Introduction

Another Way in the World

SIMON GIKANDI

For Abiola Irele, friend, mentor, *maître*.

Language for me is the soul of the text. I love the Arabic language, and I adore writing in it. It is the linguistic mold that I want to fill my personal stories and culture in, distinguished from that of Arabs.

—Stella Gaitano[1]

I WILL START WITH TWO STORIES ABOUT THIS THING CALLED LITERAture and the world it claims to name and possess.

The first takes place in Shillong, in the northeast corner of India, a place far removed from the Indian heartland, closer to Bangladesh, Burma, and China than to New Delhi. The setting is the Shillong campus of the English and Foreign Languages University, where I have come to teach a seminar to junior academics and graduate students on decolonization as a theoretical problem. My students and I will embark on a two-week systematic rereading of the philosophical claims made for decolonization in the writings of canonical postcolonial writers, from Mahatma Gandhi's writing on nonviolence to Aimé Césaire's and Léopold Sédar Senghor's on negritude to Frantz Fanon's on the pitfalls of national consciousness to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's and Trinh T. Minh-Ha's on the figure of woman in difference. Although my students are attentive, their relation to these texts is ambivalent: they recognize the importance of these texts to understanding the making of the modern world, yet colonialism, as a world-historical event, occurred too long ago to be part of their lived experience. Their ambivalence is compounded by the fact that the urgency with which the authors of decolonization write, the sense that they are operating at the end of time—the

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time of Europe—belongs to a moment that no longer resonates with people struggling to survive in a more complex, globalized world. It is hard for my students to make the connection between Senghor's negritude and his incarceration in a Nazi prison camp in Poitiers during World War II or to see that event, the imprisonment of an African fighting for France, as connected to a paradigmatic break in the discourse of empire.

The remoteness of the past does not mean that these students have been sheltered from the shock waves triggered by decolonization. Indeed, many of them have stories to tell me, often privately, about the impact on their families of colonialism and decolonization—stories of great-grandparents fighting for the British at the Battle of the Somme or of grandparents dislocated by the traumatic partition of India. Furthermore, the texts we are reading speak to this generation's own understanding, if not experience, of postcoloniality, its promises and betrayals, its pasts and futures. Still, speaking to the students, I keep wondering what power and meaning texts from the past can have in the present. Is there a time when texts begin to have no meaningful relation to their world and hence must be read in relation to our own social imaginary, our preoccupations and egotistical drives? And what makes one set of texts more relevant than another to one world?

These questions are prompted by what initially appears to be a tenuous observation: my students' engagement with the texts that we have been reading is uneven; some books or essays elicit more passion than others. I notice that this inconsistent response seems to be connected to the problem not just of the meaning of literature but also of the immediacy of the world it claims to represent. When we read selections of Gandhi's writing on satyagraha (civil disobedience), for example, disputes invariably arise about issues ranging from the logic of nonviolence to the place of Muslims and Christians in the so-called Hindu nation. My students care about the relation between negritude and freedom in former French colonies, and they worry about the consequences of Senghor's apparent location of racial essentialism at the core of black being, but neither of these topics can provoke the passion that is stirred by Gandhi's suggestion that Hindus should try persuading their Muslim neighbors to respect the cow. Some of what was at stake in the period of high nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century is evidently still part of the lived present; a passion is embedded in those texts by Gandhi, which are called on to mediate the crisis of the present.

This passion, however, cannot be explained simply in terms of the politics of the present and the provocations of cultural fundamentalists; it also suggests how texts that share an identity derived from their worldliness (in this case the Indian world) should be read in the present and in relation to, or against, their past. This point is brought home to me forcefully when Lakshmi Bandlamudi, visiting from the City University of New York, gives a public lecture called "Dialogics of Self, the *Mahabharata*, and Culture: Exchanges in the Flow of Time." Bandlamudi's goal is to provoke a rethinking of the dialogic nature of the *Mahabharata*, an ancient Indian epic (fig. 1), and to reimagine it as an interstitial text and thus, she hopes, to displace a monologic reading that lends itself to religious and literary fundamentalism. I know that the *Mahabharata*, like the *Ramayan*, the other major ancient Indian epic, has always raised passions in the politics of reading in India, but on this particular afternoon, as the students raise their voices in debate and disputation, I notice that their passion is as much about what Sheldon Pollock would call "the language of the gods in the world of men" as it is about the place of ancient texts in a world where the place of dwelling is no longer secure. Listening to the arguments from the sidelines, what I hear are not the invocations of politics or

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religion, although these may not be too deep below the surface, but serious deliberations on a now classical question in hermeneutics: how should texts from the past be interpreted to create meaning in the present? At this point I realize that, far from being a dead text, the *Mahabharata* has summoned a group of readers to converge around it and make sense of it, yet again. I say yet again because although there is no actual text of the *Mahabharata* in our classroom, everything that is being debated and disputed comes from prior readings of the text, which creates an unusual intimacy between the book and its readers.

