

It's Only the End of the World

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“If it’s Tuesday, this must be Belgium!” As Emily Apter points out in her latest book, the teaching of World Literature in the contemporary US academy has become analogous to those lightning two-week tours of cultural marvels and monuments satirized in a 1969 Mel Stuart movie, the title of which supplies my opening quotation. From the literary equivalent of the Parthenon, one travels rapidly to the Roman Colosseum, the Eiffel Tower, the Alcazaba of Málaga, Buckingham Palace, the pyramids at Giza, and the Hagia Sophia. These days, there might be the odd side trip to the Great Wall of China, Machu Picchu, and the Ajanta Caves. (Apter has her own version of the tour itinerary on pages 326–28 of her book.) *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* has recently gone into its third—and largest—edition and is used by tens of thousands of students every year. It is not the only anthology in existence, and teaching manuals on World Literature proliferate by the minute. World Literature is good for business: good for publishers, good for college enrollments, and good for the profes-

Book Reviewed: Emily S. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (New York: Verso, 2013). This work is cited parenthetically by page number only.

boundary 2 41:2 (2014) DOI 10.1215/01903659-2686151 © 2014 by Duke University Press

sors who can earn a down payment or two by writing a successful textbook. According to Goethe and Marx, its earliest theoretical proponents, World Literature is, for better or worse, itself a symptom of commercial expansion.

Before entering into a more detailed discussion of the Untranslatable, which is the key contribution of *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, I would like to pinpoint more closely the object of Apter's main criticism: "Severed from place, thrown into the maw of the global culture industry or survey course, and subject to pedagogical transmission by instructors with low levels of cultural literacy and nonexistent knowledge of a translated work's original language, local or native literature relinquishes its defining self-properties once it is exported and trafficked like an artifact" (326).

This situation engenders, according to Apter, a highly problematic epistemological compatibility between World Literature and neoliberal globalization because World Literature, "like the world-class museum or art collection, affirms a psychopolitical structure of possessive collectivism . . . scaled up to the proportions of World" (328–29). My (or rather, "our") part of the world is made a metonym for the World as such. The "us" here is the hypereducated American elite and the global elites that resemble it and are largely trained in its academies, a group that regards itself as worthy of the cosmopolitan moniker. Its metonymic move of "possessive collectivism" is homologous with that of the ideological structure of neoliberal globalization, which takes a tiny part of the world (a supposedly "level playing field" in electronically enabled economic exchange) and makes of that The Globe as such. Hence, linking the two, the current rush to "globalize" curricula all over the higher education system by adding more and more "coverage."

Against World Literature does not tackle the nuts and bolts of teaching "The Survey" in a large public or private college or university. It is hard to imagine this book having a significant impact on the way World Literature survey classes are actually taught in the vast majority of undergraduate programs, even though the instructors in those programs may well be the kind of faculty and graduate students who read it. This is not a fault of the book's or of Apter's, and I hold out the rather utopian hope that imagining and enacting curricular change on the basis of Apter's searching critique is possible—and not only in elite and well-funded institutions. However, there is currently no pedagogical, epistemological, and institutional preparation for any teaching cohort for World Literature in the United States that could address adequately the problems she highlights. If taken with the seriousness it deserves, Apter's *Against World Literature* would throw

99 percent of today's World Literature classes into complete disarray. What this reveals, though, is that World Literature is itself a (moderately lucrative) mode of damage control.¹ It manages a twin crisis: that almost no one is qualified to teach it, and that the humanities are under attack from both intellectual and economic quarters. Furthermore, this book contrastively highlights both the inertia working against curricular change and the theoretical and epistemological forms that have developed to patch over that inertia. It is worthwhile stating these rather stark conditions of the problem at the outset so as to be able to determine more accurately what Apter's site of intervention actually is, and the kinds of moves toward changes in pedagogy and research that we might realistically hope would emerge from it and from works like it.

The intended politics of the book are stated in the introduction: an *implied* "politics of literature critical of global literary management within corporate education" (16). Global literary management is represented by the recent proliferation of critical and theoretical discourse about World Literature. Apter charts the rise of World Literature (capital "W," capital "L") as a "disciplinary construct" (2)—an institutional formation within the US (and to some extent the French) tertiary and posttertiary academy. The roster of names representing the main current of this "disciplinary rallying point" (1) will be familiar to anyone who has read about the topic in the past several years: David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, Djelal Kadir, Wai Chee Dimock, Christopher Prendergast, and others.

