

Introduction

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A persistent problem for discussions of world literature in the United States lies at the starting point of this collection. World literature is generally understood as a systematic category, as Walter Cohen has stressed (Cohen 2017, 2). Like several other scholars in the field, Cohen stresses the role of prestigious literary languages in effectively shaping the system. In his view, a sequence of major languages has served varying functions historically in establishing a structure for world literature. In an analogous way, Pascale Casanova, in a pioneering work, has focused on the prestige of the French language and on Paris as a center of literary institutions to develop an argument about the modern world literary system. Alexander Beecroft, for his part, has stressed the role of literary languages in organizing complex systems of literary circulation.¹ However illuminating or accurate these accounts are, they inevitably move the focus away from the literary languages that do not hold a sufficiently high level of prestige.² As Beecroft has pointed out, the system inevitably reduces noise. The problem that motivates this collection is that of holding in mind at once the structure of world literature and the diversity of literary languages that systematic arguments cannot help but disregard.

A parenthetical remark by Franco Moretti in the influential essay “Conjectures on World Literature” suggests a productive way to work through this difficulty: a study of world literature, Moretti stresses, is inevitably “a study of the struggle for symbolic hegemony across the world” (Moretti 2013, 56). In the light of this observation, Casanova, Beecroft, and Cohen appear to converge in calling attention to the power of hegemonic languages to shape the system of world literature. Moretti’s remark is all the more interesting for advancing a dynamic understanding

of hegemony. In his view, hegemony is asserted in the process of a broad, world-wide, continuing struggle. The approach sketched in his essay opens the way for considering literary languages that are less than hegemonic, not simply in order to explore their role in the uneven and unequal field of world literature but also, more interestingly, in order to examine the overall system from their perspective.

The essays collected here focus on specific historical moments that afford dynamic and not quite central perspectives on hegemony and, more generally, into the conflicts between diverse literary and linguistic traditions. Rather than reproduce the point of view of the current hegemonic literatures, this collection is concerned with grasping the ways that hegemony is established and the costs of losing it; what hegemony masks and the ways that it is masked. Very often, as a result, these essays discuss literatures that fall beyond the small circle of prestigious modern European languages. Such comparatively unfamiliar traditions are helpful in directing our attention to the areas of obscurity that make it a considerable challenge to trace relationships between literatures that hold different levels of prestige, or that render key features of the system indistinct.

However, it seems necessary to stress the ways in which the approach of this collection diverges from Moretti's. The collection is informed by a concern with historical, linguistic, and textual specificity that stands in contrast to this critic's project of a sociological formalism. Moretti's approach is articulated in part through a dialogue with Roberto Schwarz, and especially this critic's understanding of literary forms as abstracts of social relations.³ All too often, sociologically inspired literary analysis proceeds by deriving general hypotheses to be tested later, usually though not always, through reading. One of the difficulties embedded in this method is that the initial hypothesis may establish the direction of discussion so fully that readings will serve mainly to confirm an initial insight: Sociological formalism runs the risk of asking only questions that contain their own answers. Moretti's call for distant reading heightens the abstraction implicit in this approach, by proposing a shift of focus away from the complexities of specific texts and toward models, artificial constructs, or general structures (Moretti, 2005).

This collection grows out of a colloquium organized by the Fernand Braudel Center and Binghamton's Department of Comparative Literature in April 2016. This volume, and the colloquium that preceded it, signal a convergence of interests between the Center and the Department, or between the scholarship in historical social science that, since the 1970s, has developed around the Center and the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, and the current pedagogical practice and scholarly

concerns of the faculty of comparative literature at Binghamton. However, even as social scientists, on the one hand, and literary scholars, on the other, share an interest in world literature, their approaches do not necessarily coincide. It will be helpful to discuss the nature and limits of such a convergence. It seems important to begin by noting that Richard E. Lee's contribution, "Analysis of the Socio-Culture in the Study of the Modern World-System," articulates a sociological approach to discussions of culture from the perspective of the world system that is consistent with Wallerstein's theses.