The second story unfolds in March 2016, at the historic University Hall of Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, a pioneering and important center for the study of literature in East Africa. The occasion is the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, considered one of the most important poems to have come out of Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. I have been invited to give a keynote lecture charting the genesis and history of the poem and its place in the making of world literature. The actual centerpiece of the celebrations, however, is the translation of *Song of Lawino* from English into Luganda. For outsiders, this may not appear to be an unusual event; after all, *Song of Lawino* is one of the most translated African poems. In fact, the English translation of the poem appeared in 1966, two years before *Wer per Lawino*, the original version, composed years earlier in Acholi, was finally published.[2] Soon after, the poem was translated into Swahili, French, German, Spanish, and Indonesian.

In my keynote address at Makerere, I spend considerable time reflecting on the gift and debt of translation and how the movement of a text from one language to another complicates established ideas about literary sources and targets and linguistic territories. For if the translation of *Song of Lawino* into a lingua franca such as Swahili or into major European languages such as French, German, and Spanish is a gesture of cultural goodwill,



FIG. 1
A scene from the *Mahabharata* carved on the wall of a temple in Belur, Karnataka State, India. Photograph by the author.

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its translation into Luganda is revolutionary. This is the reason: Acholi, the original language of the poem, could be considered, in a Ugandan or East African context, to be a "minor language" in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of the term—it is defined by "a high coefficient of deterritorialized language" (16). Straddling Uganda's border with South Sudan and looking to central and East Africa for its sister languages, Acholi is as different from Buganda, the language of the Ugandan heartland, as Basque is from French and Spanish. Like Basque, Acholi cannot be contained by the boundaries of one nation. In contrast, Luganda, the language of one of the most powerful precolonial empires in Africa, is closely aligned with territory and power. The journey of *Song of Lawino* from Acholi into Luganda, then, is the movement of a text from what might be construed as the margins of the nation or region to its center. The irony, of course, is that *Song of Lawino* needed to travel the world before it could be translated into another Ugandan language (fig. 2). Except for the French edition sponsored by UNESCO as part of its Collection of Representative Works, all translations of *Song of Lawino*, including Abas Kiyimba's Luganda version, *Omulanga gwa Lawino*, derive from the English translation.

At the celebrations at Makerere University, however, questions of source and target texts do not arise. *Omulanga gwa Lawino* is welcomed by teachers and scholars of Luganda literature as one the most exciting additions to their canon of letters. In fact, barely a few months after its publication, the Luganda translation has already been prescribed as an A-level text in the Luganda high school literature examination; it is now part of the curriculum in Luganda literature at Ugandan universities and an authoritative source of Luganda lexicography.

Combined, the stories told above provide a useful context for the questions and anxieties behind the publication of this special issue of *PMLA*: How does literature exist in the world? What is the nature of this world that it exists in? How is this world to be named? When the call for this special issue was first sent out, it was a broad, and one hopes bold, invitation to members of the MLA to con-



FIG. 2
Covers of various translations of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*. Photograph by the author.

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sider the nature and role of literature in a diverse and multilingual world. Although the issue was intended to focus on how literature worked in the domain of the planetary, it was driven by the need and desire, often expressed by members of the association, to think about the literary outside mainstream linguistic and critical traditions; to engage with what were often designated as minor, or less-taught, languages and literatures; and to think about the work of literature across linguistic and geographic zones. The *PMLA* Editorial Board hoped that the special issue would, like my experiences in Shillong and Kampala, engage with the project that unified students and scholars of modern languages—the thing called literature—while accounting for the diverse responses, values, and meaning that authorized the literary in different cultures and regions. To put it another way, this issue was intended to affirm the singularity of literature as an event without giving up its multiplicity (Derrida 63–64).

