

Combined and Uneven Development

Towards a New Theory
of World-Literature

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The periphery is where the future reveals itself.

– J.G. Ballard

Contents

A Note on Collaborative Method	ix
1 World-Literature in the Context of Combined and Uneven Development	1
2 The Question of Peripheral Realism	49
3 'Irrealism' in Tayeb Salih's <i>Season of Migration to the North</i>	81
4 <i>Oboroten</i> Spectres: Lycanthropy, Neoliberalism and New Russia in Victor Pelevin	96
5 The European Literary Periphery	115
6 Ivan Vladislavic: Traversing the Uneven City	143
Works Cited	168
<i>Index</i>	188

A Note on Collaborative Method

This book is the product of intensive discussion and debate. Although our individual specialisms vary widely, from postcolonial studies to American studies to modern European and Scottish literary studies, we are motivated by a common conviction that the existing paradigms of literary analysis, in whatever field, are not equal to the challenge of theorising ‘world literature’ in the new millennium. With a linked history of co-teaching as our departure point, alongside the co-organising of reading groups, conferences and symposia, we approached the task of writing from a basis not simply of shared theoretical interests and determination but of already extensive conversation on the central problems, as we saw them, of our respective sub-fields and of the emerging field of world-literary studies.

That said, the process of collaboration should never be mistaken for the harmonious reconciliation of differences. Several of our disagreements and divergent emphases are sedimented in this work, and our applications of its proposals continue to evolve in different ways. At the same time, and especially in the face of an increasingly hostile environment for critical studies of this kind, we have benefited enormously from the mutual attention, support and unstinting engagement that comes with collective endeavour.

Individual members of the collective drafted sections of the book after its main arguments were established in draft form. These were then edited, revised and rewritten in a multi-phase process by several hands. The result could indeed be termed combined and unequal – but in ways that perhaps highlight, rather than negate, the values of solidarity on which the work is premised.

World-Literature in the Context of Combined and Uneven Development

The way we imagine comparative literature is a mirror of how we see the world. (Franco Moretti 2003: 81)

These are testing times for literary studies. The challenges confronting the discipline today are legion and multiform; they range from the field-specific to the institutional, from the university to the wider spheres of politics and the economy. In addition to internal debates about the coherence and sustainability of the established forms of disciplinary literary studies, we might reference in this connection the ongoing subordination of culture generally to the laws of the market,¹ the apparently declining significance, relatively speaking, of literature itself as a cultural form,² and the steady assault on the autonomy of the humanities – and indeed of the university itself in its historical guise as, for better and worse, an ivory tower, a ‘world apart’ – by government, business and media regimes, all bent in their various ways on incorporation, control and instrumentally defined regulation.³

1 See Huggan 2001; Brouillette 2007; Strongman 2002; English 2005; and Casanova 2004, all of whom have interesting things to say about the commodification and marketing of literary prestige.

2 See Fredric Jameson: ‘My sense is that this is essentially a visual culture, wired for sound – but one where the linguistic element [...] is slack and flabby, and not to be made interesting without ingenuity, daring, and keen motivation’ (1995: 299).

3 Jameson speaks thus, of the ‘subsumption of whole fields and disciplines under the patronage of private business and, as it were, the assimilation to wage labor of the standard nonacademic type of researchers whose work is subsidized by monopolies who set the agenda and are likely to profit from the results’ (2008: 571). See, among others, Furedi 2006; Maskell and Robinson 2001; Miyoshi 1998, 2000, 2005; Ohmann 2003; Readings 1996; Teeuwen and Hantke 2007; and

The suggestion that literary studies is in crisis has been made before, of course. As long ago as 1981, for instance, Raymond Williams argued that English literary studies had stumbled into incoherence – on the one hand, because the idea of ‘literature’ no longer provided a stable evidentiary basis of study; on the other, because the connotations of ‘English’ were so densely problematical.⁴ Asking whether the ‘English’ in ‘English literary studies’ identified ‘the language or the country’, Williams wrote that ‘[i]f it is the language, there are also fifteen centuries of native writing in other languages: Latin, Welsh, Irish, Old English, Norman French. If it is not the language but the country, is that only “England” or is it now also Ireland, Wales, Scotland, North America, Old and New “Commonwealths”?’ (1991a: 194).

In the 30 years since that Cambridge-centred ‘crisis in English Studies’,⁵ arguments as to the instability – indeed, on Williams’s reading, the strict *unviability* – of disciplinary literary studies overall have been sounded with increasing resonance. Scholars in the field have been proposing that the received modes of procedure are in need of radical overhaul. Everywhere today, the institutionalised and consolidated methods, the structuring

Watkins 1989. Given their specific training, literary scholars are likely to view the ‘junk language’ of managerialism (‘junk language’ is Jameson’s term, in a slightly different context) as an insult added to the injury already caused by policies aimed at subordinating universities to contingently defined national and social policy agendas, and about which literary scholars themselves are seldom if ever consulted: ‘incentivisation’, ‘value added’, ‘quality assurance’, ‘competitiveness in a knowledge society’, ‘foresight activities’, ‘targets of opportunity’, etc. In the UK – the national environment in which we ourselves work – the ‘Research Excellence Framework’ – a top-down, state-imposed scheme, centralised and massively bureaucratic, in which all departments in all universities are obliged to participate – is widely seen to have had deleterious effects on the scope, ambition, originality and independence of humanities scholarship, especially among younger scholars. For further commentary, see Bailey and Freedman 2011; Docherty 2011; Holmwood 2011; Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon 2010; the essays by Gopal, Holmwood and Bhambra, Jarvis, and Power that make up the dossier on ‘Assaults on the British University System’ in a special 2012 issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*; and recent writings on this topic by Collini 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and Hotson 2011.

4 See also Peter Widdowson, writing at the same time and in the same national context as Williams: ‘The “crisis” in English [...] is no longer a debate between criticisms as to which “approach” is best. Nor is it directly, yet, a question of English Departments being closed down along with other economically unproductive (and ideologically unsound) areas [...] Rather it is a question, posed from within, as to what English *is*, where it has got to, whether it has a future, whether it *should* have a future as a discrete discipline, and if it does, in what ways it might be reconstituted’ (1982: 7).

5 We cite the Cambridge debate as symptomatic, not primary: other contemporary and linked initiatives (above all, perhaps, the development of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies under Stuart Hall’s direction at the University of Birmingham) were equally significant, and perhaps even more so.

premises and principles, the coherence of the disciplinary object of study itself, are being challenged and opened up to reconsideration and sometimes searching and fundamental critique. In comparative literature, for instance, the very questions of why it is worthwhile to 'compare' literary texts at all, and what doing so might involve in a world that is both more transparently, plurally and complexly polyglot and – at the same time, and seemingly paradoxically – more deeply dominated by just one language – English – than ever before, are being discussed. In American studies, similarly, there has been a proliferation of new initiatives aimed at combatting the isolationism and nation-centredness of the field in its established modes, in the interests of reconfiguring it along the lines of systemic (global) and comparative rather than exceptionalist perspectives.⁶

One does not have to be a card-carrying Bourdieusian to know that academics are rather given to pronouncing the fields or sub-fields in which they themselves work as moribund or in crisis. The strategic function of this time-honoured gesture is to pave the way for those involved to present their own interventions as being in the nature of decisive departures, corrective reconstructions or new beginnings. The goal is to make enough of a splash to attract attention, for one increases one's own specific capital in a given field by ensuring that one's own position-taking is registered in it.

In these terms, a certain programmatic scepticism might represent a healthy initial reaction to the kind of work, published under such titles as *Death of a Discipline* (Spivak 2003), *Politics and Value in English Studies: A Discipline in Crisis?* (Guy and Small 1993) and 'Beyond Discipline? Globalization and the Future of English' (Jay 2001), that gestures rather apocalyptically to dead ends and fresh starts. One such sceptic is Thomas Docherty, who, having correctly noted that '[t]he talk of crisis in the discipline compels us to think of ourselves as being at the start of something new or at least something refreshed', and having observed that 'institutional forms of literary criticism have a tendency to be complicit with [the] [...] marketisation and homogenisation of our work', proposes and defends the counter-suggestion that 'Comparative Literature is not "in crisis" at all' (2006: 26, 27). Point taken.⁷ Yet we believe that there are nevertheless compelling reasons to view the current evocation of disciplinary turmoil as more than a mere internal power play or strategic ruse. If Williams's identification of a crisis in literary studies in 1981 can be taken to mark the emergence of various new initiatives – among them, postcolonial,

6 'The notion of American exceptionalism is in many ways the foundation of the discipline of American studies', Michael Denning notes: 'whether the answers are cast in terms of the American mind, the national character, American myths and symbols, or American culture, the founding question of the discipline was "What is American?"' (2004: 175). See also Dimock and Buell 2007.

7 See also James F. English, who begins his book *The Global Future of English Studies* by announcing the 'strange news' that 'the academic discipline of English is not in a state of crisis, [and] that its future actually looks pretty bright' (2012: 3).

ethnic and women's studies, cultural studies itself, the epistemological and methodological interventions of poststructuralism, postmodernism and deconstruction – perhaps the current moment is marked by the recognition that these 'new formations' have themselves now passed their sell-by dates. Certainly there appears to be a developing consensus that the literary studies field is going to have to reinvent itself in the years just ahead – not only because, subject to irresistible heteronomous pressures, it is being given no choice, but also because what 'literary studies' is taken to be, to mean and to represent – as well as *where* and *how*, and *by whom* and *to what ends* – have (again) become burning questions to academics in the field.

In this context of disciplinary rethinking and reorientation, the notions of 'world literature' and 'global literature' have emerged as important nodes of discussion and research. A relatively minor difference in the sub-disciplinary provenance of these two linked initiatives might be registered quickly. It is clear that the thought-figure of 'globalisation' is fundamental to them both.⁸ But where 'global literature' might be understood as in the first instance an extension of postcolonial studies – *as postcolonial studies under the sign of 'globalisation theory'*, in fact – 'world literature' is in the first instance an extension of comparative literature, and might be understood *as the remaking of comparative literature after the multicultural debates and the disciplinary critique of Eurocentrism*. The term 'global' is typically deployed in discussion of contemporary social processes bearing on the modes of production, circulation and reception of literature (and culture, more generally) – hence the significance accorded, as in cultural studies generally, to such concepts as transnationalism, deterritorialisation, diaspora, homogenisation, (post-)modernity, cosmopolitanism, citizenship, and so on.⁹ Discussants of the new version of 'world literature',

8 The underlying premises of this thought-figure are clearly identified by Hirst and Thompson in the opening sentences of their invaluable dissenting study *Globalization in Question*: '[I]t is widely asserted that we live in an era in which the greater part of social life is determined by global processes, in which national cultures, national economies and national borders are dissolving. Central to this perception is the notion of a rapid and recent process of economic globalization. A truly global economy is claimed to have emerged or to be in the process of emerging, in which distinct national economies and, therefore, domestic strategies of national economic management are increasingly irrelevant. The world economy has internationalized in its basic dynamics, it is dominated by uncontrollable market forces, and it has as its principal economic actors and major agents of change truly transnational corporations, that owe allegiance to no nation state and locate wherever in the globe market advantage dictates' (1996: 1).

9 See for instance Amireh and Majaj 2000; Apter 1999; Barnard 2009; Connell and Marsh 2011; Ganguly 2008; Gupta 2008; Jay 2010; Moses 1995; Mudimbe-Boyi 2002; and Mufti 2005. For the wider context in the study of culture and globalisation, see Appadurai 1996; Breckenridge et al. 2002; Fludernik 2003; Howes 1996; King 1997; Lash and Lury 2006; and the essays by Mignolo, Subramani, Kapur and Paik in Jameson and Miyoshi 1998.

by contrast, typically treat 'globalisation' not directly but as an underlying determinant at a certain remove – as the sociological pretext or warrant for a fresh engagement with questions of comparative literary method (which is what really characterises the new discussion of 'world literature'). We might say, in these terms, that 'world literature' is what happens to comparative literature when – having, however belatedly, engaged the task of 'unthinking' Eurocentrism – it 'goes global' (a phrase that one encounters quite frequently, along with the idea of 'an age of globalisation'). A handy illustration is provided by the advertisement for David Damrosch's *How to Read World Literature* in the 2008 Wiley-Blackwell literature catalogue. Damrosch's book, the catalogue tells us, 'addresses the unique challenges faced in confronting foreign literature – reading across time and cultures, translated works, and considering the emerging global perspective'; it 'offers readers the tools to think creatively and in an organized way about the great literary works produced around our world'.

We can readily see the 'postcolonialist' origins of the discussion of 'global literature' in Frederick Buell's early, but representative, study *National Culture and the New Global System* (1994).¹⁰ Similarly, we can see the 'comparativist' origins of the discussion of 'world literature' in Emily Apter's equally emblematic work *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (2006) – one of whose staple arguments we consider in detail below.¹¹ Today, however, the discussions of 'global literature' and 'world literature' are not only often conjoined, they are also pan-disciplinary, extending beyond 'postcolonial studies' and 'comparative literature' narrowly conceived.¹² Indeed, it is clear that, since the beginning of the new century, the old idea of *Weltliteratur* – whose specific genealogy can be sketched, as in John Pizer's succinct survey, from Goethe through Marx and Engels to Auerbach, Said and such contemporary scholars as Sarah Lawall¹³ – has been reformulated quite self-consciously to carry the banner for a new, maximally encompassing project that transcends and supersedes the inherited (sub-)disciplinary formations, whether of comparative literature or postcolonial studies or the various 'national' literatures ('English', 'French', 'Russian', 'Japanese', etc.). Premised on the assumption that the 'world' is one, integrated if not of course united – an assumption that had been discouraged during the Cold War, when the opposition between 'East' and 'West' had prevailed; and not really overturned even by the 'Three Worlds Theory' that arose during the

10 See also Bhabra 2007; Dirlik 2002; Gikandi 2001; Krishnaswamy and Hawley 2008; McCallum and Faith 2005; and the essays by Behdad and Cooppan in Loomba et al. 2005. A critical commentary is provided by Brennan 2004.

11 See also Cooppan 2001; Damrosch 2006; Kadir 2004; and many of the essays in Saussy 2006.

12 Exemplary in this regard are Annesley 2006; Dimock and Buell 2007; Gupta 2008; Israel 2004; and Walkowitz 2007.

13 Pizer 2000. See also Hoesel-Ihlig 2004.

Cold War era to challenge that dominant construction¹⁴ – ‘global’/‘world’ literature in its pre-eminent contemporary formulation pushes intrinsically in the directions of commerce and commonality, linkage and connection, articulation and integration, network and system. It thereby distances itself, explicitly or implicitly, from the antecedent lexicon of ‘post’-theory, which had been disposed to emphasise not comparison but incommensurability, not commonality but difference, not system but untotalisable fragment, not the potential of translation but rather its relative impossibility, and not antagonism but agonism.

Our ambition in this book is to resituate the problem of ‘world literature’, considered as a revived category of theoretical enquiry, by pursuing the literary-cultural implications of the theory of combined and uneven development. This theory has a long pedigree in Marxist sociology and political economy and continues to stimulate debate across the social sciences.¹⁵ But the *cultural* aspects of Trotsky’s initiating formulation concerning the ‘amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms’ (1967: 432) has received less attention, even as what it highlights draws attention to a central – perhaps *the* central – arc or trajectory of modern(ist) production in literature and the other arts worldwide; and this aesthetic dynamic is, in turn, complexly related to histories and conceptions of social and political practice. It is in the conjuncture of combined and uneven development, on the one hand, and the recently interrogated and expanded categories of ‘world literature’ and ‘modernism’, on the other, that our project looks for its specific contours. All three of these terms, it seems to us, need to be thought together.

Powerful challenges to traditional ways of doing comparative business have been forthcoming recently from critics such as Pascale Casanova, with her Bourdieu-inflected study of a ‘world republic of letters’ structured by asymmetries of circulation and exchange, and Franco Moretti, whose insistence on the systematicity of world literature borrows explicitly from the language of combined and uneven development as redeployed by world-systems theory. Casanova’s study stresses aesthetic *autonomy* as a foundational precondition of the literary field; Moretti’s emphasises the *heteronomy* of literary production to world-economic relations. But both approaches pose a challenge to the received scholarship in the sociology of literature: synthesising the insights of these two lines of thought might enable us to open up a northwest passage in world-literary studies. Certainly, the continuing debates over the cultural implications of globalisation serve as a backdrop for the arguments of both,

14 See Denning 2004 and Brennan 1997, 2001.

15 See, for example, Allinson and Anievas 2009; Ashman 2009; Barker 2006; Davidson 2006b; Löwy 2010; Shilliam 2009; and Smith 1990.

and may suggest why, in the early years of the twenty-first century, the relatively old notions of *Weltliteratur* and combined and uneven development should have emerged as ways of seeking a new materialist basis for a revived literary comparativism.

One of the landmarks guiding our thinking has been Moretti's firecracker of an article 'Conjectures on World Literature' – witty, down-to-earth, erudite and terrifically 'good to think' – which has been scattering sparks and setting off flares ever since it first appeared in *New Left Review* in 2000. So incendiary has Moretti's intervention proved, indeed (not only in this single article, of course, but across his recent work as a whole), that it has provoked any number of self-appointed Red Adairs in comparative literature to rush to the scene in an attempt to quiet the conflagration – thus far to little effect (and, *necessarily so*, we like to think). 'I will borrow [...] [my] initial hypothesis from the world-system school of economic history,' Moretti wrote in 'Conjectures',

for which international capitalism is a system that is simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*; with a core, and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality. One, and unequal: *one* literature (*Weltliteratur*, singular, as in Goethe and Marx), or, perhaps better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it's profoundly unequal. (2004: 149–50)

Moretti's recent work provides us with a rich array of things to discuss: the terms of his appropriation of world-systems theory, for instance; the centrality of narrative *prose* in what he says about world *literature* (in general); his promotion of 'distant reading' and wilful corollary disavowal of 'close reading' (which we suppose is in any event more in the nature of an *emphasis* – tactical and contingent – than of any categorical argument whose propositions are to be construed *in principle*). But the formulation just cited strikes us as being indispensable in two immediate respects: insofar as it grasps 'world literature' as neither a canon of masterworks nor a mode of reading,¹⁶ but as a *system*; and insofar as it proposes that this system is structured not on *difference* but on *inequality*.

16 Compare Moretti in this respect with Damrosch, who, while rejecting the idea that 'world literature' is 'a set canon of texts', argues that it is to be understood precisely as 'a mode of reading': 'a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time' (2003: 281). Damrosch's three-part definition of 'world literature' also includes the propositions that 'world literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures' and that 'world literature is writing that gains in translation'. See also Vilashini Cooppan: '[w]orld literature, as I tell my students, is not something you are given in full or get by proxy. Not a pre-packaged canon that differs from the traditional one only in its inclusion of a handful of unfamiliar names. Rather, world literature is a way you learn to think, a mode in which you learn to read, and a collective agreement you make to lose something in translation in order to gain something in transformation' (2004: 30).

The idea of 'system' is then one of the primary building blocks of our theory. The term is not treated in Raymond Williams's *Keywords*, where the associated term, 'structure', is explored instead – primarily a noun of process in the fifteenth century, Williams explains, but already by the eighteenth century marked by its emphasis on 'a particular and complex organization of relations, often at very deep levels' (1976: 253–59). But we construe 'system' similarly, as being characterised by vertical and horizontal integration, connection and interconnection, structurality and organisation, internal differentiation, a hierarchy of constitutive elements governed by specific 'logics' of determination and relationality. 'World-system' represents a further elaboration on this. Following Braudel (1985), Wallerstein (1974, 1980, 1989), and others, we use the term to indicate a bounded social universe – whose functioning is more or less (that is to say, relatively) autonomous, more or less integrated. In general, 'world-systems', in these terms, are not coexistent with the 'world' as such, and are hence not 'global' or 'globally dispersed' systems. The significant exception is the modern capitalist 'world-system', one of the indices of whose historical unprecedentedness consists precisely in the fact that it is a *world-system* that is also, uniquely and for the first time, a *world system*.

We propose, in these terms, to define 'world literature' as *the literature of the world-system* – of the modern capitalist world-system, that is. That, baldly, is our hypothesis, stated in the form of a *lex parsimoniae*. Perhaps, therefore, we should begin to speak of 'world-literature' with a hyphen, derived from that of 'world-system'. The protocol commits us to arguing for a *single* world-literary system, rather than for world-literary *systems*. Here too we follow Moretti – but also Fredric Jameson, whose argument for a 'singular modernity' is – for reasons that we will discuss below – to be vastly preferred over the various theorisations, especially in the field of postcolonial studies, of 'alternative modernities'. Also relevant in this context is Casanova's preference for the terms 'world republic of letters' and 'international literary space' over that of 'world literature', since she wants to make clear that what is at issue in her mobilisation of the category of 'world' is not simply all the literary writing that happens to exist in the world. To think of 'world literature' as the corpus of all the literature in the world would be strictly nugatory or useless. Moretti had written that

World literature cannot be literature, bigger; what we are already doing, just more of it. It has to be different. The *categories* have to be different. 'It is not the "actual" interconnection of "things";' Max Weber wrote, 'but the *conceptual* interconnection of *problems* which define the scope of the various sciences. A new "science" emerges where a new problem is pursued by a new method'. That's the point: world literature is not an object, it's a *problem*, and a problem that asks for a new critical method; and no-one has ever found a method by just reading more texts. That's not how theories come into being; they need a leap, a wager – a hypothesis – to get started. (2004: 149)

Casanova adds to this: in raising the question of 'world literature', she writes,

it is not enough to geographically enlarge the corpus of works needing to be studied, or to import economic theories of globalization into the literary universe – still less to try to provide an impossibly exhaustive enumeration of the whole of world literary production. It is necessary instead to change our ordinary way of looking at literary phenomena. (2004: xi)

The 'central hypothesis' of her own book, she then proposes,

is that there exists a 'literature-world,' a literary universe relatively independent of the everyday world and its political divisions, whose boundaries and operational laws are not reducible to those of ordinary political space. Exerted within this *international literary space* are relations of force and a violence peculiar to them – in short, a *literary domination* whose forms I have tried to describe while taking care not to confuse this domination with the forms of political domination, even though it may in many respects be dependent on them. (2004: xii)

Casanova is here building on Bourdieu's resonant observation, at the beginning of *Distinction*, that '[t]here is an economy of cultural goods, but it has a specific logic' (Bourdieu 1984: 1). This insight needs to be followed where it leads, and Casanova duly goes down this road in *The World Republic of Letters*, as such other Bourdieu-inspired theorists as Sarah Brouillette, Anna Boschetti, Gisèle Sapiro and Michel Hockx have also been doing in their recent work.¹⁷

Our own approach to the question of world-literature is posed slightly differently from this. Casanova is careful to note that the 'literature-world's' independence from 'the everyday world and its political divisions' is only relative. '[I]nternational forms of literary dependency are to some extent correlated with the structure of international political domination', she acknowledges; 'literary relations of power are forms of political relations of power' (2004: 81). But she nevertheless seems to us to abstract too strongly from the world of politics: she tends to treat the 'literature-world' and the 'everyday world' a little too much as parallel universes, with the result that questions concerning their *intersection* – questions as to the terms of their *relationship* – find themselves being deferred in her study. Since we are suggesting that world-literature be conceived precisely through its mediation by and registration of the modern world-system, our focus falls more directly than Casanova's on such questions. But our approach differs also from the work (much of it, again, enormously important) of scholars working on the political economy of culture, who have sought to identify the encroaching capitalisation of cultural production – that is to say, the commodification of culture, as product, especially intensive in the latter half of the twentieth century – the tendency to monopoly in all sectors of the culture industry,

17 See Brouillette 2007 and the articles by Boschetti, Hockx and Sapiro in a special 2012 issue of *Paragraph*, devoted to field theory in literature.

and also the dynamics of cultural imperialism (of what has been called 'Coca-colonisation'), in terms of which not only monopoly products but also regimes of production and patterns of consumption hegemonic in the core capitalist zones are imposed elsewhere, across the international division of labour.¹⁸

To describe the world literary system as 'one, and unequal' is to reactivate the theory of combined and uneven development. The theory originated in the work of Engels, Lenin and, especially, Trotsky, although it is Fredric Jameson's more recent deployment of it that Moretti evidently has in mind. An appreciation of the 'complex and differential temporality' of the capitalist mode of production, 'in which episodes or eras were discontinuous from each other, and heterogeneous within themselves', is, as Perry Anderson has argued (1984: 101), already observable in Marx's mature writings from the late 1840s onwards.¹⁹ In these writings there is an awareness of the fact that even within capitalist or capitalising social formations, vast rural populations continued to ground the persistence not only of earlier economic conditions, but also of social relations, cultural practices and psychic dispositions.

This identification of unevenness, a staple of Marx's and Lenin's work, is then amplified in Trotsky's writings of the 1930s, in which, on the basis of his consideration first of conditions in Russia in 1905 and subsequently of those in China in 1925–27, he formulated an elaborated theory of 'uneven and combined development', by way of analysing the effects of the imposition of capitalism on cultures and societies hitherto un- or only sectorally capitalised. In these contexts – properly understood as imperialist, as Trotsky noted – the imposed capitalist forces of production and class relations tend not to supplant (or are not allowed to supplant) but to be conjoined forcibly

18 See Calabrese and Sparks 2004, whose edited volume features work by several of the best-known scholars in this particular branch of the sociology of culture.

