

# Forget English!

ORIENTALISMS AND  
WORLD LITERATURES

Aamir R. Mufti

Copyright © 2016 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College  
All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America

First printing

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Mufti, Aamir, author.

Forget English! : Orientalisms and world literatures / Aamir R. Mufti.  
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-674-73477-7 (alk. paper)

1. Literature and society. 2. Politics and literature. 3. English literature—History and criticism. 4. Literature—History and criticism. 5. Oriental literature (English)—History and criticism. 6. Developing countries—Intellectual life. I. Title.

PN98.P64M84 2015

809-dc23

2015034400

# Contents

Preface ix

Prologue: The Universal Library  
of World Literature 1

1 Where in the World Is World Literature? 56

2 Orientalism and the Institution of Indian  
Literature 99

3 Global English and Its Others 146

4 “Our Philological Home Is the Earth”: World  
Literature from Auerbach to Said 203

Epilogue: “For a Ruthless Criticism  
of Everything Existing” 243

*Notes* 255

*Acknowledgments* 279

*Index* 285

## Preface

NO MATTER HOW FAR you travel from home today, you can be pretty sure about some of the things to expect if you are told that you will be meeting someone who is a writer of some renown in that country. Any linguistic difficulties of such a meeting might be overcome by recourse to one or the other of the “world” languages of European origin, such as English, above all, but also French or Spanish, either directly or through an intermediary. You would likely meet a person familiar with the worlds of literary magazines and literary publishing, and you both may have read some of the same magazines or reviews or might at least be familiar with some of the same ones. The two of you could most probably exchange views about favorite authors, maybe even discover that you like the same ones, whom each of you may have read in the original or in translation. On the other hand, you may come to form an opinion of the person’s literary tastes as somewhat poor or even shocking. The person may stiffen visibly if you are introduced as a “literary critic”—he or she is a “writer,” after all. You might discuss the recent film adaptation of an important novel you both like. And, thinking back on the encounter, you might even come to believe that you may have recognized in this person one or another of a distinct “type” of literary or writerly personality familiar to you from other places in the world.

A mere hundred years ago—and that is a relatively short interlude in the history of the modern world—your encounter would have been

far less predictable, even in a place like India, whose languages and cultures had already undergone dramatic change under the violent impact of foreign rule by the British Empire for well over a century. Another fifty or hundred years earlier, the experience might have proved simply undecipherable. A recent European arrival requesting such an encounter might have discovered, first of all, many distinct cultures of poetic composition even in the same town or city, based in a variety of languages and dialects with no clear connection to ideas about the language of a people, let alone a nation. Some of these bodies of writing may have been alien or opaque and even possibly unknown to each other even in the same locale. In other cases, the same individual may have written in more than one language or dialect according to the very different aesthetic standards that were extant in each of them. Some persons who were introduced to the visiting European as composers of verse might have seemed more like musicians or even mystics or religious functionaries. Others may have been busy writing odes to landlords, petty princes, kings, or even officers of the British colonial administration according to regimented rules for singing the praise of benefactors specific to the language. On the one hand, such scenarios are part of the concern of the intellectual and scholarly activity called world literature; on the other, the social and cultural transformations from the older scenario to the contemporary one can be described as the *emergence* of world literature, the transformation of literature into a world-encompassing reality. It is with such matters that we shall be concerned in this book.

The idea of world literature seems to exercise a strange gravitational force on all students of literature, even on those whose primary impulse is to avoid or bypass it entirely, forcing on them involuntary and unwanted changes of course and orientation. Its promise of a unified perspective on world culture brooks no possibility of strong repudiation. It hardly seems viable to say in response, "Back to national literatures!" And yet the ongoing institutionalization of world literature in the academic humanities and in publishing cannot quite dispel a lingering sense of unease about its supposed overcoming of antagonisms and a reconciliation and singularity that is too easily achieved. More bluntly put, it is hard not to wonder if all

this talk of world literature might not be an intellectual correlate of the happy talk that accompanied globalization over the past couple of decades, until the financial crash and its ongoing global aftermath, which has taken the form of a new Great Depression in some countries, introduced a certain reality check into the public discourse. How do we ensure what we might call the *critical intelligence* of the concept, which after all has had a presence in the work of so diverse a set of critical thinkers as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Erich Auerbach, and Edward Said but which at the same time seems susceptible to easy commodification in the literary marketplace, broadly conceived?

It will have been noticed that in the opening paragraphs, I more or less implicitly assumed “you” to be Euro-American. Could it be that the latter is always at the “center” of the discourse whenever we talk about world literature? What would a discourse look like in which that was not the case? Could I have written a preface in which the native of an Asian or African society, for instance, was invited to imagine a historical encounter with a European writer as a means of discovering the alienness of *European* “literature”? The very difficulty of imagining this reverse mode of address is a sign of the *success* of “world literature.” Concepts and categories of European origin are at the core of literature as a worldwide “space” or reality, including long-established ways of thinking about the alien, the exotic, or the other. And European “world” languages, above all English, seem to be the not-quite-invisible ether that permeates this space. But what is the nature of this space, exactly, and by what means did it get established? How are we to understand its expansion and “success” worldwide? And what is its relationship exactly to modes of writing and expressivity that belong to places that are non-Western, “global southern,” or of the “underdeveloped” world? James Joyce’s great image in *Ulysses* for the predicament of culture in a colonized society was reflections in the “cracked looking glass of a servant.” The image of the native that the world threw back at her was a broken and disfigured one. How can we characterize the predicament in a postcolonial society? A great deal more is at stake in the question of world literature than some of its leading contemporary elaborators seem to recognize: the origins of bourgeois modernity—that is,

the culture of capitalist society—within a history of worldwide imperial violence; the persistence into our times, albeit in altered forms, of the racial and cultural antagonisms of the colonial world; and the ongoing struggle over the right and the ability to define the contours of human experience. The discourse of world literature today often seems to consider itself immune to questions concerning such problems. In this book, I attempt to develop ways of thinking that might hazard answers to at least some of them.

# Prologue: The Universal Library of World Literature

IN THE HISTORY OF modern language and literature, the enticing and irresistible thought of literature as a single and world-extensive reality—*world literature*—has often found an echo in the literary image of a library that contains everything of value that has ever been written—a *universal* library containing *universal* literature. Among the highlights of these interlinked preoccupations might be the following moments and scenarios. On January 31, 1827, at his home in Weimar, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe surprised an acolyte with the intimation that he had been reading a “Chinese novel” and went on to ruminate that “National literature is now an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature [*Weltliteratur*] is now at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.” But then, as if to mitigate the effects of the dizzying prospect such a statement opened up, he went on to reassure his friend that “if we really want a pattern, we must always return to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented. All the rest we must look at only historically; appropriating to ourselves what is good, so far as it goes.” Eight years later, in the midst of the historical process of the colonial modernization of elites in India in the mid-nineteenth century, Thomas Babington Macaulay, then a member of the governing council of the East India Company administration in Calcutta, in recommending that “a small class” of Indians be educated not in their own language and tradition but instead in those of another continent,



imagined “a good European library,” a “single shelf” of which could subsume all that was worthwhile in “the whole native literature of India and Arabia”—as precise an encapsulation as any of the cultural logic of colonial rule. In a lecture delivered in Calcutta in 1907 to an audience concerned with developing an indigenous form of education to replace the colonial one, Rabindranath Tagore asserted that “our goal is to view universal humanity in universal literature by freeing ourselves from rustic uncatholicity . . . and . . . in this totality we shall perceive the interrelations among all human efforts at expression”—attempting to use ideas of national particularity in order to undermine nationalism as such. Writing three decades later (and over a century after Macaulay) in Argentina at the threshold of the transition to a postcolonial world, as European global dominance was coming to an end in an intra-European conflagration, Jorge Luis Borges expanded the limits of the (“good European”) library until it became coextensive with the universe itself. Borges imagined this world as the “Library of Babel”—an infinitely expansive labyrinth, a world of bookshelf-lined hexagonal cells and passageways populated by itinerants and pilgrims, librarians, esoteric cults, mystics and fanatics, rival sects fiercely devoted to opposing doctrines about the nature of the library, and rumors about the existence of the one book that contains all the other books that have ever been written or that might be written in the future: a library that encompasses the work of humanity in all its infinitesimal complexity. Composing a novel in England in Arabic a quarter century later, the Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih placed his universal library in a padlocked room in a farmer’s home in a sunbaked village on the banks of the Upper Nile, a perfect replica of a private English library—down to author-signed books, framed pictures and mementos on the mantelpiece, carpets, and shawl-draped armchairs—whose existence is unknown to all in the village but its owner and which contains only books in English, “not a single Arabic book,” with even “*The Qur’an* in English”: this room is a stark encapsulation of the alienated fate of an African and Arab society that has undergone colonization, permanently set on a “migration” toward the North—the central image of Salih’s novel. And finally, in Orhan Pamuk’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech—written, in the

new millennium, in the same apartment building in a bourgeois neighborhood of Istanbul in which he, as he tells us, has lived for most of his life—the author recalled from his childhood his father’s library of mostly European and Republican Turkish works, a record of the disorientations of a Muslim society undergoing state-enforced Europeanization, suddenly cut off from the entire literary heritage produced until just a few decades earlier in a version of the same language but in another script.<sup>1</sup>

Goethe and Macaulay’s remarks might differ in the aesthetic and humanist *value* they attach to the literatures of “the East,” but this is a difference of emphasis alone, both sharing the more important ground of the problem of assimilating them into the European universal library. (As we shall see later on, these distinct but related positions may be identified as “Orientalism” and “Anglicism,” respectively.) Each of the above images and elaborations, to which I shall return at more length at various points in this book, is a rich and powerful invocation of “literature” (in a broad sense) as a world encompassing reality. Each was produced in a different language—German, English, Bangla, Spanish, Arabic, and Turkish, respectively—is distinct and different from the others, and emerges from and speaks to a very different historical context. But together they belong to the history of the emergence of a world of peoples, an understanding of the world as an ensemble of nations and civilizations, each in possession of its own distinct textual and expressive traditions. On the one hand, each of them seeks to capture a cosmopolitan or “one-world” reality; on the other, they all seem unable in the end to overcome entirely the pull of the local and the particular. This paradoxical manner of conceiving of human diversity is, properly speaking, European in origin, dating back at most to the mid-eighteenth century—that is, to the Industrial Revolution. But, as I shall argue at some length in subsequent chapters, such ideas have repeatedly proven their power and efficacy in the world by being absorbed into non-European societies undergoing dramatic transformation under direct or indirect colonial domination. It is, to say the least, ironic that it is on this modern *European* intellectual ground of a theory of literature as *national* institution that colonial intelligentsias have typically staked their claims to historical agency and

return to national origins from the disruptions of the colonial process. Given this European genealogy, the nationalist claim to autonomy is clearly an exaggerated or even spurious one, reproducing the *form* of a mode of modern European thinking about culture and society, and therefore it is as sure a sign as any of the “cunning” of (colonial) reason, which itself provides the ground on which a certain kind of anticolonial imagination emerges and elaborates its historical and cultural claims.<sup>2</sup>

If the literary representation of the universal library may be said to be an image of literature as world encompassing reality, the concept of world literature, which has proven equally irresistible at decisive moments in the bourgeois era, is by the same token a systematization of the former. And more concretely, as B. Venkat Mani has noted, the possibility of world literature has been from the beginning closely linked with the social and cultural institution of the library and the historical processes it embodies, the library being an “agent” of world literature.<sup>3</sup> Whether conceived as a collection of works of translocal significance, as David Damrosch has suggested, or as an intellectual problem, way of thinking, or system of organization and cataloguing of works, as it were, rather than a body of writings as such, as Franco Moretti suggests, “world literature” seems to evoke the paradoxical nature of the universal library.<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault famously described the universal museum and universal library of modern Europe as “heterotopias of infinitely accumulating time” that embodied “the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time.”<sup>5</sup> But what is the relationship between this “will” to accumulate time itself and the history of European expansion worldwide, the expansion of the idea of Europe itself as that which contains the entire world? As the above formulations clearly reveal, the very assembling of the universal library seems to highlight some of the complexities of achieving the one world in this particular manner. Clearly, there is something paradoxical about the idea of the universal library, an idea that begins to consume itself in the very process of its elaboration. In its drive toward the universal, it seems inadvertently to heighten the presence and visibility of the

particular. And for all its claims to inclusiveness, it cannot quite conceal the asymmetrical arrangement of power that structures it as an apparatus and a field. Who assembles the universal library, under what conditions, and to what purpose? What are its principles of selection, arrangement, and organization? Who, as Mani asks, has “borrowing privileges” from it, that is, who gets to use it and according to what rules, exactly?<sup>6</sup> What, if any, is its dominant language? To whom can it be said to belong? What is the relationship between the *universal* in “universal library” and the *world* in “world literature”?

The global cacophony of the early twenty-first century seems to generate different varieties of what we may call *one-world thinking*—diverse perspectives on contemporary economic, social, cultural, and political life that all nevertheless require imagining the world as a *continuous and traversable space*. This is now a pervasive discourse, informing a wide range of conflicting interests and practices including even forms of right-wing nativism in some cases. Given the ubiquity of such ways of thinking, could the claims being made in this book themselves be understood as an instance of such breezy one-world talk? In other words, in speaking of the one world, how do we not acquiesce in the ideological practices of those dominant sectors of society—including that ultimate abstraction and totality, *global society*—that have most widely produced and circulated this discourse? Navigating in and around this question and problem is one of the challenges taken up in this work. It is or at least ought to be fairly uncontroversial that such forms of imagining the horizon of the social in our extended historical moment, all the varieties of talk of the achieving of a “borderless world,” are linked in various ways to the rise of the modern multinational corporation in the postwar era and the governmental, inter-governmental, financial, and commercial structures that have been instituted alongside it, forms that have been extended and intensified in the “neoliberal” post-Cold War era—the various institutional frameworks of the contemporary global capitalist system and world market, in short.

