzd Rassam and George Smith striving to decipher the signs on a clay tablet they've gotten out of the ground, we enter into a multiple relation with the work, as Joyce suggests by having us "rede" its world. We read but also enter actively into dialogue with the work (German, *reden*: "to converse"), almost as though we ourselves were writing it with a reed pen.

The great conversation of world literature takes place on two very different levels: among authors who know and react to one another's work, and in the mind of the reader, where works meet and interact in ways that may have little to do with cultural and historical proximity. Someone who reads *Swann's Way* and *The Tale of Genji* together is likely to find them resonating in multiple and profound ways, engaging one another at least as closely as a reader who is attentive to national traditions will find Proust engaging with Balzac, or the *Genji* with *The Tale of the Heike*. World literature is fully in play once several foreign works begin to resonate together in our mind. This provides a further solution to the comparatist's lurking panic:

world literature is not an immense body of material that must somehow, impossibly, be mastered; it is a mode of reading that can be experienced *intensively* with a few works just as effectively as it can be explored *extensively* with a large number.

Auerbach's great book would not have been much improved if he had added further chapters of the sort he wished he'd had world enough and time to write: a chapter on Apollonius Rhodius, to show Hellenistic fiction in greater depth; a full chapter on Proust, now rather awkwardly shoehorned in as an aside to his chapter on Woolf, to give a more rounded account of modernism. Such additions would of course have added something to his argument, but the book is already long enough at 557 pages. He might have gained more if he had *cut* some chapters: if he had discussed a dozen works, rather than twenty, and made active use of the scholarship of those who were spending their lives on the individual periods and cultures he was passing through.

As in scholarship, so in teaching. Anthologies have been growing larger and larger, as teachers and publishers have sought to encompass our ever-expanding canon. When we are presenting a single national tradition, there is still a logic to giving some sense of most of the currently acknowledged major authors, particularly as time and space generally allow the inclusion of a range of less-known figures as well. The task becomes impossible with any truly global vision of world literature, and other approaches are plainly needed. At a minimum, it takes three points to define a plane surface, and perhaps three works, interestingly juxtaposed and studied with care, can define a literary field. *Antigone*, *Shakuntala*, and *Twelfth Night* can together open up a world of dramatic possibility. *The Tale of Genji* can profitably be read, as I have suggested, along with Proust's *Swann's Way*. There is no evidence that Proust had read Murasaki, though his book does reflect the French *japonaiserie* of his day, but if we want a direct link between the books we could add in Yukio Mishima's *Spring Snow*, which rewrites and subverts both Murasaki and Proust together.

Murasaki could also be seen, to very different effect, in a storytelling context, in combination, say, with *The Thousand and One Nights* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Or her book could be used to discuss gender issues in connection with Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* and Gottfried's *Tristan*. Or again, a culturally based comparison could discuss the evolution of women's writing in court cultures, centering on the *Genji* and on Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*. A comparison of this sort would provide a logical frame for a cluster of several related works around each of the major texts. Along with the *Genji* we could read classic

poems from the early collections the *Manyōshū* and the *Kokinshū*, and we could also include Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*, together with the *Sarashina Diary*, written several decades later by a woman who believed she was a virtual reincarnation of Murasaki herself. *La Princesse de Clèves* could similarly be framed with selections from the memoirs of La Rochefoucauld and from the letters of Madame de Sévigné.

The effect of any of these combinations is very different from what we gain from a semester devoted to medieval Japan or to seventeenth-century France, and it is even different from the net effect of a semester on Japan followed by a semester on France. Immersion in a single culture represents a mode of relatively direct engagement with it, aptly symbolized by efforts to acquire "near-native fluency" in the culture's language. Reading and studying world literature, by contrast, is inherently a more detached mode of engagement; it enters into a different kind of dialogue with the work, not one involving identification or mastery but the discipline of distance and of difference. We encounter the work not at the heart of its source culture but in the field of force generated among works that may come from very different cultures and eras.

This elliptical relation already characterizes our experience of a foreign national tradition, but there is likely to be a significant difference of degree, both because the ellipses multiply and because the angle of refraction increases. Works of world literature interact in a charged field defined by a fluid and multiple set of possibilities of juxtaposition and combination: "in-tercourse in every direction," in Marx and Engels's apt phrase. As we triangulate between our own present situation and the enormous variety of other cultures around and before us, we won't see works of world literature so fully enshrined within their cultural context as we do when reading those works within their own traditions, but a degree of distance from the home tradition can help us to appreciate the ways in which a literary work reaches out and away from its point of origin. If we then observe ourselves seeing the work's abstraction from its origins, we gain a new vantage point on our own moment. The result may be almost the opposite of the "fusion of horizons" that Friedrich Schleiermacher envisioned when we encounter a distant text; we may actually experience our customary horizon being set askew, under the influence of works whose foreignness remains fully in view.