19 In this sense, the famous passages from the *Communist Manifesto* that seem to evoke a transformation that is as abrupt as it is total are potentially misleading: 'All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient prejudices and opinions are swept aside, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air', etc. (Marx and Engels 1998: 38). But just as readings of such passages in the *Manifesto* as being infused with enthusiasm for capitalism typically 'forget' that the writings of Marx and Engels are notable also for recording and protesting the violence of expropriation, the systematised misery and servitude that the imposition of capitalist social relations visited on populations everywhere, so too it is necessary to insist that the authors were well aware of the fact that the 'capitalist revolution' was not a once-and-for-all event, but rather a sprawling, bloody and erratic historical process, protracted over centuries.

with pre-existing forces and relations. The outcome, he wrote, is a contradictory 'amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms' – an urban proletariat working in technologically advanced industries existing side by side with a rural population engaged in subsistence farming; industrial plants built alongside 'villages of wood and straw'; and peasants 'thrown into the factory cauldron snatched directly from the plow' (1967: 432). The theory of 'combined and uneven development' was therefore devised to describe a situation in which capitalist forms and relations exist alongside 'archaic forms of economic life' and pre-existing social and class relations.

This general idea has, inevitably, been important to socialist and left liberation movements since the 1930s, as well as underpinning a sizeable sociological literature.²⁰ Thus Liu Kang (1998, 2000), who argues, in writing about the imposition of capitalism on China in the nineteenth century, that even as the latest techniques in capitalist production, transport, commerce and finance were being introduced in centres like Shanghai and Beijing, over which the Euro-American powers exercised military and political control, the agents of imperialist intervention were actively propping up an archaic landholding system, and supporting landlords, officials, militarists and comprador elites in prolonging prior forms of social organisation. In discussing colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa, similarly, Mahmood Mamdani (1996) points out that while the colonial powers coercively imposed new modes of production and capitalist social relations, they typically sought at the same time to buttress traditional hierarchies, forms and outlooks, and to encourage the survival of ethnically based local power, 'tribal' divisions and those indigenous cultural habits deemed conducive to promoting social 'stability'.²¹ And in their analyses of South Asia, a long line of historians have identified the dynamics of British imperial policy in the Victorian era as consisting precisely in simultaneous and contradictory investment in industrial 'modernisation' and 'archaic' feudal (or semi-feudal) political and social structures.²²

The significance of the theory of combined and uneven development has been less often registered in the humanities than in the social sciences. But it receives a powerful revisionary elaboration in the work of Fredric Jameson, where it appears as nothing less than a template for *any* consideration of modern culture, whether in the metropolises or at the peripheries of the world-system. Insisting that it can only be conceptualised adequately through reference to world-wide capitalism (2002: 13), Jameson understands modernity

20 In addition to the material cited in fn. 15, above, see especially the work of Justin Rosenberg (1996, 2005, 2006, 2007), who revisits and reconstructs Trotsky's conception, partly by way of debunking 'globalisation theory'. See also Rosenberg's exchange with Alex Callinicos in Callinicos and Rosenberg 2008.

21 On the invention of 'tribe' as a means of colonial governance, see Mamdani 2013.

22 See Kaiwar: 'In the colonies, vestiges of older social relations were maintained to ensure a degree of dispersed social control and governance on the cheap, whose main aim was resource removal and market monopolisation' (2014: 41).

as representing something like the time-space sensorium corresponding to capitalist *modernisation*. In this sense, it is, like the capitalist world-system itself, a singular phenomenon. But far from implying that modernity therefore assumes the same form everywhere, as Jameson has sometimes mistakenly taken it to suggest, this formulation in fact implies that it is everywhere irreducibly specific. Modernity might be understood as the way in which capitalist social relations are 'lived' – different in every given instance for the simple reason that no two social instances are the same.

Jameson emphasises both the *singularity* of modernity as a social form and its *simultaneity*. In the idea of *singularity* we hear the echo of a hundred years of dialectical materialist discussion of totality, system and universality – as, for example, in Henri Lefebvre's great essay 'What Is Modernity?' Explicitly evoking the theory of combined and uneven development, Lefebvre 'insist[s] upon the need for a general concept of modernity which would be valid for all countries, social and political regimes, and cultures', while distinguishing between 'the *general* and the *worldwide*' (1995: 188) – the former tendential, the latter empirical, we take it. The concept of *simultaneity*, meanwhile, Jameson derives from Ernst Bloch's ostensibly oxymoronic formula *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* ['simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous'].²³ Modernity is to be understood as governed always – that is to say, definitionally – by *unevenness*, the historically determinate 'coexistence', in any given place and time, 'of realities from radically different moments of history – handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance' (1995: 307). The multiple modes in and through which this 'coexistence' manifests itself – the multiple forms of appearance of unevenness – are to be understood as being connected, as being governed by a socio-historical logic of combination, rather than as being contingent and asystematic.

Jameson speaks then of the singularity of modernity, of modernity as a globally dispersed general 'situation'. 'Modernity' does not mark the relationship between some formations (that are 'modern') and others (that are not 'modern', or not yet so). So it is not a matter of pitting France against Mali, say, or New York City against Elk City, Oklahoma. Uneven development is not a characteristic of 'backward' formations only. Middlesbrough and North East Lincolnshire are in the United Kingdom as well as London and the Home Counties – and London itself, of course, is among the more radically unevenly developed cities in the world. To grasp the nettle here involves recognising that capitalist development does not smooth away but rather *produces* unevenness, systematically and as a matter of course. Combined *and* uneven: the face of modernity is not worn exclusively by the 'futuristic' skyline of the Pudong District in Shanghai or the Shard and Gherkin buildings

23 Bloch originally developed his concept of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* in *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (1935); the English translation is *Heritage of Our Times* (Bloch 1991). See also Bloch 1977, and the commentaries in Brennan 2006: 47ff and Durst 2004: esp. 1–32.

in London; just as emblematic of modernity as these are the favelas of Rocinha and Jacarezinho in Rio and the slums of Dharavi in Bombay and Makoko in Lagos, the ship graveyards of Nouadhibou and the Aral Sea, the vast, deindustrialised wastelands north, east, south and west, and the impoverished and exhausted rural hinterlands. These constitute the necessary flipside of the mirroring opacities of a postmodern topos like the Portman Bonaventura Hotel, famously analysed by Jameson in his 'Postmodernism' essay. One liability of this otherwise continually suggestive survey – or at least of its reception – has been a tendency to conflate its analysis of a dominant cultural logic with a descriptive account of 'culture' in general. The result has been to encourage acceptance or dismissal of its synoptic generalisations without reference to the second half of Jameson's argument, its dialectical complement as it were, in his widely deprecated essay 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism'. Unless these torn halves are brought into relation, Jameson's theses lose their crucial emphasis on the structural connectedness between a cultural dominant expressive of the completed triumph of commodity logic and a condition in which this triumph is not only incomplete but arrested in a kind of freeze frame. Modernity is neither a chronological nor a geographical category. It is not something that happens – or even that happens *first* – in 'the west' and to which others can subsequently gain access; or that happens in cities rather than in the countryside; or that, on the basis of a deep-set sexual division of labour, men tend to exemplify in their social practice rather than women. Capitalist modernisation entails development, yes – but this 'development' takes the forms also of the development of underdevelopment, of maldevelopment and dependent development.²⁴ If urbanisation, for instance, is clearly part of the story, what happens in the countryside as a result is equally so. The idea of some sort of 'achieved' modernity, in which unevenness would have been superseded, harmonised, vanquished or ironed out is radically unhistorical. Capitalism, as Harry Harootunian has written,

has no really normal state but one of constant expansion; and expansion requires the permanent production of excess, surplus, in order for it to survive. Part of the price paid for continual expansion is the production of permanent unevenness, permanent imbalance between various sectors of the social formations, the process by which some areas must be sacrificed for the development of others, such as the countryside for the city [...] the colony for the metropole, or even one city for another. (2000b: xv)²⁵

24 Thus Claudio Lomnitz, who – writing with reference to Latin America's 'unusually long history of national independence' – observes that the subcontinent's 'long republican history made the tension among capitalist development, modernization, and modernity especially evident, and indeed it led the dependency theorists of the 1960s to puncture the development narrative being promoted on the capitalist side of the Cold War divide, by insisting that *underdevelopment* was not a lack of development but rather a specific *kind* of development' (2012: 349).

25 See the commentary in Pratt 2002 and Young 2012.

This formulation stands as a compelling repudiation of the various recent attempts to pluralise the concept of modernity through the evocation of 'alternative' modernities.²⁶ Inasmuch as these invariably derive from an initial assumption as to the 'western' provenance of modernity – rather than situating it in the context of *capitalism as a world-system* – they are both misguided and unnecessary. Of course, if one believes that modernity is a 'western' phenomenon, it is only possible to understand its global dispersal in terms of the 'universalisation' of 'the west' – to be celebrated or, as in the avowedly anti-Eurocentric conception currently so influential in postcolonial studies, deplored as imperialistic.²⁷ As Harootunian has argued in outlining his own opposition to such 'fashionable descriptions' as "alternative modernities", "divergent modernities", "competing modernities," and "retroactive modernities," to postulate 'the existence of an "original" that was formulated in the "West"' is inevitably to suppose that the form of appearance of 'modernity' elsewhere must be both belated and derivative – 'a series of "copies" and lesser inflections' (2000a: 163). No wonder then that theorists who view modernity in these terms and yet are committed to the critique of Eurocentrism should want to argue for 'alternative' modernities!

Against this postcolonialist line of thought – which seeks to make an end run around the orthodox Eurocentric conception of modernity as a gift to be given or withheld by the capitalist homelands, but succeeds only in ratifying this baleful conception – however, the account elaborated by Jameson (and Harootunian) emphasises modernity's singularity and global simultaneity, while insisting that singularity here does not obviate internal heterogeneity and that simultaneity does not preclude unevenness or marked difference. Harootunian speaks, thus, of 'modernity as a specific cultural form and consciousness of lived historical time that differs according to social forms and practices', an idea that allows for 'differing inflections of the modern' (2000a: 62). In these terms, the specific modes of appearance of modernity in different times and places, or the representations of them in works of literature – St Petersburg in the 1870s, say, Dublin in 1904, rural Mississippi in the 1930s, a village on a bend in the Nile in the Sudan in the 1960s, Bombay in 1975, Glasgow in the 1990s – ought to be thought about not as 'alternative' but as 'coeval or, better yet, peripheral modernities (as long as peripheral is understood only as a relationship to the centers of capitalism[...]), in which all societies shared a common reference provided by global capital and its requirements' (2000a: 62–63). If modernity is understood as the way in which capitalism is 'lived' – *wherever* in the world-system it is lived – then 'however a society develops', its modernity is coeval with other modernities, 'is simply

26 The case for 'alternative' modernities has been advanced most notably by Gaonkar 1999. See also Gaonkar 2001. For a critique, see Lazarus and Varma 2008.

27 This line of thought is represented in the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ashis Nandy, Timothy Mitchell, David Scott and Tsenay Serequeberhan, among others. Powerful critiques are marshalled in Chibber 2013 and Kaiwar 2014.

taking place at the same time as other modernities' (Harootunian 2000b: xvi). This should also challenge our uncritical habit of conflating epistemological and chronological primacy ('modernity happened in Europe first and best, and then in other places', etc.), and get us into the habit of systemic thinking in terms of non-linear conjunctions. Additionally, such a view suggests that the only plausible usage of the idea of 'alternative modernity' is to signify a future, post-capitalist (i.e., socialist) modernity (a case for which is made in Liu Kang 1998).²⁸

We take our cue, in this book, from this reconceptualisation of the notion of modernity, which involves de-linking it from the idea of the 'west' and yoking it to that of the capitalist world-system. However, our central concern lies less with the politico-philosophical category of modernity as such than with its literary correlates – we are chiefly interested in the *literary* registration and encoding of modernity as a social logic. We are operating therefore with a preliminary tripartite conceptualisation – modern world-system/modernity/world-literature – in terms of which the latter is understood in the broadest sense as *the literature of the modern capitalist world-system*. We understand capitalism to be the substrate of world-literature (or, to borrow the phrase that Nicholas Brown uses as the subtitle of his 2005 study *Utopian Generations*, its 'political horizon'); and we understand modernity to constitute world-literature's subject and form – modernity is both what world-literature indexes or is 'about' and what gives world-literature its distinguishing formal characteristics. Questions of periodisation inevitably arise here. If we follow Wallerstein and others in speaking of the instantiation of capitalism as a world-system around 1500, it nevertheless seems clear that it is only in the 'long' nineteenth century, and then as the direct result of British and European colonialism, that we can speak both of the *capitalisation* of the world and of the full *worlding* of capital. World-literature, as we plan to deploy the concept, would then presumably be understood as a development of the past 200 years, though its formal conditions of possibility would have begun to be established some three centuries earlier.

28 'To understand China's modernity or its alternative modernity, overdetermined by complex and multiple structural relations, the centrality of revolution and political struggle in the field of cultural production must be acknowledged. China's alternative modernity can be best grasped as an ongoing process replete with contradictions: its revolution aiming at constructing socialism in a Third World, unindustrialized economy is alternative to the Western capitalist modernity in political and economic senses, and its emphasis on cultural revolution is also alternative in a cultural sense. But Chinese revolution is an integral part of modernity that is at once fragmentary and unifying, heterogeneous and homogenizing. Its project of modernity is as incomplete as its vision is unfulfilled' (Liu 1998: 168).

Later in this book we will explore a selection of modern-era fictions in which the potential of our method of comparativism seems to us to be most dramatically highlighted. In our analysis, we will treat the novel paradigmatically, not exemplarily, as a literary form in which combined and uneven development is manifested with particular salience, due in no small part to its fundamental association with the rise of capitalism and its status in peripheral and semi-peripheral societies as an import which is in Jameson's words 'as much a component of modernization as the importation of automobiles' (2012: 476). The peculiar plasticity and hybridity of the novel form enables it to incorporate not only multiple literary levels, genres and modes, but also other non-literary and archaic cultural forms – so that, for example, realist elements might be mixed with more experimental modes of narration, or older literary devices might be reactivated in juxtaposition with more contemporary frames, in order to register a bifurcated or ruptured sensorium of the space-time of the (semi-)periphery. A brilliant summary instance of such patterning is to be found in an early passage from *South of Nowhere*, a novel by the Portuguese author António Lobo Antunes, which ought to be as well known as Coetzee's *Dusklands*, but isn't, just as Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* ought to be as well known as Conrad's *Lord Jim* or *Heart of Darkness*, but isn't. 'Understand', writes Antunes's narrator,

I am a man from a narrow old country, from a stifling city shimmering in the reflections of its tile façades. Even the sky is cluttered with flocks of pigeons. My sense of space here is also determined by a view of the river flowing into the sea but pressed in by two wedges of land. I was born and raised in a dwarfed crochet universe [...] This universe forbade me the eroticism of the ninth canto of the *Lusiads* and taught me daintily to wave good-bye with my handkerchief instead of simply taking my leave. It policed my spirit, in sum, and reduced my concerns to the problems of spindles, to the hourly calculations of the office clerk whose flight to the Indies went only so far as licking stamps at the Formica-topped tables of the post office. (Antunes 1983: 28)

In light of the novel's adeptness at mixing and repurposing narrative modalities, familiar from the analyses of Lukács and Bakhtin, we can draw attention to a further contemporary crisis pressing the case for a reconsideration of world-literature: that of cultural forms. By this we refer not to the historical opposition between mass, popular and elite cultures, terms now outmoded by the completed triumph of cultural commodification everywhere. Instead, the very processes driving the changes in the contemporary world-system have led to a breakdown of traditional boundaries demarcating genres and media, such that world-literary space is now characterised by new forms of convergence, synergy, competition and displacement. We want to suggest that the novel, and particularly the experience of reading and writing novels, has changed irrevocably within

an altered mediascape in which diverse cultural forms, including new and newly recalibrated media, compete for representational space and power. The consequence has been that hybrid genres and interactive platforms have retrospectively altered our understanding of the historical development of the novel, prompting reappraisal of its strategies and affinities in light of an expanding communicational economy.

To grasp world-literature as the literary registration of modernity under the sign of combined and uneven development, we must attend to its modes of spatio-temporal compression, its juxtaposition of asynchronous orders and levels of historical experience, its barometric indications of invisible forces acting from a distance on the local and familiar – as these manifest themselves in literary forms, genres and aesthetic strategies. Any typology of combined and uneven development will offer a catalogue of effects or motifs at the level of narrative form: discrepant encounters, alienation effects, surreal cross-linkages, unidentified freakish objects, unlikely likenesses across barriers of language, period, territory – the equivalent of umbrellas meeting sewing machines on (animated) dissecting tables. These are, in essence, dialectical images of combined unevenness requiring not just simple decoding but creative application. Consider the opening lines of Earl Lovelace's *Salt*:

Two months after they hanged his brother Gregoire, king of the Dreadnoughts band, and Louis and Nanton and Man Man, the other three leaders of African secret societies, who Hislop the governor claimed to be ringleaders of an insurrection that had a plan, according to the testimony of a mad white woman, to use the cover of the festivities of Christmas day to massacre the white and free coloured people of the island, Jo-Jo's great-grandfather, Guinea John, with his black jacket on and a price of two hundred pounds sterling on his head, made his way to the East Coast, mounted the cliff at Manzanilla, put two corn cobs under his armpits and flew away to Africa, taking with him the mysteries of levitation and flight, leaving the rest of his family still in captivity mourning over his selfishness, everybody putting in their mouth and saying, 'You see! You see! That is why Blackpeople children doomed to suffer: their own parents refuse to pass on the knowledge that they know to them.' (1996: 3)

We might then see the 'accordionising' or 'telescoping' function of combined and uneven development as a form of time travel within the same space, a spatial bridging of unlike times – in Lefebvre's sense, the production of *untimely* space – that leads from the classic forms of nineteenth-century realism to the speculative methodologies of today's global science fiction.

Our play with the Jamesonian triptych of modernisation/modernity/modernism leads us to believe that the temporal parameters of its third term, *modernism*, whose relation to world-literature it must be part of our work to specify, need to be set back rather earlier than they conventionally are, to incorporate the great wave of writing from the mid-nineteenth century

onwards that is construable precisely – as in Marshall Berman’s reading (1983), for instance – as an encoding of the capitalisation of the world, its tangible transformation at both of the levels – ‘economic civilization’ and ‘material civilization’ – specified by Braudel in his magisterial study *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century* (1985).²⁹ We need to do away once and for all with the still-dominant understandings of modernism that situate it both in terms of writerly technique (self-conscious, anti- or at least post-realist, etc.) and as a Western European phenomenon, whose claims to being *the* literature of modernity are underscored precisely by this geo-political provenance. The discussion of *later* and *differently situated* modernisms is of course well under way in contemporary literary scholarship.³⁰ But we are interested in setting the work written by writers celebrated as ‘modernist’ alongside coeval and even antecedent work by writers from peripheral and semi-peripheral locations – Pérez Galdós, Machado de Assis, José Rizal, Hristo Botev, Knut Hamsun and Lu Xun, for instance – writers seldom considered in this context because critics have rarely thought through the full implications of the link between modernism, modernity and modernisation.

It is worth stressing that even if the logic of what Marx identified as the commodity form is not solely reducible to the processes of reification and commodification, it lies at the heart of combined and uneven development. We must take stock of the curious salience of the commodity fetish in the work of many metropolitan writers in the mid-nineteenth century, at a point when commodification achieved sufficient density to become the organising principle of society and insinuate itself into the fabric of everyday life to become, for the estranged perspective, visible – perhaps for the first time – as the uncanny coloniser of consciousness and the puzzling substrate of the new bourgeois ‘common sense’. There is perhaps a twenty-five-year window, from 1835 to 1860, when this set of problems takes centre stage in such writers and artists as Dickens, Baudelaire, Hoffmann, Hawthorne, Poe, Grandville and Daumier – and then disappears beneath accreted layers of normalised perception. (Perhaps it is this latter development – the normalisation of commodity logic – that determines the emergence of naturalism?) We might then speculate that this ‘window’ reappears whenever and wherever commodification installs itself as an unfamiliar logic – especially if we bear in mind Wallerstein’s repeated emphasis (1996) that the production of capital entails ‘the commodification of everything’: ‘commodification’ is a never-ending

29 ‘[M]any works written around the First World War struck me as being part of a much more extensive history (from, say, 1800 to 2000), of which they constituted merely one moment. A moment of great inventiveness and complexity, to be sure – the high point of the whole process, if you like – but no longer an autonomous, coherent reality demanding a specific category’ (Moretti 1996: 3).

30 See for instance Brown 2005; Doyle 2010; Friedman 2001, 2010; GoGwilt 2011; Mejías-López 2009; Ramazani 2009.

rather than a once-and-for-all process; it ramifies both *extensively* – through the ceaseless development and conquering of new markets – and *intensively* – through the equally ceaseless quantification of quality. So – again – this is not a story that moves from ‘west’ to ‘east’: what is normalised as commodity logic in the time of Dickens finds itself being estranged by the new eco-semiotic regimes of subsequent eras.

In these terms our project involves remappings of both the history of modernism and the intertwined trajectories of world-literary wave formations. Theodor Adorno has already given us a reading of modernism as the (modern) culture that says ‘no’ to modernity. His argument, more precisely, is that modernism ought to be conceptualised as a cultural formulation of resistance to the prevailing – indeed, the hegemonic – modes of capitalist modernisation in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. Hence the ‘modernisms’ of, for example, Ibsen and Dostoevsky, Breton and Woolf, Kafka and MacDiarmid – all hostile, in their various ways, to ‘industrial civilisation’ and its objectifying (or desubjectifying) social thrust. Provided we are prepared, for the sake of argument, to abstract from the precise determinants, contours and coordinates of this ‘modernist’ projection, the Adornian conception is relatively elastic. It can readily be extended forwards in time to apply to such writers of the latter half of the twentieth century as Lorine Niedecker and Geoffrey Hill, John Berger and Gloria Naylor, Elfrieda Jelinek and Jose Saramago, Roberto Bolaño and Nadine Gordimer, and also backwards – certainly as far as Romanticism, say, and such obvious figures as Percy and Mary Shelley, Hölderlin, Heine and Mickiewicz.³¹ But it can also, and notwithstanding Adorno’s own deep-seated Eurocentrism, be extended geographically – or rather geo-politically – to incorporate such writers as Lu Xun and Lao She, Aimé Césaire, Gabriela Mistral and Miguel Asturias, Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai and Mahasweta Devi, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Nawal El Saadawi and Abdelrahman Munif, in whose work the dissenting registration of capitalist modernisation takes the historically unforgeable form of a critique of imperialism.

Certainly it is the case, as Nicholas Brown has pointed out in his consideration of the relation between modernist (that is to say, ‘Euro-modernist’) and independence-era African literatures, that both of these formations revolve around and are animated by the same world-historical process. ‘The mere fact that European imperialism names a key moment in the spread of capitalism as a global economic system already implies a certain baseline of universality’, Brown writes, before cogently drawing the key implication that ‘there can be no question of merely applying the methodological norms developed for [the] one literature [‘Euro-modernist’] to the texts of the other [African]’. Rather, what is required is to ‘reconstellate [...] modernism and African literature in such a way as to make them both comprehensible within a single framework within which neither will look the same. This framework

31 In this connection, see Löwy and Sayre 2001.

will hinge neither on “literary history” nor abstract “universal history” but on each text’s relation to history itself’ (2005: 2–3).³²

Adorno understood modernism as being imbued with a (more or less explicit, more or less self-conscious) *criticality*. But his emphasis on dissidence – the identification of modernism with resistance – is too categorical for us to adapt without qualification to our thinking about world-literature. The Adornian conception issues in a hyper-canon, comprising expressionism, serialism, Beckett’s drama and hardly anything else: it notoriously ignores the celebratory wing of fascist modernism (as in Marinetti) and the contradictory juxtapositions of reactionary plots and vanguard formal structures (as in *The Waste Land*, for instance). In proposing a definition of world-literature as literature that ‘registers’ the (modern capitalist) world-system, we, by contrast, are not suggesting that only those works that self-consciously define themselves in opposition to capitalist modernity be considered world-literary – nor even that world-literary works are those that stage a coded or formally mediated resistance to capitalist modernity. As we understand it, the literary ‘registration’ of the world-system does not (necessarily) involve criticality or dissent. Our assumption is rather that the effectivity of the world-system will *necessarily* be discernible in any modern literary work, since the world-system exists unforgoably as the matrix within which all modern literature takes shape and comes into being. Obviously this ‘registration’ of the world-system will be more self-evidently marked, more transparently at issue, in some works than in others. The fictions that we have selected for analysis below, for instance, seem to us to plot with particular clarity and resonance the landscape of the world-system: its hills and valleys, nodes and contours, lines and textures, balance and compaction. But it would be possible to elucidate the world-literary dimensions of any modern work, even one that set out

32 In a subsequent passage, Brown notes that such a ‘reconstellation’ would involve a deconstructive demystification of the very ideas of ‘western’ and ‘non-western’ literature: ‘The question’, as he puts it, ‘would not be whether the most vital writing of the second half of the twentieth century was produced by Third World writers: it was. The question is rather what we mean by “literature” and what we mean by “West,” what agendas reside in those words and whether they have any meaning at all [...] What we usually call “non-Western” literature is rarely the expression [...] of some other culture, if by that we understand some other set of norms and rules that has developed along its own internal logic; rather, it must be thought of in terms of the positions that economically, ethnically, sexually, and geographically differentiated subjects occupy within the single culture of global capitalism that has more or less ruthlessly subsumed what was once a genuinely multicultural globe.