[I]

But the thinking of literature as both singular and multiple raises ancillary issues: What are the possibilities and limits of studying literature across languages and traditions? What does it mean for English, French, or Spanish to be creolized? What role do regional languages and their literatures play in globalization? What happens when we change the direction of comparison from north-south to north-north or south-south? How does literature work in multilingual situations? What is the future of minor literatures and less-taught languages? How does literature function in primarily oral cultures? What is the role of translation in the circulation of literary cultures in different periods and places?

These questions are always necessitated by what Robert J. C. Young, in this special issue, meticulously maps out as the complicated language-literature dialectic. But, as Young shows, this dialectic is most complicated where languages are imposed from above, are driven by monolinguistic assumptions, or are forced into taxonomies connected to nationalist projects. Not surprisingly, literature is the mode through which the dominated or repressed try to escape from the codification of language. Beneath the narratives that claim possession of the world, as Françoise Lionnet, Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François, and Anna Brickhouse argue in their articles for this issue, smaller stories always point to the crucial intersection between the ecumenical claims of a homogenizing world and the unscripted lives of those outside the centripetal pull of globalization. Here, literature in what one may call a minor key seeks to cross borders and disperse the assumed vulgate, signaling shifting language positions and alternative epistemologies.

In some instances, however, as Ronit Ricci observes in her rethinking of Malaysian literature in Sri Lanka, the most revisionist accounts of a literary tradition can be found in places where it is not expected to exist. In a Sri Lanka where Tamil and Sinhala are assumed to be the dominant languages, Malay, spoken by a tiny part of the population, would appear to be almost irrelevant, but it is only minor and marginal within the nation-state; in global terms, Sri Lankan literature written in Malay is part of a transnational Malay world, which stretches from Cape Town to the Malay Peninsula. Conversely, as we see in Carlos Rojas's article on Mahua literature, the assumed correlation between nation and language is always challenged by minorities and minor languages. Why would Chinese writers prefer to produce a literature in Malay rather than in Chinese? And why would they insist on the distinctiveness of this literature and carefully separate it from both Chinese and Malaysian literatures? Clearly, creative writing seems to derive from the need to cross boundaries, to be out of place in the world. Most articles in this issue, therefore, ask how

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literary histories can be written when the objects of analysis are out of place. Many of the articles collected here explore the revisionist tendency of literature, its continuous questioning of the geographies and traditions that authorize it. In "The Digital *Ukumbi*," for example, Meg Arenberg shows how the long tradition of dialogic Swahili poetry has been transformed and transported by electronic media, generating alternative forms and reaching new audiences far from its site of origin on the East African coast.

There is, of course, an institutional context for these discussions. As even a cursory glance at the MLA Annual Convention program from the last few decades will show, the MLA provides an unequaled forum for the study of modern languages. In addition to studying the literatures written in the major European languages (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Russian), members of the association work on the literatures written in the major African and the Middle Eastern languages (Arabic, Persian, and Swahili), East Asian languages (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean), and South Asian languages (Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, and Urdu). And in each of these linguistic configurations, other clusters of regional languages such as Basque complicate our ideas of major and minor languages. The major European languages and their literatures operate in relation to the languages of their fringe (Scandinavian and Eastern European languages); the three dominant languages of East Asia (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) function in relation to other sets of languages (e.g., Indonesian and Malay) that resist the tag "minor."

Moreover, despite attempts to lock languages in classes and taxonomies, the linguistic and literary geography of the modern world is defined by linguistic silk roads that are impervious to national boundaries and the geopolitical map. Arabic languages and literatures are to be found in a line that stretches from Damascus to Cape Town to Dakar to Jakarta; Swahili poetry and prose can be found along the East African coast from the Gulf of Oman to the Comoros and from the coast into the interior of Africa, in the Congo and the Zambian copper belt. Tamil speakers and writers are to be found not only in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and in Sri Lanka but also in Singapore and in Malaysia, Fiji, and Indonesia, countries where the language has official standing. It is not surprising, then, that an overwhelming number of articles submitted for this special issue, of which only a small percentage is represented here, are on works that question our settled ideas of literature and literariness. The essays, too, often unsettle expectations, through surprising comparisons or the inversion of the grammar of literary criticism itself. We can see how unexpected comparisons work in Emily Setina's discussion of Marianne Moore's "war fables" and in Greg Forter's exploration of the utopian in postcolonial historical fiction. Sometimes, as the article by Yasser Elhariry powerfully illustrates, a closer interrogation of the terms of comparison opens up new ways of imagining literature in the world.

