

Globalism or Globalization?

Marshall Brown

Of the ten special issues of *Modern Language Quarterly* that I have edited or overseen, “Globalism on the Move” has cost the most effort and exerted the greatest fascination. Kafka’s fable “Before the Law” is, among other things, a reminder that each of us enters the world through a different door. If, as editor, I acknowledge that my path lies through a European door, it still is my own, and I hope that its particular slant of light offers a distinctive perspective. Comprehensiveness is unattainable, but I sought contributors representing a breadth of cultural spheres, kinds of writing, and historical epochs from earliest antiquity through the day after tomorrow. My invitations were guided by three beliefs arising out of my Euro-comparatist background and literary-historical interests. First, globalism is a worldwide phenomenon, and competing cultures and nations that stake conflicting claims all deserve the same sympathetic-skeptical attention. I wanted the discussion of globalism in *MLQ* to be as plurilingual and pluricultural as the journal could accommodate. Second, globalism is an age-old phenomenon. Today’s globe may be smaller or flatter (or, in another account, larger and rounder) than in earlier ages, but there have always been imperia and colonies. Globalism is excursive in time as well as in space, and if imperialism suggests expansion, it inevitably also suggests changing modalities. Hence the issue title, “Globalism on the Move.” If it paid no attention to the dynamic varieties of the past, *MLQ* would not be a journal of history, in any fashion. Third, it would not be a journal of literary history without a commitment to the imaginative dimen-

sions of experience. I looked for authors who would reflect on ideas and visions, not just on processes and compulsions. For better and worse, I would like to think, globalism is steered by people. “At the bare bottom,” as one critic has written, “postcolonial theory is the assertion of the centrality of the literary in the diagnosis and representation of the social terrain that we have been discussing under the sign of globalization.”¹ I intended this issue of *MLQ* not only to endorse that claim but to trump it: literature, in this journal, does not merely diagnose and represent but elevates, levels, spades, plows, and fertilizes the social terrain.

Of course, the globe is contested turf, and no responsible view of this topic would expect all contributors to speak alike. Yet they do have in common a belief in unlimited horizons. Wai Chee Dimock has perhaps said it best:

As a set of temporal and spatial coordinates, the nation is not only too brief, too narrow, but also too predictable in its behavior, its sovereignty uppermost, its borders defended with force if necessary. It is a prefabricated box. Any literature crammed into it is bound to appear more standardized than it is: smaller, tamer, duller, conforming rather than surprising. The randomness of literary action—its unexpected readership, unexpected web of allegiance—can be traced only when that box is momentarily suspended, only when the nation-state is recognized as a necessary but insufficient analytic domain, ceding its primacy upon scale enlargement.²

Implicit in Dimock’s formulation is the dialectical character of the large-scale, deep time she evokes. However named, the imagined totality is always uncanny. As “globe” it rotates and is always half in shadow, as “planet” (the preferred designation of Dimock, as of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Paul Gilroy) it is an eccentric wanderer, as Gary Snyder’s “earth” it is strangely material in its disruptiveness, as “world” it

¹ Simon Gikandi, “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100 (2001): 647. I thank Muhsin J. al-Musawi for pointing me to Gikandi’s essay.

² Wai Chee Dimock, “Planetary Time and Global Translation: ‘Context’ in Literary Studies,” *Common Knowledge* 9 (2003): 489, revised formulation in *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3.

belongs to the phantasmic realm of *Geist*; in all its manifestations, its *longue durée* intrudes at surprising, suspensive moments.³ To be sure, the global might dispute the local as well as the national, personal *Erlebnis* as well as collective *Erfahrung*,⁴ but in any guise it is a horizontal phenomenon, dynamic because never fully visible. That is what constitutes it as an idea.⁵

Of the authors in this collection, Tony Day most directly confronts globe with nation. Pramoedya Ananta Toer's acclaimed nationalism fed on a temporally deep, culturally expansive, transnational tradition. He wrote in Bahasa Indonesia, the simplified common idiom of the modern nation. But as Day shows, Pramoedya, speaking out for the nation (and for decades in opposition to its government), drew strength from roots burrowing into the ancient languages of the archipelago and spreading throughout the cultures of the Sanskrit dominion. Nation and globe nourish one another, and the declaration of independence cannot be disentangled from a pledge of allegiance. David Damrosch also searches back, into almost prehistoric time, to illuminate both the growth of cultures and a curiously small fact that hedges them in. A new writing system can be learned with more or less ease, yet every system seems to enable and constrain global expansion almost unconsciously. The psychology of Assyria is beyond our ken, but from Damrosch's demonstrations one may at least speculate on the internal pressures driving and then impeding that civilization. Of all the essays in this collection, his most directly confronts the horizontal dialectic

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 9–85. For Snyder see Dimock, *Through Other Continents*, 173–81.

