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WORLD LITERATURE WITHOUT A HYPHEN

Towards a Typology of Literary Systems

THE RUBRIC OF 'world literature' has in recent years come to assume a prominent, perhaps even dominant, role in discussions over the future of Comparative Literature, and of literary studies more generally. While discussions necessarily and automatically begin with Goethe's use of the term *Weltliteratur* in conversation with the young Johann Peter Eckermann in January of 1827,¹ I would argue that a more immediate point of origin is Immanuel Wallerstein and, through him, Fernand Braudel. Wallerstein traces the development of his world-systems theory to the 1970s and to contemporary debates in the social sciences concerning the usefulness of the nation-state as the proper unit of analysis. In place of the nation-state, Wallerstein and the world-systems analysts offered the historical system, and described three kinds of such systems that have existed: the mini-system of the pre-modern world, geographically limited in scope; the world-empire, such as Rome or Han-dynasty China, 'a large bureaucratic structure with a single political centre and an axial division of labour, but multiple cultures'; and a world-economy, such as that in place in modern times, which is 'a large axial division of labour with multiple political centres and multiple cultures'.

Wallerstein traces his use of the phrase 'world-system', and indeed 'world-economy', to Fernand Braudel's work on the *économie-monde* of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean. For Wallerstein, the word 'world' in the phrases 'world-economy' and 'world-system' functions as a noun

in apposition to the other noun in the phrase, rather than as an adjective modifying that noun, with a hyphen marking the distinction.² This point forms one of the unspoken assumptions most writers on world literature seem to have taken from Wallerstein, namely that **world-literature** (to restore the hyphen Wallerstein might demand) is not the sum total of the world's literary production, but rather a **world-system within which literature is produced and circulates.**

The other assumption for which writers on world-literature are indebted to Wallerstein is that of an axial division of labour. This aspect of world-systems theory is one (understandably) less explicitly endorsed by writers on world-literature, given its echoes of imperialism and/or of contemporary global capitalism. Nonetheless, models presented by Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti both assume some form of an axial division of labour, the former reserving higher-order and higher-value work for core cultures, and the latter for core specialists within the field of literary study (located, naturally, within the academic centres of those same core cultures). In either case, each of these models has the perhaps unintended effect of re-inscribing a hegemonic cultural centre, even as their avowed desire is to globalize literary studies. I examine the models of Casanova and Moretti in turn.

Literature and power

Pascale **Casanova** has shown us a *république mondiale des lettres*, for her a decidedly **mercantilist republic**, in which the **global cultural-capital markets** in Paris determine the exchange-value of texts. Her model has much explanatory power for the Europe of the past several centuries, and, arguably, for the post-1945 world at large, but by her own admission, can say little about the non-European world before 1945. Casanova goes so far as to date the **non-'Western'** world's entry into *literature* (not merely 'world literature' or 'world-literature') to the **era of decolonization**. Her point is perhaps less that literature did not exist in non-European languages before decolonization, than that it could not be recognized as literature until after decolonization, an argument which begs the question: 'recognized by whom?' Casanova is working within a

¹ For an enlightening discussion of Goethe and *Weltliteratur*, see David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, Princeton 2003, pp. 1–36.

² Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, Durham, NC 2004, pp. 15–6 and 98–9.

very specific and localized definition of literature, one which is effective enough, perhaps, for the periods, texts and languages which have provided the traditional focus of literary studies, but which cannot account for the full range of literary production across all cultures and times.

Another problematic feature of Casanova's work is her reading of the relationship between literary and politico-economic systems of power. She identifies a parallel between the inequalities of what she calls 'national history' and the inequalities in literary resources between nations, but sees these parallels as analogical, rather than causal.³ For her, the literary world is an alternative universe, operating under laws different from but analogous to those of the political world. The circulation of power within her republic of letters remains distinct from the circulation of power in the larger world; the currency of her republic cannot, it seems, be exchanged for dollars.