[II]

But why *literature in the world* instead of *world literature* or *comparative literature*? This question leads to another anxiety driving this special issue—the inadequacy of some of the dominant critical and theoretical modes developed to study literature in Europe when they are confronted by the diverse and complex languages and literatures of the global South. How can we operate with the idea of literature as a universality (all cultures have it) while keeping open the reality of difference and allowing that concepts or practices that might appear to be the same (e.g., tragedy or lyric) may not be understood or circulated uniformly around the globe? One of the great ironies noted by a cluster of articles in this issue (by Rajagopalan Radhakrish-

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nan, S. Shankar, Eric Hayot, Jane Hiddleston, Harsha Ram, and Nirvana Tanoukhi) is that neither world literature nor comparative literature, the two disciplinary formations intended to enhance the study of literature on a global scale, has lived up to the task designated by its name. There always seems to be a gap between the desire for reading literature on a global scale and the claims of national languages or privileged cultural regions.

The existence of this gap has not—and should not—mitigate the goal of coming to terms with the "irreducible hybridity of languages" (Spivak 9). After all, we live in an age when the desire or demand for world literature is connected to the meaning of the imaginary in a world in the throes of globalization. Indeed, a major justification for the recuperation of Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* ("world literature") in the present is that globalization gives us no choice but to insist on the provenance of literature outside national boundaries. As proponents of the paradigm of world literature remind us, although we live in a world that is larger and more complex than Goethe envisaged, globalization has become an enabling condition of world literature (Damrosch; D'haen et al.). For advocates of world literature, then, the complexity of the world makes the term even more necessary precisely because literature has become embedded in the world system itself (Moretti).

The case against the idea of world literature takes various forms, many of them elaborated in this issue's Theories and Methodologies essays; the critique often comes from scholars of literatures produced outside Europe or from those interested in the study of literature in its heterogeneity. The most common criticism of the ideologies of world literature, directed at works such as Pascale Casanova's *World Republic of Letters*, is that, in spite of their attentiveness to the global nature of literature, these works presuppose a European center as their starting point, and that despite their authors' diffusionary ambitions they seem locked in Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* and its stillborn transcendentalism (Apter; Mufti).[3] The harshest criticism of the paradigm of world literature, however, is leveled against what is seen as its deafness, or indifference, to localized literary histories. Critics argue that in its missionary desire to claim as many literatures of the world as possible, the project of world literature only ends up bringing the literary back to a domain that has already been defined by Europe, or by a corner of Europe, Goethe's Germany. In this account, the multiplicity of world literatures is reduced to the logic of what Arjun Appadurai has called Eurochronology (30; see also Hayot; Mufti; Apter).

Underlying this critique, however, is a question that is rarely asked loudly enough: Why do global cultural flows, marked by the emergence of literatures that are written across boundaries, seem unable to shake off the power of this chronology? Three authors in this issue provide models for escaping Eurochronology: Taylor Eggan reads Emmanuel Mbogo's Swahili novel *Bustani ya Edeni* ("Garden of Eden") not within the paradigm of world literature but at what he defines as its end or edge; Tobias Warner relocates *Une si longue lettre* (*So Long a Letter*), Mariama Bâ's classic feminist novel, by wrenching it from the conceptual categories that authorized it and by returning it to the Wolof that was subsumed by French and English; and Philip Joseph unsettles Eurochronology by reading Hans Jacob Christoph Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* (1669) and Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985) through the figure of the picaroon.

Still, such radical acts of comparison do not resolve an increasingly persistent problem in the paradigm of world literature: What is the world that literature speaks of, or refers to? Indeed, is there a distinction between the world—in a generalized sense—and the world that literature foregrounds as an aesthetic practice? Does the latter world have an ontological or normative standing, as Pheng

