

GLOBALIZATION AND WORLD LITERATURE

And fast by hanging in a golden Chain
 This pendant world, in bigness as a Starr
 Of smallest magnitude close by the Moon.
 Thither full fraught with mischievous revenge,
 Accurst, and in a cursed hour he hies

Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 2, lines 1051–55

Ranjan Ghosh's orientation and argument in his chapter 5, "More than Global," are considerably different from what I say in this chapter. I have learned much from his chapter, both about his own way of thinking and about the Sanskrit and Hindi theory of literature in the context of his transcontinental, (in)fusion theory of literature. The dialogical differences, however, emerge from differences between our two ways of reading texts, Ghosh's reading of a Western poem, Wordsworth's "Daffodils," my reading of a passage by Nietzsche. A juxtaposition of the two readings is perhaps the clearest way of seeing what is at stake in the dialogue between us.

Dialogue, by the way, can have two somewhat contradictory meanings. It can mean a Habermasian give and take of conversation that has consensus as its goal, or it can mean a two-centered (dia-logue) conversation between persons who will remain in dissensus. My interchanges with Ghosh mix these two forms of dialogue. Sometimes we come to agree. At other times we remain in disagreement.

On the one hand, Ghosh reads "Daffodils" as triumphant confirmation of Rabindranath Tagore's exhortation (in Ghosh's epigraph) that one should strive "to free oneself of that regional narrowness and resolve to see the universal being in world literature, to apprehend such totality in every writer's work, and to see its interconnectedness with every man's attempt at self-expression—that is the objective we need to pledge ourselves to."

I, on the other hand, am enough dubious about what it would mean to read a poem as an example of "world literature" that I have not even tried

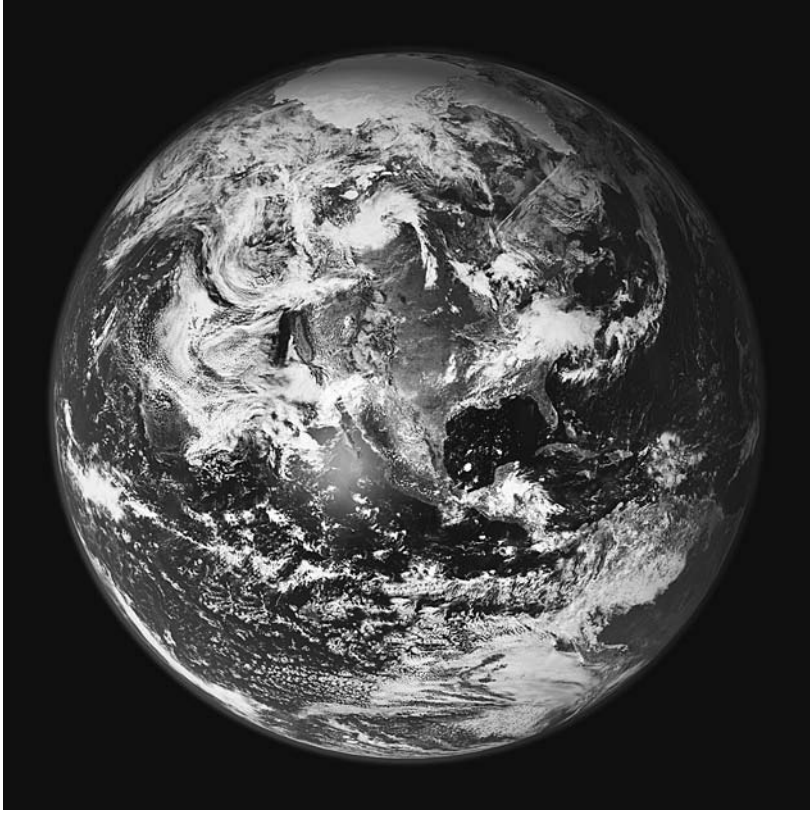


Figure 6.1 Satellite photo of earth as “Blue Marble.” Credit: NASA Goddard Space Flight Center. Image by Reto Stöckli (land surface, shallow water, clouds). Enhancements by Robert Simmon (ocean color, compositing, 3D globes, animation).

to do so. Instead, I have tried to read as best I can a passage from Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* in the context of Nietzsche’s own life situation as a nineteenth-century professor of classical philology at the University of Basel, Switzerland. I am also much more concerned than Ghosh usually is with the specificities of technological change that have brought about what we call globalization, and its concomitant, a new form of the discipline called world literature. I am also fearful that this new discipline will simply universalize Western theories of literature, whereas Ghosh does not hesitate, though with many nuances, qualifications, and caveats, and with recognition of the local in every literary text, to universalize a “more than global,” that is, to advocate a transcontinental theory and practice of poetry that is exemplified as much by Sanskrit *sahitya* as by all the

Western sources Ghosh cites. Hindi or Sanskrit theory is, for Ghosh, when combined with Western theories, as useful for reading Wordsworth's "Daffodils" as it is for reading a literary work in Sanskrit or Hindi.