First used in a widely successful book by the Japanese corporate consultant Kenichi Ohmae in the early 1990s, the term “borderless world” was quickly transformed into a cliché—that is, an apparently

transparent description of a world condition requiring no analysis of its agendas and interests—finding its way into an enormous body of writing ranging from management studies to the institutional discourse of “global health,” academic humanities and social sciences, and even countercorporate activism by professionals in many fields such as medicine, law, engineering, architecture, and teaching.<sup>7</sup> The critical task in our present moment is to try to understand in every instance of the invocation of the borderless world—whatever conceptual or rhetorical form it might take—the precise nature of its links to structures of power across the world: these links range from the reflexive commitments of those media commentators or so-called experts who function as the house intellectuals of capitalism today—think Thomas Friedman or Niall Ferguson—to attempts to appropriate the image of the borderless world for radical politics at various sites across the world.

The financial crisis of 2008–2009 and subsequent recession—and in some countries and regions full-blown depression—were from the beginning a global event and have generated new forms of activism and protest, most notably the Occupy movement, whose methods and gestures have proven remarkably mobile across oceans and continents. On June 15, 2013, Turkish police retook by force Gezi Park in the Taksim area of central Istanbul and cleared it of the “occupiers” who had been protesting for seventeen days the wildly uncontrolled “development” pursued under the ten-year rule of the “moderate” Islamist but *radically* neoliberal Justice and Development Party (the AKP), which has, among other things, created a bubble economy in real estate amid the devastation of historic urban spaces in one of the most extraordinary historic cities in the world. It is worth noting the remarkable fact that among the structures in the park destroyed by the police, as in Zuccotti Park in downtown Manhattan and Syntagma Square in Athens at earlier moments in recent years, was the protestors’ spontaneously assembled library. The assembling of a “people’s library,” as it has come to be called, has in fact been a distinct feature of the new politics of occupation and assembly across the world, a remarkable fact that surely it must be part of our task to try to understand.<sup>8</sup> What is the relationship between “world literature” and these practices of collecting and reading in New York, Athens,

Istanbul, and numerous other sites across the world whose existence is linked to the desire to defamiliarize the everyday structures and practices of neoliberal capitalism? This is neither a trivial nor a merely occasional question—it is, quite simply, one version of the broader question about the *politics* of world literature today as institution and as forms of writing, reading, teaching, valuation, and circulation, and I shall return to it near the end of the book. The people's library embodies the desire not just for different books—than those enshrined in national curricula or literary cultures or in globalized commercial publishing, for instance—but for different ways of reading, circulating, valuing, and evaluating them. As such, it constitutes an important site for thinking about the distinct politics of literature I am attempting to elaborate here.

We may pursue this question (of the politics of world literature) from a somewhat different angle as well. To speak of a borderless world is to suggest the superseding or, at the very least, diluting of the forms of sovereignty that have been institutionalized in the modern system of states perhaps “since the Peace of Westphalia,” as the cliché goes.<sup>9</sup> The mere magnitude of such a possible historical development should lead us to be cautious about the casual use of such notions. Official and semiofficial ideologists of European unification, for instance, have routinely represented it as the overcoming of the post-Westphalian order in the continent, whereas in fact many of the concepts, practices, and logics associated with the modern state, such as notions of cultural or civilizational uniformity and the institution of territorial borders, have to a certain extent simply been enlarged and mapped onto the continent as a whole, a process most visible precisely in those border regions and countries, like Greece, where “Europe” comes in contact with its historically determined others. The institution of the nation-state border has indeed undergone a series of transformations in recent decades. But as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilsen have argued in an important recent book, the result has in fact been a *proliferation* of borders rather than their disappearance.<sup>10</sup> And in neoliberal border regimes such as that of the European Union, some of the functions that have traditionally clustered at the nation-state border have come to be redistributed throughout social space. Every point in social

space has become, for those who are visibly construed as aliens, a potential site of a border experience, while the ability to cross international borders continues to be distributed unequally among populations defined by class, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or nationality and usually a shifting combination of these factors.

The fact is that as capital continues to enhance its ability to move and act ever more swiftly across the world, to behave as if it inhabits a borderless world, the conditions of the physical movement of populations, which is necessitated by the economic and political imbalances of contemporary capitalism and the needs of capital itself, become ever more differentiated and, for large numbers of human beings, ever more perilous. Can we really speak of “literature” as a single world-encompassing space without reference to these material and ideological features of the structures of mobility, and therefore also *immobility*, across the globe? We clearly cannot, because the mobility of literature is a social phenomenon, that is to say, part of the wider social phenomenon of mobility and movement as such in late capitalism. But the prevalent literary discussion seems to proceed nevertheless in the blissful serenity of the supposed perception that the age of the *worldwide* has indeed arrived. We are obliged to ask *at which locations in the world exactly* such perceptions of the worldwide acquire their aura of transparency. The international geography of academic conferences, literature festivals, literary prize competitions, and other similar practices of contemporary literature surely facilitates such “beyond borders” perceptions for those of us who participate in them in one way or another. What would it mean to consider these supposedly borderless literary experiences alongside the far more treacherous experience of borders for hundreds of millions of people worldwide? I shall return to the question of the border in our times more directly later in the book, but Chapters 1 and 2 set up the problematic, as I analyze the ways of thinking and writing that have historically played a role in the *cultural institution* of borders in the long era of nationalisms and nation-states, which is of course also the era of the rise of literature as a worldwide system or set of practices. These historically determinate forms of human mobility and immobility institutionalized in border regimes matter a great deal to the line of critical thinking about literature that I de-

velop in this book. I shall seek to demonstrate here that *world literature has functioned from the very beginning as a border regime*, a system for the regulation of movement, rather than as a set of literary relations beyond or without borders. Put somewhat differently, we might say that the cultural sphere now generally identified as world literature, far from being a seamless and traversable space, has in fact been from the beginning a regime of *enforced* mobility and therefore of *immobility* as well.

To be concerned professionally with those cultural and social practices, and more specifically practices of writing, that are generally classified and recognized today as literature is of course to deal with mostly *elite* practices of various sorts in a rigorous sense. In the societies of the Global South, in particular, literary practices typically involve attempts at representation of social worlds from the location of elite segments of society and, in world literature, properly speaking, *globally* privileged segments of society. Given this social distance between the practitioners of literary discourse (including of course criticism as well) and the most deprived strata of society worldwide—from the slum dwellers of the world's megacities, deprived of the most basic benefits of modern urban civilization, to destitute farmers permanently on the edge of devastation from drought, land theft, and the vagaries of markets and prices—any attempt to “incorporate” such social groups and such life conditions in literary discourse is confronted with the irreducible question of the very possibility of representation across the “international division of labor.”<sup>11</sup> The work of the critic under such conditions is to reveal the internal workings of such attempts at representation and the social locales (that is, the modes of “filiation” and “affiliation,” in Edward Said’s sense of these terms) from which they are made.<sup>12</sup> But we also know—as has been argued from a range of ideological positions—that the forms of written language or textuality that we call literature have the capacity to illuminate and help produce knowledge of various aspects of our individual and collective lives in the modern world even when immersed in the life of a small and exclusive class and its everyday milieu. We need think here only of Balzac, Austen, Multatuli, Soseki, Proust, Tagore, Lampedusa, or Qurratulain and the reading of their works by progressive and radical critics (from Marx onward) over the



years. The ability to think “the world” itself, whether in literary-critical thinking or other discourses and practices, is hardly distributed evenly across the world, even though its cultivation is an important task and a necessity, given those very asymmetries and inequalities. Miguel Tamen has recently asked with reference to practitioners of the prevalent U.S. academic discussion of world literature, “do they ever get to the World section of their *New York Times*?”<sup>13</sup> The accusative trenchancy of this rhetorical query notwithstanding, there is a genuine question here about our ability to speak of “the one world” from the perch of the academy in the North Atlantic zone and about *what forms of attention precisely* to the world outside this zone are consequently called for. It is this question that I seek to explore in this book.

*Forget English!* is an examination of the variety of one-world talk that is world literature, and this term will refer to a number of related things in the course of the study: first of all, “world literature” is a *concept* that, I shall attempt to show, has a genealogy that leads to Enlightenment-era intellectual and literary practices; second, linked to the first sense, it marks a contemporary *field of study*, predominantly, though by no means exclusively, in the academic humanities in the North Atlantic countries, a field that has seen a stunning success since the beginning of the new millennium, disseminating its discourse widely throughout the worlds of teaching, research, writing, publishing, and reading; and third, and most broadly, it refers to these *practices and institutional frameworks*, which make possible and compelling the experience of literature as a worldwide reality.<sup>14</sup> The academic discipline of comparative literature arose gradually in the second half of the nineteenth century in Western Europe and North America on ground that had already been prepared by the discourse of world literature, a ground that is revealed, for instance, in the flourishing of literary histories in the period that attempted to take a general or “world” perspective, however limited their actual purview to the major European languages. And a renewed discourse of world literature today, embodied in anthologies, journals, and critical monographs and collections, seems on the verge of taking over completely the disciplinary space of comparative literature.<sup>15</sup> Throughout its history, world literature in each of the

senses outlined above has functioned as a *plane of equivalence*, a set of categorical grids and networks that seek, first of all, to render legible *as literature* a vast and heterogeneous range of practices of writing from across the world and across millennia, so as to be able, second, to make them available for comparison, classification, and evaluation. World literature is therefore fundamentally a concept of exchange or, in other words, a concept of bourgeois society. Furthermore, the history of world literature is inseparable from the rise of English as global literary vernacular and is in fact to some extent *predicated* on the latter. At its core, therefore, this book is an attempt to expose and explore the relationship between English and its others, especially the languages of the Global South.

What are the rhetorical and epistemological conditions of possibility of the concept of world literature and whose interests does it serve? Does it make more sense to speak of world literature in the singular or the plural? Is world literature primarily a descriptive or normative concept, and in what way are the two aspects related to each other? What needs in bourgeois society and culture does the concept fulfill? What kinds of literary practice does it reference, envision, or produce? What possibilities does it create (or foreclose) for conceptualizing the universal and the particular? Is “world literature” best understood as system or as practice? What other forms of “world thinking” does world literature rely on or, alternatively, replace or suppress? What is its relationship in this current avatar to, for instance, the literature of Afro-Asian and Global South solidarity or to the literary cosmopolitanism of the Soviet cultural sphere? Linguistic (and therefore “cultural”) plurality has historically been a pronounced feature of human life—so what is the fate of this aspect of human experience in globalization? Can humanism ever be monolingual? Is “world literature” an adequate rubric for asking questions such as these? If “Orientalism” is the cultural logic of the modern, bourgeois West in its outward orientation, what precisely is its relation to world literature, the concept of a single literary system or ensemble that, at least in theory, encompasses all the societies of the world? Is philology still the “method” for conceiving of world literature, as it was for an entire tradition of critical thought, including such disparate figures as Goethe, Erich Auerbach, and Edward Said?

And finally, under what conditions exactly—methodological, conceptual, and institutional—can the practices of world literature be revalued and refunctionalized for a radical critique of our world, or “the world made by capitalist globalization,” as Pheng Cheah has recently put it.<sup>16</sup> This is the first constellation of questions, concerning the possibility and consequences of thinking of literature as a worldwide reality, with which this book is concerned.

Given the ubiquitous presence of English in the world today, it seems absurd to suggest that it either has been or ought to be—or, even more implausibly, *wants* to be—“forgotten.” But if indeed English is now everywhere, then surely it is also not anywhere in particular, and ubiquity or universality entail their own form of invisibility: missing the forest for the trees, especially and precisely when you happen to be *inside* the forest. But “universality” is perhaps too strong a word for our purposes—after all, hundreds of millions of human beings across the world have still little or no access to English and speak, read, or write in one or more of thousands of different existing languages and dialects. It is incontestably the case that the number of languages spoken on the planet has continually shrunk in the modern era and continues to do so in our times and that English, broadly conceived, is often the beneficiary and the agent of such changes. But still—*universal*? And yet, if it is indeed true that there are more people in China with at least some formal instruction in English than there are people in the United States, as is often now said, you know that some great river has been crossed forever.

Coming to the terrain of literature per se, a seemingly simple phrase like “English as a language of literature” appears hardly so simple on closer view, concealing fraught scenarios of linguistic and literary acquisition, assimilation, and dissemination across decades and even centuries. It points us in at least three different directions, each of which offers a certain view of the landscapes through which the others pass: English as the language of original composition (“Anglophone literature”), English as the language of reading (“the Anglophone reader”), and English as medium of translation, evaluation, and adjudication in literary relations on a worldwide scale (that is, in “world literature”). This book is concerned with each of these aspects of what we might speak of as the *cultural system* of English.

“World Anglophone literature” is, in one or another of its variants, one of the ascendant cultural rubrics of our times. This is true as much in academic literary studies as in the wider world of literary publishing. But this rise of the Anglophone has often taken the form of a reification or even an apotheosis; that is, it has been treated as a transparently universal good, not accompanied by a critical self-examination about its own conditions of possibility. How does English become available in a given society for the first time as a language of literature? What is its social position and relation to its various “others”? Through what practices and mechanisms did it come into this position of global preeminence? Such questions, foreclosed in the prevalent discussion, will be confronted head-on in this book. Above all, it asks what it might mean to speak *in English*, the quintessential world-encompassing language, of literature as a world-encompassing reality. Hidden inside world literature is the dominance of globalized English—this is, at the broadest level, the argument that is presented here.

In post-Industrial Revolution colonialism, broadly understood, the language of the colonizer was a problematic and painful acquisition. As a range of anticolonial thinkers and more recent scholars of colonialism have demonstrated over the years, the emergence of a racialized (and agonized) colonial subject was profoundly linked to the colonial language. As Frantz Fanon argued in the early 1950s in his study of the psychology of colonial racism, *Black Skins, White Masks*, language was a privileged site of the work of power in colonized society. Every subject people had experienced “the death and burial of its local cultural originality” and thus found itself “face to face with the language of the civilizing nation.” Through command of the French language, he noted, the “Negro of the Antilles,” for instance, became “whiter,” that is, closer to being a “real man” (*véritable homme*). But the fantasy of linguistic command was just as consistently shattered by the ever-elusive nature of the promised identification—he is merely “quasi-white”: “He talks *like* a white man.”<sup>17</sup> This ambiguous and ambivalent acquisition of the colonizer’s language thus marked colonial subjectivity as an alienated condition, lived in between comfort zones and European and native forms of authority. In his later writings, immersed in the practice of the

Algerian Revolution, Fanon came to view the colonial language as a major site of revolutionary practice itself, which was engaged in the “work of exorcising the French language,” exposing both its claim to being *logos* as well as the arbitrary nature of its signs.<sup>18</sup>

Fanon states explicitly that his intention is to “broaden the field of [his] description and through the Negro of the Antilles include every colonized man.”<sup>19</sup> This is part of the radiating power of his analysis: making the historical experience of the societies of the Caribbean and, in his later work, Algeria and Africa more broadly exemplary of certain facets of the colonial process as such at a certain moment in its history. To a certain extent, I make similar methodological use in this book of the historical experience of societies in South Asia and the Middle East. But I depart in more significant ways from Fanon’s formulation, which has become canonical for a whole swathe of theory and criticism in “postcolonial” and “transnational” studies in the countries of the North Atlantic, an alienated formation in a metropolitan language coming to be seen as the quintessence of the postcolonial condition. For I seek to demonstrate here, first, that the effectiveness of colonial rule extends also to the *ascription* of culture, tradition, and “originality” to the colonized, not simply to their destruction or denigration, and, second, that in neoliberal postcolonialism (to coin a phrase) the place of English (or, alternatively, French) in the relationship between dominant imperial centers and dominated peripheries takes both a much-expanded and dramatically different form compared to the colonial moment elaborated in Fanon’s work. And this new worldwide situation of English ought to compel us to a reconsideration of the cultural processes of colonialism itself.

