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Cosmopolitanism and World Literature

Simply to entertain the idea of world literature is already to be cosmopolitan, it would seem. How else might global humanity find itself on the same page, except by adopting cosmopolitanism's openness to difference? As soon as the view implicit in this question is accepted, the totality of literature becomes a kind of family romance: national bigotries and taste preferences – plaguing relations between countries in other areas – are overcome when writers around the world have more in common with each other than with their own compatriots, and speak the lingua franca of the imagination.

But this is only how it seems, for cosmopolitanism in history is far from straightforward. In Greek antiquity, the notion of *cosmopolis* was more about absorbing other nations than understanding them. The idea became pronounced in the wake of Alexander's conquests, when Stoic philosophers sought to knit together the natural and social orders, thereby giving divine sanction to the Greek nobility of mind as it was being spread on a spear-point to the 'barbarian' world. Take a second historical example: the great inter-war Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, a revolutionary who studied philology at the University of Turin, saw cosmopolitanism as the natural outlook of a centralizing and incorporative Catholic Church. He pointed out that in the early centuries of the first millennium, the Church had stepped into the shoes of the Roman Empire by taking over its role of disarticulating local cultures and languages across Europe in the name of an 'imperial-universal' based on the authority of Rome and the (now hieratic) language of Latin.

The remarkable late-eighteenth-century philosopher of language, cognition, and world history, Johann Gottfried Herder, was equally hesitant. 'Universal love for humanity, for all nations, and even enemies' too often goes hand-in-hand, he observed, with repression at home.[1] He saw cosmopolitanism as a 'pretext for exporting one's own values abroad or a justification for slavishly imitating other nations at the cost of one's freedom and independence'.[2] In the end, he thought, the position was hypocritical. As a call to arms, cosmopolitanism suspiciously surged into academic

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and media circles just after the fall of the Berlin Wall when the last impediments to the American Century were removed. That fact alone should make us think again about any natural affinity between a healthy respect for cultural differences and a unified vision of global literature – particularly in view of such cultural conflicts between political and economic systems as the conquest of Eastern by Western Europe in the continuing Cold War. To what degree, we might ask, does such a unified vision rely on a redemptive notion of the literary imagination itself? One that places the intellectual – typically more mobile than the shopkeeper or field hand – as the hero of the story?

On the other hand, why denigrate the urbane, the worldly, and the multilingual? Cosmopolitans are hard to dislike if, as most intellectuals do, one lives in cities, travels widely, is familiar with the culture of others, has no particular preferences when sampling them, and has no obvious racial or ethnic prejudices. At this level, cosmopolitanism is difficult to resist, and one should applaud its basic decency. A critical stance towards it becomes necessary only when we look at its uses in recent literary and political theory. While this body of work draws on this general sense, it frequently deploys it in a more partial, temporally bounded way.[3] Let me quote an example of how cosmopolitanism currently gets framed in metropolitan settings: the refusal to be a member of any group or cause 'smaller than all humanity, and in particular, the specifically political ones of city, empire, kingdom, or state'.[4] This is accompanied by the corollary that embracing such an ethos 'undermines established authority'. Taken together, these comments waver between vagueness and intentional double entendre. It is hard to see, for example, how the refusal to be a member of any group smaller than that of all humanity could ever find meaningful political expression. For if there is no affiliative constituency, there can be no demands, and therefore no alternative vision. How, then, can this cosmopolitanism undermine authority?