My instinct, on the contrary, is to hold that a special theory should be derived in each case as much as possible from the terminology of the text at hand in the light of its specific surrounding historical, biographical, and linguistic context. Doing that, of course, is extremely difficult, if not impossible, since any readings, even the ones most submissive to the language of the text, manifest in one way or another individual commitments on the reader's part, for example, my commitment to a rhetorical reading of the tropes in a text, as opposed to Ghosh's (in)fusion theory, which tends to relate details in a poem to larger conceptual issues, such as, in his chapter 5, "worlding" or "the more than global." He discusses for twenty manuscript pages citations from a large number of Eastern and Western authors, both theorists and writers of poems and novels, before he turns to a reading of Wordsworth's "Daffodils" that develops a more than global way of reading Wordsworth's poem.

World literature, in its recently resurrected form, is indubitably a concomitant of economic and financial globalization, as well as of new, worldwide telecommunications. Marx and Engels long ago, in a famous passage in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), prophetically said just that:

And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature."¹

We are on all sides asked by the media to think globally and are given daily new information about globalization in its current form. We have also been granted, for the first time in human history, an ability to look at the earth from outer space, that is, from outside what is happening here. Millions of people all over the world have seen one or another of the unsettling space-ship or satellite photographs. They provide a distant and detached perspective on the earth, with a vengeance. To be, or to pretend to be, wholly detached and objective is, nevertheless, perhaps diabolical. Milton imagined Satan as one of the first space travelers in literature, as in the passage from early in *Paradise Lost* I have begun by citing.² Satan was not exactly detached, since his goal was to bring about the fall of man, but he certainly could see the whole earth from a distance, hanging in space,

as all the sons and daughters of Eve can do nowadays. We are not exactly detached and indifferent, either.

World literature's time has come (again). The current return to world literature is perhaps an inevitable concomitant of globalization, but I see some problems with it. The problems I see are quite different from Ghosh's rejection of world literature in the name of what he calls the more than global. He means by that the participation of every literary work in whatever language and from whatever local culture in what he calls the "sacredness of literature."

The present context for developing a rigorous discipline of world literature is not the same as the context in which Goethe, two centuries ago, proposed the reading of *Weltliteratur*. For one thing, the current flowering of a new academic discipline called world literature is, in the West at least, a permutation of the still relatively new discipline of comparative literature, something that did not yet exist in Goethe's day or in Marx's. Western comparative literature was determinately Eurocentric in its creation and consolidation. Some of its early champions, such as René Wellek, were from the Prague semiotic school, or from Slavic linguistics generally, or were exiles from Germany. In the United States and Europe, literary study was still firmly divided into departments of this or that language or family of languages, English, German, romance languages, classics, near Eastern languages, East Asian languages, Scandinavian languages, etc. Having a separate department for something called comparative literature met with a lot of resistance from those entrenched centers of power. I well remember that from my experience teaching in the English Department at The Johns Hopkins University from 1953 to 1972.

The new discipline of comparative literature varied a lot from university to university, but it was given credence by being established at elite universities like Harvard and Yale. Harry Levin did this at Harvard, and the émigré scholars Eric Auerbach and René Wellek were largely responsible for doing this at Yale, with some help eventually from younger émigré scholars like Peter Demetz, Geoffrey Hartman, and Paul de Man. In spite of the fact that such scholars all had English as a second language, comparative literature tended to have an implicit nationalism by giving one language predominance, English in Yale's case and in the United States generally. Wellek's monumental *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (1955–1992), in eight volumes, translates all its citations into English, even though his native language was Czech. He appends his citations in the

original languages in small print at the end of each volume. For René Étienne, on the contrary, the leading comparatist in France, French was the dominant language. Many departments of comparative literature, most notably the one at Yale, became centers of literary theory. Comparative literature at Yale was the center of the writing and teaching of the so-called Yale Critics.³ World literature has developed in opposition to the Eurocentrism of most Western comparative literature departments.

The present context for the development of world literature as an academic discipline also responds to the many facets of globalization today that make Eurocentrism obsolete. I say more about these conditioning contexts in other chapters in this book.

The recent, impressive development of a new discipline called world literature seems pretty far from climate change, the World Wide Web, and the recent financial meltdown, but I think it can be shown to be a somewhat different version of a pattern of inadvertent reversal evident in those forms of globalization. The renewed emphasis on the teaching and study of world literature has, without doubt, been a response to manifold forms of technological and economic globalization. Another quite different response is the widespread takeover of literature departments by those kinds of social studies called cultural studies, postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, women's studies, film studies, and so on. These developments are to a considerable degree a good thing. It is harder and harder to justify the separate study of supposedly homogeneous national literatures, or to justify the isolated study of literature separately from other cultural forms. Widespread migration from all over the world to all over the world has meant that more and more people worldwide live in ethnically diverse communities where many languages are spoken, if you can any longer call them communities. In one section of Montreal, so I am told, an astonishing fifty-six different languages are spoken. It seems natural and inevitable these days to look at literature globally.

Doing that, however, differs radically from the shift to cultural studies and their ilk. These fields of study tend to take for granted that print literature is playing a smaller and smaller role in most people's lives, as new media like film, television, Facebook, and video games replace printed novels, plays, and poems.