All of this should be obvious, even if our entire mainstream multicultural discourse is built around its explicit denial. But the recognition of what multiculturalism denies should not be taken to signify a celebration of, or acquiescence to, the power of some henceforth inescapable “Western” tradition. Indeed, the capitalist monoculture dissimulated in multicultural discourse is not strictly speaking “Western” at all’ (2005: 6).

very purposefully (as does Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*, for example) to chart strictly private and socially incommensurable consciousness, experience or memory.

Here, too, Fredric Jameson's work is particularly important to us, since he has been concerned centrally with the relations between capitalist modernity and literary form. Thus while his essay on Third World literature has regrettably received attention only because of its claims about 'national allegory'³³ – claims which in our view have been tendentiously misunderstood – we find remarkable and illuminating his commentary in that essay on the 'crisis of representation' in non-metropolitan cultures that were, and remain, 'locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism [...] a cultural struggle that is itself a reflection of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capitalism, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernization' (1986a: 68).³⁴ The proposition that the violence entailed in the imposition of capitalism in such societies made for the 'generic discontinuities' of the literatures subsequently produced (83) receives elaboration also in 'On Magic Realism in Film', another of Jameson's essays addressing Third World cultures – published, like the 'Third-World Literature' essay, in 1986 – in which he provisionally proposes that magic realism be considered as 'a formal mode [...] constitutively dependent on a type of historical raw material in which disjunction is structurally present', and in which the content

betrays the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features. In such a view [...] the organizing category of magic realist film [...] is one of modes of production, and in particular, of a mode of production still locked in conflict with traces of the older mode [...] [T]he articulated superposition of whole layers of the past within the present (Indian or pre-Columbian realities, the colonial era [...]) is the formal precondition for the emergence of this new narrative style. (1986b: 311)³⁵

33 The paradigmatic critique of Jameson's essay remains Ahmad 1987. For a counter-critique of Ahmad and corresponding defence of Jameson, see Lazarus 2011, and also Buchanan 2002, 2003; Lazarus 2004; McGonegal 2005; and Szeman 2003.

34 We take it that the 'crisis of representation' to which Jameson refers here is that of working simultaneously *within* and *against* imposed cultural forms, of deploying these without thereby subordinating oneself to their received ideological valences: in taking up the form of the novel, for instance, 'Third World' writers sought to appropriate it, to make it over or 'refunction' it, by way of turning it into an instrument through which their own very distinct cultural and political aspirations could be expressed.

35 See also the argument in the concluding section of Jameson's book on postmodernism that modernism itself must be seen as 'uniquely corresponding to an uneven moment of social development', in which there is a 'peculiar overlap of future and past', such that 'the resistance of archaic feudal structures to irresistible modernizing tendencies' is evident (1995: 307, 309). Jameson illustrates this

Our contention is that the features of ‘combined unevenness’ that Jameson identifies in magical realism are evident also (although not in quite the same ways) in other modern(ist) literary forms: primitivism, early surrealism, Kafka’s supernatural naturalism, even critical realism. In a footnote to the ‘Third-World Literature’ essay, Jameson furthermore suggests – decisively, for our purposes – that this way of thinking about combined unevenness demands a new type of literary comparativism: namely the ‘comparison, not of the individual texts, which are formally and culturally very different from each other, but of the concrete situations from which such texts spring and to which they constitute distinct responses’ (1986a: 86–87, fn. 5).³⁶

The premise of ‘combined unevenness’ developed here repudiates at a stroke the idea – linked, presumably, to the political mantra that ‘globalisation’ is a tide lifting all boats – that the ‘world’ of world-literature is a ‘level playing field’, a more or less free space in which texts from around the globe can circulate, intersect and converse with one another. It is remarkable how pervasive this idea of a ‘level playing field’ is in contemporary literary critical discourse. Particularly among those committed to a reconstructed model of comparative literature there is discernible a tendency to suppose that ‘after’ the multiculturalism debates and the disciplinary critiques of Eurocentrism and Orientalism, comparative literature was now finally free to become genuinely, authentically comparative – a supposition perfectly encapsulated in the title of an article by Jonathan Culler: ‘Comparative Literature, at Last’ (2006). Thus Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who writes that it has been her ‘long-standing sense that the logical consequences of our loosely defined discipline [i.e., comparative literature] were, surely, to include the open-ended possibility of studying all literatures, with linguistic rigor and historical savvy. A level playing field, so to speak’ (2003: 13). Inasmuch as it has elsewhere been one of Spivak’s signature gestures to deconstruct particularisms that masquerade as universalisms, and to draw out their ideological presuppositions, it is difficult to appreciate the grounds on which, here, she chooses to subscribe to the idealist fantasy that a ‘level playing field’ is a ‘logical consequence’ of

argument through reference to Kafka’s *The Trial*, focusing on the juxtaposition in the novel of a thoroughly modernised economic order and an older, indeed archaic, legal bureaucracy and political order deriving from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. See also, in these terms, David Durst’s discussion of the ‘structure of feeling’ of what he calls ‘Weimar Modernism’ (Durst 2004).

36 He adds that comparative analysis of this kind ‘would necessarily include such features as the interrelationship of social classes, the role of intellectuals, the dynamics of language and writing, the configuration of traditional forms, the relationship to western influences, the development of urban experience and money, and so forth’ (Jameson 1986a: 86–87, fn. 5).

comparative literature as a discipline. In our view, comparative literature – in the Euro-American academy, at least – has pretty much always commenced from an unalloyed and irrevocable Eurocentric particularism.³⁷ In *Death of a Discipline*, however, Spivak holds out an olive branch to the discipline. What she is ‘advocating’, she says, is not ‘the politicization of the discipline’, but ‘a depoliticization of the politics of hostility toward a politics of friendship to come’. To the extent that we understand them, we view these tactics as deeply misconceived. For it seems to us that what is called for is precisely *not* the ‘depoliticization of the politics of hostility toward a politics of friendship to come’, but, on the contrary, the active *politicisation* of the discussion on the basis of a steady and thoroughgoing *critique* of comparative literature as a disciplinary projection, both in the past and as it continues to exist today.

Some contemporary comparativists have wanted to project the ‘level playing field’ gesture backwards in time, to propose that the deepest intrinsic tendency of comparative literature was always ‘global’ or ‘universalistic’ in this sense.³⁸ Emily Apter, for instance, argues that ‘Comparative literature was in principle global from its inception, even if its institutional establishment in the postwar period assigned Europe the lion’s share of critical attention and short-changed non-Western literatures’ (2006: 41). She attempts to defend this empirically counter-intuitive thesis by redrawing the lines of the received

37 Elsewhere – in South Asia, Latin America, China and the Arab world, for instance – literary comparativism has often had a very different critical underpinning.

38 A splendid and somewhat whimsical example of the ‘orthodox’ Eurocentrism of comparative literature is to be found in Hazel S. Alberson’s 1959 article ‘Non-Western Literature in the World Literature Program’. We write ‘whimsical’, because the exoticisation of ‘non-western’ culture appears despite Alberson’s best intentions and most earnest aspirations, in an essay explicitly directed against cultural arrogance and condescension. ‘The pressures upon all of us to become acquainted with non-western countries are more urgent and more vital than in Goethe’s time’, she writes, at the high point of the Cold War. ‘Today we are faced with a ONE WORLD. No longer can we hide behind the façade of our ignorance and our provincialism, no longer can we be indifferent to those parts of the world we do not know. Today the reality of the Orient with its varied cultures, its different orientations, its problems, is here, not to be made over in our image but to be understood and to be accommodated. It always seems to me that there should have been a Fifth Freedom – Freedom from Contempt which comes with ignorance’ (Alberson 1960: 45–46). All this is deeply humane, and rather affecting. Alberson believes that ‘in exploring [literary works from the “non-West”] with our general knowledge of literatures and our comparative approach we can introduce the East within the perspective of the West, arouse a respect for the traditions of the East, erase some of the contempt that springs from ignorance and promote a larger tolerance’ (49). But she gives the game away, betraying in the process also the narrow and strictly time-bound provincialism of her own cultural formation, when she adds: ‘I will admit that at times the literature of the Orient can seem like its foods – highly spiced, exotic, with strange flavours – but they are usually concocted on the basis of staples with which we are quite familiar, just as is their literature’ (49).

history of comparative literature, such that Leo Spitzer's period of residence in Istanbul is afforded exemplary significance, rather than – as in most accounts – Erich Auerbach's. Her point is that where the manifestly Eurocentric Auerbach claimed to feel himself in the wilderness in Istanbul, cast out of 'Europe' and hence adrift of the civilised world, and made no attempt to learn Turkish (Apter suggests that his rather self-pitying accounts were ungenerous at least, and in fact inaccurate), Spitzer made himself rather more at home in the city, learning Turkish and setting up a school of philology that published actively. Apter's speculation is that Spitzer's example 'might have significant bearing on attempts to redefine comparative literature today as a "worlded," minoritarian comparativism', inasmuch as it might be taken to signify that 'early comparative literature was always and already globalized' (45–46). Thus she reproduces the table of contents of the 1937 issue of the *Publications de la faculté des lettres de l'Université d'Istanbul* – which featured ten articles: four in German, three in French, one in English and two in Turkish – and argues that the multilingualism of this issue 'attests to a policy of *non-translation* adopted without apology' which '[i]t is tempting to read [...] as the in vitro paradigm of a genuinely globalized comparative literature, as evidence of critical reading practices that bring the globe inside the text' (54–55, 61). For Apter, Spitzer's philology 'affords its micrological counterpart as close reading with a worldview: word histories as world histories; stylistics and metrics in diaspora' (64). It is this 'worlded' model – 'always already' spectrally present within comparative literature as a promise to be redeemed – that she sees as having resurfaced over the course of the past decade in literary studies overall – hence her bold claim that '[i]n many ways, the rush to globalize the literary canon in recent years may be viewed as the "comp-lit-ization" of national literatures throughout the humanities' (41).

All of this strikes us as deeply unconvincing. Let us note in passing that, whatever might be said in this respect about, say, 'French' or 'German' or 'Spanish' as sub-disciplinary formations, Apter's purported defence of comparative literature against 'national literature' programmes fails to hit the mark against English. For 'English' has never been 'national' in the sense evidently imagined by Apter. On the contrary, it has always, and for any number of reasons (not all of which do it credit, to be sure), been deeply invested in the worldliness of language and literature, in their political instrumentality and social power. It is for this reason, for example, that it has been within departments of English that materialist, feminist, anti-racist and anti-imperialist criticism has found room to breathe in recent decades. It is true that these progressive tendencies have often led minority existences in English departments, which have mostly been given over to distinctly orthodox, if nevertheless very varied, work. But criticism of this kind could neither have arisen nor have sustained itself in the chill formalist climate of the established comparative literary scholarship.

More substantially, Apter's emphasis on translation, multilingualism and philology not only fails to challenge, but in fact reinscribes the idealist version

of comparativism central to comparative literature in its dominant institutional form. Although she refers repeatedly to 'globalisation' in thinking about what comparative literature does, and how it does it, Apter's failure to say anything at all about the structure of the world-system renders moot her claims for the universalism inherent in the discipline. It is all very well to call for 'critical reading practices that bring the globe inside the text', but it is difficult to see how the referencing of 'globality' here differs from the orthodox construction of 'the world' in comparative literature as a virtual universe of circulating languages and literatures, cultures and values.

Against 'national' particularism, Apter advocates 'a paradigm of *translatio* [...] that emphasizes the critical role of multilingualism within transnational humanism' (61). One problem here is that comparative literature has always been disposed to uphold a merely *quantitative* notion of multilingual competence, to celebrate multilinguisticity as though it in itself conduced to social harmony and equality.³⁹ The fact that the ten articles in the Istanbul literary review are written in four different languages seems to have blinded Apter to such other, less congenial, facts as that eight of these ten articles are in the hegemonic languages of metropolitan northwestern Europe and that, with only one exception, they all tackle problems to do with these languages or the literatures written in them.⁴⁰ Apter speaks of 'close reading with a worldview', but the evidence that she adduces in support of her contention that the 'worldview' in question here is no longer Eurocentric but genuinely globalised is thin, to say the least. As Apter herself knows very well, a daunting number of colonial administrators and Orientalist scholars were fluent in Farsi or Arabic or Zulu or Urdu without in the least feeling the need to question their Eurocentrism. *Their* 'multilingualism' was 'critical' not to 'transnational humanism' but to what they saw as 'the pacification of primitive tribes'!

39 Compare Rey Chow, who makes the excellent point that, although she 'deeply appreciate[s] the intellectual and personal benefits of knowing multiple languages, it appears problematic [...] to equate comparison with multilingualism per se. In that equation, so often voiced in the decision-making processes of hiring committees and other professional situations, language has come to be viewed as a stand-in for method, and the ability to use a particular language, more or less as the equivalent of having knowledge itself – indeed, as a privileged – because nativist – way into a culture, a key that opens all doors' (2004: 290). We will consider Chow's own critique of comparative literature below.

40 The multilinguisticity of this particular issue of the *Publications de la faculté des lettres de l'Université d'Istanbul* also seems less portentous when considered against the backdrop of the vibrant cosmopolitanism of Turkish (and especially Istanbul) intellectualism generally in the period. See Kendall, for instance, who points out that of the 47 journals appearing in Istanbul in 1876, 'only 13 were in Turkish: the others were in mainly Greek, Armenian, and French' (2002: 331). 'Western' literature and culture were actively debated by Turkish writers, journalists and intellectuals from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. See also Konuk 2010 for a splendid contextualising analysis of Turkish intellectual life during World War II.

The argument has been made, by Lawrence Venuti (1998), among others, with respect to translation, and Louis-Jean Calvet (2006), with respect to the 'ecology' of languages themselves, that languages, literary forms and literary productions never enter the world on their own terms. A fundamental inequality – not intrinsic, but fully social – marks their capacities as representational practices; and this inequality is then overdetermined by the social logistics of translation, publication, reading, pedagogy, and so on.⁴¹

Moreover, the idea of 'close reading with a worldview' is itself unconvincing to us in its apparent assumption as to the ideological neutrality of critical method. Whatever might be said about Moretti's injunction to scrap 'close reading' altogether in favour of 'distant reading' (and Apter is writing with Moretti's provocation firmly in mind), it is surely a mistake, given its irreparable formalism, to attempt to defend the received disciplinary practice of 'close reading' in any strict sense. For the price of the rigorous examination of language and literature in institutionalised 'close reading' has invariably been abstraction from their social determinants and structuring conditions of existence.

It is of course necessary to acknowledge that translation – a mediating social practice, after all – is inextricably bound up with cultural misrepresentation, linguistic domination and social inequality. It might seem, in these terms, that comparative literature's refusal of translation and its commitment to reading in original languages is a culturally progressive gesture. But as Chow has argued very convincingly, 'language as such tends to be viewed as a neutral fact' by literary comparativists:

seldom is it pointed out in discussions of comparative literature, that languages and cultures rarely enter the world stage and encounter one

41 Thus Calvet: 'even if to the linguist's eye all languages are equal (the most widely spoken languages and those that are in the process of disappearing, those languages in which hundreds of thousands of books have been written and those that have not been transcribed), the world's languages are in fact fundamentally unequal. To be sure, absolutely any dialect form of a little-spoken language of the Amazon basin or Africa deserves to be analysed just as much as English, Chinese or French and, so long as one undertakes the necessary labour of coining new words, everything can be said, written or taught in absolutely any language. But the fact remains that a discourse which would represent English and Breton, or French and Bobo, as socially equivalent would be both unrealistic and ideological: all languages do not have the same value, and their inequality is at the heart of the way they are organized across the world. To maintain the contrary would be an act of blindness or a sort of demagoguery, granting the same importance to a mosquito as to an elephant, to a human being as to a butterfly: there are "elephant languages" and "mosquito languages" which it is difficult to consider on the same level, except of course from the point of view of the science which describes them. This comes down to saying that "elephant languages" and "mosquito languages" are all languages, a remark that borders on tautology' (2006: 4).

another on an equal footing, that “languages embed relations of dominance,” and that the notion of parity embedded in comparison as it currently stands would need to be recognized perhaps as a form of utopianism that tends to run aground in practice. (2004: 296)⁴²

Comparative literature’s insistence on multilinguisticity is more often the leading edge of an unambiguous fetishism of language (and hence of the authority of professional experience) than of any commitment to cultural dialogue or social mutuality.⁴³ Behind it we typically encounter thoroughly idealist assumptions as to the ineffability, universality and timelessness of literature – the gamut of assumptions that Terry Eagleton once addressed under the rubric of ‘the ideology of the aesthetic’ (1990).

An enabling counter to the doxic position on the impossibility and undesirability of translation is provided in Andrés Neuman’s novel *Traveller of the Century*, which features an extended discussion of translation in the contexts of core/periphery social relations. At a literary salon, the traditionalist Professor Mieter puts forward the comparativist position as typified by Apter, arguing against translation on the grounds that literature is ineffable and that translation does violence to its integrity. ‘You must all agree’, he contends, ‘as discerning readers of poetry, that each poem possesses an untransmissible essence, a distinctive sound, precise forms and connotations that are impossible to adapt to another language with a similar perfection’ (Neuman 2012: 330). The response given to this statement by Hans, one of the novel’s protagonists, and himself a translator, strikes us as being full of consequence: ‘I think being faithful is a contradiction’, he suggests,

because the moment another text emerges, faithfulness is no longer achievable, the poem has been transformed, it has become a different poem. We have to take as a given the impossibility of rewriting anything literally, not even a single word. Some translators are wary of this transformation, seeing it as a betrayal rather than a variation. But if it is well done, if the job of interpretation gives the right result, the text may even be improved, or at least become a poem as worthy as its predecessor. And I would go further – I think it is the translator’s duty to offer the reader an authentic poem in

42 See also Gupta 2008: 147ff.

43 In her recent work *Against World Literature*, Apter makes her case against ‘translat-ability’ (and, implicitly, for the continued relevance of a comparative literary studies powered by ‘high theory’) even more starkly: ‘I have been left uneasy in the face of the entrepreneurial, bulimic drive to anthologize and curricularize the world’s cultural resources, as evinced in projects sponsored by some proponents of World Literature [...] A primary argument of this book is that many recent efforts to revive World Literature rely on a translatability assumption. As a result, incommensurability and what has been called the Untranslatable are insufficiently built into the literary heuristic’ (2013: 3). It is striking that this argument, which links the predatory spread of ‘World Literature’ to the homogenising tendencies of globalized capital, is never extended to the ‘translatability’ of Theory itself; it may be that Apter takes the latter’s ineffability for granted.

his own language precisely in order to remain faithful to the poetic nature of the original [...] Let us not deceive ourselves – even an original poem has no single interpretation, to read a poem is also to translate it, we can never be completely sure of what a poem is saying even in our own language. As I see it, a translation is not made of an authorial voice and one that obeys it, rather it is more akin to a meeting of two literary wills. In the end, there is always a third person – isn't there? – who is a third discordant voice, which turns out to be that of the reader. (331)

What Hans introduces here is the idea of a continuum – something approaching an identity, in fact – between the acts of reading and translating. If to read is already to 'translate', then the seeds are already sown for the view that, even if translation is by definition a 'political' act, something may be gained by it, not merely something lost.⁴⁴ We are further enjoined by this insight to grasp reading and translating as themselves social rather than solitary processes, and thereby to attend to the full range of social practices implicated: writing as commodity labour, the making of books, publishing and marketing, the social 'fate' of a publication (reviews, criticism, the search for, creation and cultivation of a readership, etc.). As Hans puts it in *Traveller of the Century*,

[a] work doesn't begin and end with its author, it forms part of a much broader group, a kind of writing collective that includes translators. Translation is neither a betrayal nor a substitute, it is another contribution, a further push to something that is already in motion, like when someone jumps into a moving carriage [...] No good translation can ever distort the translated work – it simply exaggerates the mechanisms of reading itself. (334)

'Efforts to rethink the study of world literature will continue', Sarah Lawall has written, 'as long as there is a discrepancy between the lively expectations generated by the term "world" and the pinched reality elicited by conventional approaches' (quoted in Damrosch 2003: 129). We would like to construe this thought-provoking formulation along materialist lines. Across the full range of disciplinary literary studies, the structurality of the capitalist world-system is typically misrecognised, if it is not ignored (or even denied) altogether. The misprision generally takes the form of an idealist recasting of capitalism – and/or of imperialism and modernity – in civilisational terms as 'the west'.

44 See Eliot Weinberger 2001: 'Translation liberates the translation-language. Because a translation will always be read as a translation, as something foreign, it is freed from many of the constraints of the currently accepted norms and conventions in the national literature' ('Anonymous Sources: A Talk on Translators and Translation', <http://www.fascicle.com/issue01/Poets/weinberger1.htm>). Accessed 10 April 2010.

The effect of this idealism is to undermine, in our view fatally, contemporary efforts to rethink the object of disciplinary literary studies. Let us examine briefly three instances of this idealism in operation, and consider their implications: Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and two representative and ground-clearing articles by Susan Bassnett (2006) and Rey Chow (2004), respectively. These three pieces come from very different points on the literary critical spectrum, both methodologically and ideologically: Said stands significantly, of course, at the disciplinary crossroads between 'English', 'comparative literature' and 'postcolonial studies'; Bassnett offers an endorsement of comparative literature in the wake of the disciplinary critique of Eurocentrism; and Chow argues that this critique has been cosmetic only, and that comparative literature remains fundamentally Eurocentric. Our argument will be that despite the stark differences between them in almost every other respect, Said, Bassnett and Chow all demonstrate the same tendency to substitute the civilisational category of 'the west' for the category of capitalist modernity as the object of their analysis – a substitution that has the inevitable effect of dematerialisation.⁴⁵

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said proposes that it has been the belated discovery on the part of contemporary scholars of 'the enormously exciting, varied post-colonial literature produced in resistance to the imperialist expansion of Europe and the United States in the past two centuries' that has served most decisively to throw the received paradigms of literary scholarship into question (1993: 71). He mobilises the category of the 'post-colonial' here following Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, who had used the term 'to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day' (1989: 2). Said tends to speak in this context of *contrapuntalism*, as in his characteristic identification, in *Culture and Imperialism*, of 'overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future' (1993: 72).

The larger point that he is concerned to make is that *imperialism* is the 'major, I would say determining, political horizon of modern Western culture' (1993: 70). His argument, in fact, is two-edged. On the one hand, he suggests that imperialism is fundamental to modern 'western' culture – is, in fact, that culture's very substrate or grounding instance. On the other hand, he suggests that precisely this truth, or reality, has been ignored, systematically and symptomatically, within 'western' culture itself: within literary studies, a 'massive avoidance' – which, were it a matter of consciousness, rather than of ideology or, better, of epistemic 'atmosphere', might be said to amount to the mother of all conspiracies – 'has sustained a canonical inclusion and exclusion: you include the Rousseaus, the Nietzsches, the Wordsworths, the Dickenss, Flauberts, and so on, and at the same time you exclude their relationships with the protracted, complex, and striated work of empire' (70).

45 See also Lazarus 2002.

Writing at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, Said argues that 'the relationship between empire and culture' has only just begun to find registration in literary studies (1993: 71). We have been quoting thus far from the chapter in *Culture and Imperialism* significantly entitled 'Connecting Empire to Secular Interpretation'. The contention in this chapter is that from the mid-eighteenth century to the time of his own writing in the late twentieth, the literary field has been blind to its own enabling conditions, modes of operation and ideological effects. The thrust of literary scholarship during this period has sometimes been nation-centred (and occasionally narrowly chauvinistic) and sometimes (as in Goethe or Auerbach, for instance) comparativist and even universalist in its rhetoric. But even in its more expansive, comparativist guises, which Said himself vastly prefers, the scholarship has been constitutively Eurocentric: the field has been organised 'epistemologically [...] as a sort of hierarchy, with Europe and its Latin Christian literatures at its centre and top' (52).