The vocabulary of world-systems analysis was brought into the field of comparative literature most directly by Franco Moretti, in the essay discussed above, "Conjectures on World Literature." Moretti's main objective in this text is to propose an account of the history of the novel that reverses the more usual narratives, which have centered invariably on European cases. Rather than focus on the rise of the novel in "Spain, France, and especially England," Moretti argues that the modern novel "arises just about everywhere" after 1750, as a compromise between West European formal patterns and "local material." Wallerstein's understanding of the modern world as a single capitalist world system, "bound together in a relationship of growing inequality," allows Moretti to distinguish between the core countries, where formal patterns are established, and the periphery, where take shape varying, often unstable compromises between, on the one hand, local realities and narrative traditions and, on the other, prestigious foreign forms (Moretti 2013, 46–57). In contrast to Moretti, again, the essays collected here do not refer directly to the account of the political economy of the modern world that has been developed more prominently by Wallerstein; neither do they rely on the conceptual distinction between core and periphery (or center and periphery, to mention two terms that are often used in literary discussions). Instead, this collection seeks to shed an oblique light on world literature by approaching the system from the perspective of literary languages that have not attained hegemonic power, no longer hold it, perhaps have never come to engage in the struggle for hegemony, or have fallen short of hegemonic power.⁴

The chapters that focus on Islamic Spain, Al-Andalus, are useful in illustrating how productive an oblique approach to hegemony can be for historical discussions of world literature. In chapter 1, "In Search of Universal Laws: Averroes' Interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*," Tarek Shamma discusses the translation of the *Poetics* into Classical Arabic by Abu Bishr Matta bin Yunus (completed AD 932) and the later commentaries by Ibn Rushd, or Averroes. Shamma's dual focus on a translation *into Classical Arabic* and the contemporaneous philosophical context

of Averroes' commentary allows him to set aside familiar concerns with mistranslation and misunderstanding in order to call attention, instead, to the "creative transformation" of the *Poetics* by Islamic scholars and, more broadly, to the ways that foreign texts may "speak to other cultures across the limitations of time, place, and literary tradition."

In chapter 2, "Lost in Transliteration: Morisco Travel Writing and the *Coplas del hijante de Puey Monçón*," Benjamin Liu is concerned with a later period. Liu brings into sharp focus the ever-possible harmful effects of the limitations in tradition, time, and place that Shamma has alluded to. Liu discusses the verse narrative of a pilgrimage to Mecca that dates from the sixteenth century, a time when Iberian Muslims faced the systematic repression that culminated in their expulsion early in the seventeenth century. Liu considers the distinctive writing practice of *aljamiado*, which uses at once the Spanish language and Arabic script. This *aljamiado* travel narrative, he argues, embodies a tension between translation and transliteration, or between rendering familiar the distant lands visited by the pilgrim and rendering unfamiliar his everyday Spanish language. This poem, which strives to keep alive "a covert cultural memory," was nevertheless lost for centuries and had become nearly unreadable when it was recovered in the 1880s. By the time the text was recovered, Liu stresses, the community it addressed had long been dispersed to lands far from the Peninsula. If we look at this pair of chapters in the light of discussions of hegemony, Shamma's argument derives innovative insights by taking the perspective of the hegemony of Classical Arabic—which is so often obscured in narratives of the transmission of Greek philosophy—while Liu focuses on a period when Iberian Muslims had lost their hegemonic position.

The subsequent chapters of the collection are concerned predominantly with literature and film from the twentieth century on. The contributions by Hannan Hever and Karim Mattar question persistent, if generally silent, assumptions about modern world literature. Each of the two critics moves away from a focus on the literature of the nation-state, Hever by considering Hebrew literature broadly, in relation to Jewish nationality and religion, and Mattar by exploring Orhan Pamuk's engagement with Islam. Beyond that, and especially when taken together, the two chapters make a compelling case for rethinking our current understanding of modern literature as secular.

In chapter 3, "Modern Hebrew Literature as 'World Literature': The Political Theology of Dov Sadan," Hever takes the perspective of Jewish thought, and par-

ticularly of Dov Sadan (1902–1989) and the distinguished philosopher Nachman Krochmal (1785–1840), to reflect on the relationship between modern Hebrew literature and world literature. For Hever, there are clear limitations to the ways that Hebrew literature may be integrated into world literature because the theological dimension of Hebrew, a sacred language, cannot be translated. Rather than discuss a transition of Hebrew literature from sacred to secular, he maintains, it is necessary to keep in mind that Jewish nationality and the Jewish religion are conflated and fully present in Hebrew literature. Hebrew is never simply the language of a given, historical nation-state, Israel. Although it may certainly function as one among the many national literatures of the contemporary world, such an approach to Hebrew literature closes off its distinctive theological-political reach. Hever's essay addresses a topic of significant interest to comparatists: by discussing Auerbach's *Mimesis* in the context of reflections on translation by Jewish scholars, Hever calls attention to aspects of this seminal work that might otherwise escape consideration.