The ethos of fewer and fewer people worldwide is determined to any large extent by reading literature in the traditional Western sense of printed novels, poems, and plays. This transformation is no doubt occurring unevenly around the globe, but it is happening to some degree everywhere.

I wish this were not so, but the evidence shows that it is the case. As I said in my part of the introduction to this book, statistical evidence shows the astounding number of hours a day many people spend surfing the web or using a smartphone or playing video games. Such people do everything but read Shakespeare or Jane Austen, even in e-text versions. Literature, in the old-fashioned sense of printed books, moreover, is migrating to e-readers like Amazon's Kindle or Apple's iPad.

Literature, in the traditional sense, tends to be marginalized in cultural studies, as it is in the lives of the mostly younger scholar-teachers who “do cultural studies.” The new discipline of world literature, on the contrary, might be seen as a last-ditch effort to rescue the study of literature. It does this by implicitly claiming that studying literature from around the world is a way to understand globalization. This understanding allows one to become a citizen of the world. If I study world literature in a course or in a textbook, I will become a cosmopolitan, not just a citizen of this or that local monolingual community. In the course of developing the new world literature, however—through the planning of courses, the publication of textbooks, and the training of competent teachers—some problems arise. Here are three important challenges to the new discipline of world literature.

One: the challenge of translation. No single student, teacher, or ordinary reader can master all the hundreds of languages in which world literature is written. Any literary work in a given language can be translated into any other language, but difficulties of translation always exist. Will world literature have a single master language, such as Chinese or English, into which a given textbook will translate all the selections? That would appear to be a form of cultural imperialism. How can world literature avoid being dominated by some single, national academic culture? This issue arises in Ranjan Ghosh's use in his chapter 5 of a complex integument of Sanskrit words to express his reading of Wordsworth's “Daffodils.” Those Sanskrit words sound, in transcriptions of the originals into English letters, quite strange to a Westerner like me. Sahitya? Ghosh gives English meanings of those words. These are of great help. But just having a rudimentary vocabulary of Sanskrit poetics with translations of those words is not at all the same thing as reading key texts in Sanskrit poetics in the original language and then internalizing those texts in the form of an embodied attitude toward reading literature. Ghosh has apparently done that, as his chapters in this book indicate, though it is only part of his larger project of developing a transcontinental (in)fusion approach to literature that draws together sources from all over the world.

Two: the challenge of representation. A scholar can spend his or her whole life studying a single national literature and still not master it. World literature will, of necessity, for example, in textbooks or courses, work by way of relatively brief selections from the literature of many countries or regions. Such selections will always be to some degree biased or controversial. How can this bias be avoided as much as possible? Who will have the authority to decide which works in a given language or in a given national literature belong to world literature? What will be the criteria for the decisions to include or exclude? Does Franz Kafka, for example, belong to world literature? The book on Kafka by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari is subtitled *Toward a Minor Literature*.⁴ Is that a true description? Does being minor mean Kafka's works do not belong to world literature? How would you know for sure one way or the other?

David Damrosch, in the brilliant introductory essay to his *What Is World Literature?* touches with wisdom and impressive learning on all the issues I am raising. He sidesteps the problem of setting a canon of world literature by saying that "world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading."⁵ Does that mean that any literary work that is circulated and read globally automatically becomes part of world literature?

Teachers of world literature and editors of textbooks on world literature still need to decide, however, which works to help circulate and get read. Such experts also need to decide what to tell students about a work from a culture that is different from their own. Damrosch identifies succinctly the challenges to doing this. "A specialist in classical Chinese poetry," he says, "can gradually, over years of labor, develop a close familiarity with the vast substratum beneath each brief T'ang Dynasty poem, but most of this context is lost to foreign readers when the poem travels abroad. Lacking specialized knowledge, the foreign reader is likely to impose domestic literary values on the foreign work, and even careful scholarly attempts to read a foreign work in light of a Western critical theory are deeply problematic."⁶ Would that mean that reading a Western poem in the light of Sanskrit theory is also problematic? That is a dialogical question I hereby pose to Ghosh.

Three: the challenge of defining what is meant by *literature*. Goethe, in one of those famous conversations with J. P. Eckermann about world literature, serenely affirms his belief that literature is a universal. It is something possessed by every human culture, everywhere at all times. When Eckermann, Goethe's fall guy or straight man, resisted reading Chinese

novels by asking whether the one they have been discussing is “perhaps one of their most superior ones,” Goethe responded firmly:

“By no means,” said Goethe; “the Chinese have thousands of them, and had when our forefathers were still living in the woods.”