In the cosmopolitan debates of recent years, ambiguity of this sort is put to use in such a way as to allow readers to confuse the internationalism of workers' organizations or the postwar decolonization movements of Africa and Asia with a cosmopolitan ethos of upwardly mobile professors and frequent-flying businessmen.[5] The ethical force of a history of commitment, danger, and militancy can in this way be appropriated by mainstream liberal sentiment, and so appear to derive from similar energies or to have similar ends. This is not to say that cosmopolitanism is a uniquely Western or metropolitan concept. Its appeals to tolerance and cross-cultural appreciation are found in the Vedas, the *Analects* of Confucius, the Mayan *Popol Vuh*, and the work of modern liberation intellectuals like Rabindranath Tagore. But the majority of scholarly attention and by far the most systematic theorizations of cosmopolitanism have occurred in Europe and the United

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States where, in the last three decades, they have succeeded in muffling its uneasy relationship with an imperial centre bred of past conquests. China may have re-emerged as a world power, but it does not express its global authority otherwise than in the language and norms established by the European empires. Globally applicable international law and state systems derive ultimately from earlier Western *force majeure*. And the same can be said of calendars, customs, technical standards, weights, measures, Hollywood, and the English language in which I am now writing.

If cosmopolitanism's double-sidedness makes one hesitate before establishing any easy parallels with world literature, the same is true from the other direction. For, given that most scholars trace the modern understanding of world literature to Goethe's *Conversations with Eckermann* (1836), it matters that Goethe saw in that concept a way of discovering the quirks and prejudices of one's own nation through the eyes of foreigners.[6] Put more bluntly, world literature was an idea that required foreigners. By contrast, cosmopolitanism – which admirably devotes itself to sampling diverse cultural riches and repudiating parochialism – does not presuppose national differences in this way. It wants rather to transcend them, or believes it already has done so in a world characterized by easy access to transportation, the Internet, and smart phones – a technological terrain that has produced de facto, and without conscious planning, a common world culture that obviates national citizenship. But contradictions are not pure negatives. Each half of the assumed homology between 'world literature' and 'cosmopolitanism' can be construed differently, and the result will be progressive or regressive depending on the actors and the situations to which one appeals.

Most students likely will have the impression that world literature is of very recent provenance, prompted by postcolonial critiques of first-world canons and the welcome curricular revisions within English and European language departments trying to be less provincial. This version of the field – the one found in some of the inaugural texts and anthologies announcing the concept's revival – is based on the idea that sampling the world's literary riches, from Nahuatl to Tagalog, is essentially an act of art appreciation, and one without priority, programme, or context. Its middlebrow aura, and lack of interest in conceptual analysis, was from the start challenged by a consciously left-materialist understanding of world literature that arose at the same time, and which offered a return to literary sociology. (I am thinking particularly of Franco Moretti, the Warwick Research Collective, and Pascale Casanova.) Here one found a deliberate reversal of literary theory's obsessions in the 1970s and 1980s with language and 'discourse'. World literature in this second guise was less about expanding the number of texts to be read than proposing a counter-formalist style of reading based on

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institutional histories, the relation of literature to the global political economy, macro-readings of book markets, computer-generated mappings of the representations of space in novels, and so on. Curiously, though, its emphasis was not on *critique* (which had once been the riposte of literary sociology to formalism – as in Henri Lefebvre, Raymond Williams, Lucien Goldmann, and Jean-Paul Sartre) but on impersonal systems, a sociology without authors, the decoupling of taste from political economy, and a literary landscape without writers, critics, or reviewers. Its models were taken not from the literary materialism made available from earlier traditions of philology, with their emphasis on the intricacies of a socially inflected form, but from non-literary sources such as economic historians and systems theorists.

Despite its vigour and expertise, this two-pronged initiative (oscillating between the poles of readerliness and system) foreclosed other vital traditions of world literature. All sides might agree that world literature as such is not new, but there has been sharp disagreement about whose past to use. Greece has always been the first research stop. But apart from its dubious cosmopolitanism (which I have already remarked), we find our way back to Greece so frequently in such discussions only because its achievements were preserved by al-Ma'mun in ninth-century Baghdad, whereas the genius of the Persians, Chaldeans, Babylonians, and Copts was lost to history, often by means of the deliberate destruction of their writing by invaders.[7] Such examples are often forgotten, as is the transformation of modern Chinese letters undertaken by the efforts of Lu Xun's translation team in the 1920s, which was part of a conscious effort to bring China's writing into a world community of letters by turning classics from Russia, France, the United States, Poland, and elsewhere into vernacular Mandarin.[8] To take an even less well-known example, a number of younger scholars have begun to draw our attention to the significant Soviet republic of letters launched in the interwar years under the influences of the communist internationals and an already well-developed native Soviet philology.[9] The decolonizing ethos of the Soviet experiment – the first major material and military (not simply ethical) challenge to the dominance of the European empires – had the result of moving beyond the feel-good optic of Goethe in recognizing, and in some cases inspiring, vast regional centres of literary authority and circulation: Persia in the near East, revolutionary Cuba in Latin America, and Bengal in South Asia (not least in the lyrical texts supplied by Bengali poets and musicians to the popular film music of 'Hindi' cinema).