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Cheah has argued (5–11), or does it refer to what Mufti calls "concrete historical alternatives and contestations" (94)? Is the world of literature arranged in concentric textual circles and networks of reading and translation (Damrosch 5–6), or does the circulation of texts only confirm the impossibility of translation and point to what Apter calls "untranslatability," "a deflationary gesture toward the expansionism and gargantuan scale of world-literary endeavors" (3)? Does literature itself have a "curious ontological status" (Cheah 4), or does it carry the symptoms of the world it claims to refer to, always subject to the exigencies of what is outside it? Here, literature, like the world, is both immanent (by virtue of its literariness) and relational (because it always exists in relation to the nonliterary). The intersection of the immanently literal and the inherently relational accounts for what Derrida has described as "the paradoxical structure of this thing called literature" (46). But how is literature to be read both immanently and relationally especially when, to enter the world or to claim the capacity to world, it must also abandon the places and referents that enabled it? These questions show why the concept of world literature sometimes seems to take us everywhere and nowhere.

[III]

But if world literature takes us everywhere and nowhere, are we better off with comparative literature, a disciplinary formation driven by the idea that literatures can be studied in their distinctive languages, across national and linguistic boundaries, without abandoning the languages and grounds that gave rise to them? The truth is that in spite of recent attempts to expand the range of comparative literature (e.g., the essays in Behdad and Thomas), its genealogy and identity, especially as the discipline has evolved in the United States since the end of World War II, cannot be separated from the crisis of European society in the early twentieth century. If world literature suffers from what Radhakrishnan, in his contribution to this issue, aptly calls its "phenomenological innocence," comparative literature is tied up in the knots of its historicist or foundational anxieties. These anxieties are evident in the central texts by the so-called masters of comparative literature, many of them refugees or fugitives from—or intellectual orphans of—an idea of Europe constituted in the late nineteenth century and left in disarray by two world wars. Indeed, the works of the founders of comparative literature—Erich Auerbach, Ernst Robert Curtius, Leo Spitzer, and René Wellek—are now read as the struggle of a distinguished group of European intellectuals to create a philological home in exile and to hold on to the idea of Europe in what would appear to be its moment of dissolution.

For Auerbach in Istanbul, on the run from the Nazis, the task of reading the topoi of representation in European literature was a belated gesture of gathering a readership under threat. Auerbach hoped that *Mimesis*, his majestic work of comparative literature, would contribute "to bringing together again those whose love for our western history has serenely persevered" (557). And for Wellek, the challenges and possibilities of comparative literature could not be understood outside the crisis of European society that began with World War I:

> The world (or rather our world) has been in a state of permanent crisis since, at least, the year 1914. Literary scholarship, in its less violent, muted ways, has been torn by conflicts of methods since about the same time. The old certainties of nineteenth-century scholarship, its ingenuous belief in the accumulations of facts, any facts, in the hope that these bricks will be used in the building of the great pyramid of learning, its trust in causal explanation on the model of the natural sciences, had been challenged sharply even before: by Croce in Italy, by Dilthey and others in Germany. Thus no claim can be made that recent

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> years have been exceptional or even that the crisis of literary scholarship has reached anywhere a point of solution or even temporary accommodation. Still, a re-examination of our aims, and methods is needed. There is something symbolic to the passing, in the last decade, of several of the masters: Van Tieghem, Farinelli, Vossler, Curtius, Auerbach, Carré, Baldensperger, and Spitzer. (282)

Although he was safe and secure at Yale, Wellek was unable to shake off the crisis he had left behind in Europe; he would hence turn to comparative literature as a site for reading and thinking outside the bondage of national languages. If Wellek seemed to posit comparative literature as an antidote to the problems of politics and history, it is because of his unshaking belief that the literary had the ability "to combat" what he considered "the false isolation of national literary traditions" and thus to enable "the conception of a coherent Western tradition of literature woven together in a network of innumerable interrelations" (283).

The project of comparative literature, then, was doubly paradoxical. It eschewed national traditions (these would only enhance fascism and isolationism) and imagined the study of literature as a weapon against nationalism and its tainted legacy, yet its presence depended on the gathering of texts produced in national traditions. Furthermore, to transcend national and linguistic boundaries, comparative literature assumed the existence of a distinct Western tradition as its enabling condition. As a field of study, comparative literature would be authorized by its simultaneous insistence on the differences between European languages and literatures and on the inherent cultural connection between them as part of a Western culture. This was the point Curtius made in his foreword to *Eur ean Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1953). The book, claimed Curtius, was not "the product of purely scholarly interests" but was impelled by "a concern for the preservation of Western culture":