“I am more and more convinced,” he continued, “that poetry is the universal possession of mankind. . . . the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.”⁷

What Goethe says here is echoed by Ghosh’s epigraph from Tagore in chapter 5. This indicates that the notion that poetry is the universal possession of mankind is by no means limited to one culture or another. But even within a relatively homogeneous, though multilingual, culture, such as that of Western Europe and America, literature is not quite so easy to define or to take for granted as Goethe makes it sound. Nonetheless, one might say of literature what a United States Supreme Court Justice famously said about pornography: “I can’t define it, but I know it when I see it.” Literature, in its modern Western form, is not even three centuries old. Is it legitimate to globalize that parochial notion of what is meant by *literature*, to make it valid for all times and places, for all cultures? The modern Western idea of literature is parochial in the sense of being limited to Western culture during one historical time—the time of the rise of the middle class, of increasing literacy, and of the printed book. It seems unlikely that what we Westerners have meant by *literature* for the last couple of centuries would hold true worldwide. How can a discipline of world literature respect the many different conceptions of literature in different times and places throughout the world? Damrosch recognizes that literature means something different in each culture, but he says, in a circular formulation, that we can define literature as whatever people in diverse times and places take as literature. All of us, in all our diversity of cultures and conceptions of literature, know a piece of literature when we see one.

The effort to globalize literary study, admirable though it is, encounters through its deployment intrinsic features in so-called literature that unglobalize the project. These features of diversity tend, or ought to tend, to return literary study not so much to the dispersed and self-enclosed investigations of national literatures in a given language in a given time and place as to the one-by-one reading of individual works that we have decided are examples of literature. The narrowness of segregated national literature study is just what the redevelopment of world literature was trying to escape. Comprehensive study of even a single national literature,

however, is a Herculean, perhaps impossible, task. In the end, no literary work, it may be, fits the periodizing or generic generalizations that can be made about it. To speak of “the Victorian novel” is a mystified projection of unity where immense variation actually exists.

The new discipline of world literature, I conclude, problematizes itself, or ought to problematize itself, through rigorous investigation of the presuppositions that made the development of world literature as an academic discipline possible and desirable in the first place. Does that mean it is not worthwhile to read a few pages of Chinese, Hindu, Arabic, Kenyan, or Czech literature in English translation, with succinct expert commentary? Would it be better not to read bits of those literatures at all? By no means. The challenges to world literature I have identified do mean, however, that one should not exaggerate the degree to which courses in world literature are any more than a valuable first step toward giving students knowledge of literatures and cultures from all corners of the earth.

I have stressed the challenges and difficulties faced by world literature as a discipline concomitant with the new forms of globalization. That does not mean world literature should not flourish. Shakespeare, in the various plots of *As You Like It* (1600), shows pretty conclusively that love in the sense of sexual desire and love in the sense of spiritual affection may not by any means be reconciled. They form an aporia, an impasse. No bringing together of lust and love. The play ends triumphantly, however, with four marriages. These break through the impasse. Let world literature thrive, say I, just as Shakespeare’s mad King Lear says, “Let copulation thrive.”⁸

This chapter, up to this point, was presented in an earlier form as part of my presentation at a conference in Shanghai, “Comparative Literature in the Phase of World Literature: The Fifth Sino-American Symposium on Comparative Literature” (August 11–15, 2010). As I expected, I learned much from all the papers. By meeting and hearing so many of the leaders worldwide in the new discipline of world literature, I learned that this discipline is thriving globally and that a consensus is beginning to emerge about what world literature is and what it does, what its conventions and protocols are.

I found, however, especially relevant to my own reflections about world literature Thomas Beebee’s paper asking “What in the World does Friedrich Nietzsche have against *Weltliteratur*?” I found Beebee’s paper extremely provocative, not least by way of the citations from Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, the exegesis of which generated

his essay. I had so much to say about both Beebee's paper and the citations on his handout that I refrained from commenting at the time he presented his paper for fear of impolitely taking up too much time in the discussion. The following remarks, as a conclusion to this chapter, are my belated response to hearing Beebee's admirable paper.

Just what does Nietzsche have against *Weltliteratur*? In order to be brief and to avoid an interminable exegesis, I limit myself almost completely to the citations from Nietzsche in Beebee's handout. Readers of the major essays on Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* by Paul de Man, Andrzej Warminski, Carol Jacobs, and Thomas Albrecht will know how complex, contradictory, and controversial *The Birth of Tragedy* is.⁹ Warminski, in "Reading for Example," gives an example of the problems of translation I have mentioned. He shows that Walter Kaufmann, in the standard translation of *The Birth of Tragedy*, misleadingly translates the German word *Gleichnis* as "symbol." Kaufmann thereby imports the whole Romantic ideology of symbol into Nietzsche's text, whereas *Gleichnis* actually means "parable," or "figure," or just plain "image," in the sense of "likeness," which is, after all, what *Gleichnis* literally means (Warminski, *Readings*, xlv–xlv).

What Nietzsche says in the striking passage from *The Birth of Tragedy* Beebee began by citing adds one more challenge to the enterprise of world literature to the three I identify and discuss above. Readers of Nietzsche's "Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben" will remember that Nietzsche argues, paradoxically and even scandalously, that it is healthy to forget history so we can get on with living productively in the present.¹⁰ We need to start afresh without the great weight of history on our shoulders. Nietzsche's title has been translated in many different ways, in exemplification of what I say above about translation and world literature, but my German dictionary gives "advantage" and "disadvantage" as the primary meanings of *Nutz* and *Nachtheil*, not "utility" and "liability," as the Richard Gray translation I cite has it.