The fundamental task that Said therefore enjoins upon his colleagues in the literary field is to 'unthink Eurocentrism'.⁴⁶ This is partly a matter of opening oneself to the existing archives and burgeoning new literary production from the world outside the 'west', for he argues, surveying the scholarship of the past 200 years, that '[w]ithout significant exception, the universalizing discourses of modern Europe and the United States assume the silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-European world. There is incorporation; there is inclusion; there is direct rule; there is coercion. But there is only infrequently an acknowledgement that the colonized people should be heard from, their ideas known' (58). But 'unthinking Eurocentrism' also involves revising our construction of 'western' culture itself. We cannot simply add or assimilate new material to an otherwise unchanged canon in accordance with unaltered modes of disciplinary practice. The constitutive Eurocentrism of old-style 'Victorian studies' for example, would not be transformed were we merely, so to speak, to 'add colonialism and stir'. Said enjoins us instead to

reinterpret the Western cultural archive as if fractured geographically by the activated imperial divide, to do a rather different kind of reading and interpretation. In the first place, the history of such fields as comparative literature, English studies, cultural analysis, anthropology can be seen as affiliated with the empire and, in a manner of speaking, even contributing to its methods for maintaining Western ascendancy over non-Western natives [...] And in the second place our interpretive change of perspective allows us to challenge the sovereign and unchallenged authority of the allegedly detached Western observer. (1993: 59)

This injunction – it would be more accurate, perhaps, to understand it, as Raymond Williams has taught us, as a dispersed and historically specific political imperative, rather than through reference to a single scholar, no matter

46 See Shohat and Stam 1994.

how influential – has been at the heart of much of the work produced across the full range of literary studies over the course of the past quarter-century.⁴⁷ Said's identification of the inextricability of 'culture' from 'imperialism'⁴⁸ – the 'integration and connections between the past and the present, between imperializer and imperialized, between culture and imperialism' (1993: 72) – strikes us as being of indispensable importance. But we need to register a major weakness in his understanding of the key concept of imperialism. This weakness has already been addressed and explored in some of the criticism directed at Said by his materialist followers and interlocutors in postcolonial studies.⁴⁹ There are various ways of registering the problem in shorthand. One of them is simply to point out that while the terms 'empire' and 'imperialism' run like a rich dye through all of Said's work, there are far fewer references to the term 'capitalism'. Another is to observe the anomalousness of his repudiation of Marxism: as Benita Parry has pointed out, we can scarcely fail to remark on the fact that Said's work on culture and imperialism 'neglected that very analysis which has done most to explain modern colonialism and imperialism as integral to capitalism's beginnings, expansion, and ultimate global entrenchment' (Parry 2013: 107).⁵⁰

The main problem is that Said presents imperialism as a *political* dispensation rather than as a *process of accumulation on a world scale*, under conditions of capitalist monopoly. Imperialism for him implicates military conquest,

47 A mere recitation of some key titles might be sufficient to demonstrate this: *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Brantlinger 1988); *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Loomba 1989); *The Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (Viswanathan 1989); *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Lowe 1991); *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from 'The Tempest' to 'Tarzan'* (Cheyfitz 1991); *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature: Nationalism, Exoticism, Imperialism* (Arac and Ritvo 1991); *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–1867* (Hall 2002); *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (Hulme 1992); *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Pratt 1992); *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Kaplan and Pease 1993); *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (McClintock 1995); *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Baucom 1999); *Literary Culture and US Imperialism: From the American Revolution to World War II* (Rowe 2000); *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662–1785* (Ballaster 2005).

48 Said presents his argument here as a break from the dominant forms of aesthetic philosophy since Kant: 'Cultural experience or indeed every cultural form is radically quintessentially hybrid, and if it has been the practice in the West since Immanuel Kant to isolate cultural and aesthetic realms from the worldly domain, it is now time to rejoin them' (1993: 68).

49 See for example Brennan 2013; Lazarus 2011: 183–203; Parry 1992, 2006, 2013; San Juan, Jr. 2006, 2008.

50 Parry continues: 'Because his focus is exclusively on colonialist exploitation, Said's writing [...] neglects the ubiquity of class inequality and the assaults visited on workers and the poor in the core capitalist countries and the semi-peripheries as well as the peripheries' (2013: 107).

alien governance, systematised top-down violence, social asymmetry, cultural and symbolic domination, and Eurocentrism as a set of deeply patterned 'structures of attitude and reference'. It is characteristically about domination rather than about exploitation or class struggle or the imposition of a mode of production. The tendential severing of imperialism from capitalism leads Said to neglect the structuring dynamics, agencies and vectors of modern historical development. Situating imperialism in civilisational terms as an 'ongoing contest between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native' (1993: 59), he typically refers us to 'the west' as its originating force – as when, in *Orientalism*, he speaks of 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (1979: 3).⁵¹ In the absence of a materialist conception of imperialism, 'the west' in Said's work comes to stand in for the socio-historical process that it tacitly references, but at the price of mystification.

A second liability of Said's conceptualisation follows directly from this first. A further consequence of his conflation of imperialism and 'the west' is that the latter instance tends to suffer homogenisation: both historically and geo-politically, its internal divisions and differences, the trajectories of its development, are flattened out and disregarded. It is not only that between the categories of 'the west' and 'Europe', no significant difference is registered – such that, for example, the United States is presented as a more or less organic outgrowth of 'Europe', merely with a broader geo-strategic base. Also observable in *Culture and Imperialism* is a steady if reductive progression from 'England', 'France' and 'the United States', to the 'major metropolitan' formations, and thence to 'the west' itself. The fact, as Lucia Boldrini has pointed out, that '[m]any European countries have no imperial history if not a passive one, having themselves been "colonised", subjugated or controlled by other political powers' (2006: 15–16), is never taken into account by Said. Although Boldrini's complaint about the 'continuing identification of Europe on the one hand with *some* Western European countries and, on the other, with "the west" and therefore with colonial history – of the reduction, that is to say, of Europe to the colonial history of some of its states' (15), is not directed at Said's work, it is easy to see its relevance to any appraisal of Said.

It is because Said's work both homogenises 'the west' and construes it as the agent of imperialist domination that he has sometimes been accused, by critics to his left and to his right, of 'Third-Worldism'. There is no need to rehearse this dispute here. What can be noted, however, is that the

51 For an interesting critique of Said's 'civilisational' understanding of imperialism, suggesting its affinities with Max Weber, see Farris 2010.

tendency to essentialise 'the west' has become a staple ingredient, across the range of literary scholarship, of much of the work that – following Said's injunction – has been directed to 'unthinking Eurocentrism'.⁵² We can see this very clearly, for instance, in Rey Chow's influential call for a 'post-European' perspective in comparative literature, to which we will turn shortly. Before doing so, however, it will behove us to look at Susan Bassnett's 'Reflections on Comparative Literature in the Twenty-First Century', since it is to the kind of thought exemplified in Bassnett's essay that Chow is evidently responding.

Bassnett wants to take stock of comparative literature *after* the disciplinary critique of Eurocentrism. This critique is taken to have been levelled, absorbed and appropriately acted upon. '[W]e have come a long way in three decades', Bassnett writes airily, *en route* to a restatement of the value and vitality of the 'western' literary canon and the tradition that it inscribes and memorialises.⁵³ She readily concedes that it was important for scholars of literature generally to take to heart the central argument brought against mainstream scholarship by the critics of Eurocentrism – which argument she introduces under the rubric of 'plurivocality': the call for multiple voices to be attended to, 'rather than one single dominant voice' (4). (It is worth registering in passing here the distance between this concept of 'plurivocality' and the Saidian notion of 'contrapuntalism'. For all that might be said against it, the latter, as we have seen, identified 'overlapping territories' and 'intertwined histories' which, according to Said, it was necessary to think *together*, as registrations of a vast social experience binding all its participants, even if antagonistically and unequally.⁵⁴ 'Plurivocality', by contrast, identifies only the multiplicity of discourses; it has nothing to say about their interrelations.) But in a passage directed explicitly at Gayatri Spivak, Bassnett suggests that while a comparatist approach to literature governed by this model of plurivocality 'works for anyone approaching the great literary traditions of the northern hemisphere from elsewhere', it is not

particularly helpful for those of us who have as a starting point one or other of those great traditions. The question remains as to what new directions

52 See the analysis of the 'fetishism' of 'the West' in postcolonial theory in Lazarus 2002.

53 '[T]here is a need now to look again at the idea of the canon, not least because of the way in which Western foundation texts have found their way into other literatures – think of the impact of naturalism on southern Indian literatures, of the extraordinarily creative use of Homer and the epic tradition by the St. Lucian Nobel laureate Derek Walcott, of the current translation boom in China, as Western writing is translated, imitated and rewritten in exciting new ways. A fundamental question that comparative literature now needs to address concerns the role and status of the canonical and foundation texts that appear to be more highly valued outside Europe and North America than by a generation of scholars uneasy about their own history of colonialism and imperialism' (Bassnett 2006: 5).

54 See the dedication to Nayantara Sahgal's 1985 novel *Rich Like Us*: 'To the Indo-British Experience and what its sharers have learned from each other'.

in comparative literature there can be for the European scholar whose intellectual formation has been shaped by classical Greek and Latin, by the Bible, by the Germanic epic, by Dante and Petrarch, by Shakespeare and Cervantes, by Rousseau, Voltaire and the Enlightenment, by Romanticism and post-Romanticism, by the European novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by generations of writers who have borrowed, translated, plagiarized and plundered, but whose works run inexorably to some degree through the consciousness of anyone writing today. (4–5)

Some of the implications of this deeply tendentious formulation are worth exploring in detail.⁵⁵ We can start by noting the conceptual muddle entailed in the internal slippage from ‘northern hemisphere’ to ‘Europe’ – and compounded elsewhere in the essay, when Bassnett mobilises in addition the category of the ‘west’ (as in ‘Western foundation texts’ and ‘Western writing’). She deploys these three terms – ‘Europe’, ‘northern hemisphere’ and ‘west’ – in her essay as strict synonyms, all naming the same thing. That thing is, evidently, a (singular) trans-national (but not global) ‘culture’ or ‘civilisation’. ‘No single European literature can be studied in isolation’, Bassnett writes, evidently meaning thereby to challenge national(ist) literary scholarship; but nor, she adds, ‘should European scholars shrink from reassessing the legacy they have inherited. There is a great deal to learn from the perspectives of Southern hemisphere scholars, principle [sic] of which is the shift in perspective that their views inevitably incite, but it is important not to lose sight of where we, as Europeans, stand in relation to our own literary history’ (10). While ‘Europe’ comes into focus as a civilisational unity for Bassnett, the premise of a *world-system* is denied or disregarded. ‘No single European literature can be studied in isolation’, she writes; but *European* literature evidently can – indeed, must – be studied in isolation from ‘non-European’ (or ‘southern hemisphere’) literatures. No ‘contrapuntalism’ for Bassnett, evidently. Instead, we must assume that she conceives of the world as the ensemble of plural, more or less discrete, *civilisations*.⁵⁶

55 The tendentiousness of Bassnett’s argument can be exposed merely through counter-citation of Sophie Bessis’s elegant demolition of its general premises. Bessis writes of Eurocentric evocations of a ‘Greco-Roman tradition’: ‘In fact, since Petrarch and others gave it an initial form in the fourteenth century, the founding myth of an exclusive Greco-Roman source has functioned as an implacable machine for the expulsion of oriental or non-Christian sources from European civilization. Erased: the Babylonian, Chaldean, Egyptian and Indian influences on Greece, from the pre-Socratics to the late descendants of Alexander. Disregarded: the huge prestige that Egypt always enjoyed within the Greek world, whose literary figures happily recognized what they owed to its sciences and its religion. Obscured: the crucial dimension of the Hellenistic era, that hybrid of Hellenism and the East. Passed over in silence: the cultural pluralism of a Roman empire for which the barbarians were men from the North, not the familiar peoples along the southern shores of the Mediterranean’ (2003: 13).

56 In which case, one would want to know the grounds on which Bassnett’s idealist

What Bassnett proposes as a bedrock – the cord that supposedly binds together and unites into a single ‘Great Tradition’ the various micro-traditions of the constituent cultures, nations and peoples of ‘Europe’/‘the northern hemisphere’/‘the west’ – is in our view a strictly ideological construction, which it would be better to construe as a *post facto* justification for the currently prevailing global dispensation.⁵⁷ The problem is not only that Bassnett’s presentation tends to erase the violence structurally entailed in ‘inter-cultural’ relations in the contexts of colonialism and capitalist modernity – specifically, the relations between ‘Europe’ and the world beyond its historically porous and often shifting boundaries. (What she terms ‘interconnectedness’, in this respect, and sees as a positive good might with greater historical warrant be described as Conrad described it in *Heart of Darkness*: ‘robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale’ [2007: 8].) Just as important is the fact that her essentialism serves to mystify the history of Europe itself. It is worth reminding ourselves that, far from representing any intrinsic civilisational unity or ‘community of values’, the ‘making of Europe’ involved (and continues to involve) conflict, division, violence and mutual animosity. The ‘Europe’ that would come to impose itself on the rest of the world in the modern era – and that would present itself in civilisational terms in doing so – was, as Robert Bartlett has argued very eloquently, itself the product of ‘internal’ conquest, colonisation and enforced cultural change:

Conquest, colonization, Christianization: the techniques of settling in a new land, the ability to maintain cultural identity through legal forms and nurtured attitudes, the institutions and outlook required to confront the strange or abhorrent, to repress it and live with it, the law and religion as well as the guns and ships. The European Christians who sailed to the coasts of the Americas, Asia and Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries came from a society that was already a colonizing society. Europe, the initiator of one of the world’s major processes of conquest, colonization and cultural transformation, was also the product of one. (1994: 313–14)

positioning of the ‘inter-connection’ between these ‘civilisations’ is to be preferred over Samuel Huntington’s rather grimmer, ‘realist’ theory of a ‘clash of civilisations’.

57 In fact, Bassnett’s argument is in places so definitively Eurocentric (in the restricted sense of ‘Europe-centred’) as to render implausible even her own conflation of ‘Europe’ with ‘the west’ and ‘the northern hemisphere’. It is difficult to know, for instance, how North American or Russian readers are to position themselves in relation to the advice that ‘it is important not to lose sight of where we, as Europeans, stand in relation to our own literary history’. The facts that significant sections of the Russian intelligentsia have consistently defined themselves in explicit opposition to the category of ‘the west’ (while insisting on their fidelity to ‘Europe’) and that significant sections of the US intelligentsia have consistently defined themselves in explicit opposition to the category of ‘Europe’ (while insisting on their fidelity to ‘the west’) have evidently not given Bassnett pause.

Reciting the names of Dante and Shakespeare and Cervantes, evoking Latin and the Bible and the Enlightenment, Bassnett conjures up the image of a literary tradition freely available, as something like a family inheritance, to all 'Europeans' – but not, evidently, to 'non-Europeans'.⁵⁸ (Her thesis is made more convoluted still – not to say, more untenable – by the fact that on her reading the category of 'Europeans' would include [some? most? all?] North Americans, Australians, etc.) One could play Bassnett's game in reverse here, and recite other names that point in a completely different direction: Andalusian Arabic, Bulgar, Drevani, Muromian, Curonian and Pomeranian, for instance – now extinct 'European' languages, obliterated (and along with them the cultural identity of the people who spoke them) in the long march of 'Europeanisation'; or Cornish, Welsh, Occitan, Breton, Livonian and Sardinian – dominated and/or sub-national languages that still survive in Europe despite the fierce pressures exerted upon them by hegemonising forces (often trans- or super-national cultures and languages), whose imposition it has proved impossible to resist. It takes nothing away from Shakespeare and Cervantes, the epic and the Bible, English and German, surely, to recognise that it has often been precisely in the name of the selective tradition identified through reference to them (and such as them) that politically dominant forces in Europe have rained violence and terror upon their neighbours, by way of subduing and subordinating them – a process involving first deculturation and then enforced acculturation. It is not only in extra-European theatres that English, French, German, Italian and Russian have been imposed on speakers of other languages, by way of breaking their resistance and undermining their cultural integrity.

Bassnett's article is written partly by way of attempting to re-energise comparative literature after the critique of Eurocentrism – a critique which, for all its indispensability, is seen to have left the discipline somewhat demoralised. Hence her suggestion that 'the perspectives of Southern hemisphere scholars' are 'not particularly helpful for those of us who have as a starting point' the Great Tradition represented by the 'western' canon. Her argument is clearly predicated on an assumption as to the distinctiveness and the internal unity of 'Europe'/'the northern hemisphere'/'the west' as a civilisational bloc

58 We are reminded here of what Karl Heinz Bohrer has written recently of Ernst Robert Curtius: 'Curtius's conception of Europe [was] as a delightful garden in which major writers and thinkers meet, from Virgil to Goethe, from Balzac to Miguel de Unamuno, from Ortega y Gasset to T.S. Eliot and Jean Cocteau' (2012: 591). However, Bohrer identifies this idealism in Curtius as a compensatory utopianism – an historically specific determination that is quite obviously different from that animating Bassnett's understanding: 'Curtius's idea that the different national writers belonged together in the spiritual present of European literature was utopian in the sense that it responded to the two wars and the state of continental Europe as a landscape in ruins. It was the anticipation of a longed-for alternative, the illusion that ideas could literally move mountains, the mountains in question being the borders separating countries' (591).

irreducibly different from, if not necessarily in opposition to, other civilisational blocs (e.g., that represented by 'the southern hemisphere'). We have attempted to demonstrate that, because of its essentialism, this construction of 'Europe' mystifies the history of Europe, as well as, of course, the relations between Europe and the rest of the world.

It might be worthwhile here to place Bassnett's argument in relation to the debate about European 'identity' sparked off by Jürgen Habermas's call for the development and projection of a European presence capable of counter-balancing 'the hegemonic unilateralism of the United States' (2005: 6). Writing in May 2003, in the shadow of the US-sponsored invasion of Iraq, Habermas asked whether there were 'historical experiences, traditions, and achievements offering European citizens the consciousness of a shared political fate *that can be shaped together*' (7). He answered in the affirmative, but only after rejecting firmly the civilisational idea of Europe evoked by thinkers like Bassnett. For Habermas, that idea would be merely the corollary of the particularist chauvinism sponsoring the 'bellicose past' that 'once entangled all European nations in bloody conflicts' (12). He proposed instead an idea of 'Europe' predicated precisely on a break from this past through the reflexive creation of 'new, supranational forms of cooperation' (12). A similar argument is proffered by the Swiss writer Adolf Muschg, who writes, in dialogue with Habermas, that

What holds Europe together and what divides it are at heart the same thing: common memories and habits, acquired step by step through the process of distancing oneself from fatal habits. Europe is what Europe is becoming. It is neither the Occident nor the cradle of civilization; it does not have a monopoly on science, enlightenment, and modernity. It shouldn't attempt to ground its identity in any other way than through its own experiences: any claims for exclusivity can only lead into the same delusion and pretension through which Europe of the nineteenth century believed itself to represent the rest of the world, and entitled to dominate it. (2005: 25)

The idea here is of Europe as a counter-hegemonic work in progress – a strictly contemporary project negatively motivated by recognition that the effects of all of the previous projections of 'Europe' – which took themselves to be gestures of civilisational self-assertion – have been catastrophic.⁵⁹ Yet even this carefully historicised and radically contingent construction⁶⁰ is

59 See also Bauman 2004 and Todorov 2005.

60 Or one could describe it as deconstructive. Habermas's manifesto actually appeared under the joint signatures of himself and Jacques Derrida. Derrida was too ill at the time to contribute directly, and managed to append only a short preface. But he indicated that he wished to have Habermas's piece appear under his own name also. The manifesto – 'both an analysis and an appeal' (Habermas 2005: 3) – duly appeared simultaneously in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Libération*. See Levy, Pensky and Torpey 2005: xi–xxix.

susceptible to criticism on the grounds that it generalises unwarrantedly from the modern experience of the historically dominant European nations to all of Europe. A latent essentialism lurks in the background of Habermas's refunctioning of the category of 'core Europe' (*'Kerneuropa'*) and his suggestion that this 'avant-gardist core of Europe' must play the role of 'locomotive', powering the generation of a new, pan-European consciousness and politics (2005: 5–6). While we certainly appreciate the necessity of defending France and Germany – whose governments opposed the rush to war against Iraq – from the wrath of the Bush administration, the assumption that avant-gardism or progressive values are to be found in 'core' or 'old' Europe⁶¹ seems to us both impolitic and high-handed.⁶² Hence, presumably, the anger directed at Habermas's manifesto by certain commentators – not only in 'east' and 'central' Europe, but also in Scandinavia and the Iberian peninsula – unwilling to accept his apparent marginalisation of them as 'non-core' Europeans.⁶³

61 Habermas was responding to the then-US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, who had infamously castigated France and Germany as 'old Europe', praising instead the 'new Europe' of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, among others, whose leaders supported – or at least refrained from publicly disavowing – the American-led offensive.

62 See also the discussion of the Habermas/Derrida intervention in Rita Felski's introduction to a special issue of *New Literary History* devoted to 'rethinking Europe' (Felski 2012).

63 See for example the dissenting pieces by Esterházy, Stasiuk, Krzeminski and Keel in Levy, Pensky and Torpey 2005. Esterházy begins his piece with the witty observation that 'Once, I was an Eastern European; then I was promoted to the rank of Central European. Those were great times (even if not necessarily for me personally), there were Central European dreams, visions, and images of the future; in short, everything (everything one needs for a round table, but that is spoken in haste and unfairly). Then a few months ago, I became a New European. But before I had the chance to get used to this status – even before I could have refused it – I have now become a non-core European' (2005: 74). Stasiuk, too, protests that Habermas's idea of 'core Europe' is not only truncating but falsifying, beginning his article with a cascading list of peoples evidently relegated by Habermas to the status of non-core Europeans: 'Albanians, Bosnians, Bulgarians, Estonians, Croatians, Lithuanians, Macedonians, Moldavians, Montenegrins, Poles, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks, Slovenians, Czechs, Ukrainians, White Russians'. And he adds: 'And just so it doesn't appear too simple, let's add the "belt of mixed population" – as Hannah Arendt calls the diverse, amorphous areas somewhere between Germany and Russia – that is, small heaps of Germans and Russians scattered here and there. To this, we can add, for example, the Gagausians and Aromunians, the restless international Sinti, the Crimeans and the Turks who didn't get back to their native lands on the Bosphorus before it unexpectedly shrank' (2005: 103). For his part, Keel, self-consciously writing from 'the Scandinavian perspective', takes the opportunity to remind Habermas that if Danes in the modern era have participated in the 'bellicose past' that Habermas sees as having 'entangled all European nations in bloody conflicts', 'it has not been exclusively as instigators but also as subjects struggling against German domination: 'Around the year 1700', he writes, 'some 20 per cent of Copenhagen's

Rey Chow's article 'The Old/New Question of Comparison in Literary Studies: A Post-European Perspective' appeared two years before Bassnett's, and so does not, of course, address the latter directly. But Chow writes self-consciously from what Bassnett calls the 'perspective of the Southern hemisphere': indeed, she might be seen as offering a 'Third-Worldist' critique of precisely the model of comparative literary scholarship that Bassnett both champions and seeks to represent. Chow begins, thus, by identifying the performative contradiction represented by comparative literature's 'cosmopolitanism' or 'universalism' whenever the focus is shifted from the European to the world stage. On the one hand, the commitment to comparativism in the discipline gestures towards inter-cultural reciprocity:

As part of a cluster of concepts that sees linguistic cosmopolitanism and the peaceful coexistence of national and cultural traditions as its telos, comparison in comparative literature is understandably grounded, as the etymology of the word suggests, in the notion of parity – in the possibility of peer-like equality and mutuality among those being compared [...] Hence [...] comparative literature often proceeds with investigating multiple literary traditions on the assumption that there ought to be a degree of commonality and equivalence – and thus comparability – among them; that they are, somehow, on a par with one another despite their obvious differences. (2004: 290)

On the other hand, this 'mutuality' proves to be highly selective. It operates only between (some) 'European' literatures and cultures, never between 'Europe and its Others'. Chow quotes as exemplary in this respect Wellek and Warren's formulation, in their *Theory of Literature* (1949), of the basic predicate of comparative literature as a discipline:

it is important to think of literature as a totality and to trace the growth and development of literature without regard to linguistic distinctions [...] Western literature, at least, forms a unity, a whole [...] and, without minimizing the importance of Oriental influences, especially that of the Bible, one must recognize a close unity which includes all Europe, Russia, the United States, and the Latin American literatures. (Quoted in Chow 2004: 294)

One might have expected Chow to criticise the essentialism evident in Wellek and Warren's statement – their insistence on the singularity and specificity of what they call 'western' culture. But she does not. Nor does she comment on the fact that their formulation is altogether blind to the radically

population was German-speaking, and Herder still regarded Copenhagen as "the Danish end of Germany". Up until the end of the eighteenth century, German was the native tongue of the Danish royal family. It was only in 1773 that Danish became the official language of the army' (2005: 81–82).

discrepant and incongruent histories of the ideas of 'Europe' and 'the west'. She focuses instead on Wellek and Warren's bracketing of the 'non-West' and the implications that derive – in her view, inevitably – from it:

Wellek and Warren's formulation of comparison, which may be named 'Europe and Its Others,' remains a common norm of comparative literary studies in North America today. In this formulation, the rationale for comparing hinges on the conjunction *and*; the *and*, moreover [...] signals a form of supplementation that authorizes the first term, Europe, as the grid of reference, to which may be added others in a subsequent and subordinate fashion [...] The *and* thus instigates not only comparison but also a politics of comparison: on the one side, the infinite opening of histories, cultures, languages in their internal vicissitudes in such a manner as to enable their studies to become ever more nuanced and refined; on the other side, a crude lumping together of other histories, cultures, and languages with scant regard to exactly the same kinds of details and internal dynamics of thought that, theoretically speaking, should be part of the study of any tradition. These other histories, cultures, and languages remain by default undifferentiated – and thus never genuinely on a par with Europe – within an ostensibly comparative framework. (Chow 2004: 294–95)

Proposing that Eurocentrism is, as it were, 'hard-wired' into the disciplinary machinery of comparative literature, Chow calls not for a revision of the discipline, but for the generation of an entirely new notion of comparativism, implicating a new form of critical practice: 'The incommensurability between what scholars might want to uphold as the ethical as well as theoretical ideal of an inclusive world literature, on the one hand, and the actual events that take place in the name of comparison, on the other, requires us to conceive of a radically different set of terms for comparative literary studies' (297).