Nevertheless, world literature in its current form should be applauded for its meticulous attention, however belated, to forgotten pioneers. To take a representative case, *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (2012) resourcefully discovers such relatively obscure trail-

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blazers as Dionýz Ďurišin, Qiang Zhongshu, and Hugo Meltzl.[10] What the list implies is fair enough – that we have settled for received canons while ignoring the accomplishments of scholars who were strange or unfashionable. But the rectification says very little about the more important philosophical principles and political outlooks that ultimately determine scholarly invisibility. We might think here, for example, of celebrated writers and intellectuals in their own spheres who fall outside the patterns of Western taste formation on the basis of their political non-compliance. For instance, Paik Nak-Chung – author of the important collection *National Literature and World Literature* (1978) and, more recently, *The Division System in Crisis* (2011) – has been neglected as much for the 'foreignness' of his political emphases as for his language and location.[11] Paik's sensitivity to form and method resists any facile overstatement of high modernism's productive relationship to the politics of the periphery, foregrounding instead the role of social movements in the taste cultures of the Cold War, with its legacy of a divided Korea. He outlines a compelling 'double mission' (in his words) of adapting to, while also overcoming, modernity in a nation artificially and coercively divided by the United States – a project, therefore, of great relevance to any contemporary challenge to cosmopolitanism's indifference to national integrity.

Similarly, as Galin Tihanov has explained – and to continue this theme of neglected political *beliefs* rather than only neglected races or languages – the Central European exiles who voluntarily left the West for the Soviet Union (rather than the other way around) are nowhere to be found in the archival digging for which world literature often congratulates itself.[12] Figures like Belá Balázs, Bruno Jasienski, and György Lukács evoked a home which corresponded not to a place of origin or native land but to solidarities and visions from which they were nevertheless exiled precisely because they broke with an obstinate liberal discourse. Their diaspora took them to an Eastern European centre, which for most literary critics of the Euro-American mainstream registers hardly at all. They fled repression at home (in France and Hungary), and yet were treated in their adopted country of the Soviet Union as politically suspect fellow-travellers, neither here nor there: true, but unwilling, cosmopolitans. On both counts, what makes them vital to an alternate theorization of cosmopolitanism and world literature has made them invisible within the liberal paradigm: they do not fit the Romantic model of the individual genius beset by *Heimweh,* who uses pain and dislocation to sharpen his critical vision. Their paradigm has no name, for theirs was a story of forced cosmopolitanism as a tragic substitute for the internationalism that was their aim.

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A true break with English-department parochialism would demand a more forthright challenge to Anglo-American literary modernism itself, encumbered as it is by notions of Western urbanity, ethical transgression, linguistic revolution, and a cosmopolitan sublime based on the figure of expatriates like Joseph Conrad, F. Scott Fitzgerald, or Samuel Beckett; or the heroic third-world literary migrants to New York, announced with American fanfare as the immigrant capital of the world. To break this doxa is easier said than done, of course, but an enticing option can be found in a tradition of dissident philology that is not so much invisible as hiding in the light, nestled between the extremes of individual form and system.