This is indeed what Apter is against in *Against World Literature*, but fortunately hers is a far richer and more generative book than the preposition would suggest. The syntagm "Against X" is an old rhetorical device signaling refutation in a legal context and developing into a sign of polemical discourse. It has a distinctly prosecutorial air about it. Thus, in regular usage from at least the time of Demosthenes's judicial orations, the Greek prefix *κατὰ* translates into the Latin *contra*, as in many Roman speeches and works, such as Augustine's *Contra Academicos* (*Against the Academicians*, one of several "Contra X's" by Augustine); and it is also translated (using another Greek preposition) into the German political and philosophical tradition by the formula "Anti-X" (as in Friedrich Engels's *Anti-Dühring*). A famous and comparatively recent title using the formula is Susan Sontag's

1. For a bleak and uncompromising diagnosis of this condition, including the situation of the humanities as "damage control," see the introduction to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1–34.

sometimes polemical *Against Interpretation*. Even the small nexus of linkages I have sketched here would be interesting material for the investigator of the Untranslatable that Apter so vividly brings to our attention in her book.

But announcing a work under the “Against X” heading leads the reader to expect polemic, and as Michel Foucault once asked, “Has anyone ever seen a new idea come out of a polemic?”² The polemic relies on a forcibly imposed *différend* that could, again, be related to Apter’s Untranslatable itself in one of its guises as the incommensurable: “The polemicist relies on a legitimacy that his adversary is by definition denied.”³ The polemicist will not attempt a translation of the other’s position, perhaps. However, in spite of her book’s title and the generic expectations provoked by it, Apter is surprisingly generous toward World Literature as a set of critical debates. Entering into a real dialogue with some of its main representatives already named above, she indicates some of the key problems of the approach as it has recently been configured within the upper echelons of literary criticism. Damrosch creates an overly ecumenical museum of great heritage sites for the *Bildung* of a well-meaning global middle class; Moretti is too enamored of quantitative analysis and a dead-end Amazon-algorithm-type technocracy as literary criticism; Dimock implicitly celebrates the United States as the privileged representative of global civil society (and world literary history) by overemphasizing a “soft, hospitable border” in its literary cartography (104). More importantly, Apter suggests alternate critical conceptualizations and research practices, and it is in these suggestions that the real critique of World Literature resides. *Against World Literature* is explicitly “not a ‘how-to’ book for teaching world literature in translation” (16). Rather, it follows what is arguably a quite traditional Comparative Literature method by arranging a sequence of “loosely affiliated topoi” but with the aim of opening up her “politics of literature critical of global management within corporate education” (16). *Against World Literature*’s exciting and original contribution to the World Literature debate is the element it isolates to link the topoi together: the Untranslatable.

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Against World Literature is organized in four parts. The first part, “Oneworldliness,” takes as its focus the notion of seeing the world as one,

2. Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics and Problematizations,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 382.

3. Foucault, “Polemics, Politics and Problematizations,” 383.

as a single system. Beginning with the Untranslatable as undoing the systematicity of “world systems” in Barbara Cassin’s *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, Apter then examines critically the way Moretti’s quantitative analysis makes a textually impoverished world system representable, confronts the extremely difficult problem of “Eurochronology,” and finally suggests that the “globe” of globalism is a symptomatically paranoid construct. In Apter’s words, “paranoia as world-system signals the dark side of planetary utopianism” (77). It “reinforces unipolar thought, specifically, a model of oneness as allness . . . rendering discrepant orders of signs mutually intelligible or pan-translatable” (79). Apter explicitly links these paranoid constructs—which are made imaginatively vivid in the literary dramatizations of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo—to “‘big’ comparative paradigms in the humanities . . . that achieve hegemonic heft by lending themselves to international translation” (96). Apter’s powerful suggestion is that “literary oneworldedness” is a paranoid projection of one nation’s (the United States’) “national imaginary” upon the rest of the world. The final chapter of part 1, “Checkpoints and Sovereign Borders,” uses the idea of the checkpoint (as mainly exemplified in the paradoxical crossing points between Israel and Palestine) to criticize the “porous borders” model of Comparative Literature represented by Wai Chee Dimock. The “idea of fluid borders—concretized by NAFTA, Shengen, the Eurozone—‘forgets’ the checkpoint in promoting the border” (104).