There is much in this proposal – and in Chow's general critique – that we find attractive and congenial. We echo her call for a new form of comparative critical practice. The problem, however, is that she mis-identifies both the nature and the historical dynamic of the dominant social instance that she wishes to counter and oppose. Linking her project explicitly to Dipesh Chakrabarty's influential campaign to 'provincialise Europe' – an agenda as thoroughly 'Third-Worldist' as her own, and for pretty much the same reasons – Chow promotes a 'post-European perspective' in literary studies. However, the persistent slippage in her commentary between geo-historical and ideological categories – 'European' on the one hand, 'Eurocentric' on the other – fatally undermines her argument, transforming a potentially compelling ideological critique into an ineffectual complaint about 'European' civilisation, which, she supposes, has always, or at least throughout modern history, presented itself as 'culturally superior'.

Thus 'the dominance of *European* conceptual models' (emphasis added) – not 'Eurocentric models' – is deplored, and 'Europe' is incoherently identified not merely as the 'source' but as the very *form* of domination on the world stage.

This way of putting things has the effect of homogenising 'Europe', mystifying its 'internal' history and flattening out the unevenness of its 'internal' development. (It's a bit rich for Chow to complain that her antagonists are guilty of 'a crude lumping together of [...] histories, cultures, and languages with scant regard to exactly the [...] kinds of details and internal dynamics of thought that, theoretically speaking, should be part of the study of any tradition' [77], when this exactly describes her own commentary on 'Europe'.) In this respect, what Paulo de Medeiros has written in general of contemporary attempts to unthink Eurocentrism pertains directly to Chow:

Within the general attack on Eurocentrism [...] there are two related flaws: first, the amalgamation of everything European into a fictive unity that, even if it might have some correspondence to the dream of homogeneity, has no real counterpart in a fragmented and divided Europe, more often than not torn against itself and amongst its constituent members; second the forgetting exactly of those parts of Europe that 'Europe' itself tends to forget, its own, anything but central, dominated others. (1996: 43)

Chow's 'Third-Worldism' also leads to a dehistoricisation and dematerialisation of the dynamics of 'modernity'. Her suggestions that 'comparison' in literary scholarship ought to include 'a critique of the uneven distribution of cultural capital among languages themselves' (2004: 303) and that such scholarship ought to take as its object 'a type of discursive situation, involuntarily brought into play by and inextricable from the conditions of modern world politics' (301), for instance, sound very promising, until we realise that, on her understanding, *capitalism* evidently plays no part in 'modern world politics'. Instead, the latter are evidently to be thought of as being about the encounter between civilisational blocs: 'Europe' (including the United States, of course) and its various 'others'. Even when 'imperialism' is named, the term is inevitably prefixed by the qualifier 'European', thus making it clear that what is centrally at issue for Chow is the imposition of 'European' culture upon other cultures.

Fredric Jameson has urged us to take on board the implications of the fact that 'the United States is not just one country, or one culture, among others, any more than English is just one language among others. There is a fundamental dissymmetry in the relationship between the United States and every other country in the world, not only third-world countries, but even Japan and those of Western Europe' (1998: 58). Chow is deaf to this suggestion. She proceeds as though it were possible to achieve the 'provincialisation' of 'Europe' in the absence of any plausible account or understanding of what has grounded and enabled 'European' dominance over the course of the past five hundred years. The fact that this idealist understanding is counter-posed to the dominant understanding, equally idealist, does not in our view make it more compelling. We would argue that the idea of a new comparativism in literary studies only makes sense in the context of an overarching theory of the (capitalist) world-system.

We can pursue the critique we are making further by turning our attention for a moment to the belated 'worlding' of American literature. Where US writing is concerned, the liabilities of nationalist exceptionalism are widely recognised today. But if the contemporary desire, as Lawrence Buell reminds us, is to think "against" or "beyond" nationness, critical practice has tended to lag behind this desire; for many of the '[d]iscourses that aspire self-consciously to transnational or global reach [...] end up recontained by nation-centered mentalities' (Buell 2007: 227–28). The converse is also true: the search for larger frameworks often leads to a decisive underestimation of the roles played by nation-states in the trajectory of the world-system. Even when it is accompanied by protestations of sympathy for the wretched of the earth, this sort of underestimation characteristically bespeaks unquestioned privilege. That is to say, it is only those citizens inhabiting the privileged spaces of dominant nation-states in the contemporary world system who tend to speak confidently of their ability and desire to transcend nations. While the desire to escape from what Buell, drawing on Casanova,⁶⁴ calls the 'Herderian imperative' to situate nation-ness as the generative matrix of all aesthetic production is readily understandable, a premature dismissal of the material effectivity of the nation paves the way, in some contemporary criticism, for the adoption of an even less plausible analytical framework: a militantly idealist transcendentalism that glories in literature for its civilisational (that is to say, community-building) capabilities, across, athwart and, indeed, in defiance of the boundaries (historical as well as geographical) of any actually existing social order. Often encountered in such contemporary slogans as 'planetarity' and 'epochal time', this new form of transcendentalism avows to release literary and cultural studies from concerns about not simply nation-statism, but capitalist modernity also.

The tendency is notably exemplified in Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (2006). Dimock seeks to emancipate US writing and culture from nationalist exceptionalism by recourse to more expansive geographic and temporal registers. Concepts borrowed from the disciplines of astronomy and geology are metaphorised and pressed into service to provide the justification for a literary critical practice involving epochal loops of time and the tectonic collision of textual elements, such that (very) distant times and places are conjoined and juxtaposed. 'Literature is the home of nonstandard space and time', Dimock writes: 'Against the official borders of the nation and against the fixed intervals of the clock, what flourishes here is irregular duration and extension, some extending for thousands of years or thousands of miles, each occasioned by a different tie and varying with that tie, and each loosening up the chronology and geography of the nation' (2006: 4). Dimock's move from history and geography to the discourse of 'deep time' testifies to a pronounced animus towards the

64 See the discussion of 'the Herderian Revolution' and 'the Herderian effect' in Casanova 2004: 75–81.

social sciences. Her substitution of a geological for a geographical cartography and her conjuring of maximally suprahuman time-frames function alike to render literature – the final object of her enquiry – irrecoverable to historicist methodologies of any stripe. Literature, on her reading, is not amenable to analysis through reference to temporally or spatially bounded power relations. It eludes explication through these means. She cites the ‘large-scale model’ that is Wallerstein’s world-system, but only to propose, ‘[w]ithout disagreeing with him’ (1), that ‘there are other phenomena, not reducible to capitalism, that also unfold against long durations, requiring scale enlargement for their analysis’ (5). These ‘other phenomena’ include ‘world religions’ – which ‘invite us to think of the world’s population as a locally inflected and yet globally connected unit’; the ‘morphology of language’ – which ‘presents us with an array of vernaculars, creolized forms developed through centuries and spread across continents’; certain ‘categories of experience, such as beauty or death, that seem not entirely predicated on the temporal and spatial boundaries of the nation-state’; ‘long-lasting genres, such as epic and novel’, likewise demanding expanded frames of reference; and ‘the concept of a global civil society’, whose purview is for Dimock both global (requiring us to think at the level of planetarity) and pan-historical, reaching back centuries (5).

It is difficult to know what to make of this inventory. So far as we know, nobody has ever proposed either that the categories of beauty or death are ‘entirely predicated on the temporal and spatial boundaries of the nation-state’, or that the development and dispersion of ‘world’ religions are ‘reducible to capitalism’. But Dimock seems to want to infer from the statement that the development and dispersion of ‘world’ religions are not *reducible to capitalism* (whatever that might possibly mean) that capitalism has not been a powerful *determinant* of this development and dispersion. This inference is unwarranted. By the same token, to recognise that the categories of beauty or death are not ‘entirely predicated on the temporal and spatial boundaries of the nation-state’ is not to demonstrate that these categories ought to be analysed without reference to the nation-state (and/or, indeed, to other historical forms of bounded sociality). Dimock seems determined to delegitimize any investigation into the ways in which capitalist modernity has distinctively restructured linguistic, phenomenological, socio-cultural and demographic patterns. *Through Other Continents* conflates the individual, the particularistic and the local with the species, the universal and the geo-galactic so as to elide the registers of the national *and* of the international, and all mediating registers of time-space – whether economic or cultural – that might open onto a conversation about transformation or social change. The catechistic fusion in her study of the human (or of the literary work as aestheticised ‘more-than-human’) and the ineffable (time-space beyond human comprehension) works to silence questions directed to conflict, domination, exploitation and temporal rupture or discontinuity.

Dimock sets out to disarticulate American nation-statism – ‘the temporal and spatial boundaries of the nation’ – from ‘other expressive domains’,

most particularly the literary. The problem, as she puts it, is that when we use the term 'American' to describe literary work, 'we limit ourselves, with or without explicit acknowledgement, to an analytic domain foreclosed by definition, a kind of scholarly unilateralism. Literature here is the product of one nation and one nation alone, analyzable within its confines' (2006: 3). But her would-be revisionary initiative – to 'bind [...] America to the rest of the world', to 'thread America texts into the topical events of other cultures, while also threading the long durations of those cultures into the short chronology of the United States', to 'bind [...] continents and millennia into many loops of relations' (3) – has three main weaknesses. Ironically, each of these, in its own way, bears witness to the persistence in Dimock's thought of the elitist (and exceptionalist) Americanism that, at the level of political self-consciousness, she rightly seeks to problematise and move beyond.

Dimock's initial problem is that her nomination of literature as an instance of 'global civil society' remains blind to the materiality of literature as a social institution. She wants us to think of reading – and of literary culture more generally – as communicative action, whose effect is to thread together the 'single reader, doing his reading in one particular locale' (9) and the planetary and trans-historical – that is to say, the *individual* on the one hand, and *all times* and *all places*, on the other. Thus she refers us to Robert Pogue Harrison's proposition 'that we think of literary culture [...] as a "lexical" civil society, made up of strings of words, nuances, and etymologies reflecting the long histories of linguistic usage, and weaving our lives into a semantic network, at once endlessly localized and endlessly extended' (8). The problem here, of course, is that this virtuality is construed as an actuality, as a substantive effect of literary culture as an actually existing domain of action. Seeking to construe the literary field in analogy with Michael Walzer's formulation of global civil society, Dimock asks us to entertain the idea of a

playing field called 'literary culture' brought into being by that most minute, most intimate of acts, the act of reading. This act, pursued within the compass of a word, a phrase, a sentence, generates relational ties that can nonetheless extend for thousands of miles and thousands of years. It is an NGO of sorts, an NGO *avant la lettre*, an unusually fine-grained as well as long-lasting one, operating on a scale both too small and too large to be policed by the nation-state. (8)

That we are cued to think of this 'playing field' as 'level' directs us immediately to the idealism underlying Dimock's thought experiment. She imagines literary culture to constitute a 'low-skill, low-stakes, low-level playing field, where people of no particular consequence can become momentarily consequential, can have some say, can take it upon themselves to step forward and "propose, debate, and decide"' (8). The image put before us is explicitly of literary culture in analogy with a non-governmental organisation such as Amnesty International. Yet the effect of Dimock's historically particular mobilisation of the NGO as a model here is to reinscribe an 'aid mechanism' according to

which metropolitan elites administer resource allocations to and for peripheralised regions outside of these localities' own state apparatuses and electoral procedures – a mechanism that has been rightly and extensively criticised by participants, activists and scholars of 'aid and development'. Literature on this reading becomes a self-credentialising mechanism that structures the development of underdevelopment as classically theorised by Samir Amin and Andre Gunder Frank. Prioritising the literate over the non- or weakly literate hinterlands, and the individual over the communal or the collective, Dimock imagines literary culture as a settled field, as trans-historical as the various geological formations and as aloof from dissension, competition and dispute. While we might harbour some reservations about Casanova's notion of a world republic of letters, for reasons that we have already discussed, her theory might be evoked here as a powerful and plausible counterstatement to Dimock: for Casanova rightly insists that unequal power relations are constitutive of the literary field and structure it in all of its aspects and dimensions. Hence her rousing proclamations, early in *The World Republic of Letters*, that literature comprises 'a world of rivalry, struggle and inequality' (2004: 4), and that '[i]ts history is one of incessant struggle and competition over the very nature of literature itself – an endless succession of literary manifestos, movements, assaults, and revolutions. These rivalries are what have created world literature' (12).

The second problem for Dimock is that her fusion of esoteric deep time and place marks a return to an old variant of cultural anthropology. 'To accept the earth as an astronomical object', she writes, in a commentary on Gary Snyder, 'is to embrace a religion affirming the primacy and equality of matter, a primacy and equality that cross the boundaries between species, even as they cross the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate' (2006: 174). Along with its surface preference for the 'new materialism' studies over historical materialism, this stance suggests a benign version of the romantic conceit that, before the arrival of Europeans, aboriginal peoples lived in musicalised content, in harmony with the natural world, free from fear of the unknown or the need to block greed through taboo. Those who espouse 'humanness' in these terms and propose that the 'archaic past redefines species membership itself' are disinclined to attend to the trans-historicity of secular cycles of war, environmental mismanagement and epidemics, or to register the record of the vast translocations of populations resulting from their desperate search for survival in the face of scarcity or locally engendered ecological disruption, or their flight to escape capture and domination as bound, coerced labour by neighbouring factions, groups or peoples. Dimock calls for a 'science-inspired humanities' and, counter-posing 'science' and 'social science' as paradigmatically at odds with one another, suggests that '[n]on-Western cultures would especially benefit from [the] elongated field' corresponding to the 'scientific' problematic: 'not just Buddhism, but all ancient cultures with a time frame asymmetrical to the shape of European history, and crucial to the fate of the earth if modernity is to be saved from being a runaway locomotive'

(175). In dissenting from Dimock's programme, we might refer here to Adam Curtis's telling argument that the ideology of the ('resilient') self-harmonising ecosystem developed alongside the neoliberal ideology of deregulation of public resources and the rise of an extreme version of *laissez-faire* economics. However unwittingly, Dimock's New Age-influenced eco-spirituality mirrors neoliberal attacks on statal forms of regional self-determination in the 'Third World'. When literary culture is presented as a vegetational concept (under the rubric of astrologic and geologic paradigms), the now extra-human speech act, freed from time and space, primordial and external to consciousness, is deprived of the means to function as an agent of political engagement.

A third weakness in *Through Other Continents* is revealed in the way that Dimock frames her initial example, Thoreau's *Walden*. Her suggestion is that, in and through its referencing of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Thoreau's text – conceived in Concord, Massachusetts – finds itself 'irrigated' by that 'ancient text from Asia'. 'Swept by that text and its torrents of time, *Walden* in turn flows outward, circumnavigating the globe, gliding past Europe and Africa on its way back to India' (2006: 9). Two problems arise simultaneously here. The first is that Dimock's identification of a subterranean affinity between a contemporary American text and an ancient Asian one squares all too comfortably with a philosophy of history that sees the modern west in precisely civilisational terms as the trustee of the world's cultural heritage: the 'concord' between *Walden* and the *Bhagavad Gita* stands conspicuously in place of conversation between Thoreau and any South Asian intellectuals of his own time. One way of making this point might be to observe that *Walden* was published in 1854, twenty years after the publication of 'Macaulay's Minute' and three years prior to the onset of the 'Indian Mutiny' in 1857; another would be to note that respect, even reverence, towards such 'treasures' as Petra, the pyramids, Chichen Itza or Angkor Wat was a marked feature of colonial discourse throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Eager to promote her argument that literary culture contributes to humanisation, Dimock forgets that supremacist, racist and imperialist ideologies have often gone hand in hand with fervid and learned commitment to the glories of the ancient past.⁶⁵ The appropriate

65 Dimock begins *In Other Continents* with an account of the ransacking of the Iraqi National Library and the Islamic library in the Religious Ministry in Baghdad by American Marines in April 2003. 'Operating under a military timetable, and under the short chronology of a young nation', she writes, the Marines 'were largely indifferent to the history of the world' (2006: 1). The implication that the action of the Marines was in some sense attributable to their status as representatives of a 'young nation' with a 'short chronology' is immediately belied by Dimock's own reference to a prior sacking of Baghdad and despoliation of its archives at the hands of a Mongol expeditionary force in 1258. Meanwhile, the fact that they were operating under the long chronology of an ancient nation scarcely caused those who ordered the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992 or the Buddhas of Bamiyan in 2001 to scruple.

counter-statement to Dimock is provided by Susan Buck-Morss, who writes, in a forum addressed to her book *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (2009), that '[w]ithin the existing model, universal history is cosmopolitanism for the privileged. The past is considered universalized when UNESCO incorporates it into the project of World Heritage, declaring historical sites as cultural treasures – “masterpieces of creative genius” – that remain the property of the state on whose territory they are located, and whose past greatness they display' (2010: 184).

A second problem here is that Dimock's postulation of a virtual universe in which ancient and contemporary texts roam freely in mutual recognition operates as a kind of secularised creationism, a humans-walking-with-dinosaurs imaginary. The metonymic drift from one text to another, one moment of communion to another, one world to another (through these communicating texts) very obviously flattens out historical specificities, gradations and differences. So what is ignored here is precisely the question of the specificity of the mode of this communication and exchange – *how do they meet and through whom do they talk?*⁶⁶ In many ways – especially in its mistaking of evidentiary material as interpretive method – Dimock's project resuscitates Cold War models of the field. The centrality of the New England Transcendentalists (Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller) and their regional followers (Lowell, Henry James) to *Through Other Continents* would hardly disturb a Cold War Americanist. By combining these elite nineteenth-century regional writers with New Age ecosystemic claims, Dimock has forged a means of reconsecrating a canon whose self-evident centrality has otherwise long been under attack. It is striking, moreover, how the questions raised by the particular conjunctions of ancient and modern in her examples, themselves expressions of combined and uneven development, go unasked. Her account is unsurprisingly silent concerning the specific forms and means of importing classical Vedic texts to antebellum New England, and the role they might play in its cultural economy; nor does she explore how the uses to which they were put differ across national and regional boundaries. Rather than analyse how particular transportation and communication networks developed in mid-nineteenth-century America in relation to those elsewhere, Dimock implies that non-American texts are primarily interesting inasmuch as they provide 'ec-centric' cultural prestige to core texts that continue to feature prominently on undergraduate syllabi. In this way, landmarks of world culture are made to give themselves up for symbolic exploitation, to the extent that

66 As Mark McGurl has noted, 'Faced with arguments that leap from Margaret Fuller to ancient Egypt, and from Gilgamesh to Henry James, a contemporary media theorist might be compelled to note how tenuously materialized Dimock's connections across deep time appear to be. What about the media of transmission from Hafez to Emerson and from Emerson to us? What about the long chain of objects, institutions, and techniques that may have had their own agendas in that meeting of minds? What story does this hardware tell?' (2012: 535).

their antiquity is used to illumine and revivify, however fleetingly, the glory of the familiar canon.

As this selective overview of recent efforts to renew the project of comparativism indicates, the challenge of 'world literature' excites expectation and arouses anxiety in equal measure; and this anxiety frequently manifests itself at the level of methodology as a swerve towards civilisational categories in place of historical and materialist ones. The question remains: if 'the way we imagine comparative literature is a mirror of how we see the world', what 'world' does world-literature demand be made visible? What methodology might substitute for the persistent forms of misrecognition that characterise extant comparative approaches? If literature as a form of knowing is to retain its specificity, what knowledge can it convey of the irreducibly conflictual terrain of interrelations that is the modern world-system?

The Question of Peripheral Realism

I

A single but radically uneven world-system; a singular modernity, combined and uneven; and a literature that variously registers this combined unevenness in both its form and its content to reveal itself as, properly speaking, world-literature – these propositions sum up the kernel of our argument. ‘World-literature’, as we understand it, is an analytical category, not one centred in aesthetic judgement.¹ We find unconvincing those writings that seek to position the ‘world’ in ‘world literature’ in value terms, as signifying ‘world-class’ – as though ‘world literature’ were to be thought in analogy to

1 See Fredric Jameson, who distinguishes between ‘taste’, ‘analysis’ and ‘evaluation’. The former, he writes, ‘correspond[s] to what used to be nobly and philosophically designated as “aesthetic judgment”’. ‘Analysis’ is then construed, by contrast, as ‘that peculiar and rigorous conjuncture of formal and historical analysis that constitutes the specific task of literary and cultural study: to describe this further as the investigation of the historical conditions of possibility of specific forms may perhaps convey the way in which these twin perspectives (often thought to be irreconcilable or incommensurable in the past) can be said to constitute their object and thereby to be inseparable’. And Jameson then goes on to distinguish ‘evaluation’, in turn, from both ‘taste’ and ‘analysis’: ‘Analysis in this sense can be seen to be a very different set of operations from a cultural journalism oriented around taste and opinion; what it would now be important to secure is the difference between such journalism – with its indispensable reviewing functions – and what I will call “evaluation,” which no longer turns on whether a work is “good” (after the fashion of an older aesthetic judgment), but rather tries to keep alive (or to reinvent) assessments of a socio-political kind that interrogate the quality of social life itself by way of the text or individual work of art, or hazard an assessment of the political effects of cultural currents or movements with less utilitarianism and a greater sympathy for the dynamics of everyday life than the imprimatur and indexes of earlier traditions’ (1995: 298).

those imaginary teams that sport enthusiasts love to argue about, in which the best players from everywhere and from all time are 'selected' to play together in some fantasy match or tournament: the *Iliad*, the *Upanishads*, *Gilgamesh*, the *Divine Comedy*, *King Lear*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Faust*, *Anna Karenina*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Things Fall Apart*, for example. It is equally nugatory to think of 'world literature' as a kind of summit conference of great writers: exercises of this nature, as Bourdieu has pointed out, are both derealising (of time and place) and intellectualist.² When we argue that it makes good sense to read, say, *Wieland*, *Max Havelaar*, *Noli Me Tangere*, *Rickshaw* and *The Lost Steps* together, we are not proposing any abstract connectivity linking them across time and space: our suggestion, rather, is that these texts should be considered together because they all bear testimony – in their own distinct ways, and in both their form and their content – to the 'shock of the new', the massive rupture effected at the levels of space-time continuum, lifeworld, experience and human sensorium by capitalist modernisation.

'World-literature' as we understand it is therefore a creature of modernity. Our definition differs obviously from that of Damrosch, who takes the category 'to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language' (2003: 4). Damrosch's formulation is self-consciously indifferent to historicity. Virgil's work circulates beyond its culture of origin; but so too do Petrarch's, Proust's and Murakami's. All four authors are therefore exemplars of 'world literature' for Damrosch. For us, by contrast, the 'world' identified in 'world-literature' is that of the modern world-system. It is of course true that work produced in earlier times continues to circulate and to exercise profound influence in modernity – but neither its dispersal nor its durability suffices to render it 'world-literature' as we understand this term.³

We prefer to speak then not of literary forms spreading or unfolding across empty time (and hence of literary history as being divided into sequential 'periods' – classicism, realism, modernism, postmodernism, etc.), but of forms

2 See Bourdieu: 'Ignorance of everything which goes to make up the "mood of the age" produces a derealization of works: stripped of everything which attached them to the most concrete debates of their time (I am thinking in particular of the connotations of words), they are impoverished and transformed in the direction of intellectualism or an empty humanism. This is particularly true in the history of ideas, and especially of philosophy. Here the ordinary effects of derealization and intellectualization are intensified by the representation of philosophical activity as a summit conference between "great philosophers"; in fact, what circulates between contemporary philosophers, or those of different epochs, are not only canonical texts, but a whole philosophical doxa carried along by intellectual rumour – labels of schools, truncated quotations, functioning as slogans in celebration or polemics – by academic routine and perhaps above all by school manuals (an unmentionable reference), which perhaps do more than anything else to constitute the "common sense" of an intellectual generation' (1993: 32).