Take one of its earliest and most influential figures, Herder, the true founder of world literature in its European guise. And then, in turn, the thinkers upon whom Herder relied for his ideas about the family of nations and the relativism of cultural values, notions so central to his colloquial take on the cosmopolitan ideal. These he took from *The New Science* (1744) by the Neapolitan rhetorician Giambattista Vico; and Vico, the grand polymath and student of antiquities, had almost certainly read the astounding *Muqaddimah* (1377), written in Tunis by the medieval historian and sociologist, Ibn Khaldūn. This fourteenth-century cosmopolitan masterpiece treats literature, poetics, and literary theory in a world-historical mode; indeed, it uses literary theory to create an original historical sociology of comparative cultural value.[13] The 1,200-page manuscript, divided into seven books, is in every respect a work of philology in the modern, here non-technical, sense of being a science of interpretive competence based on the recovery of the historical past through texts. Its central concept, *assabiyya* ('group feeling' or 'social solidarity'), is precisely about moving past a tribalism based on 'bonds of blood' to a society based on alliances and like-mindedness.

World literature lately has instead banked on Goethe, but this seems mistaken. According to John K. Noyes, he did not see the importance of the idea of world literature until learning about it 'from the young Herder during the short period of their intense friendship in Strasbourg'.[14] Then again, why should it matter whether Herder or Goethe developed the concept? Simply put, because of the different intellectual traditions within which each worked, and the less Olympian, profoundly more social and egalitarian direction in which Herder took world literature. Herder speaks of a common humanity in a world of cultural differences, whereas for Goethe *Weltliteratur* is really about the creative process and artistic genius in a world of market forces.

As one reads Goethe's surprisingly sparse reflections on world literature, their limitations become apparent. Even though we learn of his love of Serbian poetry and Chinese novels, or of his cycle of poems inspired by the

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medieval Persian poet Hafiz (*Westöstliche Divan,* 1819), most of his comments on world literature were in aid of a colloquy among a small circle of artists in England, France, and Germany. At the time he had been drawn into an exchange on world literature with the imperially minded Thomas Carlyle, for whose translation of Schiller he wrote an introduction. He was therefore mostly preoccupied with the new means of communication that were making it easier for authors to be in contact; with the futility of opposing market influences and the need to take advantage of them; and with the practical problem-solving benefits of literature (what is 'true' is also 'useful', he stresses). His was a sort of team-Europe concept, both far from and less than a cosmic vision.[15]

Apart from being more radically egalitarian, Herder's thinking was more sustained on the matter of literature and cosmopolitanism in its non-imperial sense, delving with great originality into the origins of language, the ethnocentricity of taste, the common character of human beings, the manner in which civilizations are varied, and the impediments to thinking posed by what Vico called 'the conceit of nations' and the 'conceit of the scholars'.[16] Far from being a cultural nationalist, as some have painted him, Herder excoriates the bumptious universal judgements of Europe, its 'facile or grandiose generalities', by stressing cultural incommensurabilities and the contingencies of period and place.[17] What is more, quite unlike Goethe, he believed that the world's peoples solve their own problems on their own terms – a notion taken wholesale from Vico's harsh diagnosis of colonial conquest in *The New Science*. Without temporizing, Herder refers to the imperial project as 'the grand European sponging enterprise' and writes bitterly about 'human beings [who] have been forced, through a process of conversion or civilization, into mines, treadmills and depravity'.[18] '*Women* are [part of the] people', he declared.[19] His politics and literary theory, we might say, were of a piece. Goethe went so far as to distrust Herder's use of the term *Humanität*, for its progressivist delusions, and thought that Herder threatened 'the particularity of cultural phenomena by subsuming them *a priori* under a pre-existing logically derived schema', a now mainstream sentiment heard in more than a few keynote lectures on the contemporary conference circuit.[20] Goethe's outlook, in other words, fits more comfortably than Herder's with the liberal ideal of aesthetic freedom, which wishes to liberate aesthetic work from geopolitical determinations, and to 'stick up' for peripheral literatures on the grounds that they too are capable of rising to the high levels of metropolitan experimental modernism.