> It seeks to serve an understanding of the Western cultural tradition in so far as it is manifested in literature. It attempts to illuminate the unity of that tradition in space and time by the application of new methods. In the intellectual chaos of the present it has become necessary, and happily not impossible, to demonstrate that unity. But the demonstration can only be made from a universal standpoint. (xxiv)

From its founding, then, comparative literature was imprisoned in its own anxieties and distortions. It served as the last refuge for the idea of Europe, now displaced to the United States, and as a sign of a literary exclusiveness. Indeed, the early American "masters" of comparative literature—Harry Levin and Thomas Greene, at Yale University—sought to quarantine European literature from the threat of what appeared to be an encroaching Third World: "What shall it profit our students to gain Swahili and have no Latin?" wondered Levin (12). Here, again, the unquestioned assumption was that the core of comparative literature was a set of primary European languages—for Levin, French and German—and other, ancillary European languages. And yet—this is where the distortion comes in—even as Levin sought to quarantine comparative literature from non-European languages, he insisted on the internationalist nature of the discipline. Alarmed by what appeared to be American resistance to comparative literature, Levin was a firm advocate of the internationalism of comparative literature. One of the underlying assumptions of comparative literature was what he termed "the transcendence of nationalism":

> To speak of an American school seems especially short-sighted, when so many of our leading lights are of European origin. But we may observe that this continent has provided them with a much wider prospect than they might ever have attained in their fatherlands. The ethnic precondition of our culture, the very fact that here they mix with colleagues of different

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> provenance, makes for a cross-fertilization of minds. Our objective is not a national school but an international perspective. (8)

But what did Levin mean by internationalism? His was an internationalism in which Europe took precedence and the United States provided the means for consolidating the discipline. If comparative literature was thriving in 1965, when Levin submitted the first report on the state of the discipline to the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), it was because it had found fertile ground in the United States. The fortunes of comparative literature could hence be explained by what Levin described as a "transatlantic reversal, which has Americanized so brilliant a group of European intellectuals" (13). This seemed to affirm Curtius's belief, expressed at the end of *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, that when America became "conscious of herself she strove to acquire the cultural inheritance of Europe" (587).

The belief that comparative literature was a European project nurtured by American institutions would continue well into the 1970s. Presenting the second state-of-the-discipline report to the ACLA, in 1975, Greene welcomed the new interest in non-European languages, but he could not contemplate anything more than a cautious accommodation of these languages by what he called "our own traditions" (36). It was not until Charles Bernheimer submitted his report to the ACLA, in 1993, that the "restive Eurocentrism" of the postwar period was finally questioned and "the space of comparison" expanded (41). By the time Haun Saussy issued his report, in 2004, it was taken for granted that the fortunes of comparative literature were tied to the complex interconnection among world cultures, languages, and texts (Saussy).

A number of articles in this issue provide vivid examples of the opening up of the spaces of comparison discussed at length in the Bernheimer report. As Elaine Freedgood demonstrates in her discussion of the making of the African canon of letters and as Gerald Prince does in his reflections on the location of French in the United States, literature no longer belongs to an aesthetic sphere separated from the economy of publishing and reading. Lois Parkinson Zamora argues that the most effective forms of comparison would recognize the intersection between an undisputed text of world literature—in this case, Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*)—and the localized geographies that produced it.

But there is also a pedagogical dimension to these debates on the location of literature in the world; after all, it is when they are taught that texts are asked to account for their place in the planetary. But as a group of contributors to this issue attest, the process of accounting for the value of literature through teaching takes place in often contested situations. Akin Adesokan, Nair María Anaya-Ferreira, Raphael Dalleo, and Jennifer Wallace provide vivid examples of the conflicting demands placed on the reading and teaching of literature in a professionalized world. This problem becomes even more complicated as we move away from Euro-American cultural centers and face the challenges of teaching literature in a world defined by conflicted literary histories and their competing publics. Whether we are dealing with the racially inflected literary sphere in postapartheid South Africa (Grace Musila and Meg Samuelson), confronting censorship in Myanmar and Turkey (Amy Levin and Hülya Adak), walking the sensitive linguistic line that defines the Pākehā and Māori in New Zealand (Mark Williams), or witnessing the premises and perils of curriculum reform in East Africa (Susan Kiguli and Godwin Siundu), teaching literature demands a constant redefinition of its object of analysis under the pressures of its *Lebenswelt* ("lifeworld"). One could argue that crossing boundaries is essential to understanding the nature of literature in the world because a lit-

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erary education is no longer confined to one's national or natal spaces but demands constant shifts in the spaces of instruction—that is, in the spaces of the global *Bildung*. The articles by Meena Alexander, Sharanya Jayawickrama, and Terri Ochiagha testify to the opportunities and challenges provided by this *Bildung*.