3 See in this connection the arguments made by Beecroft 2008 and Hayot 2012.

that are brought into being (and often into collision with other, pre-existing forms) through the long waves of the capitalisation of the world – not of *modernism* (or even *modernisms*) but of the *dialectics of core and periphery* that underpin all cultural production in the modern era. In the chapters that follow, we present some case studies in order to exemplify and test our method: we look at Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (Sudan, 1969), Victor Pelevin's *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf* (Russia, 2005), Peter Pist'aneč's *Rivers of Babylon* (Slovakia, 1991), Pio Baroja's *The Quest* (Spain, 1922), Halldor Laxness's *The Atom Station* (Iceland, 1948), James Kelman's *The Busconductor Hines* (Scotland, 1984) and Ivan Vladislavic's *Portrait with Keys* (South Africa, 2006), among others. Our selection of texts is not meant to suggest the chronological or geographical limits of what we take world-literature to be. We have already identified as the time-frame of the world-literary system the entire span of the two-hundred-plus years from the early nineteenth century or even the late eighteenth. While the texts we examine in this book are all products of the twentieth century, our argument could have been advanced with equal plausibility, we believe, through reference to works by such authors as, say, Whitman, Heine, Gaskell, Multatuli, Schreiner or Machado de Assis. Nor does the fact that the works we have chosen to comment on derive mostly from (semi-)peripheral Europe and Africa – and, in this chapter, from Latin America and the Caribbean – indicate that these regions are somehow exceptional in their characteristics. It is worth re-emphasising, perhaps, that the modern world-system is, uniquely, a *world* system, and that combined and uneven development is a defining feature of this system as such. Our aim is less to illustrate the geo-historical reach of our methodological framework than to test out its plausibility and explanatory potential. We are concerned to show *how* the idea of combined and uneven development works in the literary realm, and to consider whether it bears out our thesis on world-literature. We think that if what we propose can be shown to work in and through our chosen sample of works, it will hold relevance also for other works and cultural forms in which the modern world-system looms as a conceptual horizon. Indeed, this is precisely what we hope to show in our subsequent (collective and individual) projects.

For now we want to show that the texts we have selected for examination – produced at different times and places across the span of the century – share not only common themes, plots and subjects, but also a range of formal features that we propose to call 'irrealist'. Of course, anti-linear plot lines, meta-narratorial devices, un-rounded characters, unreliable narrators, contradictory points of view, and so on, have all been identified as the techniques and devices characteristic of the distinctive (and restricted) Euro-American literary formation typically addressed under the name of 'modernism'. But we understand these techniques and devices more broadly as the determinate formal registers of (semi-)peripherality in the world-literary system, discernible wherever literary works are composed that mediate the lived experience of capitalism's bewildering creative destruction (or destructive creation).

Additionally, these formal features appear in the literary texts we examine as a result of their authors' self-conscious conversation with, and deployment of, relevant formal properties of adjacent forms (often non-literary) within their local or regional cultural ecology. Thus Salih's novel, for example, quite explicitly juxtaposes the techniques of the traditional Arabic oral story-telling mode of *hakawati* with that of consecrated literary modernism, in order to signal registration of a (semi-)peripheral social space (and correspondent consciousness).

We should also note in passing that the texts that we have selected can evidently only make reference to the 'world' by articulating the problem of modern imperialism. Theoretical debates currently underway in the fields of history and sociology, among others, concerning the strict conjunction or co-relation between the capitalist world-system and modern imperialism and colonialism do not directly concern us here, although they certainly inform our thinking. But (semi-)peripheral texts' meditations on the world are necessarily performed in the harsh glare of past and present imperial and colonial dispensations, whatever the specific national, trans-national or regional provenance of these dispensations might be: British, French, Spanish, Ottoman, Soviet/Russian, American, and so on.

Building on Nicholas Brown's argument in *Utopian Generations*, Michael Niblett has argued that while the 'interpretive horizon' of capitalism might 'constitute some distant and dimly perceived limit for literatures from the core, marking a totality that, where it is not repressed, may be posited as unrepresentable or mystified as a static Absolute, for peripheral literatures the situation is somewhat different. On the other side of the international division of labour this horizon is more immediate and pressing, its historical character more apparent' (Niblett 2012b: 20). Jameson also has suggested that the representation of class-based social relations often appears more vividly in the margins and peripheries of the world-systems: 'Not only must history (the history of the classes) be surprised in the least likely places', he writes, but

we must also have the instruments of registration ready to seize it; and those may not be old-fashioned stories of individuals at all, but we also may not have the right ones. This is the sense in which I would like to maintain and strengthen the word margins: not as the 'useless eaters' who have been rejected by society, or as the spatial deserts in which no production is to be done or money made – but rather as these 'weak links in the chain,' where the Real may appear without warning, and disappear again if we are not alert to catch it. (2012: 480)

In a similar vein, Franco Moretti distinguishes in *Modern Epic* between texts produced in the core formations of England and France from the late eighteenth century onwards and those produced in (semi-)peripheral regions (including in semi-peripheral Europe: his immediate example is Goethe's Germany). Citing Ernst Bloch on the 'nonsynchronism' of Germany – 'Germany in general,

which did not accomplish a bourgeois revolution until 1918, is, unlike England and much less France, the classical land of nonsynchronism, that is, of unsurmounted remnants of older economic being and consciousness' (Bloch 1991, cited in Moretti 1996: 49–50) – Moretti suggests that we think not only of linked but starkly contrasted economic formations – core and (semi-) periphery – but also of the linked but starkly contrasted aesthetic modes that correspond to these formations:

England and France on the one hand, Germany on the other. Non-synchronism, Bloch here suggests, is connected with a specific position within the world-system: unknown to the relatively homogeneous states of the core, it is typical of the semi-periphery where, by contrast, combined development prevails. And it is precisely there that we find many of the masterpieces of the modern epic form: in the still divided Germany of Goethe (and of the early Wagner); in Melville's America (the *Pequod*: bloodthirsty hunting, and industrial production); in Joyce's Ireland (a colony, which nevertheless speaks the same language as the occupier); in certain zones of Latin America. All [...] sites of combined development, where historically non-homogeneous social and symbolic forms, often originating in quite disparate places, coexist in a confined space. In this sense, *Faust* is not 'German', just as *Ulysses* is not 'Irish' or *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 'Colombian': they are all world texts, whose geographical frame of reference is no longer the nation-state, but a broader entity – a continent, or the world-system as a whole. (1996: 50)

Moretti is looking for 'a possible geography of literary forms': 'while world texts are concentrated in the semi-periphery, the novel by contrast flourishes in the highly homogeneous cultures of France and England, at the core of the world system' (50). Two points can be made here. The first is to recognise that Moretti's interest in reading literary form under the rubric of world-systems theory is no mere passing fancy or 'accidental' feature of the 'Conjectures' essay, but has long been at the heart of his work. Thus his argument in *Modern Epic* that Goethe's *Faust* allows us to see how the expansion of the capitalist world-economy makes redundant older, 'imperial' ambitions to consolidate power through military force is made through reference to Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System* – and specifically to Wallerstein's argument at the beginning of that book that, in its development, the capitalist world-economy simply out-scaled all hitherto existing political systems.⁴ When Moretti speaks,

4 Wallerstein begins his book by distinguishing categorically between the capitalist world-system and prior imperial formations: the capitalist world-system is 'different, and new', he writes: 'a kind of social system the world has not really known before [...] an economic but not a political entity, unlike empires, city-states and nation-states. In fact, it precisely encompasses within its bounds (it is hard to speak of boundaries) empires, city-states, and the emerging "nation-states." It is a "world" system, not because it encompasses the whole world, but because it is larger than any juridically-defined political unit. And it is a

therefore – as he often does – of formal ‘compromise’ or ‘incorporation’, he is referring not to any ‘site of cultural hybridization’ or cosmopolitanising gesture, as critics such as Shu-mei Shih have evidently supposed (2013: 263). Still less is he seeking to offer a blueprint for understanding ‘non-western’ forms. Rather, he is attempting to theorise the mechanisms specific to cultural production through which conflict and struggle between core and (semi-) peripheral positions in the capitalist world-system are encoded.⁵

In his epilogue to *Modern Epic*, Moretti deploys combined and uneven development as an interpretive heuristic, with the formal manoeuvres of García Márquez’s ‘magical realist’ *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as his prime example. Grasped as ‘another story of accelerated modernization and of combined development’ (239–40) and read through the Blochian lens of the ‘heterogeneity of historical time’, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* displays for Moretti ‘another version of non-contemporaneity’ in a novel that, like *Faust* (and, we must assume, a whole host of other semi-peripheral works), ‘tells the story of “incorporation”: of an isolated community that is caught up in the modern world-system, which subjects it to an unexpected, extremely violent acceleration. It is the novel of uneven and combined development’ (243). Evidenced in various technical devices conventionally associated with modernism – digressions, restlessly shifting viewpoints, subversions of conventional causality, chronological disjunction, recursiveness – the form of the novel gestures to the uneven results of forced integration to the modern world-system, exemplifying ‘Macondo’s role in the international division of labour’ (244). The ‘compromise’ represented by the novel’s form registers not the liberally consensual process implied by cultural hybridisation, but, on the contrary, ‘enslavement to monoculture’. It embodies the violence of capitalism, the uneven advance of modernity: in *The Bourgeois: Between History*

“world-economy” because the basic linkage between the parts of the system is economic, although this was reinforced to some extent by cultural links and eventually [...] by political arrangements and even confederal structures’ (1974: 15). He then adds that ‘Political empires are a primitive means of economic domination. It is the social achievement of the modern world, if you will, to have invented the technology that makes it possible to increase the flow of the surplus from the lower strata to the upper strata, from the periphery to the center, from the majority to the minority, by eliminating the “waste” of too cumbersome a political superstructure’ (15–16).

5 Thus *Faust*’s world ambitions are taken to demonstrate the incorporating tendencies of a multiform world system that is profoundly unequal politically, but unified nonetheless by virtue of its encroaching penetration by capital. This understanding proves revelatory in explanation of the manner in which *Faust*’s ambit (which moves restlessly between magic/archaic and rational/Enlightened situations and guises) becomes extra-national. Crucially, it also accounts for the radically uneven and ‘compromising’ *formal* dimensions of the text – a characteristic that *Faust* shares with all the other ‘modern Epics’ discussed by Moretti: in Goethe’s play, and perhaps for the first time, ‘a symbolic form has been found’ for the ‘new reality’ of the modern world-system (1996: 51).

and Literature, Moretti speaks of 'a sort of cultural double helix, where the spasms of capitalist modernization are matched and reshaped by literary form-giving' (2013: 13–14).

In *Atlas of the European Novel*, Moretti muses that 'one day, who knows, a literary criticism finally transformed into a comparative historical morphology may be able to [...] recognize in the geographical variation and dispersal of forms the power of the center over an enormous periphery' (1999: 195). The second of the points that we would like to make about his recent work is then more critical. While the case studies in our book are intended to demonstrate the fruitfulness of his reading strategy, we think that it is necessary to extend the historical ambit and spatial reach of his conception. In particular, while embracing his idea that (semi-)peripheral symbolic forms register the unevenness of the modern world-system, rather than their own autotelic reality – they are 'world texts' rather than 'national texts' – we object to the starkness of the antinomy that Moretti sometimes tends to set up between a 'European' (English or French) literature conceived too homogeneously in systemic terms as 'core' and other – peripheral or semi-peripheral – literatures, in which the 'marvelous reality' brought about by jagged and heterogeneous modernisation is held to provide the basis for 'marvelous realism' as an aesthetic mode. The opposition between core and (semi-)periphery, including in continental Europe, is clear enough. (It provides the basis for the satire in E.M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, for instance.) But we think that Moretti rather overstates the 'homogeneity' of conditions in the core territories and regions. The processes of 'centralisation' (becoming 'core') and 'peripheralisation' are multi-scalar, playing themselves out at multiple levels – neighbourhood, city, nation, region, macro-region – in addition to that of the world-system itself. Literature originating from (semi-)peripheral nations is very frequently produced by metropolitan writers who inhabit a 'core' relative to a 'periphery' within the (semi-)periphery itself – so, Buenos Aires within the context of Argentina, for instance, or Bombay within the context of India⁶ – and within these cities, certain districts that are themselves 'core' in relation to (semi-)peripheral areas. By the same token, some of the most significant literature from the core countries emanates from the semi-peripheries or peripheries of those countries: marginalised class, ethnic or regional positions, as in the case of Faulkner in the US context, for instance, or of Hardy, Lawrence and others in England. In works that seek consciously to map the horizons of the world-system, the differential operations of combined unevenness are often registered multiply in the structure itself; in other works, the local scale is sometimes the most clearly articulated, with the uppermost and overdetermining scales only distantly implied.

We also take issue with the characterisation in 'Conjectures on World Literature' and elsewhere of literary forms as moving uni-directionally from

6 For an exemplary account of poetic production in Bombay in just these terms, see Bird 2013.

cores to peripheries. In 'World-Systems, Evolutionary Theory, *Weltliteratur*', for example, an essay published after the debates that followed the appearance of 'Conjectures', Moretti follows Itamar Evan-Zohar in speaking not only of the 'asymmetry' of the world-literary system, but also of the directionality of influence: 'powerful literatures from the core "interfere" all the time with the trajectory of peripheral ones, whereas the reverse almost never happens, making the inequality of the system grow over time' (2011: 70). 'While studying the market for novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth century', Moretti continues,

I reached very similar conclusions to Evan-Zohar's. Here, the crucial mechanism was that of *diffusion*: books from the core were incessantly exported into the semi-periphery and the periphery, where they were read, admired, imitated, turned into models – thus drawing those literatures into the orbit of core ones, and indeed 'interfering' with the autonomous development. And then, diffusion imposed a stunning *sameness* to the literary system: wave after wave of epistolary fiction, or historical novels, or *mystères*, took off from London and Paris and dominated the scene everywhere – often, like American action films today, even more thoroughly in the smaller peripheral markets than in the French or British core. (70)

In gross terms, the point can perhaps be conceded. This, after all, is a particular variant of what has been generally theorised under the rubric of cultural imperialism.⁷ But the broad tendency in terms of which core modes and forms superimpose themselves on or overwrite peripheral ones, 'interfering' with their autonomous development and producing 'sameness' across the core/periphery divide, should not blind us to the existence of a counter-current. The combinatory effect of capitalist development is uneven, yes; but its energy does not flow in one direction only. It is not only that cores do not always remain cores, or peripheries peripheries (the world-system is the site of a ceaseless struggle for power). It is also that in the literary and cultural spheres, at least, 'incorporation' of foreign forms – accommodation, assimilation, even indigenisation – is altogether routine in 'core' sectors also: literary forms and models developed in (semi-)peripheral locations are often pirated by core writers – appropriated, translated, generally 'borne across' – sometimes scoring themselves very significantly into 'core' productions and styles.

Some of the potential of Moretti's work seems to us not to have been tapped as yet. The 'Conjectures' essay has of course given rise to a small library of rejoinders, but most of its readers have failed to accept or to appreciate the significance of Moretti's long-term preoccupation with literary form as corollary to the modern world-system. Nor has this situation been helped by the author's own penchant for detouring into other (contradictory)

7 See Tomlinson 1991. For a particular discussion, focused on African popular music, of the dynamics and impact of cultural 'diffusion', 'domination', 'indigenisation' etc. across the international division of labour, see Lazarus 1999: 196–225.

models of mapping, evolutionism, network theory and marketology.⁸ Our case studies will suggest that Moretti tends to overlook the possibility that the 'unevenness' characteristic of (semi-)peripheral literature will also be discernible in literature from the core formations that is nonetheless 'peripheralised' by its relatively disprivileged (or provincial) location *within* the highly mobile and scalar 'centre'. For of course the unfolding of combined and uneven development produces unevenness throughout the world capitalist system, and not merely across the divide represented by the international division of labour.

The texts we have selected for examination are all novels, or at least (bearing in mind the undecidability in this respect of Vladislavic's *Portrait with Keys*), all works of narrative prose. We do not mean to suggest through this, however, that poetry or other literary genres, or indeed other forms of cultural production – art, theatre, television, cinema, opera, dance, music – are not as sensitive to the logic of combined and uneven development as is fiction. In one sense, our selection of texts is merely tactical and contingent: we have chosen to examine works that, by virtue of their location within a shared geography of combined and uneven development, allow – and, indeed, oblige – us to identify structural analogies between them. However, within the necessarily circumscribed orbit of these case studies, an emphasis emerges on varieties of numinous narration – including magical realism, irrealism, gothic and fantasy – that seems to suggest that it is easier to explore questions about '(semi-)peripherality' in the world-literary system through reference to 'modernist' and 'experimental' modes than through reference to 'realist' or 'naturalist' ones. The questions of why and to what extent our reading method seems initially to lead us away from 'realism' as conventionally defined and understood necessitate a preliminary discussion of the aesthetics of peripherality.

II

The realism–modernism debate has often been constructed around opposition, with the terms being defined against one another – one of them being identified (and celebrated) as more progressive than the other, as more subversive or inventive or daring or resourceful, and the other being identified, reciprocally, as less so. In particular, the German-language Marxist

8 In our opinion, even the 'Conjectures' essay itself does not devote enough time to specifying the theory of capitalist modernity upon which it depends. This is excusable, of course, since the essay is short and intended as a spur to thought. The essay's presentation of arguments around distant reading, markets and canon formation is crucial, but it comes at the cost of any deep engagement with the relationship between world-systems theory and the idea of the world-literary system.

debates of the mid-twentieth century that centred on the forms, meaning and value of contemporary writing tended to calcify into a stark and iron-cast (and, in our view, unhelpful) antinomy between ‘modernism’ and ‘realism’.⁹ Adorno’s vitriolic polemic, in his essay ‘Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukács’ *Realism in Our Time*’ – the latter a work in which the Hungarian Marxist had criticised ‘the attenuation of actuality’ in modernist literature (1979: 25) and had affirmed what he took to be the superior power of realism to represent the totality of society – has proved deeply influential in this respect. Accusing Lukács of projecting a dogmatic sclerosis of content, Adorno set out not merely to question Lukács’s ‘indignation’ at the ‘worldlessness of modern art’ (1991: 225), but to challenge and, indeed, rout the terms of his conception *tout court*:

Hegel’s critique of Kantian formalism in aesthetics is reduced to the oversimplified assertion that in modern art style, form, and technique are vastly overrated [...] What looks like formalism to Lukács aims, through the structuring of the elements in accordance with the work’s own formal law, at the same ‘immanence of meaning’ that Lukács is pursuing, instead of forcing the meaning into the work from the outside by fiat, something he himself considers impossible and yet objectively defends. He willfully misinterprets the form-constitutive moments of modern art as *accidentia*, contingent additions to an inflated subject, instead of recognizing their objective function in the aesthetic substance. The objectivity he misses in modern art and which he expects from the material and its ‘perspectivist’ treatment devolves upon the methods and techniques he would like to eliminate, which dissolve the purely material aspect and only thereby put it into perspective. (218)

Where Lukács had spoken of the passivity and defeatism of modernist writing in the face of modern social existence, Adorno celebrates modernism for the pertinence of its grasp of contemporary reality. It is ‘modernism’, he argues, not contemporary ‘realism’, that voices an immanent negative critique (whether from the left or the right) of the intensification of social misery in capitalist society. ‘The great avant-garde works of art cut through [the] [...] illusion of subjectivity both by throwing the frailty of the individual into relief and by grasping the totality in the individual, who is a moment in the totality and yet can know nothing about it’ (225). The distinctive features ascribed to European modernist writing from this perspective – its metropolitanism, its ‘bracketing out’ of the world (225), its deliberated rejection of tradition, its stylistic innovation, its non-representational narration that dispenses with linearity, its rendering of self- or inner consciousness, its obsessive focus on the libidinal horizons of bourgeois subjectivity – all relate to that particular historical moment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when changes to experience and lifeworld in the rapidly modernising capitalist

9 The definitive collection here is Adorno et al. 1986.

societies of the 'west' are seen as necessitating new cultural forms to mediate or express them.¹⁰ Naming Joyce, Proust, Musil, Kafka and others as exemplars of this kind of modernist literary practice, Adorno turns the tables on Lukács's celebration of Balzac and Dickens, asserting that the works of these latter authors 'are not so realistic after all' (228). This point he elaborates by describing Balzac's novels as 'an imaginative reconstruction of an alienated reality, that is, a reality that can no longer be experienced by the subject', suggesting that in these terms, the difference between the Balzacian conception and that of the modernist authors is not very significant, 'except that Balzac, in accordance with the sense of form in his works, considered his monologues to represent the fullness of the world, whereas the great novelists of the twentieth century enclose the fullness of their worlds within the monologue' (228).¹¹

That Lukács's critique of modernism is doctrinaire and often reductive cannot be gainsaid. In this sense, as Michael Löwy has written, the essay

10 This paradigmatic change in the 'structure of experience' constituted, of course, one of the major objects of Walter Benjamin's research. See especially 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (Benjamin 2003). But see also, in this respect, Raymond Williams's commentary on Dickens's style in his 'Notes on English Prose 1780–1950': 'We can then see more clearly what Dickens is doing: altering, transforming a whole way of writing, rather than putting an old style at a new experience. It is not the method of the more formal novelists, including the sounds of measured or occasional speech in a solid frame of analysis and settled exposition. Rather, it is a speaking, persuading, directing voice, of a new kind, which has taken over the narrative, the exposition, the analysis, in a single operation. Here, there, everywhere: the restless production of a seemingly chaotic detail; the hurrying, pressing, miscellaneous clauses, with here a gap to push through, there a restless pushing at repeated obstacles, everywhere a crowding of objects, forcing attention; the prose, in fact, of a new order of experience; the prose of the city. It is not only disturbance; it is also a new kind of settlement' (1991b: 93–94).

11 See also the account of characterisation in Dickens that Adorno gives in his rather remarkable essay on *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which stands somewhat at right angles to his generally critical approach to the English novelist: 'Dickens is currently considered to be one of the founders of the realistic and social novel. Historically, this is correct; but when one examines the form of his work itself, it requires some qualification. For Dickens' fictional work, in which poverty, despair, and death have already been recognized as the fruits of a bourgeois world, a world to which only the traces of human warmth and kindness in individual human relationships can reconcile one – this work also contains the outlines of a completely different sort of view of the world. You may call it prebourgeois; in it the individual has not yet reached full autonomy, nor, therefore, complete isolation, but instead is presented as a bearer of objective factors, of a dark, obscure fate and a starlike consolation that overtake the individual and permeate his life but never follow from the law of the individual, as do, for instance, the fates of the characters in Flaubert's novels. The novels of Dickens contain a fragment of the dispersed baroque that maintains a strange ghostly presence in the nineteenth century' (1992b: 171).

to which Adorno takes such exception 'is probably one of [Lukács's] most unconvincing essays' (Löwy 2007: 213). Even so, we might follow Fredric Jameson and suggest that history itself – the history since World War II – has had the last, or at least the latest, laugh. Reminding us that it would be a mistake to reify the concepts of 'realism' and 'modernism', Jameson points out that even if Adorno clearly had the better of his argument against Lukács in the mid-century, it is, today, some sixty years later, not so easy to ratify the terms of the German theorist's celebration of modernism's irrecoverability – the source, apparently, of its resistance to incorporation – when 'what was once an oppositional and anti-social phenomenon in the early years of the [twentieth] century, has [...] become the dominant style of commodity production and an indispensable component in the machinery of the latter's ever more rapid and demanding reproduction of itself' (1986c: 209). 'Realism' and 'modernism' are not to be grasped as phases in a stably unfolding literary history: Jameson describes modernism, rather, as 'realism's historical counterpart and its dialectical mirror-image' (198);¹² and he draws the conclusion that follows from his contemporary resituating of the mid-twentieth-century Marxist debates 'within the broader context of the crisis of historicity itself' – a conclusion that, if we were thinking of 'realism' and 'modernism' in categorical terms, as counter-posed absolutes, would loom as paradoxical or even inexplicable:

[Today,] indeed, there is some question whether the ultimate renewal of modernism, the final dialectical subversion of the now automatized conventions of an aesthetics of perceptual revolution, might not simply be ... realism itself! For when modernism and its accompanying techniques of 'estrangement' have become the dominant style whereby the consumer is reconciled with capitalism, the habit of fragmentation itself needs to be 'estranged' and corrected by a more totalizing way of viewing phenomena. In an unexpected dénouement, it may be Lukács – wrong as he might have been in the 1930s – who has some provisional last word for us today. (211–12)

What Jameson finds compelling in Lukács is his dialectical understanding of history, discernible in all of his writing, and in terms of which realism has 'to do with an art whereby the narrative of individuals [is] [...] somehow made to approach historical dynamics as such, [is] [...] organized so as to reveal

12 Elsewhere, he writes that the 'concepts of modernism and realism are not on all fours with each other [...] [T]he two terms, whether considered to be concepts or categories, are drawn from two unrelated systems, and like those two well-known lines which, prolonged into infinity, never meet, they are incommensurable with each other. Modernism is an aesthetic category and realism is an epistemological one; the truth claim of the latter is irreconcilable with the formal dynamic of the former. The attempt to combine the two into a single master narrative must therefore necessarily fail, yet its failure produces the more productive problem which is that of the model of innovation which underwrites both' (2002: 124).

its relationship with a history in movement and a future on the point of emergence' (Jameson 2012: 479). We, too, would prefer not to close the door on the Lukács of the mid-twentieth century. His essay 'Dostoevsky', for instance, written in 1943 and first published in 1949, seems to us to demonstrate the workings of a sort of critical apprehension that is far removed from the manifest reductionism of those sections of *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* that drew Adorno's scorn. This essay on Dostoevsky is of special interest to us because it comes at the question of realism in such a way as to offer what might be extracted as a nascent theory of literary production in the light of combined and uneven development. With a kind of astonished admiration, Lukács heralds Dostoevsky's social location as fundamental to his ability to invent a new form that, by registering the particular dynamics of social life in the Russian semi-periphery in its nineteenth-century moment, gestures towards the actuality of capitalism as an unevenly integrated world-system:

It is a strange, but often repeated fact that the literary embodiment of a new human type with all its problems comes to the civilized world from a young nation. Thus in the eighteenth century Werther came from Germany and prevailed in England and France: thus in the second half of the nineteenth century Raskolnikov came from far-off, unknown, almost legendary Russia to speak for the whole civilized West [...] 'Suddenly' there appeared from an underdeveloped country, where the troubles and conflicts of contemporary civilization could not yet have been fully unfolded, works that stated – imaginatively – all the problems of human culture at its highest point, stirred up ultimate depths, and presented a totality hitherto never achieved and never since surpassed, embracing the spiritual, moral, and philosophical questions of that age. (1962: 146)

In Dostoevsky, Lukács thinks he sees 'the first and greatest poet of the modern capitalist metropolis', the first to draw 'the mental deformations that are brought about as a social necessity by life in a modern city', the first to recognise and represent 'the dynamics of a future social, moral, and psychological evolution from germs of something barely beginning' (153). When he writes as a journalist, Dostoevsky speaks 'consolingly' and as a political conservative; yet in the delirious, hallucinatory realism of his fiction, a social vision asserts itself over political intentions: 'It is a revolt against that moral and psychic deformation of man which is caused by the evolution of capitalism'. The experimentalism of the novelist's prose is read as 'a desperate attempt to break through the barriers which deform the soul and maim, distort, and dismember life' (156).¹³

13 Compare Marshall Berman's account of a 'modernism of underdevelopment' in Dostoevsky: 'The contrast of Baudelaire and Dostoevsky, and of Paris and Petersburg in the middle of the nineteenth century, should help us see a larger polarity in the world history of modernism. At one pole we can see the modernism of advanced nations, building directly on the materials of economic and political modernization and drawing vision and energy from a modernized reality – Marx's

Two implications deriving from Lukács's observation that there is 'nothing unusual in the fact that a backward country produces powerful works' might be highlighted here. The first is that parts of the world undeveloped by capitalist modernisation – or, indeed, *underdeveloped* by it – are nonetheless coeval contemporaries of the world-system's metropolitan centres. The second, even more important, is that it might well be in these 'backward' locations that the pressures of combined and uneven development find their most pronounced or profound registration – including in the sphere of culture, where new forms are likely to emerge, oriented (and uniquely responsive) to these pressures, which constitute their final determinants.