By contrast, the more historically alert sense of world literature that we get from the lineage of Khaldūn, Vico, and Herder – and the same can be said of their intellectual descendants, Erich Auerbach and Edward Said – responds

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to just-completed or newly threatened wars (the Arabic conquest of the Berbers, World War II, the 1967 war in Palestine). It is an effort to preserve culture in the face of barbarous extremes and foster amity among nations. But for thinkers in this Vichian lineage, unlike many in the current field, the ideals of cosmopolitanism and world literature have more to do with methods and philosophical positions than with adding authors to canons or broadening representation for languages or ethnicities. Cosmopolitanism is positive for them only when not confused with an actually realized rejection of national polities or a Pax Americana masquerading as global citizenship, just as world literature is valuable only insofar as it is not confused with a body of texts that might ontologically *be* a cosmopolitan world republic of letters.

We can see the degree to which cosmopolitanism is ambiguous by noting that it too is a response to war, although in a different way from that of world literature in the Herderian sense. For we might understand it not necessarily as a bid for dialogue with others or a solidarity across cultures in the face of a collapse of polities, the threat of invasion, and the mobility of peoples (often in the form of the flight of refugees following regional catastrophes), but as a weapon of war itself, and a mode of expanding war into new cultural territory. Here one might consider the sort of cosmopolitanism that is the natural reflex of an imperial centre (like ancient Greece and the Church, with which I began), an identification of one's national values with the aspirations of the world that it is busy assimilating: not cynically or with conscious malice, but unreflectively under the weight of norms so ubiquitous as to be invisible. We confront here structures of taste-formation institutionalized as a result of the imperial encounters of the past, which many of the current debates in world literature underplay – structures that materially develop out of book markets, the techno-fixations of digital distribution, circulation of American styles via film and television, the presence abroad of military personnel, missionaries, tourists, and real estate speculators.

The traditions of dissident philology are large and significant, not ephemeral. As one example, Nikolai Konrad's *The West and the East* (*Zapad I Vostok*) argues that literary paradigms historically have moved from East to West by way of Italy's longstanding maritime trade with the Levant, where Europe was renewed by returning to classical texts via Arabic learning. Or take S. S. Prawer's remarkable *Karl Marx and World Literature*, which gives a sense of the worldliness and literary ground of Marx's sociological imagination.[21] Interestingly, Khaldūn issues a methodological warning against the errors of historical reporting, cautioning against the misuse of figurative language for the purpose of concealing motives, and against the perpetually ironic state of mind that cannot decide or choose.[22] This has

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profound implications for the status of literary modernism in third-world literature, since it implies a counter-modernist aesthetic of witness and testimony. Given that a similar argument can be found after Khaldūn in Vico, Hegel, and twentieth-century Marxist thinkers, a suspicion towards the misuses of irony might be said to form the basis of a broad peripheral aesthetics.

The idea of world literature in recent academic writing, even though I am suggesting it misses the emphases found in its Herderian origins, can be traced to the interventions, very much against the stream, of the young Edward Said. He, of course (unlike Konrad or Paik), is *not* excluded from the canon of world literature theorists. But his insights have been distorted, often due to an ignorance of the way in which he inherits Vico. Even a Goethean world literature is the product, not of the US academy of the last decade, but of Fritz Strich's seminal book in 1949. And it was Auerbach's 1952 dedicatory essay in honour of Strich ('Philology and *Weltliteratur*') that Said translated with his then wife Maire (née Jaanus, an Estonian and native speaker of German) in 1967, at a time when the profession had lost touch in most ways with philology, opting for a counter-historical school of formalist close-reading known as 'New Criticism' in its more old-fashioned guise and 'deconstruction' in its avant-garde articulation. In different but complementary ways, both paradigms stood against everything that philology represented: the authority of authorship, historical context, and the possibility of an accurate interpretation based on documentary evidence and care for the integrity of the text.