The question of a dominant world literary language is not just part of the subject matter of world literature studies; it has a more foundational relationship to the very concept itself. Auerbach—scholar of Latin and Romance literatures, German-Jewish émigré, one of the founders of comparative literary studies in the interwar and postwar periods, and the author of arguably the most important formulation of the idea of world literature—viewed Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* as an attempt to think diversity and uniformity in the same instance. For Auerbach, it was clear that it was precisely the great concentration of human life in the modern era, its convergence and standardiza-

tion, that had produced such concepts of human diversity as world literature. He argued that if humanity should “succeed in withstanding the shock of so mighty and rapid a process of concentration—for which the spiritual preparation has been poor [*innerlich so vorbereiteter Konzentrationsproceß*—then man will have to accustom himself to existence in a standardized world, to a single literary culture, and only a few literary languages, and perhaps even a single literary language.” Such an outcome would mean, Auerbach pointed out, that “herewith the notion of *Weltliteratur* would be at once realized and destroyed.”<sup>20</sup>

I shall return to Auerbach in some detail in Chapter 4, but suffice it here to say that this notion of a possible future is a “figure” in a precise sense, a rhetorical structure of exaggeration that nevertheless seeks to reveal an actual potentiality in the contemporary configuration of the world. Clearly, as an image of the future, it delineates a utopia and dystopia at the same time, a future toward which we could only take a contradictory stance of revulsion and anticipation: *anticipation* because of its promise of universal human communication—an overcoming of the post-Babel “confusion of tongues,” at last!—and *revulsion* because of the loss and violence entailed in its emergence.<sup>21</sup> How close exactly we are to such a condition—one single major language of literary adjudication, translation, and even expression worldwide—is not possible to ascertain with absolute certainty, but from our present historical perspective, it seems fairly evident that if such an eventuality were ever to come to pass, that single “natural” language of world literature would be English—if we bracket off for the moment the question of whether contemporary literary English is one single language. There is no more worldwide a literature today than that in English. And even if it were to be argued, correctly, it seems to me, that we are very far indeed from a single dominant language of literary *composition*, we could nevertheless say that this one language is preeminent in the forms of mediation and adjudication that constitute world literature. It is English that seems to have usurped in our times the ancient Babel dream of universal comprehensibility and communication.

This book is an attempt to think critically (and therefore historically) about the potential worldwide situation of language and

literature that is revealed in Auerbach's remarkably prophetic formulation of the concept of *Weltliteratur*, written in the 1950s, a bit over sixty years ago, when, to quote a sociolinguist, "any notion of English as a true world language was but a dim, shadowy, theoretical possibility."<sup>22</sup> It is a call for vigilance against ways of thinking that might naturalize and normalize this state of affairs and the forms of historical amnesia it rests on and facilitates in turn. Under the conditions of neoliberal capitalism, whenever English rises to dominance in a particular cultural and social sphere for the first time—the appearance and global success of the Pakistani Anglophone novel in recent years, for instance, or that of its Indian predecessor a few decades ago—it seems at once to naturalize itself, erasing the scene of politics and power that marks its emergence. This retroactive ability of English in its contemporary "global" form to suspend its own prehistory should be of interest and concern to criticism and to humanistic study more broadly.

The "rise" of English to worldwide preeminence—including literary preeminence—is one of the most pronounced cultural and social developments of the modern era, with profound implications for, among other things, languages and cultures of writing on a world scale. It has been the language of two successive world empires—the territorial British Empire for 200 years from the middle of the eighteenth century and the (for the most part but not exclusively) nonterritorial imperial structures of U.S.-led global capitalism since the middle of the twentieth. However, this institutionalized *visibility* is only part of the story. It is an element in the social situation (and power) of English worldwide that it can assume an aura of universality and transparency, including as language of theory and criticism, *disappearing* from view precisely as it assumes various mediating and officiating functions. Any critical account of literary relations on a world scale—that is, any account of world literature as such—must thus actively confront and attend to this functioning of English as *vanishing mediator*, rather than treat it passively as neutral or transparent medium, both as a world language of literary expression and as the undisputed language of global capitalism. In fact this role of English as mediator has its own history, from its beginnings in the

very inception of world literature in the colonial era to its “globalized” form in our own times.

If English is now incontestably the lingua franca of neoliberal capitalism, the language, for instance, in which individuals in a wide range of professions and in various sectors of industry and finance can most reliably expect to be able to communicate with their counterparts from across the world, then we might say that this book is concerned with a subset of that global linguistic reality, namely, the situation of English as *global literary vernacular*—English not merely as a language of literary expression but as a cultural system with global reach, not simply a transparent medium but an assemblage and apparatus for the assimilation and domestication of diverse practices of writing (and life-worlds) on a world scale. In both these spheres of functioning, therefore—that is, both in its wider role as a global language and in the more specialized role as literary language—English is involved in exchange relations: relations, in other words, in which values are produced and exchanged, where historical particulars are made fungible and put in circulation. As Ronald Judy argued some years ago, this global situation of English on the threshold of the digital era is in a line of development from the politics of language in decolonization, even for former French colonies like Algeria and Tunisia.<sup>23</sup> And I fully share the concerns voiced by those critics who argue that contemporary practices of world literature in North America, given their reliance on translation from the world’s languages into English, participate at the very least in a leveling out of linguistic particularities. Emily Apter, for instance, has warned against the emergence of a “translationally translatable monoculture”; Gayatri Spivak has described the situation as the “literatures of the world through English translations organized by the United States”; and Jonathan Arac has wondered whether, given the indisputable fact that writing composed in English is the most worldwide body of literature today, the world-encompassing ambition of world literature could really be at base a case of “Anglo-globalism.”<sup>24</sup> But I argue here that the role of “English” in mediating world literary relations predates by centuries the age of globalization, properly speaking, namely, the role that the cultural system of English



has played historically in the transformation of these very “other” linguistic spaces, especially those of the Global South, so that it is necessary to displace the question of the postcolonial national language from its fixed place in the politics of authenticity. And it is pertinent to ask whether the modes of production and dissemination of “theory” itself, especially Franco-American poststructuralist theory, constitute today a subset (and motor) of this monoculture.<sup>25</sup>

Subsequent chapters will thus examine the long prehistory of these more recent changes of the postwar era in the social situation of English as a world literary language. How historically has the cultural system of English played the role of absorbing and appropriating distant and diverse modes of life into the expanding bourgeois world? How exactly does it become available as a literary language for the first time to a society in which it does not originate? How may we describe the relationship between contemporary English in its global role as a language of literature and its various linguistic others worldwide? Is it a situation of hegemony, strictly speaking—a normalized and naturalized power—or a form of domination that is incomplete and contested, and if so, in what ways, exactly? What is the role played by English as cultural system in the great epochal shift we think of as the “modernization” of literatures written in those other languages? How are we to conceive of the prehistory of the contemporary “Anglophone” novel, which clearly plays a disproportionate role in the circuits of circulation and validation of world literature? Is it descended from non-Anglophone narrative traditions (in Asia or Africa, for instance) or from the eighteenth-century “Oriental tale” in Europe? What exactly is its relationship to the life-worlds that it claims to depict but that are not lived in English? Could the same be asked, at a different level of analysis, of the novel written in such languages as standardized Arabic, Hindi, or Urdu? What is the role of English in the creation of world literary publics through translation and other means? What role does it play in determining which forms of writing “make it”—and which do not—into world literature? What forms of (literary) mobility in the world does English represent? What does it mean that the discussion about world literature takes place disproportionately in the Western languages and above all in English? But *wherever English is or goes in*

*the world, it is dogged by its various others*—this is the basic premise of the argument presented in this work, which it variously assumes, defends, or elaborates. In order to be understood as critical thinking, properly speaking, criticism in English thus bears toward *itself* the responsibility of “unflagging vigilance against any fraud it promotes,” to quote Theodor Adorno on the responsibility of “the returning émigré” toward the language and world that are his or her own but from which he or she has been violently separated.<sup>26</sup> It is this vigilant and split relationship to English that this book seeks to cultivate—in English. It is of course hardly possible (let alone desirable) to literally “forget English” in our present conjuncture, but in this book, I insist on the necessity and possibility of thinking past, around, and *about* it. This is the second set of questions—concerning the global situation of literary English—that will concern us here.

If “English” is the ether that permeates the space of world literature, a third set of issues pertains to the *cultural logics* that world literature embodies and represents. I approach this problem by offering a historical argument, namely, that world literature had its origins in the structures of colonial power and in particular the revolution in knowledge practices and humanistic culture more broadly initiated by Orientalist philology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which developed in varying degrees of proximity to the colonial process. In historical terms, my main thesis is thus that *a genealogy of world literature leads to Orientalism*, a fact that the contemporary discussion appears by its very nature to be incapable of recognizing. More specifically, this genealogy leads to the classical phase of modern Orientalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an enormous assemblage of projects and practices that was the ground for the emergence of the concept of world literature as for the literary and scholarly practices it originally referenced. Furthermore, the cultural and social logics which, since the appearance of Edward Said’s landmark study, we have called Orientalism, *continue* to structure the practices of world literature, even when in transformed and updated forms that do not allow the continuities to be perceived immediately as such—hence the need for a genealogy, that is, a critical-historical examination of a certain

constellation of ideas and practices in its accretions and transformations over time.<sup>27</sup>

Orientalism (and world literature) are thus approached here as an articulated and effective imperial *system of cultural mapping*, which produced for the first time a conception of the world as an assemblage of civilizational entities, each in possession of its own textual and/or expressive traditions. This “scene” of world literature’s emergence in colonial capitalism was thus irreducibly a *political* one in a larger historical sense, and the contemporary practice of world literature in all its senses under neoliberal global capitalism remains equally a politically fraught process—a politics of culture that it is the aim of genealogy to unmask and to make available for criticism and analysis. In other words, we might say that if the concept of world literature always contains within itself an attempt (or at least the desire) to bridge the social distance between the First and Third Worlds, between the centers of the world system and its peripheries, our name for the logic of this bridging is “Orientalism.” I should note, however, that the method adopted here—the assembling of a wide and textured cultural archive and in fact the purposeful articulation of distinct bodies of work and text—diverges from that which is conventionally associated with genealogy at the present moment, which often consists of the isolated manipulation of a single concept, sometimes with reference to centuries and even millennia, in the course of a few pages.<sup>28</sup> To this limited extent, it is closer to the method followed in *Orientalism* by Said himself, who, after defining Orientalism as “an exercise in cultural strength,” had immediately cautioned that “it is better not to risk generalizations about so vague and yet so important a notion as cultural strength until a good deal of material has been analyzed first” (*O*, 40).

Despite the reputation of Said’s book as a sort of foundational text for concern with cultural relations on a planetary scale, the specifics of that book’s conceptual armature or the archive with which it engages do not seem to play a significant role in the present discussion and intensification of interest in the effort to comprehend literature as a planet-wide reality. This is certainly the case with Moretti’s numerous and influential writings on the subject, although he was for many years a colleague of Said’s, and even in Pascale Casanova’s

*World Republic of Letters*, whose English translation was published in a series edited by Said. And the recent attempt by Theo D'haen to write an overall history of the concept of world literature from its nineteenth-century origins into our own times gives scant attention to the role of Orientalist practices in its emergence and subsequent development.<sup>29</sup> The fact that this is a somewhat elementary observation about these influential works does not make the facts any less striking. Such elisions imply that the discussion more or less forecloses an adequate account of the asymmetries and inequalities of the institutions and practices of world literature. As will be familiar to readers of Said's work, he describes Orientalism as a highly effective and "worldly" but *protean* object of knowledge, requiring dynamic and varying definitions that shift according to conceptual constellation and perspective. Here are some of his well-known formulations from the early pages of the book: "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and . . . 'the Occident'"; from the eighteenth century on, it "can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it"; it "*is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world"; it is "a system for citing works and authors" and "a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unambiguously held"; and it is "a kind of free-floating mythology." What such diversity of definition and designation reveals, first of all, is the complex nature of the object named in the title of Said's study. He is keenly aware of the fact that "Orientalism" is a *composite* object, a suturing together of disparate practices, representations, works, motifs, "projects," institutions, and archives, whose very deliberate articulation in an act of intellectual imagination makes visible the larger underlying network of relations between them. What emerges from this range of definitions is a conception of a mode of *action* and effectiveness in the world, a will and an intention, furthermore, "that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an

uneven exchange with various kinds of power.” When I speak of Orientalism in this study, therefore, I refer, as does Said, to a particular “nexus of knowledge and power” or a type of knowledge in its worldly “career” (*O*, 2, 3, 13, 23, 41, 53, 27, 5).