This essay is Nietzsche's version of James Joyce's definition of history as "the nightmare from which I am trying to awake." Nietzsche's and Joyce's views of history seem paradoxical and scandalous to us humanities professors who have given our lives to studying the history of literature, including, for many now, the history of world literature. Nietzsche himself was charged with an obligation to study and teach literary history as an Ordinarius Professor of Classical Philology at the University of Basle. Appointed at twenty-four, he was one of the youngest ever called to such

a post. The Nietzschean view is the opposite of the by no means implausible and now proverbial counterassertion that those who forget history are condemned to repeat it.

Nietzsche's basic assumption, in the extracts from *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Beyond Good and Evil* Beebee discusses, is that we now live trapped in the meshes of what he calls an "Alexandrian" culture: "Our whole modern world is entangled in the net of Alexandrian culture. It proposes as its ideal the theoretical man equipped with the greatest forces of knowledge, and laboring in the service of science, whose archetype and progenitor is Socrates."¹¹ Just what do these two sentences mean? They mean that, like the citizens of Alexandria in the twilight of the ancient Greek world, we in the modern world know everything and have accumulated all knowledge, such as was gathered in the famous library of Alexandria, or as was collected in the great European university libraries of Nietzsche's time, or as does the Internet encompass today. In these days of global telecommunications, anyone can get information about almost anything by Googling it from almost anywhere in the world, that is, wherever one has an Internet connection that allows one to open Google. Use of Google is by no means globally allowed. Moreover, even our art, in Nietzsche's view, has been enfeebled by becoming imitative. It is cut off from fresh sources of inspiration. Our poets and artists know too much about the histories of poetry and art. This is Nietzsche's version of what Harold Bloom, in the late twentieth century, was to call "the anxiety of influence."¹²

Nietzsche takes a dim view of this situation. Why? Why does Nietzsche define the power of knowing everything as like being entangled in a net? It might seem a wonderful asset to have knowledge of everything under the sun at one's fingertips. On the contrary, Nietzsche holds that just as a wild animal, a fish, or a bird caught in a net is deprived of the ability to live its life freely, so Alexandrian people are paralyzed. They are prevented from living a normal human life by knowing too much, just as we today, it may be, are made Alexandrian by being entangled in the immense knowledge provided by the Internet. Nietzsche's concept of a proper human life is to live and act in the present, in a particular situation with present problems. We must live oriented toward the future, forgetting the past. One of Beebee's citations quotes Nietzsche's citing of Goethe's praise of Napoleon to Eckermann as the type of the non-theoretical man who embodies "a productiveness of deeds."¹³ Normal human beings dwell within a local culture. This culture includes indigenous literature and other art forms. Such a culture is sequestered from other cultures and takes its assumptions, as

well as its native language, as universals. The Greeks saw everyone who did not speak Greek as barbarians. It sounded as if they were stammering “bar . . . bar . . . bar,” not speaking anything intelligible. Learning another language seemed pointless or dangerous to the Greeks. It would lead to dissonance, to the multiplication and dissolution of the self.

The word *dissonance* appears in the second of Beebee’s citations. It is taken from the last section of *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 25. The word *dissonance* appears with increasing frequency toward the end of *The Birth of Tragedy*. “If we could imagine dissonance become man—and what else is man?—this dissonance, to be able to live, would need a splendid illusion that would cover dissonance with a veil of beauty [einen Schönheits-schleier über ihr eignes Wesen].”¹⁴ A more literal translation would say “spread a veil of beauty over its own being.” *Ihr*, “its,” could refer either to dissonance or to man, but Nietzsche’s argument, after all, is that man is essentially dissonance. They are the same. Man is dissonance in living human form. (Present-day readers are likely to note, by the way, the imperturbable sexism of Nietzsche’s formulations. He speaks of dissonance become man, not man and woman. *Mensch* apparently includes everyone, both men and women. Sexual difference does not matter to Nietzsche, at least not in these citations. *Birth* is used in the title without apparent reference to the fact that only women can give birth.)

Just what is Nietzsche’s dissonance? Thomas Beebee was perhaps too reticent or too intellectually chaste to say anything, so far as I can remember his oral presentation, about that dissonant can of worms, the vexed opposition between the Dionysian and the Apollonian that ambiguously organizes the whole of *The Birth of Tragedy*. That opposition is especially salient as the leitmotif of section 25. In incautiously opening that can of worms, I say the opposition ambiguously organizes *The Birth of Tragedy*. The opposition is ambiguous because, though at first it seems that the Dionysian and the Apollonian are clear opposites, it turns out that matters are not quite so simple. The Dionysian, it appears, refers to the underlying cacophony of the universal Will (an echo of Schopenhauer), “the Dionysian basic ground of the world.”¹⁵ Music and Greek tragedy (Sophocles and Aeschylus, but not Euripides) are direct expressions of this Dionysian “basic ground of the world.”¹⁶ “Music and tragic myth are equally expressions of the Dionysian capacity of a people, and they are inseparable.”¹⁷