In chapter 4, "Islam in the Theory and Practice of World Literature: Translating *Adab* in the Middle Eastern Novel," Karim Mattar takes issue with the predominant reading of Pamuk's *The Black Book* as a secular, postmodern work. Mattar seeks to read through the modern overwriting of precolonial Arabic-Islamic literary practices in order to bring to light Pamuk's complex engagement with, at once, secularism and Islam. Together, Hever's and Mattar's chapters call attention to the irreducible religious and cultural diversity that cuts across world literature at the present time, yet remains masked by the image of a hegemonic secular modernity.

Two chapters of this collection approach world literature from the perspective of Latin America, Patrick Dove's and my own. My own contribution, "Selective Invisibility: Elizabeth Bishop, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and World Literature," chapter 5, explores the difficulty of apprehending the complex yet fruitful literary relationship that Elizabeth Bishop's poetry establishes to the work of Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902–1987). The hegemonic power of English, I argue, renders Bishop's sustained engagement with Drummond nearly invisible. I suggest that we need to triangulate between languages in order to grasp literary relationships that remain masked when we consider hegemonic languages alone—much as binocular vision achieves depth perception through triangulation. In chapter 6, "Latin America and the World: Borges, Bolaño, and the Inconceivable Universal," Dove is concerned with a critical reevaluation of the terms, *world*

and *literature*. He proceeds through readings of Borges and Roberto Bolaño, Latin American writers who have undeniably attained world literary status, approaching them in the light of a discussion of referentiality inspired by Derrida and Heidegger.

Richard E. Lee's "Analysis of the Socio-Culture in the Study of the Modern World-System," chapter 7, extends the field of discussions of world literature toward the social sciences and, specifically, toward world-systems analysis. Lee begins by outlining an understanding of capitalist modernity as a system defined by two large scale structures—a world-scale economic division of labor, which goes hand in hand with the interstate geopolitical system—and proceeds by proposing that the third arena of the system, culture, be approached through the lens of large-scale, enduring structures of knowledge. Lee concludes by offering three examples of the work that this perspective enables in approaching the contemporary university, in the understanding of the classification system of the Library of Congress, and in exploring the development of Western musical forms.

Finally, a pair of chapters discusses contemporary world cinema, moving the focus away from hegemonic film and the hegemonic traditions of reflection on cinema. In chapter 8, "Ethics of Skepticism: A Case Study in Contemporary World Cinema," Jeroen Gerrits discusses a subgenre of global art cinema, that of collision films, in particular Lucrecia Martel's *Headless Woman* and Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Three Monkeys*. Gerrits proposes the concept of cinematic skepticism, drawing on Stanley Cavell's discussion of epistemological skepticism. Both Martel and Ceylan, he argues, introduce a virtual point of view and rely on this cinematic technique to suggest at once that "our forms of knowing have their limitations" and that "our (recovery from our broken) relation to the world is not grounded in knowledge." In chapter 9, "Polycentrism, Periphery, and the Place of Brazilian Cinema in World Cinema," Cecília Mello stages a dialogue between discussions of "world cinema" in English language scholarship and Brazilian academic debates about audiovisual media. Mello calls attention to the contribution of Brazilian scholars to articulating some of the recurrent terms in discussions of world cinema, notably the conceptual contrast between center and periphery. However, Mello notes, a paradoxical result of the persistent understanding of Brazilian cinema as peripheral and underdeveloped is that it is often discussed as if it were isolated from the rest of the world, and in particular from Asia and Africa. Even as a polycentric view of world cinema proves illuminating for contemporary cinematic production, if this approach is transplanted to the Brazilian context, it gives rise to a series of

new questions: why, for instance, is the term *world cinema* so prevalent in English language scholarship, but not so frequent or comprehensible elsewhere?



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Notes

1. In contrast, David Damrosch's influential account of world literature focuses on the reader's activity rather than on the structure of the system.

2. See, in this respect, Gayatri Spivak's and Emily Apter's reservations about the category of world literature.

3. See Schwarz 1997, 51: "Neste sentido, formas são o abstrato de relações sociais determinadas." In Gledson's translation, "In this sense, forms are the abstract of specific social relationships" (Schwarz 1992, 53).

4. Pascale Casanova's arguments stand in contrast to Moretti's as well, but for a different reason. Casanova examines the modern world literary system directly from the perspective

of a sociology of literature. Rather than rely on a sociological argument for the hypothesis that enables literary discussion, Casanova is concerned with proposing an account of the world literary system by examining the institutions and mediations that shape it.

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