Casanova's model constructs a **world-system of literary circulation** and exchange centred on Paris, and a given nation's access to 'literature' is a function of its recognition as such by Paris. Forms of literary circulation which predate French literary culture, or which exist outside it today, have no real place in Casanova's world-system. There is a pronounced division of labour within her system, in that the core (Paris) performs the value-added work of evaluating, setting prices for, and admitting to literature the textual production of the periphery (most of the rest of the world, with London and New York as slightly less central components of the core and Germany, perhaps, as what Wallerstein would label the semi-periphery). Peripheral production is only of value once recognized by the centre.

Franco **Moretti**, who makes explicit use of the world-systems model developed by Immanuel Wallerstein, presents a less innocent vision of the **relationship between literary and economic systems**. He proposes a theory of the novel in which peripheral cultures—those outside the Anglo-French core of novelistic production—develop the novel, not as an indigenous formation, but as a 'compromise between a Western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials.'⁴ There

³ Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, Paris 1999, pp. 24, 62–3.

⁴ Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *NLR* 1, January–February 2000, reprinted in Christopher Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature*, London 2004. Moretti and Prendergast have continued a lively exchange on the subject: see *NLR* 8, 20, 24, 26, 28, 34 and 41.

seems to be a dilemma inherent in the formulation of Moretti's law of the novel: the more rigorously the novel is defined as a 'Western' form, the less explanatory power the law has (since by definition if a Western form is imported into a culture the result will be a mix of that Western form and local materials), while the more inclusive the definition of the 'novel', the less valid the law (since there will then be more 'novels' which don't especially partake of the form of the Western novel).⁵

Although I disagree with the details of the law's formulation, I nonetheless recognize the urgent significance of framing the question of the development of the novel (as we know it) outside its Anglo-French homeland in terms like Moretti's.⁶ As with Casanova's *république mondiale*, however, his model has its chronological limitations. Wallerstein himself insists that the world-system is a product of the Columbian Exchange and the Industrial Revolution, and he has resisted attempts by the late Andre Gunder Frank and others to apply his framework to earlier times.⁷ Moretti does not altogether share Wallerstein's timidity about projecting his model backwards in time; he has offered, for example, an analysis of Petrarchism as a poetic phenomenon that suggests that it obeys something like the same law he describes for the modern novel.⁸

The axial distribution of labour in Moretti's theory of the novel is quite clear: core cultures develop new genres for export to the periphery, and the mapping of that distribution of labour onto that of the larger

⁵ Jonathan Zwicker uses a methodology owing much to Moretti (including numerical analyses of the numbers of books published per year in different forms, and the numbers held in particular library collections), as well as close readings, to show *inter alia* that pre-Meiji literature—that is, prior to Western influence—continued to have a major impact on Japanese readers and writers into the twentieth century. Zwicker, *Practices of the Sentimental Imagination: Melodrama, the Novel and the Social Imaginary in Nineteenth-Century Japan*, Cambridge, MA 2006.

⁶ The five volumes of *Il romanzo* edited by Moretti between 2001–03 provide an indispensable foundation for further and ever more nuanced work on these problems.

⁷ See Janet Abu-Lughod for what she characterizes as a 'thirteenth-century world system' in *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250–1350*, Oxford 1989. Andre Gunder Frank and Barry Gills both attempt to stretch the beginnings of a world-system to much earlier times: Frank and Gills, *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?*, London 1993; Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, Berkeley 1998.

⁸ 'More Conjectures', NLR 20, March–April 2003, pp. 73–4.

economy is too neat to be accidental.⁹ The relationship between the diffusion of Petrarchism and the contemporary centres of political and economic power is nowhere near as clear—which reminds us that to expand the field of inquiry for literary studies beyond the modern West will entail the analysis of systems of literary circulation quite distinct from that experienced by the nineteenth-century Anglo-French novel. Where Casanova's model suggests the autonomy of literary markets from the economic and political spheres, Moretti's may insist on too easy an equivalence between the two. If we wish our model of world literature to extend deeply into the past, then the theories of Casanova and Moretti, useful as they are in their own context, will not suffice.