It is true that Said, the great instigator of the world literature concept in the contemporary university settings of Europe and the United States, highlighted Goethe rather than Herder. And yet his emphasis was not so much on Goethe as on philology. *That* was the polemical intent (unpolemically delivered) in this translation, which is to say in this indirect manner of address at a time when theory declared authorship a dead letter, spoke of discursive regimes, and argued that readers create the text's meaning decoupled from the writer's intention. Even in these early days, Said was trying to reorient the field of comparative literature by taking it out of the sterile system-thinking of Left-Bank theory into a more humane, unspecialized love of literature as a disordered, arbitrary, and always partial set of textual encounters. There, the Goethean idea lay dormant, waiting for its time during a long poststructuralist lull, only to be disinterred by others more recently on the edge of Said's orbit, but without his philological commitments.

It is important that the translators (Edward and Maire) – in a nod, perhaps, to Herder's view that our native languages are the ones we find most alive with meaning and nuance – declined to translate the term *Weltliteratur*.

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To have done so, they argue, would have been to 'betray the rather unique traditions of the German word'.[23] They give to Goethe, in fact, a Herderian gloss, arguing that he coined the term with the intention of capturing the idea of 'universal literature, or literature which expresses *Humanität*'. It is not to be understood as a 'collection of world classics or great books' but as a concert among all the literature produced by man about man'. And then, decisively, they reach the crucial point: 'into this complex of meanings flows another stream, this one deriving from Herder, Grimm, the Schlegels, and especially in Auerbach's case, Giambattista Vico'. This 'general tradition of German philology,' they continue, inaugurated historicism and vastly expanded the idea of philology to include not just textual matters of grammar, etymology, or authentic authorship but 'all, or most of, human verbal activity'.[24]

Philology is, they stress, the highest form of historical study, treating as it does all contingent truths at their 'most basic level', producing, thereby, a 'dialectical' rather than monadic conception of human activity.[25] Literature is political because it is historical, and because it is not limited to fiction or other genres of the imagination such as the novel, poetry, or drama. Auerbach's essay takes an untranslated quotation from Augustine as its epigraph: 'Some part of discovery is knowing what you are looking for.' What appears to be wholly invented, this suggests, is actually determined by a prior direction, an instinctive urge to solve problems – an argument that shapes the form of the imagination, which is tethered to the localities and vagaries of authorial experience.

The case for seeing world literature as more than a collection of world classics is most persuasive when considering masterpieces not found on the standard world-lit reading lists of American undergraduate courses. Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps* (*Los Pasos Perdidos*, 1953) – thought by some to be the greatest of all Latin American novels – is helpful when considering the stakes of seeing world literature as an approach routed through philology, rather than as an actual corpus of texts.[26] Like the real ale and soft cheeses that, despite the claims of globalization, never survive export, certain world-historical themes are difficult to translate as they move from periphery to centre. The novel's story of an intellectually paralysed composer who flees the pretensions of the Parisian demi-monde and New York nightlife to live among villagers in the heart of a South American jungle is almost perfectly fashioned to be misunderstood, as Carpentier well knew. The composer, whose creativity has dried up, is looking for his next meal. Having written a thesis on the origins of primitive music, he gets a museum curator to send him on a mission to collect rare instruments and thus to provide definitive evidence that music began as an imitation of the calls of birds. Thinking he might collect the research funds more simply by palming

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off on the museum some old instruments found in a bric-à-brac shop on the outskirts of Caracas, he nevertheless sees the project through. When he witnesses the dirge of a shaman in the remotest part of the jungle, he understands that music derives not from mimesis, but ritual. His thesis had been wrong. Music is the soul-call of a people without power over nature. Inspired by the insight, he throws himself into finishing his sonata with a burst of inspiration, but runs out of paper. He returns briefly to the capital in order to buy the paper, but is then unable to find his way back. In Carpentier's words: 'My hero travels on the Orinoco to the point of the roots of all life, but when he wants to revisit them, he can't. He's lost the portal to authentic existence.'[27]