Dostoevsky is able to parlay the sense of backwardness and incongruity into a source of literary innovation and pre-eminence, processing the co-presence of the archaic and the new into a modern form that has few parallels elsewhere in nineteenth-century literary space. His 'realism' – if it is that – does not register the smoothly commodified and rationalised surfaces of capitalist modernity as experienced by the dominant fractions in the core zones (which have their peripheries and semi-peripheries, also, but in which the ruptures and divisions are more deeply concealed – in key instances self-consciously so, in advertising, publicity, etc. – beneath the second nature of appearances and spectacle). Rather Dostoevsky's 'realism' registers the manifest incongruities, dislocations and forms of unevenness characteristic of the (semi-)periphery.

In these terms, we can understand why literary theorists and historians should sometimes have invoked the Russian situation in attempting to explain the emergence of remarkable and seemingly anomalous forms of writing in contexts far removed from Russia itself. Writing about the great Brazilian novelist Machado de Assis, for instance, Roberto Schwarz refers us to St Petersburg and Dostoevsky in his account of how the 'backwardness' of Brazil in the nineteenth century came to be reworked into a source of literary innovation. Addressing the generic features of the novel as a literary form that did not emerge 'organically' but was imported into Brazil, Schwarz notes 'the dissonance between representations and what, upon consideration, we know to be their context' (1992: 27). The specificity of Brazilian fiction is given to it by its affirmation of European ideas and ideals in local conditions that contradict these ideas and ideals: the consequence is a distinctive aesthetic marked by varieties of unevenness, stylistic mismatches and improbable contiguities.¹⁴ Connecting the stylistics and literary devices of

factories and railways, Baudelaire's boulevards – even when it challenges that reality in radical ways. At an opposite pole we find a modernism that arises from backwardness and underdevelopment. This modernism arose first in Russia, most dramatically in St. Petersburg, in the nineteenth century; in our own era, with the spread of modernization – but generally, as in old Russia, a truncated and warped modernization – it has spread throughout the Third World' (1983: 232).

14 See Jameson's reference to Cuban theoreticians of the 1980s, who, instead of decrying the technological underdevelopment of Cuban film, affirmed a 'Third World aesthetic politics' in terms of which Cuba's 'own "imperfect cinema"',

(semi-)peripheral novels in general to their social ground, Schwarz proposes that the forms of these fictions be read in the light of the overdetermined complexity of their material, cultural, social and existential conditions:

Sustained by its historical backwardness, Russia forced the bourgeois novel to face a more complex reality. The comic figure of the Westernizer, Francophile or Germanophile (frequently under an allegorical or ridiculous name), the ideologies of progress, of liberalism, of reason, all these were ways of bringing into the foreground the modernization that came with Capital. These enlightened men proved themselves to be lunatics, thieves, opportunists, cruel, vain and parasitical. The system of ambiguities growing out of the local use of bourgeois ideas – one of the keys to the Russian novel – is not unlike the one we described for Brazil. The social reasons for this similarity are clear. In Russia, too, modernization would lose itself in the infinite extent of territory and of social inertia, and would clash with serfdom or its vestiges – a clash many felt as a national shame, although it gave others the standard by which to measure the madness of the individualism and progressomania that the West imposed and imposes on the world. The extreme form of this confrontation, in which progress is a disaster and backwardness a shame, is one of the springs of Russian literature. Whatever the difference in stature, there is in Machado [...] something similar, something of Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Goncharov and Chekhov. (1992: 29)

Expanding on these suggestions, Schwarz observes that when the ideas and ideals of European liberalism are affirmed in a Brazil in which social relationships are based on *latifundia* and the unfree labour of slaves, they stand out in bold relief as ‘second-degree ideology’, incongruous with the circumstances of Brazilian life (50). These affirmations are accordingly always ‘improper’ (29) – which does not, of course, make them false or lacking in material consequence – and the cultural work that is predicated on these particular social foundations looms (even to its producers and champions) as backward and belated. The novel in Brazil then has to wait ‘to discover some arrangement by which these elements, instead of producing an incongruent form, would become part of a regulated system, with its own logic and its own – our own – problems, dealt with on their own appropriate level’ (53). It is with Machado, according to Schwarz, that this breakthrough is achieved. In *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*, his study of Machado’s 1880 novel *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, Schwarz argues that the work’s ‘Babel of literary mannerisms’ (2001: 17), the heterogeneity and bewildering multiplicity of its juxtapositions of narrative form and style, is to be read neither as inconsistency nor as baroque exhibition, but as a figuration of the contradictoriness of Brazilian sociality, ‘slave-owning and bourgeois at

consequent on economic constraints, is transformed ‘into a strength and a choice, a sign of its own distinct origins and content’ (1986b: 316).

the same time' (3). The sheer *volubility* of Machado's prose is itself the point here. Schwarz draws our attention to 'the profusion and crucial nature of the relationships implied in the rhythm of Machado's prose, and the extraordinary contrasts between the voices orchestrated in its truly complex music' (16) in order to suggest that what might seem at first – and especially to a metropolitan reader – excess or superfluity is in fact 'intensified realism' (73), more 'realistic' actually than the Romantic, nationalist endeavours of such contemporaries of Machado's as José de Alencar.¹⁵

In *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*, Schwarz describes his own methodology as an extension to the cultural field of the arguments that had been advanced by the members of a group of scholars of his teachers' generation at the University of São Paulo, who 'used to meet to study *Capital* with a view to understanding Brazil':

This group had reached the daring conclusion that the classic marks of Brazilian backwardness should be studied not as an archaic leftover but as an integral part of the way modern society reproduces itself, or in other words, as evidence of a perverse form of progress. For the historian of culture and the critic of the arts in countries like ours, ex-colonies, this thesis has an enormous power to stimulate and deprovincialize, for it allows us to inscribe on the present-day international situation, in polemical form, much of what seemed to distance us from it and confine us to irrelevance. (3)

Hence Schwarz's argument that the aesthetic of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* is not simply *uneven* – 'fractured', its constituent elements uneasily juxtaposed, concatenated, imposed one upon the other – but also *combinatory*, its elements 'telescoped' and 'accordionised'. This marks the difference between Machado and his contemporaries, and also between the early Machado and Machado from the *Memoirs* onwards:

[W]hen Machado in his first phase retreated from the so-called contemporary terrain and practically excluded the new and critical discourse of individual freedoms and the right to self-fulfillment from his novels, he was fleeing from the false position in which liberal ideology and the conspicuous virtues of progress found themselves in the Brazilian context. Once this position of discernment is established, it will permit him, from the *Memoirs* on, to reintroduce the presumptions of modernity, only now explicitly marked by belittlement and dislocation, as was demanded by the circumstances. (158)

The volubility of the *Memoirs* bespeaks neither marginalisation or restriction nor the pseudo-universality of a dominant discourse that imagines itself unisonant, but rather the 'accordionised' combination of all aspects of Brazilian

15 And compare Jameson on Joyce: 'Joyce, in his Irish context, is far more realistic than other contemporaneous strains of a romantic or nationalist Irish culture' (2012: 476).

sociality: the work's volubility 'squeezes' these contradictory aspects, Schwarz writes,

stretches them, and explores them in every direction, in any way it pleases. In other words, we have a firework display of a caricatured universal culture, a kind of down-market universality, in the best Brazilian tradition, in which Brás Cubas's caprice takes as its province the total experience of humanity and makes itself absolute. *It is no longer a passing tendency, psychological or stylistic, but a rigorous principle, placed above everything else, and that therefore is exposed, and can be appreciated all along the line.* This universalization establishes the axis that gives ideological power to the *Memoirs*. (18)

No wonder, then, that a novel of the 1880s can appear to a present-day reader as anticipating the dislocated and absurd worlds of Eastern and Central Europe conjured up in the writing of the early decades of the twentieth century by such authors as Kafka and Musil.

Yet, if Machado's aesthetic seems to anticipate Kafka and Musil, his novel's form also looks backward to the eighteenth century in modelling itself partly on *Tristram Shandy*, another fictional work that could be considered authored by a semi-peripheral author, and whose narratorial experimentalism, as Terry Eagleton has written, 'strikingly prefigures Irish literary modernism' almost a century and a half before its debut (Eagleton 1995: 147). Sterne's biography renders him a liminal figure in Irish literature: he was born into an Anglo-Irish family in County Wicklow, but lived for most of his life in England. He can be understood, as such, as an intellectual born in the semi-periphery but resident in the imperial centre. In his prologue to the third edition of *Memoirs*, Machado cites his narrator's description of his autobiography as 'a scattered work where I, Brás Cubas, have adopted the free form of a Sterne or a Xavier de Maistre', and goes on to note that '[a]ll those people traveled: Xavier de Maistre around his room [...] Sterne in other people's lands' (Machado 1998: 3). Eagleton notes that while 'reality is not disowned in Irish writing', there is in the tradition from Sterne to Beckett a 'calculatedly [...] ironic rift between [reality's] own meagerness and the self-consciously elaborate languages used to record it. This bathetic gap between form and content [...] is then among other things an index of the condition of the colonial writer, wryly conscious of the discrepancy between the exuberance of the signifier and the meanness of the referent' (1995: 150). Given Machado's appropriation of Sterne's form, we might take more seriously Viktor Shklovsky's provocative declaration that '*Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel of world literature' (2006: 52). For Shklovsky is referring, we take it, to the way in which Sterne's novel represents – and indeed embodies – a fundamental dissonance in the structure of reality, and therefore also in the way in which reality is experienced.¹⁶

16 Perhaps, indeed, the form of Machado's novel might be traced backwards, through an alternative route, not to the eighteenth century world that produced *Tristram Shandy*, but to the seventeenth century world that produced *Don Quixote*.

III

Our intention here is not to repeat the disciplinary privileging of 'modernist' over 'realist' writing. '[W]e all know what precedes modernism', Jameson writes, in characterisation of the prevailing viewpoint – 'or at least we say we know (and we think we know): it can be none other than realism, about which it is surely obvious that it constitutes the raw material that modernism cancels and surcharges' (2002: 119–20). Rather, we seek an explanation for the apparent proliferation of forms of irrealist narrative and catachresis at particular moments of systemic crisis, above all as experienced in the (semi-)peripheries of the world-system.

To unfold the full implications of Lukács's assessment of Dostoevsky and Schwarz's of Machado requires us to think beyond the received constructions of modernism. Adorno's insight that '[m]odernity is a qualitative, not a chronological, category' (Adorno 1985: 218) already allows us to recognise that 'modernism' is not to be thought of as 'coming after' 'realism', as 'succeeding' or finally 'displacing' it. For what is at stake in Adorno's defence of modernist literature is paradoxically (its) *realism*: the various modernist techniques are affirmed not for their own sake but because they are taken to register and resonate with the systemic crisis of European modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Stripped of any reference to society, the Poundian injunction to 'make it new' would not have interested Adorno.) Adorno's defence of modernism is thus a defence of modernism's realism.

The inverse holds true, too: the defence of realism will take the form of an identification of its *modernism*. It is not only, as Jameson observes, that 'each genuinely new realism denounces its predecessors as unrealistic'. It is also that 'genuine realism, taken at the moment of its emergence, is a discovery process, which, with its emphasis on the new and the hitherto unreported, unrepresented, and unseen, and its notorious subversion of inherited ideas and genres (the *Quijote!*), is in fact itself a kind of modernism, if not the latter's first form' (Jameson 2012: 476).

Of course, the Adornian insight needs to be complemented by an analogous

'Cervantes lived his age', Carlos Fuentes has written, in describing the 'revolutionary' political implications of the 'uncertainty' upon which his novel is premised: 'the decadent Spain of the last Hapsburgs, Philip III and the devaluation of money, the fall of the economy due to the successive expulsions of the industrious Jewish and Arab populations, the compulsion to disguise Hebrew or Moorish origins leading to a society of brittle masks, the lack of efficient administrators for a far-flung empire, the flight of the gold and silver of the Indies to the mercantile powerhouses of northern Europe. A Spain of urchins and beggars, hollow gestures, cruel aristocrats, ruined roads, shabby inns, and broken-down gentlemen who, in another, more vigorous age, might have conquered Mexico and sailed the Caribbean and brought the first universities and the first printing presses to the New World: the fabulous energy of Spain in the invention of America' (Fuentes 2006: 615).

spatial awareness: 'modernity is a qualitative, not a *chronological*, category'; but it is also a qualitative, not a *geographical* (or *geopolitical*) category. Even Jameson's lexicon of 'modernistic realisms' and 'realistic modernisms' only becomes fully serviceable when it is yoked to a politics of space as well as a politics of time, in circumstances in which it can be deployed to characterise the relationship between literary form and a (changing) social landscape. 'The fruitful idea of "estranging estrangement" might well be raised here, in the context of a text that uses and then questions the experimental; and a modernist realism would begin to emerge when the traditional methods of narrative representation (novelistic realism) are used and then undermined', Jameson writes (2012: 479). He might have written 'when *or where*', for as he himself shows us in much of his work, one of the paradigmatic sites of emergence of a 'modernist realism' such as is here under review is the world of the semi-periphery, in which 'local' and 'global' forces come together in conflictual and unsteady flux.

To read modernist literature in the light of combined and uneven development is then to read it with one eye to its realism. Such a reading cuts against the grain of the received literary histories, which, throughout the twentieth century, have sought to drive a wedge between these two modes. On the political left, of course, and in the 'Third World', realism, as Jameson notes, has continued to 'be saluted as a conquest of reality and a weapon in cognitive struggle' (2012: 476). But these are exceptions that prove the rule, since – for those gazing out from the citadels of cultural hegemony and the various cathedrals of learning – developments on the political left or in the 'Third World' are frequently assumed to be residual if not quite anachronistic. If socialist and 'Third World' writers continue to insist on 'realism' – well, that just goes to confirm their belatedness. Closer to home, meanwhile, the many varieties of peripheral and semi-peripheral realism are typically stigmatised or marginalised in critical discourse, or taken to be fatally compromised by the reductionism that derives, supposedly inevitably, from their class consciousness. The further from 'realism' one travels, the more likely it is that one will be lionised for one's 'modernism'.

Thus within postcolonial studies, to provide just one disciplinary example, we can discern a pronounced tendency to privilege writings that reject narratives of nation and nationalism and that stylistically inscribe the techniques of hybridity, pastiche, irony and defamiliarisation. A very large number of works have gone largely ignored by practitioners in the field because their 'realism' has been taken, programmatically, to testify to a secret or explicit accommodationism. Meanwhile, the actual 'realism' of many of the works that *have* been read widely has typically been misrecognised, their 'irrealism' being misunderstood as existing in stark opposition to any aesthetics of representation. So we find Yambo Ouologuem's once notorious novel *Bound to Violence*, for instance, being celebrated (by no less influential a reader than Anthony Appiah) as a work that 'seeks to delegitimize the forms of the realist African novel'. The suggestion is that realism itself has become

obsolete: an historically discredited idiom, it has now been categorically eclipsed. Realism seeks 'to naturalize [...] a nationalism that, by 1968, had plainly failed' (Appiah 1991: 349). Appiah's characterisation of Oulougum's novel as 'postrealist' simply reiterates the orthodox (self-)understanding of modernism. The same structure of interpretation governs the contemporary reception of Roberto Bolaño's *2666* – again, a work widely celebrated for its 'post-postmodernism', that is to say its definitive post-realism. We would want, in opposing ourselves to such readings, to draw attention instead to what is registered, formally and as content, in the narrative arc of Bolaño's novel: the self-conscious incorporation of the problematic of imperialism, cultural and otherwise; the attention to the starkest manifestations of inequality in the social and economic realm – the 'deathworld' epitomised by the serial killings of female workers in the maquiladoras on the US–Mexican border; the sustained and extended critique of a system that engenders moral and psychological deformation. In a recent article, Joe Cleary emphasises that 'most of the great modernist epics' arose in the cultural context of 'a turbulent and changing world-system' (2012: 260). '[H]owever conceived', Cleary writes, modernism 'was essentially the literature of an interregnum between the dissolution of one kind of European world-ordering imperialism and the consolidation of a new kind of US-Soviet imperialism in its place' (261).

In these terms we might suggest that the value of literary-world systems theory lies in the fact that it enables comparison of discrepant literary subunits and social formations of the world-system, both at the same point in chronological time and at congruent conjunctures in the recurring rhythmic cycles of capitalism – Russian and Brazilian novels of the 1880s, for instance, or those from the Austro-Hungarian empire and Ireland in the early twentieth century, and so forth. It is surely possible to pay attention to the irrealist aesthetics of (semi-)peripheral literatures without stumbling into either of the complementary pitfalls: on the one hand, of subscribing to stagist accounts of realism and modernism as periodic categories; on the other, of losing sight of the historical specificity of mutations in literary form (and their correspondence to particular social developments).

IV

We are proposing that something of an elective affinity exists between the general situation(s) of peripherality and irrealist aesthetics. Our suggestion is that the work of literary representation in (semi-)peripheral contexts seems to require a supplementation or heightening of what, following Michael Löwy (from whom we have derived the term 'irrealism' in the first instance), we might call the 'ideal-type' of realism (2007: 195). It might then be worthwhile to spell out here some of the structural factors that underlie the evident need of (semi-)peripheral writers to look beyond 'ideal-type' realism.

It is by now widely understood that the current crisis of the world-system was preceded (and indeed heralded) by a shift in the core capitalist zones, from material production to credit and speculation (financialisation). This shift has been actively registered in any number of recent works of fiction: without looking beyond the English language or the social terrain of Anglo-America, we can immediately name such works as Franzen's *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988), Haslett's *Union Atlantic* (2009), Faulks's *A Week in December* (2010) and Lanchester's *Capital* (2012), for instance. Less widely commented on, however, is the fact that shifts of exactly this kind – from 'real' to 'fictitious' capital¹⁷ – have been a symptomatic feature of historical contexts in which a fundamental transformation takes place in the balance of power between core states, regions or sectors in the world-system. Marx spoke, for example, of 'the sudden emergence of [...] [a] brood of bankocrats, financiers, *rentiers*, brokers, stock-jobbers, etc.' at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, decades that bore witness to the founding of the Bank of England and to the 'South Sea Bubble' (1990: 920). And in *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994), Giovanni Arrighi makes a similar observation about shifts in the prevailing forms of capitalisation, with reference not merely to the recent 'bubble' of the 1980s, but to the pre-Crash years of the 1920s also.¹⁸

It is certainly interesting to reflect on the fact that the shift to fictitious capital is a tendential feature of capitalist development on the world scale, and not – as many contemporary commentators seem to imagine – one that is historically without precedent and unique to the conjuncture of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. But what is key to our purposes here is not this fact alone, but a corollary one. For inasmuch as they create (and themselves respond to) imbalances and ruptures in the world-economy, these tendential shifts in forms of capitalisation typically become the occasion also for new cycles of material despoliation, violence and expropriation on a world scale, as imperialist powers compete with one another for relative advantage. In his chapter 'Primitive Accumulation' in *Capital*, Marx famously argued that 'it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part' in capitalist development (1990: 874). What he called 'primitive accumulation' (*ursprünglich*, 'original' or 'originating') – and which should not be understood in stagist terms as an *early* form of accumulation, one progressively eclipsed and left behind as capitalism 'matures' or 'advances' – David Harvey (2005: 137–82) has more recently theorised

17 These are Marx's terms: see Chapter 29 ('Banking Capital's Component Parts') of Part Five of the third volume of *Capital* (Marx 1991: 594–606).

18 Among the more important works of fiction registering – and, typically, deploring – the growth of speculation and fictitious capital in the contexts of earlier crises, we might cite Zola's *L'Argent* (*Money*, 2007 [1891]), Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1991 [1873]), Sinclair's *The Moneychangers* (2006 [1908]) and Dreiser's *The Financier* (2008 [1912]).

as 'accumulation by dispossession' and Jason Moore (2012) as 'plunder and productivity'.¹⁹

The appearance and growth of fictitious capital, the most virtual or immaterial form of capitalisation, and primitive accumulation, the most bloody and material, are interlinked. The two forms depend on each other. One cannot separate the history of credit from the wider history of capitalist imperialism. The simultaneity of material and immaterial regimes of production – of spilled blood and evanescent credit, to put it sloganistically – which is a pervasive and conspicuous feature of peripheral social formations, especially, does not readily lend itself to representation through the relative facticity of realist forms of the 'ideal-type'. The in-mixing of the imaginary and the factual that characterises 'irrealist' writing is arguably more sensitive to this simultaneity, to the seemingly incongruous conjunction of 'abstract' and 'scarring' modes of capitalisation. Irrealist aesthetics might then be presented as corresponding not to any depreciation of realism, but to a refinement of it, under the specific circumstances of combined and uneven development.

Of course, even the canonical texts of nineteenth-century realism are marked by a degree of this 'in-mixing' – one thinks of the spectre of the Megalosaurus, 'forty foot long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill' in the opening sentences of Dickens's *Bleak House* (2001 [1852–53]: 3); or of the 'aleatory realism' of the parable of the pier-glass in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, which Matthew Beaumont has used as the basis for a thoroughgoing and very welcome critique of 'the simplistic conception of realism sponsored by postmodernist thought' (2011: 11). It is also the case that, precisely because core countries have their own peripheries and semi-peripheries, we often encounter a subdued or mediated registration of combined unevenness in these sectors as well.²⁰ This is discernible even within

19 Among other things, these formulations are important inasmuch as they make clear that the history of modern European colonialism cannot be separated from the wider history of capitalism. This argument has long been a staple of materialist criticism within postcolonial studies (see Lazarus 2002 and several of the essays in Parry 2004, for example, and also the discussion of Edward Said in Chapter One, above), but has recently been forcefully restated in Chibber 2013.