Six modes

The model of world literature that I seek is one constructed as a means of understanding and appreciating the multiplicity of strategies used by literatures to relate to their political and economic environments. As such, it should neither innocently claim that literature is exempt from this larger economic and political order, nor engage in *a priori* assumptions about what that order, and literature's relationship with it, look like. It will recognize the multiple centres and systems of cultural power in operation across human history, and in addition will affirm that profound theoretical insights can and must come from the study of diverse literatures, rather than from the study of a core tradition or from the work of a dedicated class of theoreticians exempted from the cultural labour of textual analysis. In sum, it will be a theory of 'world literature' rather than 'world-literature', focused on the production of verbal art and its relationship to its environment as a genuinely universal phenomenon in human culture. As such, the world-literatures of Casanova or Moretti emerge, I would argue, as the current manifestation of the more general problem of the relationship between literature and its environment.¹⁰

⁹ Moretti's model of 'distant reading', which involves the reading of scholarship *about* the novel rather than novels themselves, seems another version of the axial division of labour: specialists in national literatures do the resource-extracting work of reading vast numbers of texts, while generalists add surplus value to this work through their theoretical syntheses.

¹⁰ I am inspired to make this turn away from economic metaphors towards ecology by Niklas Luhmann's discussion of 'environment' as that which lies outside a particular social subsystem. The notion of literature as such a subsystem, recognizing distinctions within its environment but only selectively interconnected with it, is a useful refining of the discussions of literary and economic systems found, for example, in Casanova. Luhmann, *Ecological Communication*, Chicago 1989, pp. 15–21.

What follows is not a definitive configuration of a discipline-to-be, but rather a suggested **organizing principle**, together with a set of six modes in which that principle seems to have manifested itself. I suggest that the shifting configuration of the **relationship between literatures and environments forms the most useful object of study** for a future ‘world literature without the hyphen’. None of these six modes (the epichoric, panchoric, cosmopolitan, vernacular, national and global) are my own invention; in each case I draw on considerable existing scholarship and my only contribution is to suggest that these six modes might constitute a meta-system of literary systems.¹¹ I will present the six in the order of their chronological emergence, but do not suggest that they constitute a teleological history of world literature, or of any one literature. No single literature or language has passed through all six of these modes, and in past periods several of these modes have co-existed. Nor is this list exhaustive; based as it is in scholarship on individual literatures, the list can and should be added to or altered in light of further literary encounters. In what follows, I will briefly sketch the features of each mode, and will suggest examples of texts or literatures which fall under their rubrics.

The **epichoric** is a mode of literary production in which literature is produced within the confines of a **local community**. It represents the **zero-grade of literary circulation**, since epichoric literature as such does not circulate beyond the community in which it is produced. I borrow the concept of epichoric literature from the work of **Gregory Nagy** on archaic Greek poetry. Nagy introduces the term **epichoric, in opposition to the Panhellenic**, in the context of myth, and identifies the epichoric as that which is produced in a local context and whose meaning depends on that context—local hero-cults, versions of myths and songs which do not travel well. Inasmuch as it is associated with small polities, which may or may not share a language with their neighbours, the epichoric may well have a political dimension in establishing and delimiting that polity or as a form of resistance to a broader cultural and political sphere.¹² I would like to suggest the potential applicability of the concept of the epichoric

¹¹ I find, in other words, that scholars on Greek and Sanskrit provide not merely the raw data which theories of literature can attempt to explain, but the very theoretical structures which those theories seek to develop.