This theme of authenticity at first seems quaint. Everyone knows that nothing authentic exists, that everything is a copy of everything else, and that only tourists or nostalgia-mongers settle for myths of the noble savage. Carpentier, though, foresaw these objections: 'it would be absolutely vain to attempt an interpretation of America in whatever region, without taking into account the fact of an intact nature, the sort of nature that the Europeans have left behind and have been unable to experience for at least three centuries'.[28] In a nod to what today we would call the theory of uneven and combined development, he remarks that 'all of the stages of civilization known to humans throughout history can be witnessed *in the present* in the American continent [...] It is altogether possible there to *evade time*.'[29] To critique Carpentier's novel for its romantic notions about authenticity would be to overlook its self-criticism, particularly the way it sends up metropolitan attitudes. The protagonist is a sighing underachiever who plods through life bored by his own aestheticized observations, and his city friends are even more reprehensible. Out of touch with the enduring indigenous communities that are just next door in countries like Venezuela and Brazil, and having never lived the extremes of dictatorship routinely experienced by Latin American intellectuals, American critics tend to miss that Carpentier's invocation of authenticity is not a return to El Dorado but a portrait of class exasperation: it is about the vanity of civilizational niceties outside polite society, and the possibility that intellectuals do not simply observe poverty from an Archimedean viewpoint, but identify with it and become a part of its project.

The Vichian tradition swings the pendulum away from textual pieties and towards a reckoning with competing interests, wilful aesthetic foreclosures, and situated rivalries and agendas. Working within it, one is forced to reckon with the worldliness of authors and authorship – nasty editors, bought reviewers, the cronyism and snobbery of academic publishing, stultifying commercial taste-markets, etc. – all of which seem in our own time very much under erasure in an era of surface reading/distant reading, as well as in its

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other: the 'happy family' of world literature and its appeal to more catholic readers. In the former tendency, it is proposed not only that the author is dead but that the text itself no longer needs to be interpreted, that determining meaning is beside the point, and that we should be caught up instead with the ontology of the text or work itself, and the aesthetic experience of a reading untethered from its significance – literature as a mechanico-natural unfolding. Along with the unsubtle belletrism of the Euro-American academic mainstream and its principal institutions (such as the Modern Languages Association), this view closes its eyes to authors and to literary authority as intention and will.

For just that reason, the philological emphases of Khaldūn, Vico, Herder, and Said seem especially vital today. One could well argue that Raymond Williams's devotion to the work of V. N. Volosinov and Lucien Goldmann, Walter Benjamin's distinction between information and narration in 'The Storyteller', and Sartre's portrait of the author as manipulator and persuader in *What is Literature?* are all firmly in this tradition, and at odds with recent trends. They represent, one might say, the misplaced sociological hermeneutic of world literature. One longs for a different literary sociology that captures the affiliative networks of authors choosing, strategizing, carving out a space in a hostile commercial environment of circles, schools, and class fractions, as Raymond Williams so brilliantly explores in his understudied masterpiece, *The Sociology of Culture*.[30] It would be in the spirit of that book to confront such little-asked questions today as the fate of reading in an environment of social media; of the degree to which the digital media pre-empt choice (just as CDs replaced vinyl records in a corporate *coup de main*); of the slavish homologies between anti-philological trends in literary study and these very technological determinates. We would be driven more in the direction of Régis Debray's mediologies, with their exciting linkages between socialism and the printed word and, in turn, between the digital and the neoliberal. It would allow us to see that being contemporary is not necessarily about employing new technologies, but about critically unpacking them according to a humanist calculus inherited from a mode of critical thinking whose contents certainly have changed, but not its form.

The impression that capitalism tends to contain and co-opt everything is ubiquitous these days. So it appears to many that nothing lies outside the embrace of capital, which can turn every idea, however subversive initially, into a marketing device. But is that true? Are there not, in fact, unspeakable opinions that determine who gets published? And, if published, reviewed? And, if reviewed, given pride of place on the graduate seminar reading lists? The alternative to the present understanding of world literature is to reinstate a critical encounter with conflicting movements, antagonistic constituencies,

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hostile theories, discordant practices, unequal access, mutual epistemological incomprehension, and historically situated openings or foreclosures – in other words, the real world of peoples and texts. It is to reject what at times has seemed in world literature circles to be on offer: either an ensemble of books confected of an aesthetic dream of universal uplift, or a faceless network of systemic determinants whose 'materialism' makes literary trends appear as unconscious as volcanic eruptions or the migration of birds.