The same year as the appearance of Said’s *Orientalism* saw the publication of Bryan Turner’s *Marx and the End of Orientalism*, a quiet little book that was unfortunately eclipsed by its bigger and more brash contemporary. But there are significant areas of overlap between them. Turner defined Orientalism as “a syndrome of beliefs, attitudes and theories which infects, not only the classical works of Islamic studies, but also extensive areas of geography, economics and sociology.” It led, Turner argued, to the production of “internalist” theories of the history of Middle Eastern societies, viewing them as stagnant and unchanging due to a range of their internal features, from attenuated class structure to reliance on traditional forms of authority. The historical form of such theories was often a sort of reverse teleology—an initial efflorescence followed by decline. And this picture of Islamic civilization was drawn precisely in contrast to an ideal type of the Western societies at the center of the world capitalist system. Orientalist knowledge-claims were thus essentialist in two related ways, positing, on the one hand, a conception of “Islam” as a “coherent, homogeneous, global entity,” and, on the other, a “decline thesis where Islam is seen as declining because of some flaw in its essence.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Turner argued, the Marxist tradition, and Marx himself, while trying to break out of the Orientalist “syndrome” and its many essentialisms often relied on and reproduced precisely these characteristic assumptions and conclusions. But Said, it seems to me, took the argument further, viewing Orientalism not merely as varieties or modes of *misperception* of “Oriental” realities but rather as knowledge practices embedded in the historical process of the *production* of those very realities. More broadly, we might therefore say that, historically speaking, “Orientalism” is the name of the *cultural logic of colonial rule* in the post-Industrial Revolution era, that is, the cultural logic of the bourgeois order in its outward or nondomestic orientation.

In establishing this usage, however, it is important at the outset to make one clarification. For scholars of the British Empire, the word

“Orientalist” has specific historical resonances in tension with “Anglicist”—as the names of the two sides in the great colonial debate about the nature and direction of British rule in India that lasted for several decades from the late eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries and ranged across an expanse of practices and institutions, including education, law, art and architecture, and urban planning.<sup>31</sup> The former referred to those administrators, ideologues, and ideas of colonial rule that advocated a “preservation” of native forms under British tutelage, while the latter signified those that called for the transformation and rationalization of at least segments of native society along bourgeois-European lines—their *Westernization*, in short. (*Anglicism* is thus simply the name for the project of Westernization as practiced within the British Empire.)<sup>32</sup> The text of Macaulay’s with which I began this prologue is of course a leading and well-known expression of the Anglicist side of this debate. I shall argue at various points in this book, however, that Orientalism, despite its rhetoric of “preservation” of Asiatic forms, in this sense itself represented as much of a logic of sociocultural *transformation* (and in fact Westernization) as Anglicism did, requiring the *Orientalization*, as it were, of the social and cultural forms under its purview. Furthermore, Anglicist and Orientalist ideas and practices, properly speaking, overlapped considerably in ways that remain invisible to those historians who take their polemical self-definitions at face value.<sup>33</sup> It is not always understood that Said, in his powerful designation of Orientalism, whether deliberately or otherwise, collapsed these supposedly mutually antagonistic tendencies—a *productive* conflation, as it turns out, since it allows us to glimpse the colonial logic in its entirety, though not always in its internal complexity. In this book, I too collapse the two from time to time in line with the current usage but at relevant points will also elaborate the distinction between them in order to explicate their distinct work as elements or moments within the overarching and contradictory logic of sociocultural transformation under colonial rule.

At the present moment, at least in literary studies, attention to Orientalism seems to have reverted more or less exclusively to the form of cataloguing representations of this or that social collective in this or that body of Western literature. While I recognize the value of this

form of scholarship, my contention is that the critique of Orientalism must ultimately lead us to the Orientalized spaces themselves. For “Orientalism” consists of those Western knowledge practices in the modern era whose emergence made possible for the first time the notion of a single world as a space populated by distinct civilizational complexes, each in possession of its own tradition, the unique expression of its own forms of national “genius.” It is the name for the vast cultural apparatus in modern Western culture for the establishment of identitarian truth-claims around the world—an *imperial* task, par excellence. A precise aphoristic formulation of this question comes in one brief luminous sentence in Said’s essay on the late works of Jean Genet: “Imperialism is the export of identity.”<sup>34</sup> But it should be understood that this is a broad historical statement; the actual modalities of the varieties of Orientalisms in their social effects in the range of societies with which they are concerned vary a great deal from place to place and time to time.<sup>35</sup> As Stathis Gourgouris has shown, even northern European philhellenism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries worked in this manner when directed at contemporary Greek society. It represents, he argues, a colonization of the realm of the *ideal* rather than of the real.<sup>36</sup>

It is symptomatic and significant, therefore, that when Said turns to thinking explicitly about the implied reader of his text, he can only describe a *dispersed* figure, split between different social locations worldwide. In addition to “students of literature and criticism,” “contemporary students of the Orient,” and the “general reader,” Said writes, his critique of Orientalism is directed toward “readers in the so-called Third World”: “For them this study proposes itself as a step toward an understanding not so much of Western politics and of the non-Western world in those politics as of the *strength* of Western cultural discourse, a strength too often mistaken as merely decorative or ‘superstructural.’ My hope is to illustrate the *formidable structure of cultural domination* and, specifically for formerly colonized peoples, *the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon other.*” Recalling Antonio Gramsci’s assertion in the *Prison Notebooks* of the “imperative” to produce an “inventory” of the “infinity of traces” that the historical process has left on the critical subject itself, Said makes a remarkable confession: “Much of the per-

sonal investment in this study derives from my awareness of being an 'Oriental' as a child growing up in two British colonies. All of my education, in those colonies (Palestine and Egypt) and in the United States, has been Western, and yet that deep early awareness has persisted. In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, an Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals" (*O*, 24, 25). The Orientalized subject has a split "awareness" of itself, a divided consciousness of the self produced as other and, inversely, as the object of the historical will, intention, and "project" of an other. Thus, far from ignoring the possibility of historically autonomous action on the part of the colonized and far from viewing Orientalism as a totalizing and absolute system of representation from which there is no escape, as some readers have suggested over the years, Said's critique of Orientalism amounts to a *call* to precisely such action, an invitation to historical self-transformation in the very process of the "critical elaboration" of the self.

Said places the rise of modern Orientalism within the general process of secularization of Western culture in the early modern era. His account of this process is of some interest to us here:

Modern Orientalism derives from secularizing elements in eighteenth-century European culture. . . . But if these interconnected elements represent a secularizing tendency, this is not to say that the old religious patterns of human history and destiny and "the existential paradigms" were simply removed. Far from it: they were reconstituted, redeployed, redistributed in the secular frameworks just enumerated. For anyone who studied the Orient a secular vocabulary in keeping with these frameworks was required. Yet if Orientalism provided the vocabulary, the conceptual repertoire, the techniques—for this is what, from the end of the eighteenth century on, Orientalism *did* and what Orientalism was—it also retained, as an undislodged current in its discourse, a reconstructed religious impulse, a naturalized supernaturalism. (*O*, 121)

Said's critique of Orientalism is thus in essence criticism of its, we might say, "naturalized supernaturalism," of its remapping of



humanity in terms of supposedly secular cultural logics whose Manichean modalities with respect to human collectivities, and in particular those societies that are Christianity's traditional antagonists, can only be understood as a "reconstructed religious impulse."<sup>37</sup> The doctrines of Orientalism, its repertoire of authoritative representations of Oriental-Islamic societies, thus constitute "a secular post-Enlightenment myth whose outlines are unmistakably Christian" (*O*, 115). It is in this sense that *Orientalism* may be said to offer an account of the cultural logic of (Western) bourgeois society in its global or outward orientation, in its encounter with and reorganization of human societies on a planetary scale. Against this, as it were, *false* appearance of the secular in history and its attendant antagonisms—a fundamentally localized (that is, Western) emergence that simultaneously carries the force of the universal in history—Said points not so much to a utopian and distant future without those, as it were, theological antagonisms as to the question and possibility in the historical present of "surviving the consequences" of these structures and logics "humanly" (*O*, 45).

Said conceives of this anti-identitarian imperative as the classically *secular-critical* task, concerned with the here and now, attentive to the dense and ultimately inassimilable fabric of society. It is no accident that "Secular Criticism" is the main conceptual essay of the first book that follows *Orientalism* in Said's trajectory, for it may in some important ways be read as a methodological reflection backward on the critical project of the latter. As I have argued elsewhere, the figure of Auerbach exiled in Istanbul that provides a sort of running leit-motif in that essay is an exemplary figure for secular criticism in Said's terms precisely because, as a figure of displacement and dis-possession, it marks a certain distance and fissure from the transcendentalization of cultural authority, forms of reckoning cultural community, transmission, and descent that are based, as it were, on the "quasi-religious authority of being at home among one's people."<sup>38</sup> The critique of imperialism (and of Orientalism more specifically) is inseparable for Said from criticism of culture as transcendentalized authority, all those cultural forms, both the conventionally religious and the supposedly secular, whose appeal to authority is placed outside the fabric of social interest and the possibility of historical

transformation. For instance, in comparing Macaulay's appropriation and dismissal of "the native literature of India and Arabia" in line with the logic of colonial rule and John Stuart Mill's exclusion of the colonized peoples from the space of "liberty" as such—these two iconic moments of liberal imperialist thought in the nineteenth century—Said notes,

Both are related to the point I made earlier about Auerbach, that culture often has to do with an aggressive sense of nation, home, community, and belonging. . . . Macaulay's was an ethnocentric opinion with ascertainable results. He was speaking from a position of power where he could translate his opinions into the decision to make an entire subcontinent of natives submit to studying in a language not their own. . . . In turn this validated the culture to itself by providing a precedent, and a case, by which superiority and power are lodged both in a rhetoric of belonging, or being "at home," so to speak, and in a rhetoric of administration: the two become interchangeable.<sup>39</sup>

Secular criticism is thus a radically historical practice, opposed in concrete and detailed ways to metaphysical grounding and authorization of culture, both secular and religious, constantly unearthing its social filiations and affiliations and identifying the "human" costs of failing to subject to such criticism the process of critical thinking itself.

This elemental aspect of Said's project is either lost on those of his current readers who have found their way to the emerging orthodoxy of the "postsecular" or political-theological in the humanistic disciplines and yet cannot quite do without Said's understanding of imperialism in its cultural and epistemological dimensions, or it is actively disdained for its investment in the secular imagination and in criticism itself.<sup>40</sup> Taking up this concern once again, I am interested here in the significance of historical Orientalism for the fabrication, in non-Western societies in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of forms of cultural authority tied to the claim to authenticity of (religious, cultural, and national) "tradition"—*turāth*, *rivāyat*, or *paramparā* in some of the languages that will concern us

here—and thus, given the links between such forms of authority and the *majoritarian* state in the modern era, for the emergence of the kinds of social fissure that have often accompanied such transitions. Both religious and secular traditions in this sense in the modern era—the Arab tradition and Islamic orthodoxy, for instance, or Indian civilization and Hinduism—are products of the Orientalist conjuncture and, far from excluding the religious, the secular cultural complexes have themselves been produced by their anchoring in religious elements configured in majoritarian terms.

If *Orientalism*, despite its wide reputation, remains still a strangely misunderstood and underexplored book, this is possibly because readers in the literary-critical disciplines are generally still not trained to be at ease in at least some of the “Orientalist” archives with which it engages, and those readers who are professionally assigned the mastery of those archives in the division of labor in the humanities sometimes respond defensively to its relentless (and occasionally overreaching) criticism of their disciplinary methods and procedures. The entire problematic of whether European writers and scholars engaged in the representation of non-European realities were exercising their power over those life-worlds or engaged in genuine attempts to overcome the limits of their own cultures or societies—whether they were humanists or racists, to put it somewhat bluntly, in terms of a supposed binary that does not quite hold—preoccupies even so perspicacious a historical scholar and reader of literature as Srinivas Aravamudan, who argues, against what he takes to be Said’s position, that the writings of what he felicitously calls Enlightenment Orientalism were “not just bent on the domination of the other but also aimed at mutual understanding across cultural differences.”<sup>41</sup> Who in their right mind could really argue to the contrary? Certainly not Said, though the problem may in part be due to the rhetorical register of parts of the argument in *Orientalism*, where Said seeks to trace his larger theme of power and knowledge at the level of individual writers and their mind-sets or even intentionality, leaving itself vulnerable to such a reading if read in isolation. But why should we read such passages in isolation from the rest of the book or from the enormous body of Said’s other writings that clearly point away from such a possible reading? At one level, in fact, Said is con-

cerned precisely with demonstrating in what (different) ways exactly Western Islamophilia and Islamophobia constitute distinct but related varieties of Orientalism. In other words, when a late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century European writer turns to “India”—available to him or her first and foremost as a newly canonized textual corpus—for a stock of motifs and images, explicitly with the hope of overcoming the limitations or provinciality of hitherto existing European ideas about literature, culture, religion, or antiquity, he or she is still engaged in an exercise that is fundamentally European in nature, that is, *embedded* in a strong sense in the centers of the emergent world system and concerning its peripheries.

The *material* effects of these textual practices on those other societies—they are material because they are social and political—some of which I explore in this book, are fundamentally asymmetrical and unimaginable in reverse. As Said pointed out, for instance, with decisive implications, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti’s *‘Ajā’ib al-āthbār fi al-tarājim wa al-akbbār* (a mostly untranslatable title in rhymed prose that may be rendered very roughly in English as “Marvelous Traces of Discourse and Events”), a chronicle of life in Egypt that provides a contemporary Egyptian account of life during the Napoleonic invasion of 1798, could not possibly have the same material presence in the world as the massive compendium *Description de l’Égypte*, compiled by the team of scholars who had worked under the auspices of the military invasion.<sup>42</sup> Intentionality is not irrelevant to this mode of cultural and social analysis, but it is far from being the exclusive or even dominant mode of determining the “worldly” reality, as Said calls it, of cultural practices, including textual ones. This is what Said references as “contrapuntality,” the imperative to excavate the material inequalities of texts as events in the world and the asymmetry of cultural transactions, not some happy-go-lucky concert of the world’s peoples and civilizations. In fact, contrapuntality is in one sense precisely a critique of this (European) view of the world as an assemblage of supposedly equal peoples, nations, or civilizations, produced and developed in exactly the decades (and more broadly centuries) of an ever-accelerating conquest of these very societies and civilizations and their rendering into—in Marx’s words, from writings on colonial India to which I shall turn in some detail

in Chapter 1—a “heap of ruins.”<sup>43</sup> The entire globally dispersed twentieth-century project of “decolonizing the mind,” in the felicitous phrase of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, is based on a clear-sighted recognition of this historical reality.<sup>44</sup>

It has become de rigueur in books concerning world literature—even those that are critical of its claims—to perform ostentatiously the global crisscrossing that the concept itself seems to call for, producing almost a distinct style of writing, typified by the stringing together of the names of (say) a dozen different writers from several countries repeatedly into as many paragraphs as possible. I proceed somewhat differently here, providing a critical historiography, first, of the concept itself and, second, of its applications and consequences with respect to one region of the world and its languages and literatures. This emphasis in the book is on the archive of literature either from or concerned with the Indian subcontinent and, more precisely, its northern region. The varieties of Orientalism that will concern me are therefore primarily Indological—mainly British but also French and German—and “classical” (that is, concerning Sanskrit) as well as “vernacular” (especially concerning Urdu and Hindi); but the framework brought to its study is a comparative one, and whenever possible and necessary, I also address questions that pertain to Persian, Arabic, and even Turkish Orientalisms and literatures. I seek to elucidate how “India” has been implicated in the mutual entanglement of Orientalism and world literature but also, more crucially, how it can also be a site for a *critique* of this entanglement. How exactly are we to conceive of Orientalism as the genealogical origin of world literature? What is the relationship in this regard between Orientalism as a scholarly activity and as imaginative literature? If Orientalisms of all varieties can be understood as generating discourses of authenticity, as I have argued earlier, what precisely is their relationship to nationalist claims to authenticity over and against the historical disruptions of the colonial process? This is the third group of questions, concerning Orientalism as the cultural logic of bourgeois modernity in its outward orientation, that will concern us in this book. But more broadly I hope to demonstrate what consequences follow for our critical practice if we explicitly link the

question of Orientalism to that of world literature, a linkage required by the history of these two formations themselves.