Worth noting at this point is that Apter’s emphasis on the checkpoint as a blockage to smooth passage represents a kind of self-critique. Her previous book, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (2006), perhaps unwittingly contributed to a model of translation studies that idealistically emphasized the ease of (translation as) border crossing. That model proceeds on something like the assumption that international travel is easy because everyone has a US or EU passport. The harsh reality of border checks somehow disappears as the self-metonymizing “global” minority translates its cosmopolitan relative ease of passage into the experience of all border crossings.

Part 2 opens onto the more elaborated performative dimensions of the Untranslatable: “Doing Things with Untranslatables.” Made up of five case studies, this part comes closest to exemplifying the kind of work I hope this book will inspire: careful readings of situations and webs of untranslatability that engage precisely those moments that World Literature is almost congenitally obliged to gloss over. Part 3 examines four conjunctures in which translation meets World Literature in a productively disturbing way.

Within each conjuncture, this part of the book is where Apter trains her gaze on untranslatability's secular and theological dimensions, and the proper names involved are Erich Auerbach, Edward Said, Jacques Derrida, and Abdelfattah Kilito. Auerbach's critical practice is described as a "theological figuralism" (209), in which (Judaic) sacral categories might animate the representation of reality in the name of justice. Said's notion of "secular criticism" (which develops from his deep engagement with Auerbach) is reread through his (mis)translation of Auerbach's *irdisch* as "worldly." Apter is at pains to show just how *irdisch* Said was as a critic, as disclosing an engagement with the historical and political specificity of territory without ever quite losing sight of the transcendent figure of an "earthly paradise" (226). Derrida pushes the self-definition of Comparative Literature to its untranslatable extreme, not so as to violently destroy it but in order to find the "lever" (*mochlos*) that will enable comparison to be done differently. Finally, Kilito exemplifies a different limit-case for translation in the duty or injunction *not* to translate (a theological, or at least quasi-theological imperative) so as to protect a sacred text or to "preserve linguistic difference among men" (257). The risky—and perhaps irreducible—proximity of this desire to racism, chauvinism, or nationalism is disclosed in Kilito's admission that "I dislike having foreigners speak my language" (Kilito quoted at p. 253). The "American woman whose uncanny mastery of the language made him squirm" is an interesting type case of the would-be comparatist who has learned a language well enough, in this instance, to deploy a Moroccan colloquialism containing a potentially sacred phoneme (253). Kilito's discomfiting honesty as he reveals his elite *litterateur's* distaste for the fluent female foreigner would have been worthy of further discussion in terms of the *unbehagen* as well as the *unheimlich* aspects of linguistic intimacy.

The fourth and final part of *Against World Literature* contains four chapters on the question of property and translation as "authorized plagiarism or legalized appropriation" (281). It arcs from the strange story of filiations and inscriptions of the name "Marx" above English translations of *Madame Bovary* (from Eleanor Marx to Paul and Patricia de Man) through the contemporary legal status of translation and translation-like activities to subvert the privatization of literary property as it is supported by the disciplinary formation of World Literature. "Dispossessive collectivism" here becomes the other side of the coin from World Literature's collection of nationally definitive heritage sites—"possessive collectivism." "Planetary Dysphoria," the final chapter, ends the book on a note of radical limit: the

planet, in the Spivakian sense of the alterity that remains indifferent to World or Globe, as melancholic (or nihilistic) figure for the ending of the human thoughts that invest it.

As one might imagine, Apter endorses the old Comparative Literature vocation of a “deprovincialization of the canon” as the best World Literature can offer, coming close to the ideals of the discipline as voiced in the past by René Wellek, for example. Apter describes Cassin’s *Vocabulaire* as “an ideal of linguistic *civitas* over and against ethnic and nation-based language cartographies” (38). But is all this just a cosmopolitanized comp lit with more bells and whistles? Even if it is, it does not matter, because Apter has a much more interesting alternative in store for her readers. Early in the book, she offers an arresting description of World Literature’s “entrepreneurial, bulimic drive to anthologize and curricularize the world’s cultural resources” (2–3). We have already seen how Apter elaborates this critique. Here, though, in her pathologizing metaphor, Apter clues us in to the fact that she is offering a subversive supplement to World Literature by, as it were, picking up its mess and doing something with it. What is bulimia? Voracious eating followed by self-induced violent purging from one end of the body or the other. Between vomit and shit, what remains after a bulimic episode? The Untranslatable is the name Apter gives to the feces and vomit left behind by the great binge of World Literature. The Untranslatable represents all the stuff World Literature cannot profit from, the accursed share it sends to waste as it crams its Anglophone mouth with the world’s cuisine. “Non-translation, mistranslation, incomparability and untranslatability” (4): such names for the profitless excreta of World Literature provide, in Apter’s view, the levers that could open up World Literature to a productive sense of its own limit. *Against World Literature* is a preliminary foray into how to read and think and practice comparatism with the effluent that World Literature cannot and will not use.