The full title of Nietzsche’s book, after all, is *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. Just why Nietzsche says “spirit of music” rather than just “music” is a difficult question to answer. Apparently the spirit of music

precedes actual musical compositions, such as those operas by Wagner that are Nietzsche's prime example of the modern Dionysian. The spirit of music and music, Nietzsche's phrasing implies, are two different things. In any case, the Apollonian seems clearly opposed to the Dionysian. "Man" cannot face the Dionysian directly and go on living. It has to be covered over with a veil of beautiful illusion: "This dissonance [that is, dissonance become man in a *Menschwerdung*], in order to be able to live, would need a splendid illusion that would spread a veil of beauty over its own being." As T. S. Eliot puts this, "Human kind / Cannot bear very much reality."¹⁸

This opposition seems clear enough. It has an Apollonian, reasonable clarity. The more one reads carefully, however, everything Nietzsche wrote about the Dionysian and the Apollonian, including the abundant notes written prior to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche's letters of the time, the recanting "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," written for the third edition of the book (1886), and the comments on *The Birth of Tragedy* in *Ecce Homo* (written 1888, published 1908), the more complicated matters become. The edition of 1886 even had a different title: *Die Geburt der Tragödie, oder: Griechenthum und Pessimismus* (The Birth of Tragedy, or: Hellenism and Pessimism). More and more, the careful reader comes to recognize that the Dionysian and the Apollonian, even at the time of the first edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), are not opposites. They are, to borrow Jacobs's word, "stammering" permutations of one another as slightly different "transfigurations" or figurative displacements of an original dissonance that, pace Schopenhauer, can never be expressed directly.

That dissonance can only be figured by one or another catachresis, that is, by a borrowed word or phrase used to name something that has no proper name. Dissonance, after all, is not music but the absence of music in clashing sound, just as stammering is language that is not language but the product of a speech impediment that produces repetitive dissonant sounds, like "bar, bar, bar." Already in section 25 of *The Birth of Tragedy* the same word, *transfiguration*, is used to define what Dionysiac music, tragic myth, and Apollonian illusion all do in different ways: "Music and tragic myth are equally expression of the Dionysian capacity of a people, and they are inseparable. Both derive from a sphere of art that lies beyond the Apollonian; both transfigure a region in whose joyous chords dissonance as well as the terrible image of the world fade away charmingly."¹⁹ Only Apollonian form, apparently, can save us from the formlessness of the Dionysian: "Of this foundation of all existence—the Dionysian basic ground of the world—not one whit more may enter the consciousness of the

human individual than can be overcome again by this Apollonian power of transfiguration.”²⁰

The reader is left, in the end, with an opposition not between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, but between the primordial, underlying dissonance, on the one hand, and, on the other, both the Dionysian and the Apollonian in all their various permutations as forms of the transfiguration (in the sense of turning into figures) of what mankind cannot face directly and go on living. These apparently clear figures, however, betray their origin in their own stammering dissonance. Carol Jacobs has in her brilliant essay “The Stammering Text: The Fragmentary Studies Preliminary to *The Birth of Tragedy*” conclusively demonstrated this in her admirable reading of the notebooks (especially notebook 9) preliminary to *The Birth of Tragedy*.²¹ Her essay culminates in an exegesis of Nietzsche’s use of the word *stammeln* (stammer) both in the notebooks and once in *The Birth of Tragedy* itself.²² Jacobs’s difficult insight might be summarized by a slight extension of her epigraph from *The Birth of Tragedy* itself: “Thus the intricate relation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian in tragedy may really be symbolized by a fraternal union of the two deities: Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo; and Apollo, finally the language of Dionysus.”²³

In truth, Nietzsche, as Albrecht and others of the scholars listed in my endnotes argue, saw both the Dionysian and the Apollonian as generating out of their own stammering dissonance the illusion of primordial dissonance, rather than just being figurative transfigurations of it. My word *catagresis*, as I said in chapter 4, the tropological name for a “forced or abusive transfer,” hints at this possibility.²⁴ I refrain from pursuing this rabbit any further down its rabbit hole. It is a good example of the way an innocent-looking word, *dissonance*, can lead to a virtually interminable reading that ultimately includes everything the author wrote and its dissonant (and therefore resistant to totalization) intellectual, cultural, and linguistic context.

Nietzsche’s harsh judgment of Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* is a concomitant of this larger set of contextual assumptions. Specialists in world literature know many languages, many cultures, many literatures. They set these all next to one another in simultaneity, as exemplary of a universal or global literature that began thousands of years ago and that still flourishes everywhere in the inhabited world. The efflorescence of world literature as an academic discipline today is clearly a concomitant of globalization, as I began this chapter by asserting. Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) saw this, ironically, as civilization, humanizing, progress, or “the *democratic*

movement in Europe,” that is, as “an immense *physiological* process . . . the slow emergence of an essentially *super-national* and nomadic species of man, who possesses, physiologically speaking, a maximum of the art and power of adaptation as his typical distinction.”²⁵ This process has now reached a hyperbolic level. The new, nomadic species of man takes many forms today, but it might be personified in the scholar who travels much of the time all over the world by jet plane, as I used to do, to attend conferences and to give papers that are heard by participants who come from all over the world, the globe compacted to the size of a lecture hall.