¹² Gregory Nagy notes that Archaic Greek lyric is in fact usually in a dynamic tension between the epichoric and what I call the panchoric. *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past*, Baltimore 1990, pp. 66–7.

to contexts other than Archaic Greece: the *Chinese Canon of Poetry*, for example, includes a collection of *Airs* representing epichorically the various states into which Zhou-dynasty China was divided, and the concept may help understand, among other things, pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, the South Slavic oral epic tradition as studied by Milman Parry and Albert Lord, or the cultural practices of many of the First Nations of the Americas.¹³

The traces of epichoric literatures are generally difficult to discern, especially in the written records of past times. Instead, what we most often find are epichoric refractions of what I will call *panchoric* texts, as well as epichoric approaches to reading and interpreting such texts. I extrapolate the term ‘panchoric’ from ‘Panhellenic’, and use the term to refer to literary texts and systems of circulation operating across a range of epichoric communities, united to some degree in language and culture, but generally fragmented politically. Panchoric texts such as Homeric epic and the *Chinese Canon of Poetry* often represent themselves as some form of negotiation of epichoric tensions. More speculatively, I would suggest that Sanskrit epic, similarly composed in a culturally-unified but politically fragmented world, likewise contains elements of the panchoric. Epichoric and panchoric impulses are perhaps most frequently encountered in mutual interaction, and the opposition between them is frequently productive. The great Panhellenic epics, the *Iliad*, with its famous Catalogue of Ships, and the *Odyssey*, with its world-spanning journey, project into their narratives the assimilation of epichoric traditions to panchoric cultural agendas.

My notion of the *panchoric* has some affinities with Wallerstein’s ‘mini-system’, which I take to be an *analogue to the world-system on a smaller scale*. They represent the first historical contexts in which literatures circulate, and come to be aware of that circulation as a problem. That is, panchoric literatures must adapt themselves to different political niches,

¹³ Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, Oxford 1971; Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA 1960. The appeal to the oral histories of the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en nations in the establishment of aboriginal land title in *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* offers a contemporary example of the use of epichoric literary tradition to define communities and their territories. Richard Daly, *Our Box Was Full: An Ethnography for the Delgamuukw Plaintiffs*, Vancouver 2005, provides an excellent introduction to these issues by an anthropologist involved in the case.

and questions of the origins of texts become especially important in this mode. The panchoric and epichoric exist primarily in opposition to each other, and the panchoric in particular frequently represents itself as some sort of negation of the epichoric.¹⁴

The Sanskrit example

The term *cosmopolitan*, derived from Stoic philosophy, has seen active service in recent years in a series of debates about the contemporary world.¹⁵ My own use of the term, however, derives instead from the work of the Sanskritist Sheldon Pollock. Pollock has written compellingly about the pervasiveness of inscriptional poetry in Sanskrit, from modern Pakistan to Java, in the years 300–1300 AD. In the regions Pollock discusses (which he identifies as ‘the Sanskrit cosmopolis’), Sanskrit inscriptions exist alongside inscriptions in vernacular languages—Prakrits, Kannada, Tamil, Khmer, Old Javanese—throughout much of this period, but with the important distinction that the vernacular languages are used to ‘document’ the world, whereas Sanskrit is used to ‘interpret’ the world.¹⁶ In other words, practical matters such as the granting of lands and privileges happen in the vernacular; the idealized and aestheticized self-representation of the ruling order happens in Sanskrit. In contrast to contemporary models of cultural diffusion, the spread of Sanskrit across South and Southeast Asia takes place without military conquest or large-scale colonization; it seems to be a free and voluntary act on the part of dozens of polities.

¹⁴ Although the reverse can also be true. On the use of Stesichorus’s *Palinode*—an epichoric rejection of the Panhellenic myth of the abduction of Helen to Troy—by Plato in the *Phaedrus* as a means of situating Socrates’s own work in opposition to rhetoric (which Plato has Socrates align with epic and the Panhellenic), see Alexander Beecroft, “‘This is not a true story’: Stesichorus’s *Palinode* and the Revenge of the Epichoric’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, vol. 136 (2006), pp. 47–69.

¹⁵ Basic bibliography here would include: Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds, *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, Minneapolis 1998; Carol Breckenridge et al, *Cosmopolitanism*, Durham, NC 2002; Gillian Brock and Harry Brighouse, eds, *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*, Cambridge 2005, and Kwame Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, New York 2006.