Against World Literature’s most brilliant and sustained insight is that the Untranslatable is a kind of performative. Apter, a bit like J. L. Austin with his bewilderingly proliferating taxonomy of performatives, offers us the Untranslatable under such headings as “mistranslation,” “translation failure,” “incommensurability,” “neologism,” “semantic dissonance,” “mis-fired speech-acts,” “translation-wobble,” and so on. *Against World Literature* would undoubtedly yield a kind of lexicon of these phenomena, which are not organized systematically by Apter (it would be a much drier book if they were) but come into play at strategic moments to illustrate different aspects of a general untranslatability. The element of strategy is important:

once you start looking, the Untranslatable is *everywhere*! It defines the horizon against which any translation must take place and thus demands a scrupulous and reflexive mode of research, a “politics,” as Apter’s title has it, because the ground of decision—which Untranslatables to look at?—is abyssal.

Working in the light of Derrida’s revision of the Austinian performative (this word and its cognates surely being another wonderful case study for the investigator of Untranslatables⁴), Apter characterizes the Untranslatable as a kind of unintended textual event within the implied speech-act “I translate (or don’t translate, or forbid the translation of) you as X.” If translation were a felicitous performative (successfully achieving translation’s constitutive and irreducible desire for linguistic transparency), then there would be no event, no translation. Taken to the limit then, every Translatable *is* an Untranslatable, and to propose “translating untranslatably,” as Apter does, is to acknowledge this (18). This, again, is why a “politics of untranslatability” is necessary.

Intentionally echoing Samuel Weber’s analysis of the German suffix *-barkeit* (-ability) in his *Benjamin’s -abilities*, Apter has given the subtitle of her book as “The Politics of Untranslatability” (*unübersetz-barkeit*).⁵ She defines it in these terms as “that which impedes translational fluency yet enables critical faculties nonetheless” (138). In its most reduced formula, then, what this performative *does* is impede the commonly understood flow of translation in the same move as it enables some other kind of critical moment. The fascinating potentiality, this *-ability* of the Untranslatable, which is also the terror of its seeming all-pervasiveness, is that every “translation” is subject to the possibility of untranslation: hence the Benjaminian untranslatability. Each singular event of translation has this *-ability* and thus, once more, calls for a politics of its reading and untranslating.

Somewhat unpredictable in its local effects, the Untranslatable nevertheless leaves trails and signs of impeded passage to be followed between both specific literary and philosophical works and social and cul-

4. It has one of the briefest mentions in Cassin’s *Vocabulaire* under the entry for “Performance.” See Barbara Cassin et al., *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil/Dictionnaires Robert, 2004), 916–17. After his initial engagement with Austin in “Signature, Event, Context” and “Limited Inc. a b c,” a significant strand of Derrida’s later work was dedicated to a revised notion of the performative in his writings on the promise, the lie, the oath, the “to-come,” the event, and so forth.

5. Samuel Weber, *Benjamin’s -abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

tural texts in the broad sense. Apter is, at a certain point, tempted to call the entire web of trails/blockages a "World-System" (31–44), which is an appellation I would resist precisely because, as she rightly says of Cassin's *Vocabulaire*, the Untranslatable yields "wide-span intellectual cartography without a hegemonic global paradigm" (31). The Untranslatable is not and cannot be a system, though specific instances can, of course, as Apter suggests, be systematically studied.