Notes

1. J. G. Herder, *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, F. M. Barnard (ed. and trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 200.
2. S. Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 226.
3. See T. Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); and 'Cosmo-Theory', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100.3 (2001), 659–692.
4. This quotation and the one that follows are taken from J. Ingram, *Radical Cosmopolitics: The Ethics and Politics of Democratic Universalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 7, 67.
5. For more on this distinction, see T. Brennan, 'Cosmopolitanism and Internationalism', *New Left Review*, 7 (2001), 75–84.
6. J. W. Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*, J. Oxenford (trans.) (San Francisco: North Point, 1984), p. 135.
7. Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, N. J. Dawood (ed.), F. Rozenthal (trans.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 10.
8. See Daniel Dooghan's innovative work along these lines: 'Old Tales, Untold: Lu Xun against World Literature', *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, 16.1 (2017), 31–64.
9. See, for instance, the work of Monica Popescu, Sandeep Banerjee, Rossen Djagalov, Auritro Majumder, and Marla Zubel.
10. T. D'haen, D. Damrosch, D. Kadir (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
11. N-C. Paik, *The Division System in Crisis: Essays on Contemporary Korea* (Berkeley: University of California, 2011), pp. 53–67. See also N-C. Paik, 'The Reunification Movement and Literature', in Kenneth M. Wells (ed.), *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence* (Manoa: University of Hawaii at Manoa, Center for Korean Studies, 1995); N-C. Paik, 'The Two Cultures Problem and Renewal of the Humanities', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 11.4 (2010), 524–30.
12. G. Tihanov, 'Narratives of Exile: Cosmopolitanism beyond the Liberal Imagination', in N. Glick Schiller and A. Irving (eds.), *Whose Cosmopolitanism? Critical Perspectives, Relationalities and Discontents* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), pp. 141–159.
13. Khaldūn's achievement was known to the erudite in Vico's time. It had been prominently discussed by Jean Bodin (1576) and Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1680),

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and had appeared in French translation at the end of the seventeenth century, a few decades before the first edition of Vico's *New Science* (although it is unclear how well Vico knew French). Vico, however, does not cite him, perhaps because Khaldūn was Muslim and the Inquisition in Naples at the time was vigorous.

14. J. K. Noyes, 'Writing the Dialectical Structure of the Subject: Goethe on World Literature and World Citizenship', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 51.2 (2015), 100–114 (p. 100).
15. See F. Strich, *Goethe and World Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 350.
16. G. Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch (trans.) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948), pp. 34, 27.
17. Muthu, *Enlightenment*, p. 215.
18. Muthu, *Enlightenment*, pp. 253, 230.
19. J. G. Herder, 'How Can Philosophy Become More Universal?' in M. N. Forster (ed.), *Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 26.
20. For a fuller account of this relationship, see Noyes, 'Writing the Dialectical Structure', pp. 101, 107.
21. N. I. Konrad, *Zapad i Vostok: Stat'i* (Moscow: Nauka, 1966); S. S. Prawer, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).
22. Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, p. 7.
23. E. Auerbach, 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*', M. Said and E. Said (trans.), *Centennial Review*, 13.1 (1969), 1–17 (p. 1).
24. Ibid., p. 1.
25. Ibid., p. 2.
26. A. Carpentier, *Los Pasos Perdidos* (Mexico D. F.: Edición y Distribución Ibero Americana de Publicaciones, 1953).
27. A. García-Carranza, *Bibliografía de Alejo Carpentier* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1984), p. 22. My translation.
28. V. L. Lemus (ed.), *Entrevistas: Alejo Carpentier* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1985), p. 29. My translation.
29. *Entrevistas,* p. 172 (Carpentier's emphasis). My translation.
30. R. Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

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