¹⁶ Sheldon Pollock, ‘The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, 300–1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization and the Question of Ideology’, in Jan Houben, ed., *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, Leiden 1996, p. 219.

Not only does Pollock provide one of the most compelling examples of an incongruity between cultural and political power in the pre-modern world, but even more importantly he explicitly identifies this incongruity as one worth studying—a concern that should, I argue, be reflected more broadly in pre-modern studies. Indeed, Sanskrit is far from the only cosmopolitan language whose cultural status does not map neatly onto its political and economic one. The prestige of Akkadian and Greek as literary languages in the eastern Mediterranean so long outlives the conquests of Sargon and Alexander as to undermine the role of political hegemony in establishing that prestige, while the enduring and **complex status of Chinese literature in Japan, Korea and Vietnam, like that of Persian literature at the Mughal and Ottoman courts, can again hardly be explained in terms of conquest, colonization or trade alone.** The **cultural prestige of Latin** in the European Middle Ages likewise has **little to do with imperial power.** Cosmopolitan literary languages, then, may sometimes follow in the wake of a world-empire of the kind discussed by Wallerstein, but the two cannot be elided into a single phenomenon.

The circulation of literature within a cosmopolitan literary system is distinct from that encountered in a panchoric system, partly because **cosmopolitan literary languages** can be used by groups speaking a variety of mother tongues and partly because cosmopolitan literatures tend to represent themselves as **agents of an ideology of universal rule**, whether or not that ideology is seen as practiced or practicable. In theorizing the constitution of the **ideal state**, for example, I would see Plato as engaging in an incipiently cosmopolitan gesture, while the New Testament's appropriation of the Hebrew Bible, re-reading what I would characterize as the 'panchoric' nature of the tribes of the former as the 'nations' of the world, undeniably has cosmopolitan ambitions. Where a **panchoric literary language allows literature to circulate among a set of political entities sharing a native language** (but likely not a political regime), a **cosmopolitan literary language creates a cross-cultural system, in which speakers of many languages share a common literary idiom.** This language may be the cultural expression of a world-empire, or a nostalgic reminiscence of a former empire, or it may constitute a cultural world-empire without political ramifications. **Core-periphery relations** may be present (as in the Chinese case: Sino-Japanese and Sino-Korean poetics do not circulate within China itself), or the system **may be more polycentric** (as is the case with Greek in the Hellenistic and Imperial periods, or with Latin in

the Middle Ages). However they are configured, cosmopolitan literary languages aim at a universal reach.

Vernacular to national

While in some senses **vernacular languages** resemble panchoric languages, being used for literary purposes over comparatively large territories sharing linguistic but not necessarily political unity, the distinction comes in the kind of cultural difference they are required to negotiate. Where panchoric literatures evolve in relationship to epic-choric traditions, **vernacular languages react against the hegemony of a cosmopolitan literary language**. Just as cosmopolitan literatures need not depend on a political infrastructure for support, so vernacular literatures need not reflect a political declaration of independence from empire. Indeed, as in the case of the emergence of Anglo-Saxon literature and of other European vernaculars, the cosmopolitan language in use may long since have lost its political and economic supports. The programmatic declaration of a new vernacular literature is nonetheless frequently a political and politicized gesture (especially if it involves choices among a variety of dialects), as in the case of Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia* or the **May Fourth movement in China**. Alternatively, literary languages may choose to retain their cosmopolitan status, rather than yield to any one vernacular standard, as has been generally the case with Arabic. Vernacular languages need not map onto the political world; in delimiting the range of dialects he considers 'Italian', Dante sketches very nearly the borders of modern Italy, but his project of nation-building (if we can call it that) remains unrealized for centuries. Furthermore, vernacular literatures can circulate beyond cultural as well as political borders, as, successively, did Occitan, Dante's Italian, and du Bellay's French in medieval and early modern Europe.