My concluding image is meant to illustrate this point (p. 280, figure 12). Like a work of world literature, this image can be seen emblematically or with attention to its historical context, a history located neither in the present nor in ancient Egypt. As an emblem, it serves here to suggest the opening up of the world of world literature: what was once largely a European

and male preserve, bounded historically as well as geographically, has become a far broader and less familiar terrain. So we have the European men trying to take the measure of a figure that is African, and feminine in appearance, and far more ancient than the antiquity of Greece. The Great Sphinx at Giza, at the time of this etching still buried to the shoulders in sand, puzzles her European interlocutors much as her literary counterpart, brought to life two and a half millennia ago by Sophocles, challenged Oedipus to solve the riddle of human identity.<sup>4</sup>

So far, so good; but we can historicize our image as well. The gentlemen with their plumb line and sketchbook are four of the scientists whom Napoleon brought with him in 1798 when he made his ill-fated attempt to conquer Egypt; this picture was sketched on the spot by one of the expedition's artists, Baron Dominique Vivant Denon, a diplomat, playwright, and painter. In the long history of European conquest, there can have been few invasions so futile in military and political terms. Napoleon's chief purpose in invading Egypt was to strike a blow against England's growing imperial reach: his hope was to begin dismantling the Ottoman Empire before the British could accomplish the task, and ultimately to subdue England itself. "The road to London passes through Egypt," as he declared (Silotti, *Egypt Lost and Found*, 83). He set out from Toulon in May 1798 with over three hundred ships, manned by ten thousand sailors and carrying thirty-five thousand troops. He and his forces quickly took Alexandria and headed to Cairo, where they drove out the Ottoman general Murad Bey.

But things soon started to go badly for the French. In August 1798 the British navy, commanded by Horatio Nelson, destroyed the French fleet at Alexandria, leaving Napoleon's army virtual prisoners in their newly conquered country. Napoleon sent his brilliant young general Desaix up the Nile to pursue Murad Bey: in a series of bloody battles, Desaix gained control of most of Upper Egypt. Meanwhile a series of violent uprisings in Cairo were launched by Egyptians who were finding the French to be worse oppressors than their Ottoman predecessors. Other battles ensued against an allied army of the Ottomans and the British. By the time he had been in Egypt a year, Napoleon had lost half his army to warfare and plague. He managed to hold on by winning a major battle at Aboukir in July 1799, al-

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps under the influence of Greek tradition, in which sphinxes were female, Denon portrayed the Great Sphinx as looking like a Nubian princess, rather than with the markedly masculine features that other artists more accurately conveyed. In his narrative, Denon describes the Sphinx's expression as "douce, gracieuse, et tranquille" and praises the softness of the lips (*Voyage*, 109); all in all, it seems most appropriate to refer to Denon's version of the Sphinx as female.

bei at the cost of thousands of lives, but French defeats in Europe forced him to return to France, sailing secretly out of Egypt so as to avoid the British blockade. Several months later Desaix also returned to Europe, where he was killed in the Battle of Marengo in June 1800. By an odd coincidence, General Jean-Baptiste Kléber, Napoleon's commander in Egypt, was assassinated on the very day that Desaix died, two thousand miles away in Italy.

Napoleon's remaining Egyptian forces eked out several more bloody victories against local and foreign opposition, but then in March 1801 the French were soundly defeated by the British. Shortly before being killed in this climactic battle, Major General Lanusse declared to his commander, Jacques-François de Bussay de Menou, "A man like you should never have commanded the French army. You are not capable of running the kitchens of the Republic" (Siliotti, 87). Three months later the remaining French surrendered to the English, who gave them passage out of the country and assumed control. Napoleon's invasion had cost some twenty thousand lives of his own troops, and took an even greater toll on the Egyptians he was nominally liberating. Far from reducing British power, moreover, the whole sad sequence of events only increased it.