⁴ See Marshall Brown, "Multum in Parvo: Comparatism in Lilliput," in *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Haun Saussy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 249–58; and Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006), esp. 101–13.

⁵ Of interest because so startlingly askew of current discussions is Albrecht Koschorke, *Die Geschichte des Horizonts: Grenze und Grenzüberschreitung in literarischen Landschaftsbildern* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990). Koschorke's horizon is personal and religious, not social and ethical; it lies between immanence and transcendence, not between singularity and totality. From his angle, "the world as globe" represents "the ongoing colonization of space and its consequent shriveling in imagination" (304; my translation). Would that the woes of colonialism could be so readily subordinated to the "utopian energies" (305) of the romantic imagination!

of globalism. The negative or conflictual dialectic is most directly confronted in Haun Saussy's essay, though here the key term is *world*—unless indeed it is *and*. From the European perspective, “China and the world” claims China for a global ideal, much compromised and perhaps even deluded in its application; from the Chinese perspective, the same phrase defies the globe in a much compromised, perhaps deluded competitive stance. These three confrontations present different versions of the phantasmic dialectic implicit in global imaginings.

I am particularly pleased to include two essays that discuss the Arabic domain. By one count, Arabic is the fifth most widely spoken language in the world (after Mandarin, Hindi, English, and Spanish);⁶ it has an ancient and ever-vibrant literary tradition; and the riches and complexity of the cultures it spans surely demand greater attention from us as we seek to rebuild the literal and metaphorical bridges burned by political and military conflagrations. The essay by Rebecca Carol Johnson, Richard Maxwell, and Katie Trumpener emphasizes a dialogue from which all parties have profited: it describes tales circulating among cultures, generating value all along the way, in a history without victims and victors. To be sure, the whole globe is not implicated, but the power of movement receives its due, transcending not just the limitations of any putatively single culture but also the capacities of any single scholar. Conversely, Muhsin J. al-Musawi highlights a clash of worlds. The energy it generates is thrilling, in a diversified culture of contemporary narrative stretching across many countries, much of it not yet accessible in translation. Both outlet and outrage, the “global order” here sounds like a disorder when it issues “unsettling challenges to communal identities”; informationalization promotes “interactively engaged literature” with a far more “mixed agenda” than is often visible in Western news reporting. Whatever value we attribute to the slow, enduring migration of Shahrazad's stories or to the ferment of the immediate cultural moment, they demonstrate that Euro-Americans are linked in countless ways to Arabic culture, now and forever.

Al-Musawi concludes that “the global order is a fact on the ground,” but his ground is no easy level; it soars into the technosphere and “will

⁶ See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_languages_by_number_of_native_speakers (accessed January 17, 2007).

definitely keep Arabic literature and culture,” in an essential mixing of his metaphor, “in high alert.” Global views are sublime: elevating and disturbing, revealing and confusing. The hope that if you rise high enough you can see all the way around is probably inescapable and certainly unappeasable. The utopian dimension of globalism rises up in the other three essays in this collection. Jahan Ramazani turns to poetry, a more compact medium than prose, hence, if less extensively mimetic, then by the same token “more quick and nimble.” Poetry is swift, freely associative, and “affiliative”; it thereby dislodges identities and projects intersections. These have always been poetic functions, both of epic and of lyric, from ancients to moderns; Pope’s verse traveled to China and James Thomson’s to Siberia and the Ganges with equal swiftness. Without downplaying the risks or the pain that often (as in Plath) accompanies the exhilaration, Ramazani’s high-speed essay turns up the volume of global encounters in a way that probably no reader of extended prose could match. Still, prose may capture a depth that poetry overflies, as Monika Kaup’s presentation of one kind of utopian encounter suggests. In the thrill of reanimating for new uses a seemingly exhausted tradition, Latin Americans imagine a future that “is entirely fabulous.” Surely, I am not the only one to sense the glitter of Hollywood in that adjective. The fabled neobaroque is evidently fab as well as fabulated; it has its sheen in common with the romance of Shahrazad as well as with Riyadh chicks. I feel some of that storied radiance in most of the essays in this collection; no doubt it is one reason for the fascination of the exotic writing systems from millennia ago that have captured Damrosch’s imagination. Kaup concludes by pitting Latin American energies against the “oppressive weight” of Jamesonian realism. If (as Jameson famously said) “history is what hurts,” then globalism is what soars beyond the historical destinies constricting subject peoples.⁷