It will therefore be clear, I hope, that the book seeks to present a *comparatist* approach to the history and contemporary worldwide situation of English as a literary and cultural system and its role in the emergence and functioning of world literary relations. But by no means is it meant to provide an exhaustive account of even the skeletal structure of literary relations on a “world” scale, let alone the sinew and muscle that make them whole. This is an argument about one distinct line of development from emergent cultural practices in eighteenth-century Europe, a line of development that is embedded in the social life of English as a language of literature, Orientalist scholarship, colonial and postcolonial pedagogy, and imperial administration and power. “English” is clearly a single thread in a much-larger historical weave, and I have no doubt that from other linguistic, literary, and historical locations—say, the Slavic sphere in the early Soviet decades, the discourse of literary modernity in Meiji and Taisho Japan, the emergence of a globalized literary French in our own times, or even the distinctly German trajectory of the concept and its dissemination through the world of publishing and therefore of reading practices—the pattern might look substantially different.<sup>45</sup> This multiplicity is in fact the very point of my argument here, as the plural nouns in the subtitle of the book are meant to indicate: the discourse of world literature, even in its most triumphalist “one-world” moments, reveals the multiplicity and particularity of its purportedly unitary object and relies on a range of Orientalist notions and practices for the arrangement and comprehension of its textual materials. But it is also my conviction that the pattern I describe here is a central and significant one, first of all because it is not entirely without influence on these other cultural configurations but also because it is a prototypical case, *exemplifying* some of the decisive structures, asymmetries, and routes and modes of cultural transmission in the modern world in the colonial and postcolonial eras.

The problem of Orientalism as I have sought to redefine it here is the crucial missing link in preeminent contemporary accounts of world literary relations, even those that are broadly sociological in

their conceptual orientation. In Damrosch's work, the role of the Orientalists is typically viewed as a neutral process of the discovery and insertion of non-European textual exempla in the (European) sphere of world literature, rather than as the politically charged process of acquisition and assimilation that I take it to be. In the case of Casanova and Moretti, the elision could be laid at the feet of world-systems theory itself, which both authors rely on in their works. World-systems theory has been criticized by humanists for its deterministic economism, its inability to attend to the specific socio-cultural logics that institute the inequalities between "centers" and "peripheries," to the reality of antisystemic pressures and projects, and to the fact that no social system, no matter how comprehensive, can consume and exhaust the forms of social and cultural life, let alone all possibilities of thought and imagination. Although these criticisms are at least partially correct, they miss the point with regard to the humanists' task in this connection—the possibility (and usefulness) of a critical engagement with the center-periphery model that would make it more responsive to these problems, the application of a humanistic supplement to its rigidly economistic forms.<sup>46</sup> The model is for us an unavoidable one, making visible at the very least the systemic *aspects* of relations of inequality on a world scale, and I myself rely on it to a great extent in this book. And whereas the recent discussion appears to reveal a certain strain, if not outright hostility, between those who employ a "center-periphery" conceptual framework and those more reliant on "empire-colony," I see the tension between these rival frameworks as a *productive* one and based within their somewhat different relationships to the historical as such. The former model represents a certain abstraction from the historical process of the constitution of empires and their colonies, which allows, among other things, a broadening of its field of application, incorporating, as it does, postcolonial relations as well. But this does not mean that the latter polarity is itself not the result of abstraction from the historical process. On the contrary, it very much marks a conceptual abstraction but one that grants to the historically particular a certain visibility rather than subsuming it entirely into the language of generality by making any specific particular more or less equivalent to all other similarly situated

particulars. Throughout this book, I therefore alternate between these usages, using each one to modify and enrich the perspectives made possible by the other.

The problem with Moretti's and Casanova's use of the center-periphery model is its wholesale and largely uncritical and positivistic "application."<sup>47</sup> This means that each of them fails to understand the nature of the very social and cultural processes that assign societies, languages, and practices of writing either to the center or to the periphery. Precisely how literary traditions or intelligentsias acquire the one status or the other in the world literary system—or that of "semi-periphery" somewhere in between the two—is a question that remains foreclosed in their works. In Moretti, the question seems to be avoided by simply mapping the world literary system onto the world-system as such in Immanuel Wallerstein's original sense, as its superstructural aspect, so that centers and peripheries in either, it seems to be assumed, more or less correspond with each other.<sup>48</sup> And Casanova, attempting to avoid this strong economism, can go no further than a vague notion of the "autonomy" of the former from the latter. Their respective works are salutary in having emphasized *inequality* as the primary structural principle of world literary space rather than *difference*, which has been the dominant preoccupation in the discussion of world literature since the late eighteenth century, including in Goethe's late-in-life elaboration of the idea of *Weltliteratur*. But they give us no account whatsoever of the exact nature of these forms of inequality and the sociocultural logics through which they have historically been instituted, logics for the institution of inequality that *incorporate* notions and practices of "difference" and proceed precisely through them. It is these logics that I refer to collectively as Orientalism, or, rather, Orientalism-Anglicism, in this book. But beyond this failure to understand the mutual imbrication of inequality and difference, Moretti and Casanova also share an evisceration of an entire other dimension of the idea of world literature from its inception: namely, its normative force and its links to a historical and teleological conception of humanity that views the world as historical and intersubjective horizon rather than simply as a certain extent of geographical space populated by objects—either by literary genres that circulate between centers and



peripheries (Moretti) or by centers that adjudicate the literary productions of the peripheries (Casanova), as we shall see in more detail in subsequent chapters.<sup>49</sup>

In his fine study of the Latin American novel in a global frame, Mariano Siskind has made a distinction that is useful for our purposes here, distinguishing “the globalization of the novel” from “the novelization of the global.” The former refers to the worldwide spread of the novel as a genre in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from its origins in a handful of languages in the western European countries, while the latter signifies the very treatment of “the global” within this globalizing form: the first points to the systemic (and, for Siskind, more or less invariant) processes of the universalization of the bourgeoisie and the preeminent place of the novel form within that historical process, while the second indicates the varieties of strategies used by individuals and groups of writers to bend the form to their local needs as members of an emergent bourgeoisie. The first points to an externalist approach to the novel, whereas the second points to an internalist one. To this extent, Siskind seems to be following the structure for novel studies established by Moretti in his two-volume compendium and collective study of the novel across the world.<sup>50</sup> I shall return in a later chapter to evaluate the merits of Siskind’s argument about the novel as a “universal” form. But two related problems with his argument are worth outlining here in order to further define the line of argument I am elaborating. The cultural relationship between emergent bourgeoisies in the world’s peripheral regions and the bourgeoisies of the world centers, Siskind argues, is marked by a *desire* for modernity on the part of the former, which takes for them the form of emulation of the latter. This claim, which he makes with respect to the Latin American intelligentsia in the nineteenth century, could be extended, with minimal modulation, to many other regions of the colonial world, including the ones that will concern us here. But Siskind goes further and argues that consequently “the operation of universalization that constitutes the discursive basis for the globality of the novel should not be understood as an instance of the periphery’s cultural subordination to the core. . . . That is, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century the representation of the particularity

of bourgeois European culture and its institutions as universal was an enterprise shared by intellectuals and practitioners both at the center and at the margins of a global discursive field that sanctioned the universality of the novel-form.”<sup>51</sup> At various points in this book, I shall proceed precisely on the premise that the expressed desire for bourgeois modernity among colonial intelligentsias is a sign not of the absence of (colonial or imperial) domination or subjugation but rather precisely of such relations of inequality. The very use of the term “globalization” for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historical realities leads to a circularity of argument in Siskind’s work: once that earlier historical process is given the name “globalization,” its differences from the processes in our own times become occluded. It obviates the historical specificity of colonial relations within a somewhat ahistorical model of centers and peripheries. At the very least, then, we might say that the concept of world literature is always marked by an attempt to conceive of the universalization of certain aspects of modern bourgeois culture and society. In fact it appears to be *forced* to confront this issue even when it seems like its particular deployment in any given context might be intended to avoid it.

In Chapter 1, I begin by laying out the conceptual and historical groundwork for the study as a whole. The main historical premise here is that what we call modern Orientalism is merely the cultural system that for the first time articulated a concept of the world as an assemblage of “nations” with distinct expressive traditions, above all “literary” ones. Orientalism thus played a crucial role in the emergence of the cultural logics of the modern bourgeois world, an element of European *self*-making, first of all. But as Raymond Schwab observed a long time ago, the philological revolution also sought to make the world *whole* for the first time, and it is this specific *modality* of making the world whole that will concern us here.<sup>52</sup> At the center of this worldwide enterprise was of course the British Empire, arguably the most linguistically diverse imperial formation in the history of the world. The very birth of modern philology, and of the comparative method as such at the center of the modern humanities, was directly linked in a myriad of ways to this complex historical conjuncture, as a wide range of scholarship has demonstrated over the

years. I seek to demonstrate here in concrete historical terms that world literature was from the beginning an eminently Orientalist idea, made possible by the new philological and institutional practices that made up the world of modern Orientalism. Its emergence was contingent not only on the dissemination of the textual materials made available for the first time by the Orientalists' translational labors but also on the canonizing of Orientalist procedures and concepts of cultural difference as such. In the first section of this chapter ("Historicism and Orientalism: Reading the World"), I seek to demonstrate that such Orientalist ideas were inseparable in their emergence from the forms of philosophical historicism that are contemporary with them, and I discuss these links in some detail through the writings (and influence) of Johann Gottfried Herder, William Jones, Wilhelm Schlegel, and Goethe. Decades before Goethe's first use of the term, Herder and Jones had laid its basis in their respective theories of the mutual relations between the languages and cultures of the Old World, and in Schlegel's work, as Michel Foucault observed in *The Order of Things*, the modern Indological paradigm achieved its settled form at the center of the philological humanities.<sup>53</sup> And in the second section ("A Heap of Ruins: Colonialism, Capitalism, World Literature"), I demonstrate that world literature was from its inception a concept and a practice, in a strong sense, of bourgeois society, that is to say, a concept of exchange, and that this fact was first understood by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*, less than two decades after Goethe's coining of the term. They viewed it as part and parcel of the bourgeoisie's continuous attempt to create a "world market," which entailed (and continues to entail) the almost continuous and massive destruction of lived social and cultural forms across the world's diverse societies. I seek here to restore Marx to the contemporary discussion of world literature, from which he seems to be often missing, even in the work of Casanova and Moretti, each of whom represents a variant of a sociological approach to the question. Every occasion of the achieving of a "world" status by a local practice of writing must be understood as an element within a new phase in the history of the development of the "world market." (I reserve Auerbach's remarkable intervention in the history of the concept of world literature,

and the use made of it by Said, for separate and fuller treatment in Chapter 4.)

In Chapter 2, I turn to the process I call the *institution of Indian literature*. The primary argument developed in the first part of this chapter (“Calcutta Orientalism, Phase I: Europe’s Age of *Śākuntala*”) is that the conditions for the development of the concept and the practices of world literature were first established in the new Orientalist philology that began to appear in the 1770s and especially the Indology that emerged as part of the work of the colonial state in Calcutta in that decade—what I am calling *Calcutta Orientalism*. This revolution in humanistic knowledge affected European culture profoundly, a second (“Oriental”) renaissance in the West, as Schwab called it a long time ago, but more importantly, from my perspective in this book, contributed to a slow but cumulatively massive *Orientalizing* of culture in the colonized society itself. I examine the first emergence of the idea of a unique Indian civilization in this corpus, its dissemination throughout the European literary sphere, and its eventual installation in Indian society itself as the core cultural belief of the new, English-educated middle-class that emerged in different parts of India in the course of the nineteenth century. It is at the core of my argument that Orientalist theories of cultural difference are grounded in *a notion of indigeneity as the condition of culture*—a chronotope, properly speaking, of deep habitation in time—and that therefore *nationalism is a fundamentally Orientalist cultural impulse*. To take just one small example from the twentieth century, without the institution of this structure of knowledge, which was the result of the long work of Orientalism in the course of the nineteenth century, some of whose elements will concern us here, the structure of the historical narrative presented in so canonical a work of nationalist thought as Jawaharlal Nehru’s *Discovery of India* (1946), in which the nationalist consciousness and imagination emerge at the end of a long arc of development out of Indic-civilizational roots, is unthinkable. I trace some of the variety of ways in which practices of indigeneity came to be installed in Indian society in the nineteenth century, instituting the canonization of ancient Sanskritic culture as the unique civilization of the subcontinent, the possibility of historical descent from which became the test

of indigeneity in contemporary society for diverse social groups, cultural practices, and social imaginaries. This in my view is the full arc of the historical dialectic of Orientalism and/as world literature in its relation to culture and society in the subcontinent.