If global networks of communication have opened readers to the diverse nature of literary texts, thinking about literature in the world also means thinking about method. What modes of reading are best suited to thinking about literature in a world defined by linguistic and cultural heterogeneity? Here, we encounter the essential difference between world and comparative literatures: while world literature wants to open itself to the whole world and to adopt a polarity as the key to its method, comparative literature seems to derive its legitimacy from methodological analogy (Lloyd). In spite of these differences, however, both approaches appear to be trapped in the methods that necessitate their practices: world literature opens its doors to the primary texts of the whole world, but it does not want to derive its methods from that world. In fact, world literature seems to ask the world to supply the raw materials or objects of analysis but not the metacommentaries that have been essential to the production of literature. Comparative literature is comfortable with West-East comparisons that posit a totalized Europe in an analogical relation to an East Asian field in which the cultures of China, Japan, and Korea seem to share the same roots and thus promise both difference and similitude.

Lost in the desire for West-East comparisons and in the practice of a diffusionary model of literary history, however, are modes of literary exchange between the cultures of the global South, especially those that have not been mediated through the European center. Here, not even the gesture of translation seems adequate to the task of accounting for literatures that contest the logic of old and new empires. In some cases, as the articles by Waïl Hassan and Harsha Ram illustrate, using the example of Latin American literatures that are conjoined to the Arabic axis and the Caucasus, the lines that connect texts can move against the logic of geography and history. Ram argues that thinking about global modernism outside the diffusionary model attunes it to the vitality and longevity of genres that predate the institution of modernism and inverts the temporal logic that has held back attempts to properly account for its global scale. Among other things, this requires thinking about texts that mediate the world and their own relations without passing through Europe.

[IV]

Consider, for example, the relationship between Bessie Head, the exiled South African novelist, and Munshi Premchand, one of the leading Indian authors of the early twentieth century. Separated in time and space, the two authors encounter each other in a memorable scene at the end of Head's novel *A Question of Power* (1974), where the main character, Elizabeth, is confronted with what appears to be the final dissolution of a troubled colonial childhood:

> She turned and picked up a book from a table beside her bed. It had waited for a whole year to be read. It was: *The Gift Of A Cow*, by Premchand. It was a UNESCO publication of the classic Hindi novel which exalted the poor. In their introduction to the novel they wrote that it opposed the basic trend of Indian literature, which seemed to be a literature intended only "to entertain and to satisfy our lust for the amazing . . ." a literature of magic, of ghosts, of the adventures of high-born heroes and heroines. . . . She had fallen from the very beginning into the warm embrace of the brotherhood of man, because when a people wanted everyone to be ordinary it was just another way of saying man loved man. As she

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> fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging. (206)

On the surface, the encounter between Elizabeth and the classic Hindi novel would appear to be anomalous and to defeat all our familiar methods of comparative reading. Here, we have what appears to be polarity without analogy: there is no thematic connection between *A Question of Power* and *The Gift of a Cow* (*Godaan* [1936]). Although Head and Premchand emerge out of the world created by the British Empire, the forms of colonialism represented in their works are different. In Premchand the crisis of society is mediated through caste relations, through changing forms of social class, and through the relationship between landowners and subalterns. In Head the unrelenting logic is that of color and race. If *Godaan* is the classic novel of Indian realism, as many scholars (e.g., Gajarawala) have argued, Head is heavily invested in modernism. In her novel, the characters do not explore the crisis of society and race; rather, the turmoil triggered by this crisis takes place almost exclusively in the subject's mind. Furthermore, the power of her novel depends on the adoption of a schizophrenic language that bears the signature of the monad. In other words, it is the interiorization of the culture of racism, rather than a concern with social realism, that makes this novel stand out in the literature of apartheid. What, then, is Premchand doing in this novel? Why would a novel of radical interiorization end with an affirmation of the classic novel of exteriorization?