In the light of this brief establishment of a wider context for world literature, as Nietzsche saw its “disadvantage” for life, I now turn back to the first citation Thomas Beebee made from *The Birth of Tragedy*. The narrower context of Nietzsche’s putdown of world literature is Goethe’s celebration of it in that famous interchange with Eckermann, already cited, about Chinese novels as a manifestation of world literature. The Chinese, Goethe told Eckermann, had novels when we Europeans were still living in the woods. “The epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach,” said Goethe with his usual somewhat ironic cheerfulness. It is coming anyway, so why not hasten its coming, or, rather, we *should* therefore hasten its coming. Goethe, as opposed to Nietzsche, saw no danger in world literature. In his serene and sovereign imperturbability, he welcomed its coming, perhaps because he was sure he would be part of it, as has certainly turned out to be the case.

Nevertheless, the effects on Goethe’s Faust of total knowledge should give the reader pause. Beebee’s citations include a reference in *The Birth of Tragedy* to Goethe’s Faust as the type of modern man’s omniscience turning against itself in a perpetual dissatisfaction: “How unintelligible must *Faust* [He means Goethe’s Faust], the modern cultured man, who is in himself intelligible, have appeared to a true Greek. . . . Faust, whom we have but to place beside Socrates for the purpose of comparison, in order to see that modern man is beginning to divine the limits of this Socratic love of knowledge and yearns for a coast in the wide waste of the ocean of knowledge.”²⁶

Well, just what does Nietzsche have against Weltliteratur? Here is the crucial passage Beebee cites. It must be scrutinized closely: “Our art reveals this universal distress: in vain does one depend imitatively on all the great productive periods and natures; in vain does one accumulate the entire ‘world-literature’ around modern man for his comfort; in vain does one place oneself in the midst of the art styles and artists of all ages, so that one may give names to them as Adam did to the beasts: one still re-

mains eternally hungry, the ‘critic’ without joy or energy, the Alexandrian man, who is at bottom a librarian and corrector of proofs, and wretchedly goes blind from the dust of books and from printers’ errors.”²⁷

Just what is the “universal distress,” the unassuaged need for “comfort,” the eternal hunger that modern man suffers? The passage just cited from *The Birth of Tragedy*, as well as other passages from Nietzsche’s writings, indicate that it is the distress of a successful Socratic, Faustian, or even a Kantian or Hegelian, search for total knowledge, empirically verified and epistemologically sound. This search has turned against itself through its very success. This reversal has left modern man in a state of universal distress, typified by the eternal dissatisfaction of Goethe’s Faust. The dissatisfying superabundance of knowledge that causes Faust grief is exemplified today by the more or less limitless knowledge about everything under the sun, and beyond the sun, available on the Internet.

The immediate context of the passage just cited from section 18 of *The Birth of Tragedy* affirms clearly that this superabundance of knowledge is the cause of universal distress. The whole section, however, is complex and would demand a lengthy exposition. To put what Nietzsche says in an oversimplifying nutshell, the search by theoretical, scientific, or scholarly man for the power and equanimity granted by a comprehensive knowledge has reversed itself by reaching the irrational and illogical, from which theoretical man recoils in fear:

It is certainly a sign of the “breach” of which everyone speaks as the fundamental malady of modern culture, that the theoretical man, alarmed and dissatisfied at his own consequences, no longer dares entrust himself to the terrible icy current of existence: he runs timidly up and down the bank.²⁸ So thoroughly has he been pampered by his optimistic views that he no longer wants to have anything whole, with all of nature’s cruelty attaching to it. Besides, he feels that a culture based on the principles of science must be destroyed when it begins to grow *illogical*, that is, to retreat before its own consequences.²⁹

In this extraordinary passage, rational knowledge is said to overreach itself and become dangerously illogical, irrational. This is the “distress” of which Nietzsche speaks in the opening sentence of the first citation Beebe discussed: “Our art reveals this universal distress.”

Just how, for Nietzsche, does this revelation through the art of the present moment, that is, the moment of the late nineteenth century in Europe, occur? It happens, says Nietzsche, through the Alexandrian

derivative and imitative quality of today's art. Present-day artists and poets know too much literary history and too much art history to produce other than feeble imitations of the great productive artists and poets of the past. Nietzsche's formulations take place, you will have noticed, through a cascade of phrases beginning with "in vain." It is as a member of this sequence that the failure of world literature to give modern man comfort in his distress is asserted. Categorizing art styles and periods in the literature of all ages and countries (for example, speaking of Baroque, Romantic, or Victorian styles), work all we literary historians perform, is as arbitrary and ungrounded as are, to a skeptical eye, those names Adam gave to all the beasts.

The bottom line is that for Nietzsche world literature, far from giving modern man comfort in his distress, fails completely to do that. In fact, turning to world literature is one of the signal ways that distress manifests itself and is exacerbated. As far as Nietzsche is concerned, it would be better not to know, better to forget all those alien literatures that swarm around the globe. It would be better to live as Nietzsche implies Athenian Greeks did, that is, in joyful possession of a narrow local culture that ignored all other cultures and literatures and saw them as barbarous.