20 See Jameson, who points out that canonical approaches to the 'great works of the West' for the most part exclude not only the 'realities of the rest of the world', but even 'their own "peripheries"' (2012: 484). Consider also Casanova's astute observation that Faulkner's writing has exerted so much influence over writers from the global south – particularly in the southern hemisphere of the Americas – precisely because he has been taken as 'the precursor and inventor of a specific – narrative, technical, formal – solution that made it possible to reconcile the most modern aesthetics with the most archaic social structures and landscapes' (2004: 345). The famous axiom in *Requiem for a Nun*, 'The past is never dead. It's not even past' (Faulkner 1973 [1953]: 81), powerfully evokes the ways in which social situations corresponding to residual formations such as the archaic plantocracy in the post-bellum South might linger in combined form in the peripheral regions of industrialised cores. With the rise of multiculturalist

the metropolises of the core countries, whose populations have long since been divorced from and have forgotten their agrarian cultural roots. Stripped of – or liberated from – direct contact with non-urban and residual modes of sociality, metropolitan writers often resuscitate other forms of ‘obsolete’ culture in their work. What then emerges are peculiarly metropolitan variants of irrealism or magical realism. In graphic novels, for instance, of both the ‘serious’ and the ‘superhero’ or horror kinds, an uncanny form of realism is developed with its roots in fanciful childhood modes of narration and representation but its branches in the unforgiving salt air of the present.²¹ Speculative fiction similarly displaces ‘ideal-type’ realism backwards and forwards: a particularly vivid example can be found in Kim Stanley Robinson’s *2312*, which explicitly describes late capitalism as riven by unevenness – an unstable formation that rocks between residuality and emergence – and sets out to map ‘the combination and battleground of its residual element, feudalism, and its emergent element – what?’ (2012: 126) by aligning the techniques of science fiction, with its emphasis on the revenant and the numinous, to the collage techniques employed in an earlier SF novel, John Brunner’s *Stand on Zanzibar*, which had itself been inspired by the experimental realist *U.S.A.* trilogy by John Dos Passos.²² Here we have a writer mining

politics, this registration of combined unevenness in the work of writers from core countries has, unfortunately, often been co-opted or redirected, producing an emphasis on ‘minoritarianism’ and ‘hyphenation’ and a corresponding focus on questions of identity. Writers who have been positioned as ‘multicultural’ – Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, Toni Morrison, Gloria Anzaldúa, Jhumpa Lahiri, even Ishmael Reed, for example – have typically been read in the light of a substantialist cultural politics that works, in Jameson’s words, to ‘secure an appearance of multiculturalism at odds with economic, existential and class realities’ (2012: 481).

21 See, for example, the body-horror allegorisation of teenage alienation and social caste in Charles Burns’s *Black Hole* (2005), or the more nuanced depiction of reified consumerist identity in Daniel Clowes’s *Ghost World* (2001).

22 Asked in an interview about the ‘collage structure’ of *2312*, Robinson responds as follows: ‘The book was clearly going to have a big information load, and as I was planning it, Jerad Walters of Centipede Press asked me to write introductions for new editions of John Brunner’s novels *Stand on Zanzibar* and *The Sheep Look Up*, classics from 1968 and 1973. I agreed to do that, and rediscovered the way Brunner had portrayed a complex global culture, which was by adapting the technique invented by John Dos Passos for his great *U.S.A.* trilogy of the 1930s. So I finally actually read the Dos Passos trilogy, which had been sitting on my shelf for thirty years, and I was amazed at how good it is – truly one of the great American novels. I decided to follow Brunner’s example and adapt the Dos Passos method, which in essence is a weave or collage of different kinds of writing, including songs, newspaper articles, stream-of-consciousness passages, impressionist pocket biographies of famous Americans, and so on. My lists, extracts, planet biographies, and quantum walks are my variations on the Dos Passos technique’. Interview with Kim Stanley Robinson: <http://blogs.publishersweekly.com/blogs/genreville/?p=1789>. Accessed 19 August 2013.

or reactivating the techniques of not just one but two writers from earlier moments, and projecting them into a narrative future, precisely in order to portray the 'unstable mix of past and future systems' that characterise contemporary capitalism (126).

When pre-existing social unities are violently destroyed, the relative stability – or, as Jameson has put it, the 'conviction as to the massive weight and persistence of the present as such' (2007: 263) – required by realist representation of the 'ideal type' disappears with it. In the work of writers from peripheral and semi-peripheral formations, the registration of combined and uneven development through deployment of an aesthetics of anamorphosis is characteristically pronounced and intensified. Of course, not every work from the peripheries will consciously encode disjunction and amalgamation as literary innovations in the manner of a Machado or a Dostoevsky or a Faulkner or a Salih; but there is very characteristically a propensity to reactivate archaic and residual forms, to use these to challenge, disrupt, compound, supplement and supersede the dominant (often imposed) forms, in order to convey the palimpsestic, combinatory and contradictory 'order' of peripheral experience.²³ Even the narratives of (semi-)peripheral authors who hew quite closely to the line of the dominant realist traditions display irrealist or catachrestic features when registering the temporal and spatial dislocations and the abrupt juxtapositions of different modes of life engendered by imperial conquest, or the violent reorganisation of social relations engendered by cyclical crisis.

In (semi-)peripheral aesthetics, the 'shock' of combined unevenness is registered with particular intensity and resonance. Insofar as the mode of representation is (ir)realist, the writing will take the present social order as its object. But the *epistemology* of irrealist representation is quite often historicist: the attempt will be made to peer back into the past, by way of recovering both the specific history of the present and the alternative histories that might have been but were not, yet that (paradoxically) still might be. Wilson Harris's fiction, for example, typically reads the present through the past, searching for the moment or moments when the structurality of the present order was first concretised and set in place. In his discussion of Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*, Niblett cites the Glissantian formulation of a 'point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away' – a formulation that he then glosses as follows:

The point of entanglement for Glissant as much as for Harris is the point of contact between diverse histories and modes of existence. It is a dynamic conflictual site; Glissant calls it the point 'where our problems lay in wait

23 Representative examples might include Argueta's *Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District* (1998 [1977, rev. 1996]), Carpentier's *Kingdom of this World* (1989 [1949]), Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (1998 [1992]), Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), Pepetela's *The Return of the Water Spirit* (2002 [1995]) and Yi Mun-Yol's *The Poet* (2001 [1992]).

for us', and Harris views it as simultaneously constituting the problem (the colonial conquest, for example) and containing within itself the seeds of a radically different future to the one that was materialized under imperialism. This unfulfilled potential – a potential Harris elsewhere refers to as a 'phenomenal legacy' – is represented by the folk in *Palace of the Peacock* and must be uncovered to rethink history: as a past that did not come to fruition, it must be brought into and concretized in the present so as to transform the future. (Niblett 2012a: 65)²⁴

We might emphasise the relative singularity of a specifically *colonialist* violence here. As Benita Parry has cautioned, it is surely necessary to take the measure of

the extent and degree of the coercions visited on those societies that were seized for their natural and labour resources, or invaded for both material and political reasons. Such determinants inflected the singular accents of the modernisms in these locations, registering a consciousness of a violent imperialism that we will not expect to find in Eastern Europe or Portugal. (2009: 29)

The key point here, as Niblett elaborates it in a recent essay, is that while in such specifically colonial theatres as the Caribbean, 'colonial conquest involved the near complete destruction of pre-existing social formations', in other regions – semi-peripheral Europe, for instance, or 'territories subject to informal colonialism' – 'the penetration of capitalist modes and structures has occurred in less extreme or abrupt fashion' (2012b: 23). As Niblett explains, this difference in the intensities of social violence accompanying the forced incorporation of particular territories (as peripheries) into the world-system has potentially decisive implications for culture. For '[i]f irrealism comes to the fore in those periods when "all that is solid melts into air"', we might suppose that it would 'wane as an aesthetic strategy once the emergent conditions have been stabilized and new socio-ecological unities created' (23). And this stabilisation is more likely to occur in the 'economically driven' circumstances of capitalist globalisation, for instance, than in the more 'politically driven' circumstances of the colonial project.

Niblett refers us to Sylvia Wynter's seminal analysis of the relation between the form of the novel and the plantation system in the Caribbean – the latter 'inseparable from external domination, its systematic extraction of surplus value and natural wealth fostering economic and environmental underdevelopment'. In Wynter's analysis, 'the rise of the capitalist world-economy, as both cause and effect of the region's plantation-societies, marked "a change of such

24 The internal quotations here are from Glissant 1989: 26, 25; and Harris 1981: 45. See also Niblett 2013, which discusses the 'conflicting ecologies' of sugar and cassava in *The Guyana Quartet*: the former 'mediating the impact of plantation capitalism on Guyana', the latter underpinning 'an aesthetic of the socio-ecological totality' (148).

world-historical magnitude that we [in the Caribbean today] are all, without exception, still ‘enchanted’, imprisoned, deformed and schizophrenic in its bewitched reality” (Niblett 2012b: 22).²⁵ Because it is impossible in existing circumstances to imagine the Caribbean as free of external domination, Niblett speculates, ‘the irrealist current in the corresponding literary texts [...] is also likely to be a constant narrative tendency’ (23). This ‘irrealist current’ he finds not only in the forms of writing where it is widely recognised as existing, such as in the ‘marvellous realism’ of the 1950s or in the work of such subsequent authors as Harris, Chamoiseau and Wynter herself, but equally in a whole array of so-called ‘realist’ fictions, all the way from the barracks-yard novels of prominent representatives of the ‘Trinidad Awakening’ of the 1930s (James, Mendes, etc.), through the ‘West Indian’ generation of the 1950s (Selvon, Lamming, etc.), to such contemporary authors as Lovelace and Kempadoo.²⁶

V

Sociological studies suggest that one prerequisite of the consolidation and rise to prominence of literary realism in nineteenth-century Europe was the prior emergence of bureaucracies (state and para-state, public and private) charged with the task of collecting, storing and disseminating ‘value-free’ and ‘objective’ data, and legitimated by their success in doing so. The crisis of absolutism that lay behind the development of the modern state form saw an army of professionals being newly created to produce normative, analytical data: about population, the economy, jurisprudence, social deviance, social migration, the movement of ‘masterless men’ from the country to the city, and so on (Bauman 1987: 38–50). The accumulated information produced by this corps of professionals – increasingly, experts in the collection and classification of particular forms of knowledge, and trained in their fields of specialisation – would come in time to constitute the ‘raw material’ from which the realist novel would itself be processed. The epistemo-political basis upon which is erected the work of such nineteenth-century writers as, say, Flaubert, Eliot, Howells, Fontane and Prus is altogether different from that underlying the work – variously ‘sentimental’, ‘picaresque’ or ‘romantic’ – of writers who had preceded them by only fifty years or so.

Let us briefly consider Marx’s *Capital* itself, in terms of its ‘realist’ project. While the text has been influentially read by S.S. Praver (1976) as a signal contribution to ‘world literature’, and celebrated as such for its erudite intertextuality and virtuosic incorporation of the topology of the gothic

25 The internal quotation here is from Wynter 1971.

26 Even the work of Naipaul warrants (re-)consideration in these terms. See the interesting discussion in Krishnan 2012 of the registration of what he calls ‘historical derangement’ in Naipaul’s writing.

novel, it is also one of the first great achievements of the realist impulse. Without the data collected in the *Blue Books*, for example, or the existence of a more or less open reading room in the British Library, *Capital* would not have been possible. The work's extraordinary scholarship is dependent on the existence of a set of bureaucratic institutions devoted to the production and dissemination of knowledge: it was the accumulation and concentration of work produced, in multiple spheres, by dedicated professionals and experts that allowed Marx to analyse factory conditions and industrial relations at a distance. But then the proliferation of gothic and spectral tropes throughout *Capital* in the attempt to describe the abstractions of capital and commodity fetishism must be taken to suggest its author's recognition of the failure of 'realist' representation in certain respects or with regard to certain objects. In his 1890 'Reminiscence on Marx', Lafargue (2002) wrote that Marx 'did not publish a single work without repeatedly revising it until he had found the most appropriate form'. In these terms the resort in *Capital* to a revelatory, irrealist vocabulary that magnetises the literary form of both the gothic novel and the archaic materials of fairy tale and fabulous monsters must be taken as motivated – indeed, as consciously chosen: a vocabulary to model a particular order of reality relatively inaccessible to 'realist' representation.

If we now move back into the literary realm and consider the example of Multatuli's (Eduard Douwes Dekker's) *Max Havelaar* (1982 [1860]), we can see that the novel's biting critique of Dutch colonial policy in Java and the East Indies is made possible not only by the author's experience as a functionary in the colonial service, but by his access to documentation on the cultivation and tax collection systems of the Dutch colonial state. Relying on (and re-processing) data drawn from the state's own archives, Dekker's novel achieves something like a global awareness of the historical situation in the colonies – an awareness that exceeds the capabilities of first-person or eye-witness reportage. But again, as with *Capital*, the realist register of *Max Havelaar* is repeatedly undercut by irrealist techniques: the extraordinary split narration, frame narrative, and generically incongruous incorporation of indigenous Javanese materials such as the story of Saïjah and Adinda, for instance. We read these splits and incongruities as indicative of the text's formal registration of the compound instability of life as experienced in the periphery of the Dutch East Indian colonies and its bitter awareness that the lives of complacent luxury enjoyed by the Dutch bourgeoisie 'at home' and the colonial elite 'abroad' are precisely a product of their exploitation of peripheral populations and resources. The 'reality' of coffee merchant Droogstoppel's bombastic and mercenary world-view is deliberately undermined by the narrative construction, while an alternative 'reality', that of the abject native populace, is counter-posed through the use of residual indigenous materials. Realist content is thus conjoined to a tendency on the secondary level of form towards peripheral irrealism, particularly expressed through the literary device of unreliable narration – and here we might recall Moretti's list of 'uneasy narrators' appearing throughout semi-peripheral literatures from

India to Japan, who persistently signal the adaptation of particular imported literary devices in order to register the local experience of combined and uneven development (2004: 152–58).

The logic of peripheralisation is such that it has often not been possible for non-core societies to construct strong, centralising state apparatuses; where these existed previously, they have often been left crippled or destroyed. (Semi-)peripheral intellectuals have consequently been confronted with an underdevelopment or deficit of institutions of normative knowledge production in their own societies. In fact, to the degree that these institutions do exist in the peripheral states, they are often strongly subordinated to the interests of the core powers, so that the knowledge that emerges from them often functions to disempower local peoples. This, after all, is the thrust and effect of all colonial epistemologies – one thinks of the District Commissioner's prospective work on 'The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger' in the concluding paragraph of *Things Fall Apart*. In such instances, information given a selective veneer as 'facts' is often presented, and perceived, as antagonistic to emancipation, even at the level of its 'truthfulness'. In this light, the critique of 'Eurocentric' knowledge not only represents an insight into the power wielded by knowledge produced and imposed by 'Europeans' and 'European' agencies, but at the same time registers frustration by members of the peripheralised middle classes at being unable to develop state institutions for their own benefit, without the interference of external interests. On the other hand, local agents interested in contesting their domination must confront the peripheral state and its institutions as complicit in their domination. Whereas Marx in London could tacitly accept the validity of Blue Book data, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist agents in the peripheries often cannot be sure of the adequacy of information produced about their own societies. We think here again of Wynter's observation that all history in the plantation context is perceived by Caribbean peoples as 'a fiction written, dominated, controlled by forces external to itself' (1971: 95), so that reality itself comes to seem unreal; or of Schwarz's analogous observation that conditions in Latin America are such as almost inevitably to produce scepticism. In such conditions, the emergence of 'ideal-type' realism is foreclosed or sidetracked, and there is a resort to other (at times informal) institutions of local knowledge production. Such sources are frequently those displaced by the arrival of external agencies; associated with backcountry or agrarian lifeworlds, their substance remains comparatively weakly capitalised.

It would be a mistake to see these latter institutions as more 'authentic' than official ones, or as truly archaic. 'Tradition' here comes into existence not as the lingering forms of the past but as the coeval other of 'modernity'. It is better to understand the phenomenon *politically*: since neither the state nor the statist institutions of knowledge production are trusted, other institutions must be summoned, and these tend to be repositories of non-normative or numinous forms of folkloric knowledge, located in alternative cultural archives, often those depending on oral story-telling practices, embodied performance

and the use of dialect. Culturally speaking, then, irrealist innovations, such as we find represented in the Latin American 'New Narrative' and 'Boom' novels, or in the *New Portuguese Letters* of the 'three Marias' (Barreno, Horta and Da Costa 1994 [1972]), correspond to the evolution of new forms of realism, registering not only the socio-economic experience of combined and uneven development (in general), but also the specific historical conditions of the Latin American *dispositif* or of Portugal in the final years of the dictatorship. In such instances the assumed facticity of conventional realist accounts cannot be relied upon since the institutions that produce it are either weakly present or too ideologically compromised.

In drawing attention to the fact that realism's consolidation in the core nations of the world-system in the nineteenth century is dependent on the rise of institutionalised archives and forms of knowledge production, we are not of course arguing for a normative account of realism. Quite the contrary: our interest lies in placing 'ideal-type' realism in relation to the host of different realisms that emerge from colonies and (semi-)peripheral locations, many driven by anti-colonial, nationalist, subalternist and leftist politics – among them varieties of socialist realism, the Chinese critical and social realist traditions associated with Lu Xun, Mao Dun and Ding Ling, the writing of members of the All-India Progressive Writers' Movement, the work produced in the 'fighting phase' (Fanon 1968 [1961]: 222ff) of African nationalist and liberation movements, and South American varieties of regionalist realism and *testimonio*. This is not even to explore the working-class and regional realist traditions from the peripheries of the cores. As Joseph Cleary argues,

even though realism was devalued and pushed to the prestige-periphery of the old Europe-centred world literary system by the emergence of modernism, realism as such did not simply disappear or merely become calcified after modernism; instead, realism, an always mutating mode, underwent further major mutations after modernism and was developed along classical-traditionalist and populist or 'low-brow' as well as socialist and proletarian or subaltern trajectories. Moreover, new technologies such as radio, cinema and television stimulated new realisms in these media also, adding to the literary varieties. (2012: 267)

A central factor animating the formation of these multiple modes of realism and accounting for their surges to dominance at various periods is the presence or absence of the collective forces necessary to change a regime or challenge a particular state formation from below. The realisms that achieve the most full-fledged and dominant expression are consequently those associated with revolutions or liberation movements, with their investments in a conception of reality as apprehensible and accessible to realist representation springing directly from their political commitments. Adapting Fanon's idea of a 'fighting phase' in literary history, we might then speak of various 'fighting realisms', whose investment is not merely in mapping present realities but in the revelation of possible futures and emergent social orders. Jameson makes the

point that realism should not be too narrowly defined in terms of a fixed or static processing of the available facts of a particular social order, but should be imagined in relationship to ‘a history in movement and a future on the point of emergence’ (2012: 479). Realism ‘would thus have to do with the revelation of tendencies rather with than the portrayal of a state of affairs [...] History is in that sense like Heideggerian Being: it cannot be looked at or perceived directly or head-on; it emerges and disappears; one has to seize it at the moment of emergence’ (479–80). When this moment of emergence becomes perceptible to collective society – as in the process of anti-colonial or revolutionary struggle – realist representations of the ‘ideal-type’ sometimes do flourish. (One example that might be given is of South African literature in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁷) But in those conditions where such collective awareness is not available, or when the forms of knowledge that emerge from peripheral institutions are oriented specifically towards disempowerment, this kind of realism tends to prove inadequate, as Jameson goes on to suggest:

This is why a historical realism of this kind falters when it attempts to deal with situations in which historical movement is not perceptible (the colonial situation, for example); and it is also left perplexed when the historical currents of a society are buried under layers of appearance of Lukacsian ‘second nature’ (our own society of the spectacle would appear to correspond to his dilemma). ‘Essence does not always appear’, to paraphrase the great Hegelian watchword’. (480)

We might examine this tendency in the Latin American context, where the dominant literary inclination from the nineteenth century into the earlier decades of the twentieth was realistic, as found representation both in the Romantic nationalist novels that emerged in tandem with the attainment of political independence, and in the autochthonous fictions of various kinds – the *novella de la tierra*, *criollista* fictions, regionalist novels dedicated to documentation of regional folkways – that flourished from 1900 into the 1930s. As Philip Swanson remarks, however, ‘many of the major so-called realist novels to appear in Latin America [in the nineteenth century] [...] do not really stand comparison with the European Realism of, say, Balzac, Dickens or Galdós, or the Naturalism of, say Zola or the early Pardo Bazán’ (2005: 14). The nationalist romances and allegories were invariably haunted by the kinds of incongruities that Roberto Schwarz remarked in Alencar’s works, expressive of the mismatch within them between genre and local social relations; the regionalist novels that then followed in the 1920s were marked both by their ambivalence about the Eurocentrism of the received Romantic inheritance and by their desire to ‘avoid the Dickensian or Galdosian model of Realism which seemed to deal mainly with urban life’ (Swanson 2005: 23).

27 Consider the work during these decades – not always successful – of such writers as Brutus, La Guma, Gordimer, Kuzwayo, Serote and Tlali, for instance.

As Swanson makes clear, the overweighting of the Boom novel in recent histories of Latin American literature has served to create the impression of a gulf between the aesthetic experimentalism of that vaunted formation and the aesthetic of the earlier 'regionalist' novels, whose narrative ambiguities and ambivalences have not been sufficiently thought through. The portrait that has been painted of regionalist fiction as embodying a 'simplistic black-and-white social realism' is not sustainable (Swanson 2005: 28). Even when it was most dominant, moreover, the realist imperative in pre-Boom Latin American writing tended to exist alongside avant-gardist initiatives, such as are represented in Chilean writer María Luisa Bombal's gothic, posthumously narrated *The Shrouded Woman* (1938), for instance, or in Colombian José Eustasio Rivera's 1924 commodity fiction *The Vortex*, whose documentary realist attempt to expose the evils of the rubber trade is constantly undermined by narrative unreliability and the madness of its central protagonist, or the phantasmagorical stories of Uruguayan Felisberto Hernández,²⁸ with their dizzying array of talking cigarettes, water-filled dolls and erotic relations with objects and furniture which capture a new era of commodity relations. All of this suggests that realism in the Latin American literary tradition was never governed by a passive objectivism, but typically manifested scepticism and ideological ambivalence, whether unconsciously, as formal and generic incongruity, or deliberately, in the incorporation of fantastic and avant-gardist methods, devices and effects.

A variant of 'ideal-type' realism flourished and achieved sub-generic dominance in the Mexican novel of the revolution in the 1920s and 1930s. Historically, the Mexican revolution was characterised not only by the mobilisation of the peasantry but also by the revolt of the middle class against the Porfiriato dictatorship and the *latifundia*. Mariano Azuela's paradigmatic novel of the revolution, *The Underdogs* (2006 [1915]), can be seen as the direct attempt to give voice to the collective forces of the period, albeit through a liberal bourgeois rather than properly radical perspective of the revolution, thus reflecting the ambivalent role of the middle classes. Even though it has often been seen as paradigmatic of the overly simplistic social realism of revolutionary novels, however, Azuela's novel in fact problematises such a reductive construction. Its realist approach is complicated by an 'uncertainty in point of view' and coupled with a 'fragmentary or episodic structural pattern' (Swanson 2005: 28), and the text is marked throughout by an attempt to incorporate indigenous and residual folk values, particularly in its rhetoric of heroic indigenous Indo-American fertility. For Swanson, therefore, whose lead we follow here, realism might have been the 'main narrative force' in Latin America in the early twentieth century, but it always appeared in an ambivalent guise that 'contained the seeds of its own transcendence' and that coexisted alongside surrealist, avant-garde and vanguardia movements, particularly in other literary genres such as poetry. All of these currents together would give

28 See the narratives collected in *Piano Stories* (Hernández 1993), for example.

rise to the new narratives of Asturias, Arguedas and Rulfo and the 'magical realism' of Boom novelists such as García Márquez and Fuentes, marking the transition from the emulation of received forms to the manufacture of new ones capable of capturing more adequately the experience and temper of social life in the (semi-)peripheries and of articulating more sharply the scepticism of intellectuals towards their distorted state formations and their sense that earlier revolutionary aspirations had been betrayed or incorporated.²⁹

Michael Denning has proposed that magical realism, including the Mexican variety, had its roots both in left-wing writers' movements – the 'novelists' international' – and in the radical critique of capitalist society articulated in surrealism (2004: 51–72). By the 1940s and the 1950s, Mexican intellectuals' sense of the betrayal of the Revolution by the PRI, which had consolidated itself as an authoritarian state in collusion with predatory US capital interests even as it fanned a constant smokescreen of revolutionary rhetoric, had reached a peak. Given the state's co-option of radical rhetorics, the realist forms of representation previously associated with the expression of revolutionary politics could not help but be tarnished, and what had formerly seemed radical now came to seem accommodationist. The political dispensation of realism shifted towards irrealism, which moved into a position of dominance by the 1960s. The intense commodification of Latin American magical realism in the world-literary market in the ensuing decades (similar – and linked – to the commodification of the form of 'South Asian magical realism' exemplified by Salman Rushdie) has led to a stripping away of its original radical politics and the emergence of reactionary forms consonant with the tastes of metropolitan cultural elites. Texts of this latter kind demonstrate no conscious or critical registration of social unevenness but tend rather to a facile aesthetics in which globalism, hybridity and connectivity are idealised and celebrated: hence the distinction between 'faithful' and 'irreverent' modes of 'magical realism' that Chris Warnes (2009) draws in his comparative reading of South Asian, West African and Latin American magical realisms.³⁰ For us, this suggests a general tendency within the history of the world-literary system, where, as Jameson remarks, 'in one situation a modernist stance may be progressive (for a time), while in another it is rather the realist impulse which will be politically (and culturally) indispensable', since '[w]hat is progressive may very well harden into its opposite as the situation evolves, and the balance may well shift the other way' (2012: 483–84).

29 Hence the dissolution of realist conventions in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1987 [1955]), for example, and the invention of a Mexican gothic irrealism couched in a fragmentary structure drawing on indigenous Amerindian mythology and orality. Rulfo's novel expresses a profound crisis of confidence in the PRI.

30 An example from another contemporary context of a magical realist text that caters to elite tastes is the swollen behemoth of Haruki Murakami's *1Q84* (2011), a domesticated cousin, we suppose, of Roberto Bolaño's properly world-systemic *2666*.