So, I would hope, it may sometimes be. But Jameson sees the future, too, and does so, as Eric Cazdyn shows, in a more mixed, dialectically tensed tone. Globalism is a utopian dream. Like any dream, it sublimates infinite conflicts, and like any utopia, it remains out of reach, a

⁷ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 102.

regulative ideal that, in a regulated world, may prove less inspiring than any of Kant's. Disruption and shock—the Jamesonian “car crash”—are categories that Cazdyn's contribution has in common with several of the others, and the shock may come from the inconspicuously small as easily as from the terrifyingly large. In the last analysis—which is to say, in any genuine project—the energies of globalism can never dispense with electricity, and the risks of electrocution must always be acknowledged and faced.

Cazdyn's point brings to my mind one of the more forgettable novels of the eighteenth century. Possessed of more sensibility than sense, though widely admired in its time, Wilhelm Heinse's *Ardinghello and the Fortunate Isles* (1787) is the fable of a band of sixteenth-century Italians who defy the Turkish empire so as to establish a home in the Aegean for all humanity. The bonds with present-day global ideals appear inescapably in the novel's brief final paragraphs:

As for the whole human race, separated by seas and mountains and climate, by customs and languages, what head will bring order to it? Nature seems like a child eternally in love with multiplicity and therefore wishes at all times, round about the earth, Scythians, Persians, Athens and Sparta.

The particular secret of our constitution, which was confided only to those who had distinguished themselves with heroic deeds and great understanding, consisted in putting an end to the rule of the Turks in this pleasant climate and raising humanity back into its dignity.⁸

There is not much to complain of here, so long as we permit ourselves to understand the demonization of the Turks generically, bearing no relationship to the peoples and polities of our day. But perhaps, as “Anti-anti” implies, there is not much to hope for, either. Heroic deeds and great understanding don't come cheap. Hence the novel comes to a car crash of its own in a single last sentence that rescues Heinse's utopianism from indulgent fatuity. In the double-dealing, double negative of the global imaginary, utopia can only live off its own demise. Heinse's sentence is memorable for its brevity, and I translate it with an authentic defamiliarization by preserving the German word order, with the

⁸ Wilhelm Heinse, *Ardinghello und die glückseligen Inseln* (Leipzig: Insel, 1962), 351; my translation.

subject dangling ominously at the end. Imagine this dry deflation after four hundred effusive pages: “But thwarted this after blessed interval implacable fate.” Not even that brutal translation does it, though. For the German word for “interval” is *Zeitraum*. The timespace of globalism is also the spacetime of science fiction and of utopia. Cazdyn and Jameson know that, and so, for one blessed moment, did Heine.

The various titles I weighed for this collection all included the focal term *globalism*. The contributors, however, speak more frequently of globalization; so do the book and essay titles they cite. Most striking to me are Saussy’s phrases, “globalization, then, or rather globalism” and “globalization, or rather globality.” There is evidently a terminological quandary here. Rather than elide it, I would like to see the split focus as part of the global dialectic. By globalism I understand an idea, an image, a potential; by globalization a process, a material phenomenon, a destiny. Not everyone will accede to this usage. But whatever else emerges from these essays, a prime motive throughout lies in the complex countercurrents of globalisms or globalizations near and far, past, present, and future. Globalism and globalization are things that we all desire and resist, create and succumb to, in the vast, crowded, sometimes inhospitable world we call home.

I would never want to conclude a collection without thanking all the participants. In this case (as almost always) they include some who have waited patiently for years and others who have struggled nobly to beat the bell. None has escaped the editorial tool, which I hesitate to label as either scalpel or blunderbuss, and all have delivered wonderful work. I give particular thanks to Monika Kaup, whose globalism lecture series at the University of Washington started the ball rolling, and to Ivan Kidoguchi, without whose lightning efficiency and volcanic creativity it could never have reached the finish line.