In Apter's hands, the Untranslatable becomes a performative in its textual activation at two levels. First it *does* something in and to the "primary" text in which it occurs. Part 2 of the book is devoted to specific case studies of this, through what Apter calls "Keywords," in homage to the kind of encyclopedia and/or lexicon produced by Cassin (or Raymond Williams, for that matter). The first of these keywords is "Cyclopedie" (117–128), and it refers to the destabilizing effects of the *Vocabulaire-Encyclopédie* (dictionary-encyclopedia) pair at work in the very title of the Cassin volume. Apter shows that the book "revealing the history of mistranslation and misfired speech-acts in the history of philosophical terms" is thus inevitably caught up in the very process it attempts to define (117). Another "Keywords" entry looks at "sex" and "gender" as they move between English and French in mutual translations of a cluster of words and terms for feminist philosophy and activism. The play of untranslatability in the translations of *The Second Sex* produces a range of effects that allow for a Simone de Beauvoir useful to North American feminism but paradoxically useful on the very basis of the untranslatable. That is to say, on the basis of a rather different "Beauvoir," unwittingly stripped of the philosophical nuance of her terminology so as to enable a more easily empiricized and identitarian feminist subject in the Anglophone world. One could multiply examples resembling this one indefinitely. For instance, all the existing English translations of Frantz Fanon's *Damnés de la terre* render invisible Fanon's subversive deployment of the language of philosophical phenomenology so as to turn him into an empiricizer and advocate of "violence" rather than an investigator of its modes of appearance in the extremes of postcolonial conflict. Here is one mode of the performative Untranslatable at work: it *does* something to de Beauvoir and Fanon *in* the translation (a related example would be the translation of Walter Benjamin's *Gewalt* as "violence").

The second level is not entirely distinguishable from the first, but it comes more to define the activity of the detective and critical analyst of Untranslatables (and thus the work of Apter herself, or of Cassin as avid collector and lexicographer of them). He or she can also "do things with

Untranslatables.” In this case, the Untranslatable’s performative power is that it permits an original, unpredictable series of linkages to be made between texts and clusters of texts in multiple languages. If the Untranslatable is embodied in singular moments of “militant semiotic intransigence,” then following “how an Untranslatable moves—often with tension and violence—between historically and nationally circumscribed contexts to unbounded conceptual outposts; resistant yet mobile” (34) does not always bring us to places that are politically radical. It can also be made to account for a large number of moments of cultural misprision and violence, because what is produced or en-acted by the Untranslatable performative is far from always being a salutary event. Remarking on a work of billboard art by Emily Jacir, Apter asks us to imagine how—or whether—mediatized and Islamophobic US politics might be different if the word “Allah” were consistently translated into the English word “God.” Investigations further afield than the biennial art circuit (however politically progressive the works concerned) would turn up many more such examples.

As Apter notes in her acknowledgements, this new book is fundamentally a record of her engagement with and involvement in the translation of Cassin’s *Vocabulaire* (vii). Apter is on the editorial team that is bringing out an augmented translation of the work edited by Cassin, and *Against World Literature* is an attempt to translate the approach of the *Vocabulaire* into a revision of how US Comparative Literature deals with World Literature.⁶ Without necessarily resorting to philological fetishism or its other extreme in quantitative word counting, the literary and philosophical study of the Untranslatable calls for an interesting set of research skills: close reading, a dash of philology, geopolitical and geohistorical awareness, “transnational literacy” of a new kind, deep expertise in a couple of languages or more. It is of significance that the *Vocabulaire* in its French and English versions is a large-scale team effort. Future pedagogies and research programs of the Untranslatable will have to try and work for supported team efforts, too, in spite of their budgetary inconvenience and incompatibility with the radical individualism of the humanities career path. The first chapter of *Against World Literature* gives an account of the ways in which Apter

6. I was a little surprised that Apter did not situate Cassin’s project in relation to comparable lexicons that the *Vocabulaire* either borrows from or subverts. Especially notable here would be Émile Benveniste’s 1969 *Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (of which the Cassin *Vocabulaire* is surely an attempted subversion, though it actually has less linguistic reach), and the tiny *Dictionnaire critique* of Georges Bataille and others, of which Cassin’s book could be regarded as a gigantic and academicized expansion.

thinks the Cassin-derived Untranslatable could shift the priorities and practices of Comparative Literature toward “constant updating and revision of vocabularies of cultural reference . . . a kind of self-translating machine of the humanities” (39). This is an excellent general aim. Though I understand and sympathize with the impulse, I nevertheless believe it is overly utopian to imagine that literary research and pedagogy could “respond critically and in real time to cartographies of emergent world systems” (39). First, there is always a delay in the production of academic work. It takes time, and necessarily so. Much as we hope to be able to move at the speed of politics, journalism, and popular culture, even the digital tools we have will not, I hope, engender a literary studies moving at the pace (and inevitably with the depth) of a Twitter feed. This is not an argument for quietism and a disengagement from the contemporary world. But Apter seems not to acknowledge the double bind of immediate responsivity, translating its predicament into a near-utopian prescription for mapping the times as they happen. And, as with Cassin’s *Vocabulaire* being susceptible to the very dilemmas of untranslatability that it categorizes, it is worth remembering that the same goes for the cultural critic, too, whose explanations are part of the very flow with which he or she is trying to become continuous. “Culture alive is always on the run, itself the irreducible counter-example,” writes Gayatri Spivak.⁷ It is, of course, the vanishing counterexample that the cultural critic runs to keep up with (hot on the trail of the Untranslatable); I add to my cautionary note the observation that “real time” means different things in different places, and catching its movement in nonmetropolitan locations is far harder than it sounds. It requires, precisely, *time* spent catching the idiomaticity of timings in another language zone.