The institution of “Indian literature,” that is, the single event of its emergence and insertion into the space of world literature, was thus a deeply fraught event, leading to social and cultural cleavages whose effects are still with us today. If these Orientalist practices were first developed in the Sanskritic preoccupations of the “first phase” of Calcutta Orientalism, the second, namely, the colonial project of the standardization of the “vernacular” languages, especially from 1800 onward, established them in a wider cultural terrain. My focus in the second section of the chapter (“Calcutta Orientalism, Phase II: What Is the ‘Language of Hindoostan?’”) is therefore on the question of the now-split vernacular of North India, namely, Hindi-Urdu—identical at the level of spoken language but now in many ways distinct in terms of “higher” vocabulary and literary practices (and of course in orthographic terms). I chart the effects of indigenization as an Orientalist practice on this linguistic-literary field and examine the transformation of the pluralist logic of this cultural space as it entered the (colonial) “world republic of letters” and was submitted to its logic of indigenization. This indigenizing logic of linguistic differentiation provided the cultural basis for the ultimate differentiation and standardization of two distinct political identities along religious lines in North India and infiltrated the cultural politics even of those regions, like Punjab and Bengal, that were, strictly speaking, outside this linguistic zone. This politics of linguistic and literary indigenization is a distinct element in the larger historical process that culminated in the religio-political partition of India in 1947 and is thus at the same time an important element in the history of the worldwide institution of world literature. In the third and final section of this chapter (“Literary History and the Beginnings of Colonial Time”), I argue that literary modernity, properly speaking, in (colonized) societies like India subject to Orientalist practices may be said to begin not so much with the emergence of such characteristically modern genres as the novel, as is often suggested or even just assumed, but rather with the acquisition

of a canonical *literary history* by a premodern corpus of writing. I demonstrate the way in which the (modern) linguistic split in the linguistic and literary field of the northern Indian vernacular was actualized by the canonization of two distinct (and rival) literary histories for its corpus of writing.

In Chapter 3, we come to the situation of English as a “global” literary language in the postcolonial era and the structure of its relations to its various “others” worldwide, in particular the so-called vernacular languages of the Global South. I examine this relationship both in general terms and within a variety of modes of Anglophone writing itself. In the first section of this chapter (“A World of English”), I analyze the modes of domination of English as literary language and cultural system, which now constitute the preeminent ground of adjudication and assimilation of diverse bodies and practices of writing into world literature. Using South Asia once again as my main archive, I argue that the relationship of English to the Indian vernaculars in our own time replicates and updates the cultural logic of the colonial state at the threshold of the Anglicization of segments of the elites in Indian society in the mid-nineteenth century. In the second part of the chapter (“‘Out of the Garrets of Bloomsbury’: The Anglophone Novel from Anand to Aslam”), I trace the persistence of the Orientalist versus Anglicist debate of the early colonial state in debates in our own times about the Anglophone novel and its apparent role in world literature as India’s “representative” literary form. The chapter presents a critical theory of this form, the Anglophone novel in and from the subcontinent, in relation to its vernacular linguistic environment, from the 1930s to our contemporary moment. Taking Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, which is situated historically at the culmination of the colonial process and the threshold of decolonization, as the starting point for my analysis, I analyze the tensions that constitute the Anglophone novel as a form. Taking Salman Rushdie’s works as emblematic of the “boom” in Indo-English fiction, I then analyze the ways in which these later novels stage their own relationship to the vernaculars—“subaltern” speech forms, for instance, or vernacular literary cultures, such as that of Urdu. Signs of these literary and cultural others of English often appear within these novels packaged as the vehicle for the pleasures

of the form itself. Finally, I turn to the contemporary emergence of an Anglophone novel practice in Pakistan that is being widely hailed as the arrival of a new literature not only for Pakistan but for South Asia as a whole—such writers as Nadeem Aslam, Kamila Shamsie, and Muhammad Hanif. The tension between English and the vernacular—voice and imagination—is renewed and reinscribed in a handful of these works through an engagement with Urdu and its social worlds. Hovering above these works, I argue, is the question of the possibility of a distinct “Pakistani” historical experience and its representation in “epic” form. And in the final section of the chapter (“The Ghazal among the Nations”), I turn to Anglophone poetry, namely, the translingual (and transnational) poetic practice of Agha Shahid Ali, self-described “Kashmiri-American,” one of whose most remarkable experiments has been the transposition of Urdu poetic forms and rhythms into writing in English. All these Anglophone authors—variously validated in the contemporary space of world literature—are immersed in the question of the nationalizing (that is, *partitioning*) of society, culture, literature, and social imaginaries in the subcontinent in the twentieth century and thus offer us resources for thinking about the historical arc of the dialectic of indigenization and alienization whose philological archive I analyzed earlier.

In Chapter 4, the focus turns once again to the concept of world literature itself to examine its refashioning in the work of Auerbach and the engagement with it by Said, bringing to my reading of Auerbach the genealogy of world literature I have developed in earlier chapters. Much of the argument here takes the form of a close engagement with Auerbach’s landmark essay “Philology and *Weltliteratur*,” which I situate in its historical moment, the Euro-Atlantic aftermath of war, genocide, and imperial decline. In the first section of the chapter (“The One World and the End of World Literature”), I examine the dialectic of the universal and the particular that Auerbach attributes to the concept and with which he engages in a productive manner. The figure of the philologist in Auerbach’s essay is, I further argue, a figure for the cosmopolitan European subject in the transition to the postcolonial world, attempting to refashion its cultural authority in the wake of these momentous historical transformations. I read this figure alongside that of the ethnographer in

Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, a contemporary work that shares with Auerbach's essay the European pathos of the emerging one world.<sup>54</sup> The philologist and the ethnographer in these works are figures for the humanist European subject and for the European subject as humanist, produced in distinct disciplinary formations but sharing this ground of the reconstitution of the European subject put under stress by historical developments—above all, decolonization as a world historical event. And in the second section of the chapter (“A World of Philology”), I examine Auerbach's (and following him, Said's) *exilic* rethinking of the philology of world literature. Auerbach's innovation in the history of elaborations of this concept is the decoupling of modern philology—his “method” for the study of world literature—from the organicist forms of historicism in which it had been born in the late eighteenth century and its rearticulation with the exilic imagination (and exilic experience) in the twentieth. He accomplishes this in part by counterposing Vichian historicism to the Herderian, and it is this rearticulation of philology that Said takes as his own starting point in his engagement with Auerbach's work. Said's critique of the Orientalist dimension of modern philological practice, with its ties to the imperial process, which had remained unmarked and therefore unexamined in Auerbach's writing, completes the transition. Said rewrites Auerbach's high-modernist motif of (European) exile as the affective and cognitive orientation of the criticism of culture and society and their relation to the structures of domination in the contemporary world.

I began this prologue with various instances in modern literature of representations of the universal library as figures of world literature. I conclude now with a concrete embodiment of this figure by turning to an institution in a city that, as in the colonial nineteenth century, is once again one of the financial centers of the world economy. As Mani has noted, much as “literature codes the world in verbal and aural signs and promotes representation—aesthetic, epistemic, political—libraries present themselves as prolific, substantial, and expansive ‘texts’ that rely on the collective knowledge about the world.” Housed in its “new” building in the London neighborhood of St. Pancras, the British Library presents itself as one such text, encoding the multilayered historical processes of its origin and



development, the “historical contingencies that condition accumulation and classification, circulation and distribution, patronage and accession, orderly organization and disorderly contention.”<sup>55</sup> It has largely silenced early critics of its design since opening to the public in 1997, the critics having famously included Charles, the endlessly waiting heir to the throne and amateur critic of modern architecture, who derided the design as reminiscent of both a train station and a secret police academy. The broad consensus since it became the functioning home of the United Kingdom’s “national” library is that whatever it may lack in its exterior design, it more than makes up for in its interior, a warm and inviting set of spaces conducive to research and writing. Visitors enter the building from the large street-level plaza, which is dominated by the Scottish-Italian artist Eduardo Paolozzi’s bronze *Newton*, a giant mechanical, nuts-and-bolts man, seated and leaning over, in the manner of Isaac Newton in William Blake’s well-known print, engrossed in making measurements with a mathematical instrument on the ground at his bare feet. (In the print, it is on an unrolled length of parchment that seems to be an extension of the mathematician’s body.) Paolozzi thus makes reference in his sculpture to each side of the “two cultures” of knowledge—science and mathematics as well as the arts and humanities, and Enlightenment as well as Romanticism. On entering the building through the main doors, visitors find themselves in a cavernous hall that is several stories high, with windows, balconies, and overhangs at various levels overlooking the entrance space from various directions. Toward the back of this enormous space is a dimly lit, rectangular glass tower that rises in the middle of the building, emerging seemingly from below street level and rising up into its upper reaches. On one floor, the tower is surrounded by a railing that can be approached by visitors for a closer look at the tower’s contents. It is full of books—old books, including many impressively large volumes, most bound in morocco leather, the spines beautifully tooled in gilt.

The collection known since 1973 as the British Library—which is, by most measures, the largest library in the world—came into formal existence through a series of donations to the British Museum in the early years of its existence in the late eighteenth century.<sup>56</sup> This

included the handing over by King George II in 1757 of the so-called Old Royal Library of the English sovereigns, whose contents were absorbed into the museum's general collections. But a second royal "gift to the nation" by George IV in 1823 of the roughly 60,000 books and 19,000 pamphlets of the so-called King's Library came to acquire a special status in the museum in Great Russell Street in Bloomsbury, eventually acquiring a new gallery for its storage and display (now known as the Enlightenment Gallery). The collection donated by George IV had been built largely by his father, "mad" King George III, as befitting the monarch of an emergent modern empire and is considered by the institution of which it is now part as "one of the most significant collections of the Enlightenment," containing many of the earliest printed books, the collection as a whole ranging from the mid-fifteenth century to the early nineteenth.<sup>57</sup> There is something endearing about this gesture, which speaks of domestic dramas—one imagines the son, having been relegated for nearly a decade to the role of regent, belatedly inheriting the throne in his late fifties and sweeping the house clean of the possessions of his deranged and demanding parent. The books in the glass tower in St. Pancras are the contents of the mad King George's library. As an architectural element, the tower thus makes a powerful statement about the historical continuity in British life from the monarchical order to a bourgeois and democratic one—from "Royal" to "British" or "National" institutions. It seems to commemorate the slow transformation of an absolutist monarchy into a modern bourgeois nation-state anchored to its past through a constitutionally constrained monarch and suggests that in this "gift" from the king to the people, in this transformation of the private collection of the king into a public institution, the cultural patrimony of the modern nation was born.

Situated on an upper level and toward the back of the British Library building is what is now called the Asian and African Studies Reading Room. Here, scholars can consult, along with other materials, the vast collections of what used to be the India Office—and before its creation, the East India Company—the institutions through which Britain's Indian possessions were governed over the centuries, first on behalf of the board of directors of the company

and, after its dissolution following the brutal suppression of the Great Rebellion of 1857, known to colonial historiography as the Sepoy Mutiny, the ministers of the Crown. The entire central archive of the British administration of India is available for scholars to peruse in this reading room. But besides these official records, printed books, maps, photographs, personal papers, and other materials, the India Office collections include a large number of manuscripts “in the Oriental languages,” as the catalogue description has it, including precious volumes in Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and a number of the vernacular languages of the subcontinent. In many cases, these are the only known copies of the works in question, and they were acquired at various times throughout the life of the East India Company and its successor. As briefly described in a small bibliographic pamphlet titled *Urdu Language Collections in the British Library*, available to readers in the reading room, the manuscripts “were acquired from various sources but before the early twentieth century the majority came from the libraries of Indian princes and retired servants of the East India Company and the India Office.” The manuscript holdings, we are told, are “rich and varied, with many rare items of literary or artistic merit. [They contain] some of the earliest Urdu manuscripts extant today, a large number of autograph or otherwise distinct items, and several fine examples of calligraphy and illumination. Poetry forms the backbone of the collection, especially genres favored by early and medieval Urdu poets.”<sup>58</sup>

Of the eight “special collections” known to contain manuscripts in Urdu, the first to be listed is called the Delhi Collection, and its description, of admirable brevity, reads as follows: “Consisting primarily of Arabic and Persian works, the collection represents about three-fourths of what remained, in 1858, of the royal library of the Mughal Emperors. . . . In 1859, the Government of India purchased the remnants of the royal library for just under 15,000 rupees at a sale organized by the Delhi Prize Agents. In 1867, 1,120 volumes, the less valuable of the manuscripts, were sold. The remainder, approximately 3,710 volumes, were transferred to the India Office [in London] in 1876. These include 144 items in Urdu.”<sup>59</sup> “Delhi Prize Agents” is one of those euphemisms that are ubiquitous to the culture of British imperialism, like “District Collector” for the official

tasked with extracting agricultural revenues from a population of cultivators in a rural administrative district. It refers to the individuals appointed by the army to give some semblance of order and bureaucratic efficiency to the unhindered universal looting by British soldiers of all ranks throughout the city after its recapture in September 1857 from the Indian rebels who had held it for much of the summer during the Great Rebellion. Individual British officers made their fortunes in the immediate aftermath of victory, but the prize agents, who had entered the defeated city in the footsteps of the victorious soldiers, continued their “work,” meticulously recorded, into the 1860s. The “Delhi Prize” is a recurring subject of the discussions among officials in India and in London during these years that are preserved in the Parliamentary Papers, but it is only one such rubric, similar designations (“Lucknow Prize,” “Jhansi Prize,” et cetera) being utilized to indicate the loot acquired in other centers of rebellion throughout the affected areas of North India.<sup>60</sup> Every colonial war or campaign in India won by the colonizers (and numerous “scientific” expeditions) produced such loot, including some more famous objects, such as the notorious Koh-i-noor diamond, now set in a Maltese cross in the so-called Queen Mother’s crown among the crown jewels on display in the Tower of London, and the throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum, both acquired in the defeat of the “last major indigenous power in the subcontinent,” the Sikh kingdom, in 1849.<sup>61</sup> Not to put too fine a point on it, then, the Delhi Collection of manuscripts in the British Library consists of the remnants of “the royal library of the Mughal Emperors” that was taken from the fort in Delhi in the aftermath of the summer-long siege of the city, in the midst of the massacres, demolitions, banishments, and other forms of collective punishment that reduced it to a ghost town in the matter of a few months.