Nietzsche's view of Greek culture is not quite so simple, however. *The Birth of Tragedy* ends with paragraphs asserting that Athenian Apollonian beauty was a compensation for Dionysian madness: "In view of this continual influx of beauty, would he [someone today imagining himself a curious stranger in ancient Athens] not have to exclaim, raising his hand to Apollo: 'Blessed people of Hellas! How great must Dionysus be among you if the god of Delos [Apollo] considers such magic necessary to heal your dithyrambic madness.'"³⁰ Nietzsche imagines an old Athenian's responding, "But say this, too, curious stranger: how much did this people have to suffer to be able to become so beautiful!"³¹ The Dionysian causes suffering. The Apollonian is beautiful.

Nietzsche's forceful rejection of world literature already manifests in hyperbolic form the reversal that was the climax of the paper I gave at the Shanghai Symposium (that is, the original version of the first part of this chapter). The new discipline of world literature, I said, "problematizes itself, or ought to problematize itself, through rigorous investigation of the presuppositions that made the development of world literature as an academic discipline possible and desirable in the first place." One of the bad effects of the discipline of world literature, Nietzsche implies, is that it transforms scholars into something like what Nietzsche became or feared

becoming as a professor of classical philology. Nietzsche's description is memorably sardonic. It recalls George Eliot's description in *Middlemarch* of Edward Casaubon and his futile pursuit of the Key to All Mythologies. Here again is Nietzsche's description: "The 'critic' without joy or energy, the Alexandrian man, who is at bottom a librarian and corrector of proofs, and wretchedly goes blind from the dust of books and from printers' errors." It may have been in part fear of becoming like this critic that led Nietzsche to resign his professorship. His main, overt reason was trouble with his eyesight. Here is Eliot's description of Casaubon: "Poor Mr. Casaubon himself was lost among small closets and winding stairs, and in an agitated dimness about the Cabeiri, or in an exposure of other mythologists' ill-considered parallels, easily lost sight of any purpose which had prompted him to these labors."³² What circulates in Casaubon's veins is neither blood nor passion but marks of punctuation, just as Nietzsche's dry-as-dust scholar spends his time with misprints. As Mrs. Cadwallader, one of Casaubon's sharp-tongued neighbors, says, "Somebody put a drop [of his blood] under a magnifying-glass, and it was all semicolons and parentheses."³³ For both Nietzsche and Eliot, culture as enshrined in texts is reduced to concern with the materiality of the letter or of punctuation marks, such as have preoccupied me in revising and footnoting this essay. Friedrich Nietzsche, the precociously brilliant young professor of classical philology, may have written an outrageously unorthodox first book (*The Birth of Tragedy*) as a way to avoid becoming just another classical philologist.

I make one final observation. I intended to make a few brief comments about Thomas Beebee's admirable paper and about the citations from Nietzsche on which he focused. As I might have foreseen, my comments have got longer and longer and might be yet longer. They extend themselves indefinitely. What Thomas Beebee, and then I, following in his footsteps, have said about Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of *Weltliteratur* indicates that theoretical statements about world literature require as much contextualizing exposition as do works of world literature themselves. Such statements must be read, and they must be contextualized.

I do not think we can ever go back to a world of isolated societies, each with its own indigenous culture. To wish we could all be like the putatively happy ancient Athenians, as Nietzsche sometimes seems to do, is, in my view, a form of unproductive nostalgia. We must make do with what we have, which is a worldwide Alexandrian culture. The new efflorescence of world literature as an academic discipline is a natural concomitant of this.

Its great value is that even if it does not give “comfort,” it does help us to understand and to live productively in the new, uncomfortable world of global telecommunication and global wandering that Nietzsche calls nomadism. The encounters between me and Ranjan Ghosh in the alternating chapters of this book are attempts to exemplify in another way such an “understanding and living productively.”

Though Ghosh and I agree in putting the new discipline of world literature in question, our questioning comes from opposite directions. Our chapters 1 and 2 somewhat unexpectedly ended in my recognition of a consonance, or at least resonance, between Ghosh’s concept of *Sahitya*, which is one version of his sacredness of literature, and my only slightly ironic allegiance to “the imaginary” as expounded by Wolfgang Iser and Maurice Blanchot. Our chapters 5 and 6 are not so happily in tune, even though in both cases the exposition is structured as a juxtaposition of a theory section and a section “close reading” a text, a poem by Wordsworth in Ghosh’s chapter, a passage from Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* in my chapter. Ghosh challenges the new discipline of world literature in the name of the more than global, that is, in the name of a complex theory of literature based on both Eastern and Western sources that works as well for Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” as it would for any poem in Chinese, Sanskrit, Hindi, or Bengali. I challenge world literature in the name of the irreducible idiosyncrasy and specificity of each literary work, for example, Wordsworth’s “Daffodils.” That individuality can, I claim, be assimilated neither to a more than global theory nor to whatever may be said about the characteristics of English Romantic literature or even of Wordsworth’s poetry. The most important features of “Daffodils” are *sui generis*. Moreover, my “theory section” in this chapter by no means takes Nietzsche, much less Goethe, as solid foundations for a theory of world literature. Both Goethe and Nietzsche, I hold, must be read with a critical eye and with close attention to problematic linguistic details in what they wrote, not as solid foundations on the basis of which a correct more than global theory of literature might possibly be constructed.