Sheldon Pollock's work on the vernacular reminds us of the nearly-simultaneous development of vernacular languages in South India and Western Europe, beginning with Old English and Kannada in the eighth century CE, and spreading across the Latin and Sanskrit ecumenes in the following seven or eight centuries.¹⁷ Pollock sketches these twin

¹⁷ Sheldon Pollock, 'Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History', in Breckenridge et al., *Cosmopolitanism*. As Pollock himself points out, Tamil occupies a somewhat problematic position within this schema: 'The Cosmopolitan Vernacular', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 57, no. 1 (1998), p. 20, note 14. If the (disputed) traditional dating of early Sangam literature to the first few centuries CE is accepted, then Tamil

phenomena, of the rise of a cosmopolitan idiom in one millennium, followed by the rise of vernacular languages in the next, mainly to suggest that both phenomena, and vernacularization in particular, have histories which remain to be written. Beyond the historical questions, ideas about cosmopolitan and vernacular literatures as developed by Pollock offer a useful framework for understanding the structure of a wide variety of literary systems, past and present, which function in ways analogous to those described by Moretti and Casanova but do not fit their specific parameters.¹⁸ As both the South Asian and European examples illustrate, vernacular literary languages tend to operate within systems, incorporating a cosmopolitan language or languages and a range of vernacular rivals. The continued presence of cosmopolitan languages in many vernacular contexts renders the relationships among vernacular literatures more complex, and complicates the picture of literary rivalry imagined, for example, by Casanova.

It is in the realm of *national* literatures that we enter Morettian and Casanovan territory more explicitly. The boundary between a vernacular literature and a national literature is necessarily a vague one, but I will provisionally suggest that the moment of transition occurs when the history of a given literature, and its contemporary practices, are mapped onto the history and contemporary status of a particular political state. As such, national literatures are, I would argue, a product in part of the nationalisms of the nineteenth century, although certainly with earlier roots in some cases. The phenomenon which Casanova identifies as *'effet Herder'*, the development of a literature out of a mix of folk traditions and nationalism, is another version of this mode. I would suggest as well that the history of the novel outside its homelands, as sketched by Moretti, constitutes in some measure the construction of explicitly *national* literatures, especially in non-Western cultures—that is, the larger-scale absorption of European ideas of the nation and of national literature mirrors to some extent the absorption of the European

becomes a quite disruptive vernacular intrusion on the cosmopolitan millennium. The point need not be to embrace Pollock's model dogmatically, something that the nature of this article would in any event hardly permit. Rather, the value in this exercise lies in identifying a typological similarity, which can inform the study of a variety of literary contexts.

¹⁸ In effect Casanova takes the vernacular moment as the birth of her narrative. Prendergast finds in it phases analogous to the vernacular, national and global, although I would prefer to stress their status as a synchronic system of systems rather than as an evolutionary process.

literary form of the novel. Wherever a national literature emerges, it will represent itself as a manifestation of the political and/or cultural dimension of a nation-state. Such literatures are characterized by their marginalization of dialectal and minority-language literatures, and the construction of narratives of literary history which prize the autochthonous over the cosmopolitan (i.e. the history of English literature as beginning from *Beowulf*, or of Bengali literature from the *Charyapada*).¹⁹ In other words, they represent a projection of national political goals onto the literary system, and, in spite of obvious difficulties arising from the non-coincidence of linguistic and political borders, this national model retains considerable power, even today, in literary studies.

Regional and global

The national-literature model is now clearly inadequate, both because a number of languages and their literatures transcend national borders, and because the de-centring of the nation-state brought about by contemporary global capitalism alters literary circulation. As such, we may begin to imagine what might reasonably be termed a global literature. This category, still more conjectural than real, consists of literatures whose linguistic reach transcends national, even continental, borders. In some senses, a global literature resembles a cosmopolitan literature, except that (at least at this time) global literatures continue to represent themselves as systems of national literatures to an extent that cosmopolitan literatures do not. They are in that sense inter-national rather than extra-national. The concept of 'global' literature, or verbal art, as it now exists in an age of proliferating media, also raises the question of how broadly 'literature' is to be defined. A definition which focuses on those texts which receive critical esteem in the West will generate a model of global literature looking much like that described by Casanova or Moretti; whereas one which embraces all verbal art, popular as well as 'literary', and including the cinematic, will acknowledge the centrality of otherwise peripheral locations such as Mumbai and Hong Kong. I do not believe we need to (or can) draw firm boundaries around categories of verbal art in this context; indeed, one of the most exciting aspects of a global literature is the extent to which it lends itself to bricolage, with texts serving different purposes in different systems of circulation.