Why have I chosen to conclude my introductory remarks about the project developed in this book, which concerns the feasibility of the contemporary concept of world literature, with this little “reading” of the disparate contents of the British Library? It is a tale about the visibility and invisibility of the different components of the national library of the United Kingdom and, more broadly, about the extremely asymmetrical and unequal formation of the archive in

the modern world. I have read it admittedly as a parable of sorts, but what kind of parable, exactly? Why should we care about the fate of *any* king's possessions? And what, if anything, does it tell us about the contemporary compulsion, institution, promise, and failure that is world literature? At one level, this is a story about the extraction of value—symbolic and cultural as well as material—by the colonial powers from their conquered and administrated territories. It seems to highlight the powers of absorption of the “good European library” in the era of European expansionism that was so powerfully evoked by Macaulay twenty years before the Indian rebellion in a bureaucratic debate about the future of education in Britain's Asian colony—powers that have social, political, military, and even epistemological dimensions. But it foregrounds other kinds of asymmetry in the world as well. No impressive architectural structure is ever likely to house *this* king's library in the land where it originated. Governments in both India and Pakistan have demanded the restitution of the Queen's gaudy diamond—a claim needing to be publicly rejected as recently as February 2013 by a sitting British prime minister on a visit to India—but so far as I know there is no record of any state in the subcontinent showing any interest in the restitution of the Mughal library.<sup>62</sup> This lack of interest in the former royal library of the Mughal rulers of India is no doubt a small detail in the life of the elites that ascended in 1947 to the helm of the state that had been fashioned by colonial power—by dividing it into two (and, later, three) states—but it is not a trivial one and speaks volumes about their intellectual, political, and social instincts and capabilities.

We might make a few initial observations concerning this situation. First, it reflects the tawdry and thoughtless consumerism of the ruling classes in the subcontinent and the region more broadly in the era of neoliberalism, elites that typically desire shopping malls, not libraries. (The Indian ruling class of the Nehruvian era represents the most obvious counterpoint to this contemporary situation.) It is a desire that can overpower even religious piety of the most conservative sort, as evident in the hideous shopping-mall-hotel-condominium complex, including a grotesquely enlarged and kitsch facsimile of the (already kitsch) Big Ben clock tower, with the expres-

sion “Allahu akbar” inscribed above the huge clock face, that now looms over the Kaaba shrine in Mecca. It was built—by the Binladen construction and real estate conglomerate—after the demolition of a historic hilltop Ottoman citadel that had itself been built for the protection of the shrine, which was repeatedly threatened by, among others, Wahhabi iconoclasts, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>63</sup> The Abraj al-Bait tower complex, which includes a twenty-story-high shopping mall, is reportedly only the first of its kind, and more are in the planning. It is thus possible that the Saudis may in effect be secularizing the sacred geography of Mecca and the surrounding region in ways that recall the fate of formerly sacred spaces of pilgrimage sites in the advanced capitalist world, such as Santiago de Compostella in northwestern Spain, surrounding it with the paraphernalia of well-heeled tourism. This would be historically ironic if we follow Americo Castro in his understanding of the apostolic cult itself as Iberian Christendom’s response to the orientation of the dominant “caste” in the peninsula—that is, Muslims—toward the Hejaz and more precisely the shrine in Mecca.<sup>64</sup> From Istanbul to New Delhi and beyond—by way, we might say, of Dubai—the shopping mall may be the characteristic modern architectural structure of our times in the region, marking the arrival at a certain form of late modernity.

More pertinent to our present concerns, however, is the fact that a narrative of historical continuity of the sort promoted by the glass tower in the British Library does not seem to be possible in the post-colonial subcontinent, even in India, whose “national” culture can of course marshal powerful chronotopes of antiquity, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. The historical experience of being colonized—that is, the transition to capitalism and bourgeois modernity under the conditions of colonial subjugation—introduces historical disruptions that cannot be subsumed in a narrative of continuous historical development, as is possible in metropolitan societies—hence the specific forms that the crisis of authenticity (the desire for a return and restoration to an origin) takes in postcolonial societies. But in South Asia there is an additional complexity as well: the “Mughal” (and, more broadly, “Muslim”) can only function at the limits of these “Indian” chronotopes that posit an *Indic* core as the ever-present

origin, thereby appearing as modes of interruption of the national historical narrative. When, for instance, Nehru, in his famous speech at the moment of independence from colonial rule, spoke of the present as that rare historical moment in which “the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance,” the historical temporality inherent in that statement was far from an unambiguous one, quite independently of the speaker’s intentions. More precisely, we might say that the statement marks the *indecision* in nationalist culture regarding the length of the interregnum in national life—whether it corresponds to the 200 years of British rule or to the millennium since the arrival of Islam in the subcontinent.

And the “national” nature of Pakistani state narratives is of course always in question, made incoherent by the fact, as Rushdie put it memorably three decades ago, that “Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time.”<sup>65</sup> From Aziz Ahmed’s *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* to Aitzaz Ahsan’s *The Indus Saga*, defense of the view of Pakistan as the logical culmination of some underlying process of millennial historical development in the subcontinent—a distinct Muslim collective life from the very beginning, in the case of the former, and the civilization of the Indus riverine system reclaiming its independence from the plains of North India, in the latter—has typically involved an unembarrassed disregard for long-established and even incontrovertible historical facts.<sup>66</sup> On the one hand, the Indic as a secular concept of culture tied to the (Indian) nation-state—the concept of the latter is anchored in that of the former—works to conceal its own religio-political (that is, modern) markings. And, on the other, Pakistani nationalism, which seeks to replicate the procedure of the (Indic) national, fails necessarily in this project precisely because, as the nationalism of a minority marked by religious difference, it cannot quite suppress its religious markings. *Literature*—that is, the modes of writing, reading, teaching, circulation, and historicization that conform to the now-global category of literature—has played a distinct and unique role in the historical process that has installed these complexities and contradictions in the social and cultural lives of the societies of the subcontinent.

This “reading” of the structure of the British Library, the universal library par excellence in our times, as a sort of parable in brick, steel, glass, and mortar about sociocultural realities on a global scale is not meant as a morality tale and should not be confused with an attempt to “justify and defend the innocence which confronted modern Western colonialism”—a form of sentimental thinking that has become popular over the past several decades among sectors of the Indian national intelligentsia.<sup>67</sup> The “document of civilization” that was the “royal library of the Mughal Emperors” was itself also patently a “document of barbarism,” that is, a distillation and concretion of distinct forms of historical violence and the exploitation of human beings. It would be absurd to attribute a historical innocence to it in its moment of encounter with the Euro-colonial bourgeois order, as it would be meaningless to attempt to “justify and defend” its right to exist. And this individual act of plunder is of course merely one, and a latecomer at that, in a whole series of events that repeatedly destroyed and reshuffled the contents of major collections in the subcontinent and its neighboring regions over the course of the previous several centuries.<sup>68</sup>

The multiple resonances of this cultural “transaction” or event, whose history is both embodied and hidden away in the British Library, must be sought in the vastly different fates of these two libraries in the transition to the modern world, in the historically significant but unremarked absorption of the one by the other. It reveals for us something crucial about aspects of the constructing of this world itself. “World literature” came into being (only) when the cultural system of the modern bourgeois West had appropriated and assimilated—that is, “discovered,” absorbed, recalibrated, rearranged, reevaluated, reclassified, reconstellated, compared, translated, historicized, standardized, disseminated, and, in short, *fundamentally transformed*—the widely diverse and diffuse writing practices and traditions of the societies and civilizations of the “East,” which extended in the Euro-Occidental imagination from the Atlantic shore of North Africa to the littoral of the Sea of Japan. So the organization of the disparate contents of the United Kingdom’s universal library makes clear the fuller resonance of the statement that “the whole



native literature of India and Arabia” could be subsumed into “a single shelf of a good European library.” And the seizing of “prize” from a premodern social economy and its being put into circulation in a capitalist world economy is thus not merely an effective *image* for this epochal shift in the relations between the North Atlantic “center” of the world system and its various peripheries in the “East.” We should view it as a *concept* for this historical process of appropriation that is immanent to that process itself, developed and used internally by its various actors.

Hamra Abbas’s remarkable four-panel artwork, *All Rights Reserved* (2006), an image from which is used for the cover of this book, is a distillation of these issues at the intersection of culture and possession, knowledge and appropriation, and the histories of imperialism and nationalism. The image is based on a detail from an illustration in a famous Mughal manuscript of the *Padshahnama* (*Pādśāhnāmeḥ*, 1656–1657), a Persian-language history of a portion of the reign of Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), which is the personal property of the English monarchs as part of the so-called Royal Library housed at Windsor. The stunning double-page image in the original depicts the wedding procession of Dara Shikoh, the great scholar, prince, and martyr for an ecumenical vision of religion and governance in the subcontinent, whose succession of his father was usurped by his younger half brother, Aurangzeb, whose subsequent rule is associated with religious orthodoxy and the consolidation of sharia and who has consequently served as the *bête noire* of nationalist and progressive thinkers and commentators at least since the middle of the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> The detail itself shows a number of figures, probably servants and even slaves, carrying tribute and gifts for the King on the occasion of his son’s wedding. The piece is remarkable for its detail of depiction of the subaltern retainer class of the Mughal imperial context, including racially and regionally recognizable faces, from Persian and Turkic ones to a *ḥabaṣī* (“Abyssinian,” that is, black African).

The illuminated manuscript was “acquired” in the late eighteenth century in Lucknow, from the library of the princely rulers of Avadh (usually transcribed as “Oudh” in colonial times) and presented as a personal gift to George III by John Shore (Lord Teignmouth),

Governor-General of the company's possessions, a close friend of William Jones, and the author of the first "memoir" of Jones's life compiled from his letters and other writings.<sup>70</sup> The title of Abbas's work is taken from the catalogue of a rare exhibition of the manuscript, and the detail we are concerned with here is itself on the cover of the catalogue.<sup>71</sup> Her technique is basically to change the image enough to be able to use it without violating the Royal Collection Trust's proprietorial rights. She has whited out the trays of tribute that the servants are carrying on their heads and reproduced them in an identical placement on another panel of the work. All these layers of density in the history of this manuscript are resonant in Abbas's work, from the contemporary artwork's relationship to precolonial art, its misplaced tribute, we might say—she was trained in the so-called neo-miniature practice developed at the National College of Art (NCA) in Lahore—to the unavoidable detour through the (institutional as well as conceptual) networks of the "Orientalist" historical configuration. In other words, the work is a sort of brooding (but also sharply sardonic) reflection on cultural possession, (*mis*)appropriation, reclamation, and translation—all in the context of the global neoliberal "intellectual property" regime and its descent from the colonial world.<sup>72</sup> The legal claim to possession mimicked in the title of the work—"All Rights Reserved"—becomes a metaphor for a wider cultural predicament: postcolonial aesthetic practice cannot imagine its own history as a linear one but rather one characterized by distance, detours, and displacements.

*Forget English!* is a study of this larger process of assimilation and its consequences for the structure of relations between different languages, traditions, literatures, intelligentsias, and reading publics on a world scale and seeks to make a number of interventions. It enters the ongoing discussion about the globalization of literary relations from a sharply critical angle, discovering in the contemporary world structures and relations whose genealogy takes us to the national, linguistic, continental, civilizational, and racial definitions, asymmetries, hierarchies, and inequalities of the colonial era. It insists in particular on the need to consider the social and cultural situation of the languages of the Global South at a range of locations in world society, from subnational ones to the global horizon

itself. In most of the societies of the South, English is never spoken (or written) out of hearing (or writing) range of its various others, a basic perception that this book takes seriously as the starting point for an understanding of the role of English as a world literary language, including as a language of criticism. And it demonstrates that “world literature” itself has always signified a system of unequal relations between a handful of Western languages—above all English—and these languages of the South. But an unmediated and uncritical notion of the “vernacular” or particular—and this is perhaps the politically most consequential argument presented in this book—has never been able to mount an adequate critique of the “cosmopolitan,” global, or universal, since, far from being a space of unmediated autonomy, it has itself been constituted through the processes of the latter. Neither side of this debate about literature and culture as a worldwide reality seems capable of dismantling the essentialism through which it views the cultural products of the societies of the global periphery. A politics of language, literature, and culture affiliated with the struggle for survival and autonomy of postcolonial societies must therefore configure differently the relationship of the cosmopolitan and the vernacular, the universal and the particular, in order to facilitate ways of thinking about culture and society that do not simply replicate the extant antinomies of power on a world scale, and it is to such a politics that this book seeks to make a small contribution.

It is not an accident, therefore, that the title of this book takes an imperative form. “Forget English!” is the imperative for Anglophone criticism to take seriously and examine critically its own historical situation as a discourse in a *particular* language and cultural system, relying on the latter’s historical rise and *worldly* success, which includes the ability to provide the conditions of legibility of diverse and heterogeneous practices of writing in numerous languages as (world) literature. English as a language of literary and cultural criticism exercises no less a dominance today than it does as a language of imaginative literature, and it has become, among other things, for instance, the means of circulation of Continental “theory” worldwide. Whereas English was once the vehicle for a distinctly Anglo-Saxon tradition of critical thinking—from Matthew Arnold, T. S.

Eliot, and the *Scrutiny* writers to Northrup Frye or the U.S. Agrarians and New Criticism—it now distributes globally a mode of thinking, namely, “theory,” that claims to come from nowhere in particular. It is indeed in this manner that post-1970s Continental theory and its American modulations (and especially deconstruction) have typically been disseminated in the literary spheres of such languages as Arabic, Hindi, and Urdu in recent years—as the most advanced and in fact universal approach to the reading of literature. As both an intellectual-critical and pedagogical exercise, therefore, “world literature” can only mean taking such a critical and *skeptical* attitude toward the modalities and the possibility of achieving the one (literary) world, the possibility of assembling the universal library. If, on the one hand, I urge world literature studies to take seriously the colonial origins of the very concept and practices they take as their object of study, on the other, I hope to question the more or less tacit nationalism of many contemporary attempts to champion the cultural products of the colonial and postcolonial world against the dominance of European and more broadly Western cultures and practices. In sum, therefore, this book attempts to open up the current discussion about world literature to a number of larger questions of social theory—from the constitution of nation-state sovereignty, its social and cultural logics, and its ties to the colonial order to the nature of the global imperium in late capitalism.