The only thing of any real value to emerge from this misguided adventure was the work of Napoleon's committee of 167 scientists, and the voyage was fatal even for many of them: thirty-two of them died during the course of the expedition, from wounds or from disease. The survivors set about surveying and studying Egypt and its ancient monuments, and their work was crowned by the completely unexpected discovery of the Rosetta stone. Two decades later, Champollion's decipherment of its hieroglyphs laid the groundwork for the recovery of the language, the history, and the literature of ancient Egypt. The excitement surrounding these discoveries in turn inspired Henry Rawlinson to seek out and decipher the cuneiform inscriptions at Bihistun and led to the subsequent recovery of *Gilgamesh* and the literatures of the several major ancient Near Eastern cultures now known to us.

Vivant Denon was the first to stimulate wide public interest in the scientific study of the ancient Near East; his lavishly illustrated account of his journey up the Nile with Desaix became a European best-seller when it was published in 1802 as *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte pendant les campagnes du Général Bonaparte*. Denon dedicated his great work to Napoleon, praising him as a worthy heir to the greatest of the pharaohs of old:

To combine the lustre of your name with the splendor of the monuments of Egypt, is to associate the glorious annals of our

own age with the fabulous epochs of antiquity; and to reanimate the dust of Sesostris and Mendes, who like you were conquerors, and like you benefactors. All Europe, on learning that I accompanied you in one of your most memorable expeditions, will receive my work with eagerness and interest. I have neglected nothing in my power to render it worthy of the Hero to whom it is inscribed. (*Voyage*, 31)

The story of Napoleon's ill-fated expedition involves far more loss of life than reanimation. Yet Denon and his colleagues inaugurated the recovery of long-lost artworks and writings that do, in a fashion, reanimate monarchs like the great Twelfth-Dynasty kings Senwosret I-III, known to Denon only from Herodotus's account, a millennium and a half after the fact, of a single figure vaguely remembered as "Sesostris."

The French failed to dominate the Egyptian culture that Napoleon tried to reorganize along French lines, and they didn't even retain possession of the portable antiquities they unearthed, which the victorious English commandeered: the British Museum got the Rosetta stone. Conquest failed, and there now seems something grimly fatuous about Denon's identification of Napoleon with Sesostris—or Napoleon's own self-identification with Alexander the Great, whose footsteps he felt he was following to the Alexandria founded by his conquering predecessor. Master of his destiny during this period in Europe, Napoleon was out of his depth in the sands of Egypt. Yet his fascination with Egyptian antiquity was sincere: "Men," he told his army before the pyramids of Giza, "from the top of these monuments forty centuries are gazing down on you!" (Siliotti, 83). A more detached engagement, though, would have been better all round, a genuinely revivifying encounter such as we can now have when we seek pleasure and enlightenment rather than a possessive mastery of the world's cultural productions. The gentlemen of Napoleon's "Commission des Arts et des Sciences" failed to take the Sphinx's true measure, though we can see them trying literally to get into her head. The Sphinx turns out not to have the direct conversational interests that Sophocles gave her. In Denon's engraving she raises her eyes, parting her lips as if to speak, but not to question the ephemeral mortals, whose presence she ignores; she greets Amun Re, Lord of the Two Lands, who rises at dawn without fail, perfect each day, to shine in power on his eternal kingdom.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu-Lughod, Janet. "Going Beyond Global Babel." In King, Culture, Globalization and the World-System, 131–37.
- Aldridge, A. Owen. *The Reemergence of World Literature: A Study of Asia and the West*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1986.
- Ali, Tariq. "Literature and Market Realism." *New Left Review* 199 (1993): 140–45.
- Amich, Arna, and Lisa Suhair Majaj, eds. *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*. New York: Garland, 2002.
- Anderson, Mark. *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ed. *Reading Kafka: Prague, Politics and the Fin de Siècle*. New York: Schocken, 1989.
- Appiah, K. Anthony. "Cosmopolitan Reading." In Dharwadkar, *Cosmopolitan Geographies*, 197–227.
- Apter, Emily. *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Apuleius. *Metamorphoses*. Tr. J. Arthur Hanson. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library, 1989.
- Arias, Arturo. "Authorizing Ethnized Subjects: Rigoberta Menchú and the Performative Production of the Subaltern Self." *PMLA* 116.1 (2001): 75–88.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ed. *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Asad, Talal. "A Comment on Translation, Critique, and Subversion." In Dingwaney and Maier, *Between Languages and Cultures*, 325–32.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Tr. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953.
- Barnstone, Willis, and Tony Barnstone, eds. *Literatures of Asia, Africa, and Latin America*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1999.
- Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Tr. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- Bassnett, Susan. *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Translation Studies*. Rev. ed. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Bassnett, Susan, and Harish Trivedi, eds. *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 1999.