¹⁹ Strikingly, both texts, recovered respectively in the early 19th and 20th centuries have been deployed as the autochthonous origins of multiple literatures: English and (erroneously) Danish for *Beowulf*; Bengali, Assamese and Oriya for the *Charyapada*.

In the case of global literatures the legacies of nineteenth-century empires and of contemporary global capitalism wield considerable power. The clearest example of a global literature is English, with its well-developed theoretical infrastructure of postcolonial studies and institutions such as the Booker Prize working to construct the notion that literary production and consumption in English is in principle universal (even if, like contemporary trade in goods, national borders and invisible barriers render the claim of universality and equality of access hollow). The institutional representation of the English global literary system still varies greatly from nation to nation; within the United States, a tripartite division into British, American and 'postcolonial' literature is most common, while in Canada, for example, a quadripartite structure, including Canada as a fourth term, is the norm. Postcolonial literatures are to some extent represented as a distinct system, and to some extent as a series of national or regional literatures; that is, a Nigerian author writing in English might, from different angles, be a participant in a national Nigerian literary system and also in a post-colonial circuit of Global English literature.

French literature has an undeniable claim to a similar status, as reflected in the recent literary manifesto *Pour une littérature-monde*, whose title illustrates its clear debt to Braudel.²⁰ The relationship between the status of these two literatures and contemporary political and economic systems is obvious, and is reflected in the particular interest that they both hold for Moretti and Casanova. There are few other languages that might rival English and French as global literatures, given the political and economic power, demographic weight and geographic breadth they possess; however, each of their major rivals (Chinese, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, Russian) participates in a global circulation of some kind, as do a very few other literatures under more limited circumstances. That reality is not a sign of failure or defeat (as, arguably, Casanova's model would suggest); the national, vernacular and cosmopolitan successes of these and other languages can serve to ensure their continued literary vitality, and to warrant an increased attention to their role in the current world-literary system.²¹

²⁰ Jean Rouaud and Michel Le Bris, eds, *Pour une littérature-monde*, Paris 2007.

²¹ A productive example is the collection of essays edited by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, which explores in part the connections between the two editors' respective Francophone and Sinophone interests: *Minor Transnationalisms*, Durham, NC 2005.

This survey of various modes in which literary systems operate has of necessity been generalizing and schematic, and presents problems as severe as those it attempts to address. The status of Spanish or Arabic in the modern world is an obvious case in point; the former's international, but for the most part geographically-constrained circulation, might better be called 'regional' than global, while the latter, with its preservation of a classical written language linked to a universalist religion, is in many ways a cosmopolitan language in a global era. I do not intend, however, for this to be an exhaustive survey, nor do I intend for it to provide a continuous and adequate narrative of world literary history. Rather, I hope to have at least established that the question of the structure and function of literary systems in different environments is a problem worthy of study, and that there might exist typological parallels among these systems whose examination could yield useful results for specialists in a variety of literatures.

Rather than a division of labour in which national-literature specialists produce raw data for processing by world-literature scholars, I propose a sharing of labour by which, say, specialists in Persian literature find useful theoretical and practical insights in the work of Sinologists, or Anglo-Saxonists in the work of specialists of Old Kannada. Such a sharing of labour holds out, I believe, the possibility of world literature, unhyphenated, as a coherent field of study; taking as its object not a world-literary system which maps roughly onto Wallerstein's world-system, but rather, and simply, the literature—the verbal artistic production—of the world.