Let me end here on a note that is both personal and methodological in nature. This book is concerned with the possibility of humanistic knowledge of social and cultural forms in the Global South—the “Urdu ghazal” or “Anglophone novel,” for instance—the societies outside the traditional circuit of the European and more broadly Western humanities or, more accurately speaking, placed in various ways at the margins of their intellectual universe: constituted as objects of knowledge for Orientalism, anthropology, or comparative literature. In other words, I am interested here in the possibilities of knowledge across the imperial divide and the international division of labor. I view this as simultaneously a theoretical and historical question, that is, as a line of conceptual analysis necessitated by the historical formation of the modern humanities in relationship with the geopolitical structures of power of the modern world in

both the colonial and postcolonial eras. My own training was interdisciplinary, in two separate humanistic disciplines, namely, literary studies and anthropology (both the British/social and American/cultural varieties), with an added dose of Islamic-Arab area studies. As is now well understood, each of these disciplines contains a distinct Western practice for the understanding of non-Western social and cultural realities, each organized around a concept of culture and each with its own distinct notions of social, cultural, or linguistic difference and particularity.

The practices and ideas associated with anthropology and literary studies are very much part of my intellectual makeup, but I have come to view myself as situated at a certain angle to each of them. Each appears to me, as a knowledge practice, to be marked in its own distinct way by problems and shortcomings in its attempt to bridge the social distance between its own world and that of its objects. To some extent in my work, I have therefore used the location of each as a basis for the examination of the methods and possibilities, as well as limitations, of the other. Anthropology, in its insistence on an experiential encounter with the social life-world that is the object of research, should be a corrective for postcolonial or transnational literary studies in the Anglophone North Atlantic, which too often consist of mastering a now largely settled canon of two dozen or so novelists, mostly of English, which is added to with the first books of bright young things from time to time. No detailed knowledge of the languages, history, politics, and conflicts of the countries or regions in question appears to be necessary in order to claim “expertise,” not even knowledge of the concrete and material situation of English in those societies. On the other hand, the emphasis on textuality, that is, the insistence on the codified and mediated nature of all social and cultural experience, and therefore the insistence on the necessity of *reading* and interpretation, is a challenge to the traditional positivistic anthropological predilection for, as it were, “just the facts, ma’am,” to quote Sargent Joe Friday, an early fictional icon of the city where I live. This positivism seems to have survived in some of the supposedly most “advanced” forms of anthropological thinking today, even as they draw on the so-called antifoundationalist aura of French poststructuralist theory. The criticism of extant

practices in literary studies around the concept of world literature that is offered in these pages draws, in a self-critical way, on this double intellectual and disciplinary legacy.

I am aware of running the risk that what I have to say in this book might be misconstrued as the (heavily footnoted) flashing of a middle finger at existing practices in the discipline of literary studies and the ways in which it conceives of the contemporary literary world. Dear Reader, avoid that temptation. There is no polemical intent here, just an *attempt* to think critically about our concepts and categories or “the way we think now” about the world in which we live.

# Notes

## Prologue

1. See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Conversations of Goethe with Johann Peter Eckermann*, trans. John Oxenford (n. p.: Da Capo Press, 1998), 165–167; Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Minute Recorded in the General Department by Thomas Macaulay, Law Member of the Governor-General’s Council, Dated 2nd February 1835,” in *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781–1843*, ed. Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 1999), 161–173; Rabindranath Tagore, “World Literature,” in *Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, ed. Sisir Kumar Das and Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 150; Jorge Luis Borges, “The Library of Babel,” in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, trans. James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1962), 51–58; Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. Denis Johnson-Davies (London: Heinemann, 1985), 136–138; and Orhan Pamuk, “My Father’s Suitcase,” *PMLA* 122, no. 3 (2007): 788–796.

2. The now classic argument about the “derivative” nature of anticolonial nationalist discourse is of course Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

3. B. Venkat Mani, “Borrowing Privileges: Libraries and the Institution-ization of World Literature,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2013), 250. Also see, Reingard Nethersole, “World Literature and the Library,” in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. Theo D’haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (New York, 2012), 307–315.

4. See David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54–68. The latter essay and a number of other

relevant ones have now been collected in Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (New York: Verso Books, 2013).

5. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986), 26.

6. See Mani, "Borrowing Privileges."

7. See Kenichi Ohmae, *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy* (New York: Harper Business, 1990).

8. A number of websites track the proliferation of these "people's libraries" worldwide. See, for instance, <http://peopleslibrary.wordpress.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/pages/ Occupy-Wall-Street-Library/215569408506718>.

9. On the involvement of world literature discourse itself with notions about Westphalia, see Jane O. Newman, "Auerbach's Dante: Poetical Theology as a Point of Departure for a Philology of World Literature," in *Approaches to World Literature*, ed. Joachim Küpper (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013), 39–58.

10. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilsen, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

11. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 24.

12. Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 16.

13. Miguel Tamen, review of *On Literary Worlds*, by Eric Hayot, *Modern Philology* 112, no. 1 (August 2014): E1–E4. My thanks to Paul Bové for bringing this review to my attention.

14. A useful (though highly selective) historical account of world literature discourse and practices is provided in Theo D'haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (London: Routledge, 2012).

15. On the intertwined histories of world literature and comparative literature, see D'haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*, 18–21 and 47–73; and Sandra Berman, "World Literature and Comparative Literature," in D'haen, Damrosch, and Kadir, *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, 169–179.

16. Pheng Cheah, "World against Globe: Toward a Normative Conception of World Literature," *New Literary History* 45 (2014), 303.

17. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 34, 36; and Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967), 18, 21; emphasis added.

18. Frantz Fanon, *Sociologie d'une révolution (L'an V de la révolution algérienne)* (Paris: François Maspero, 1972), 75; and Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 90 and 91.

19. Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 34; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 18.

20. Erich Auerbach, "Philology and *Weltliteratur*" (1952), trans. Maire Said and Edward Said, *Centennial Review* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1969), 3. For the German original, see Erich Auerbach, "Philologie der *Weltliteratur*," in *Weltliteratur: Festgabe für Strich zum 70. Geburtstag* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1952), 39–50. All references to the German are to this edition.

21. On the Babel motif in modern theories of language, see Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," in *Psyche*, vol. 1 of *Inventions of the Other* (Stanford,



CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 191–225. For a historical study of the philological preoccupation with the origins of language, see Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Ethnicity, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

22. David Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xii.

23. See Ronald A. T. Judy, “On the Politics of Global Language, or Unfungible Local Value,” *boundary 2* 24 (Summer 1997): 101–143; and “Some Notes on the Status of Global English in Tunisia,” *boundary 2* 26 (Summer 1999): 3–29.

24. Emily Apter, “On Translation in a Global Market,” *Public Culture* 13 (2001), 3; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), xii; and Jonathan Arac, “Anglo-Globalism?” *New Left Review* 16 (July–August, 2002): 35–45.

25. Considerations of the history of theory rarely confront this question. Even in an important volume dedicated to comparative literary studies and globalization, most contributions continue to focus on its emphasis on “difference” rather than its role in the production of “sameness” or standardization. See Haun Saussy, ed., *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

26. Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Question ‘What Is German?’” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 213.

27. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978; repr., New York: Vintage, 2003). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *O*; and Karim Mattar, “The Middle Eastern Novel in English: Literary Transnationalism after Orientalism” (D.Phil. diss. University of Oxford, 2013).

28. For such a “genealogy” of the concept of criticism itself, for instance, see Talal Asad, “Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism,” in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, by Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

29. See Moretti, *Distant Reading*; Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); and D’haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*. This is also true of other notable contributions in recent years, like John Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006) and Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

30. Bryan S. Turner, *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), 81, 10–11, 7.

31. Among the classic historical studies are Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1959); and David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773–1835* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). My argument here is influenced by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, “After ‘Orientalism’: Colonialism and English Literary Studies in India,” *Social Scientist* 14, no. 7 (July 1986): 23–35.

32. I shall thus retain the term “Anglicism” for the project of *Europeanization* as conceived of in the Anglocentric British Empire.

33. See Gail Minault, “Alois Sprenger: German Orientalism’s ‘Gift’ to Delhi College,” *South Asia Research* 31, no. 7 (2011): 7–23, on such ambiguities in one important historical figure.

34. See Edward W. Said, “On Jean Genet’s Late Works,” *Grand Street* 36 (1990), 38. On Genet and this remarkable essay of Said’s, see Stathis Gourgouris, *Does Literature Think? Literature as Theory for an Antimythical Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 249–291.

35. Even for colonial India, the range is a wide one. For a pioneering set of studies of these phenomena, see Carl A. Breckenridge and Peter Van Der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Predicament of Culture* (Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1994).

36. See Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); and Gourgouris, “Derealizations of the Ideal: Walcott Encounters Seferis,” *boundary 2* 39, no. 2 (2012): 181–199.

37. Said’s source for this idea is M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973).

38. Said, *World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 16. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Aamir R. Mufti, “Auerbach in Istanbul: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture,” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 1 (1998): 95–125. On secular criticism and “detranscendentalization,” see Stathis Gourgouris, “Transformation, Not Transcendence,” *boundary 2* 31, no. 2 (2004): 55–79.

39. Said, *World, the Text, and the Critic*, 13.

40. See, for instance, Asad, “Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism.” For a close critical reading of the latter text, see Stathis Gourgouris, *Lessons in Secular Criticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

41. Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 3.

42. See Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 33–35.

43. Karl Marx, “The Future Results of the British Rule in India,” in *On Colonialism*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Moscow: Progress, 1974), 82.

44. See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing the Mind* (New York: Heinemann Books, 1986).

45. Any number of the works of, for instance, Galin Tihanov and Karatani Kojin are relevant here, as is the collection *Pour une littérature-monde*, ed. Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud (Paris: Gallimard, 2007). Our understanding of the German context will no doubt be much enhanced and transformed by B. Venkat Mani’s forthcoming study.

46. For an enormously useful set of revisionist engagements with world-systems theory by scholars in the humanities, see David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins, and Nirvana Tanukhi, eds., *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

47. On positivism in Moretti, see Tom Eyers, “The Perils of the ‘Digital Humanities’: New Positivisms and the Fate of Literary Theory,” *Postmodern Culture* 23, no. 2 (2013). [https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern\\_culture/v023](https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v023)

/23.2.eyers.html#f6-text. An early and still pertinent critique of Moretti's use of evolutionary theory, which puts the literary market in the place of nature in physical science, is Christopher Prendergast, "Evolution and Literary History: A Response to Franco Moretti," *New Left Review* 34 (2005): 40–62. On Casanova, See Christopher Prendergast, "Negotiating World Literature," *New Left Review* 8 (2001): 100–121.

48. For a critique, with respect to the literatures of Latin America, of this assumption of correspondence and the attendant claim that literature in the peripheries is always a matter of compromises with metropolitan forms, see Efraín Kristal, "'Considering Coldly . . .': A Response to Franco Moretti," *New Left Review* 15 (2002): 61–74.

49. See Cheah, "World against Globe."

50. See Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

51. Mariano Siskind, "The Globalization of the Novel and the Novelization of the Global: A Critique of World Literature," *Comparative Literature* 62, no. 4 (2010): 342. I am citing this article, rather than the fuller chapter in *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), because aspects of the argument have been, it seems to me, made weaker in the book version, the phrase "world historical globalization of the European bourgeoisie" (338), for instance, being changed in the book to "the globalization of modernity" (28).

52. See Raymond Schwab, *La renaissance orientale* (Paris: Payot, 1950), translated as *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

53. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 282–285.

54. See Auerbach, "Philology and *Weltliteratur*"; and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Trois Tropiques* (1955; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

55. Mani, "Borrowing Privileges," 243.

56. These historical details have been gleaned from the official history of the British Library. See P. R. Harris, *A History of the British Museum Library, 1753–1973* (London: British Library, 1998).

57. British Library, "George III Collection: The King's Library," <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/prbooks/georgeiiicoll/george3kingslibrary.html>.

58. Q. Mahmudul Haq and Salim Quraishi, *Urdu Language Collections in the British Library* (London: British Library Reference Division, 1984), 5.

59. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

60. See, for instance, *Parliamentary Papers: Accounts and Papers*, vol. 12 (1860).

61. Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 181; and Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 133–164.

62. See Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 180–181; and Helen Lawson, "The Koh-i-Noor Diamond Will Stay in Britain, Says Cameron as He Rules Out Returning Gem to India on Final Day of Visit," *Daily Mail*, February 21, 2013,

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2282104/The-Koh-noor-diamond-stay-Britain-says-Cameron-rules-returning-gem-India-final-day-visit.html>.

63. I cannot resist noting the rather delicious irony that Osama Bin Laden and his estranged family seem to have adopted opposite but equally iconoclastic positions in this regard.

64. See Americo Castro, *The Spaniards: An Introduction to Their History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

65. Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 91. I discuss these matters at length in Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), esp. chap. 3.

66. See Aziz Ahmed, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); and Aitzaz Ahsan, *The Indus Saga* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

67. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), ix.

68. See, for instance, Kalpana Dasgupta, “How Learned Were the Mughals: Reflections on Muslim Libraries in India,” *Journal of Library History* 10, no. 3 (1975): 241–254.

69. The latest iteration of this idea takes the form of the play “Dara” by the Pakistani playwright Shahid Nadeem, staged at the National Theater in London in early 2015, which takes as its subject matter the trial of Dara by Aurangzeb, highlighting their different conceptions of religiosity, the mystical and the juridico-scriptural, respectively. Contemporary questions about the nature of (Islamic) religiosity in Pakistan and the subcontinent are mapped back onto this early eighteenth-century conflict. Nadeem told a reporter that the entire subsequent history of Hindu-Muslim conflict in the subcontinent, including the Partition of India, could be traced back to this historical event. See Riyaz Wani, “Seeds of Partition were Sown when Aurangzeb Triumphed over Dara Shikoh.” *Tehelka* 19, no. 12 (May 9, 2015). <http://www.tehelka.com/2015/05/seeds-of-partition-were-sown-when-aurangzeb-triumphed-over-dara-shikoh/>.

70. See Lord Teignmouth, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of Sir William Jones*, 2 vols. (London: John W. Parker, 1835).

71. See *The King of the World: The Padshahnama, an Imperial Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library Windsor Castle* (Azimuth, 1997); and the website of the Royal Collection Trust: <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/1005025/the-padshahnama>.

72. For a superb ethnographic study of the neo-miniature practice at the NCA, see Virginia Whiles, *Art and Polemic in Pakistan: Cultural Politics and Tradition in Contemporary Miniature Painting* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2010).

## CHAPTER I *Where in the World Is World Literature?*

1. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 80.

2. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48, 75.