The desire for literary humanities to have this “real time” responsiveness is reiterated throughout the book. But, second, if comp lit has to “catch up” with quick-time “socioeconomic mapping” (40), where is the linguistic, cultural, and literary training in place for this discipline that could pursue anything like the research agenda Apter sketches for the “second world” on page 40? She acknowledges that there is no infrastructure for it. The pursuit of real time does offer the refreshing sense that if we have the ambition of changing research agendas and curricula, then practitioners of Comparative Literature must assign themselves the task of better understanding the wider world. Apter’s is an implicit call for a more politically

7. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Culture Alive,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 23, nos. 2–3 (May 2006): 359.

engaged and involved type of intellectual who can negotiate the labyrinths between intricate philological inquiry and far-flung grassroots activism. To produce a Comparative Literature on the track of the Untranslatable is thus a larger and more complex task than merely keeping up with the great digital-mediatized spectacles of a world politics running out of control.

Sometimes, though, the alternatives Apter seems enthusiastic about are doubtful: at one extreme, we get digital idealism (a new multitude of hackers, avant-garde collective literary production); at the other extreme, we get philological slowdown as a fantasmatic way of questioning the velocity of political language (see the analysis of John T. Hamilton on page 130). I guess the odd guerrilla philologist would be useful, but would anyone listen to him or her? Apter shows that even her critical blueprint, Cassin's *Vocabulaire*, is at certain points undone by nationalism. "There is a measure of national recidivism," she writes, in the way that certain entries reinstate national-language clichés (36). Alain Badiou's entry on "Français" "defaults to national language myths" about philosophical clarity (127). I am somewhat at a loss to explain Apter's stated desire to "conjugate" Badiou and Cassin, given her account of Badiou's commitment to a univocal structure of truth and his rejection of the idea that philosophizing happens in language(s). Badiou's rigid and Francocentric absolutism does not seem to be a particularly compelling foil for what might be seen as overly relativistic in Cassin's engagement with the sophistic philosophical tradition. The so-called poststructuralist turn had, in the 1960s, already questioned the idea that everything is structured on the model of language. Badiou today appears as a very blunt instrument by contrast with the best of this trend.

If it is still this difficult, even among the very best of contemporary philosophers of the Left, to escape nationalistic language outlines and chauvinisms, I must question the vanguardism of thinking that plagiaristic translation, digital hacking, or experiments in collective authorship by elite experimentalists can bring about structural change, no matter how correct the politics of those involved. Of course, "literary studies falls short as anti-capitalist critique" (15): reading skills and attention to the Untranslatable need to be moved in another direction if we want anticapitalist critique. Placing one's hope for anticapitalist critique solely in the activities of a metropolitan cultural avant-garde sets too severe a limit on the adventurous and rhizomic lines traceable with the help of the Untranslatable. Untranslatables should be helping us to get out more.

Apter writes in her introduction that "there are few close encounters with individual texts" in her book (16). I understand why—because it's

a book of critical methodology—and yet the dearth of close encounters leaves me slightly unsatisfied. Because of its vertiginous rush through a plethora of examples and philosophical positions, *Against World Literature* sometimes resembles an inspired riffing on a series of themes. It is exciting, dazzling, and provocative but in need of more follow-up and thicker case studies that will both elaborate the ingenious theorizing and also provide its counterexamples.

Against World Literature is a splendid beginning for the end of World Literature as we know it. It supplies genuinely new groundwork and support for authentic case studies that will be developed in many other places. Perhaps what Comparative Literature research needs after this book are new areas of deep inquiry rather than more works devoted only to large-scale methodological and categorical suggestions without close textualized engagement. Following the performative itineraries of *Untranslatables* can disclose, each time afresh, a web of unexpected flows and breaks that are worldly without defining The World. In Apter's words, we might achieve a "translational humanities whose fault lines traverse the cultural subdivisions of nations or 'foreign' languages while coalescing around hubs of singularity" (31). There are few better manifestos for recycling the shit and vomit of World Literature than this.