There are three ways of responding to these questions. The first one is to argue, with Sonali Perera, that this is an intertextual "gesture of reaching out toward a different literary tradition—of responding to a distant call to solidarity" (161). But why Premchand? Surely, Head could have found other Indian writers—Mulk Raj Anand, for example—whose situations were analogous to Elizabeth's. The second response is that Premchand's novel provides Elizabeth with a form of compensation that is deeper than a mere sense of social justice or of Third World solidarity. One could argue that Elizabeth reads, or rather misreads, *Godaan* as the quintessential agrarian novel, in which body, space, and language operate in what Jean-Luc Nancy, writing in a different context, calls an "inoperative community." Head's novel is simultaneously the testimony of what Nancy would describe as "the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community" (1) and the expression of the unfulfilled desire for a community that is always defined by its impossibility (15). In this context, Elizabeth reads Premchand's novel as the affirmation of the impossible.

Still, the question remains: why Premchand? After all, Head has access to other agrarian novels, texts that promise the romance of a happy ending as a cure to the ills of modernity. She could have chosen Alan Paton's 1948 novel *Cry the Beloved Country*, whose ending presents the rural pastoral as an unquestioned retreat from the crisis of modernity and as an unproblematic reconciliation with nature. Paton's novel would perhaps not have worked because in its South African setting the agrarian mode of production carries in its structure the deep scars of colonial modernity, and the pastoral promises nothing more than the illusion of the subject's reconciliation with nature. Elizabeth's primal scene—the South African farm—is itself a symptom of the dislocation brought about by colonial capitalism. It could appear then—and this is the third response to the question of why Head turns to Premchand—that Elizabeth seeks to undo the trauma of the South African farm by seeking what appears to her to be a world in which the alienation of land does not lead to the dissolution of the subject.

This reading is, of course, open to debate, but if we then read or reread Head's novel backward, as it were—starting with Prem-

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chand's *Godaan*—we perhaps can establish a literary history for *A Question of Power* that displaces the high modernist norm that has often been seen as the only prism through which we can read the novel. At a micro level, Head's language comes out of modernism—this is evident in her use of the rhetoric of failure, a Woolfian stream of consciousness, and interiorized representation. At a macro level, however, the invocation of Premchand's novel draws attention to the anxieties and desires that are concealed by the language of modernism—the search for a stable world, the yearning for a community of language, and even the quest for the real. In fact, the last paragraph of *A Question of Power* might contain the key that explains Head's whole oeuvre. Her turn to writing is necessitated by the failure to find a home and an identity; this situation is mediated through the language of modernism, but instead of being an end in itself, this language always emerges as a poor substitute for the realism that the author associated with the agrarian. In other words, reading *A Question of Power* through Premchand, rather than through the canonical texts of European modernism, reveals that beneath its language lies a world defined by the deep desire for and lack of the agrarian. This is a manifest subject in Head's other novels, including *Maru* (1971) and *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968), and in her ethnographic works such as *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* (1981). If *A Question of Power* has appeared to be an anomaly in this agrarian constellation, it is only because its high modernist signs have concealed the novel's political unconscious, including its keen sense of the rural landscape as the place where the desire for and lack of a nonalienated identity can be imagined (Jameson 9–16). It is only after we have returned to Head through Premchand that the agrarian repressed can be read symptomatically. This opens a way out of the privileged vulgate of comparative and world literatures, of modernism, and indeed of the primacy of the European text. As the articles in this special issue testify, to think about literature in the world is first and foremost to rethink the assumed nature of centers and margins.

Notes

1. Qtd. in Kushkush. Gaitano is a young South Sudanese writer of fiction who chose to write in Arabic rather than English. This article grew out of conversations with many practitioners of literature in the world: Prafulla Kar, Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, S. Shankar, and Gaurav Desai in Mysore; K. C. Baral, Walter Mignolo, D. Venkat Rao, and Lakshmi Bandlamudi in Shillong; and Susan Kiguli, James Ocita, Dominic Dipio, and Ernest Okello Ogwang in Kampala. My thanks go to Yopie Prins, who, as president of the American Comparative Literature Association, gave me the opportunity to speak in absentia about *Song of Lawino* as a world poem.

2. Okot had composed the poem in Acholi in the 1950s and then translated it into English.

3. In "The World Republic of Letters," Prendergast delivers a wide-ranging critique of Casanova from a Europeanist perspective.

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