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ANGLO-GLOBALISM?

This brief essay on a huge subject is very much thinking in progress.[1] To achieve a manageable scope for discussion, I engage key programmatic works by three Western comparatists, representing three generations over the last half-century: Erich Auerbach, Edward Said, Franco Moretti. I select works that are roughly evenly spaced—the early 1950s, the mid-1970s, and 2000—although I will not be dealing with them in chronological order. For the argument developed here, criticism deals concretely with the language of texts, while theory is cast in abstraction, at a distance. By this definition, a lot of what we call theory, because it is thoughtful—much of the work of Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida—would count as criticism.

In this perspective, then, it seems clear that globalization erodes criticism in favour of theory. The reason for this is the relation of English, as the global language of exchange and information, to the hundreds of languages and cultures that globalization brings into interaction with each other.[2] I am by no means the first to describe this complex phenomenon, which could be summarized as follows:

> Globalization pluralizes: it opens up every local, national or regional culture to others and thereby produces 'many worlds'. Yet these many worlds can only be known through a single medium: just as the dollar is the medium of global commerce, so is English the medium of global culture, producing 'one world'.

The exemplum for my thesis comes from a brilliant and challenging piece which makes me uneasy. It was written in English, for an English journal, by an Italian scholar based in the US. Franco Moretti, in his 'Conjectures on World Literature', proposes to escape the confines of the Eurocentric, Cold War discipline of comparative literature by renewing

the notion of *Weltliteratur*, first proposed by Goethe in 1827 and also invoked by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*.[3] Moretti focuses on the modern novel, as a transculturally extensive form that has spread from a European core with the dual rise of capitalism and the nation-state—an instance of the globally productive conjuncture of print, capital and nation over the last two centuries evoked by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*.

Moretti begins from the observation that 'the literature around us now is unmistakably a planetary system'. In an age when we confront, more imperatively than ever before, 'hundreds of languages and literatures', he asserts that it can hardly be sufficient simply to insist, as comparatists always have, that we must read 'more'. His solution moves from quantity to quality: what we need is not to read more, but to work with a new set of *categories*. Reaching back a century, he finds in Max Weber a model for interpretive, historical, comparative social science as *Geisteswissenschaft*. Weber argued that

> It is not the 'actual' interconnection of 'things' . . . but the *conceptual* interconnection of *problems* which define the scope of the various sciences. A new 'science' emerges where a new problem is pursued by a new method.

As strongly as, in their different ways, Kuhn, Foucault and Althusser later did, Weber here emphasizes the primacy of ways of knowing, of cognitive technique, and the subordination of raw material. Following this model, Moretti argues that world literature is not the name of an object, a thing, but rather of a problem—that is to say, a possibility—which requires for its science a new critical method that can never be found simply by reading more texts. To come into being, Moretti asserts (in the wake of Popper), theories require 'a leap, a wager, a hypothesis'.

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[1] NLR and the author wish to thank the journal *Diaspora* for collegial courtesy in allowing the publication of this essay, which will also appear in a forthcoming special issue of *Diaspora* on globalization, edited by Roland Greene.

[2] My thinking on this issue has been valuably stimulated by work from my colleagues at *boundary 2*. See Ronald Judy, 'On the Politics of Global Language, Or Unfungible Local Value', *boundary 2*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1997, esp. pp. 101–4; and essays by Ronald Judy, Wlad Godzich, Joseph Buttigieg, and Terry Cochran, gathered under the rubric 'Reasoning and the Logic of Things Global', *boundary 2*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1999, pp. 3–72.

[3] Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', NLR 1, January–February 2000.

Moretti founds his hypothesis on the world-historical system studies of Immanuel Wallerstein, whose work has been such an inspiration and precedent for much recent thinking about globalization. From Wallerstein, Moretti takes both a conceptual model of core and periphery—a world-system that is 'simultaneously one, and unequal'—and a mode of proceeding. He notes what the page of a work by Wallerstein looks like—composed of quotations from works by others, which he 'synthesizes into a system'.

Reading second hand

From this method, Moretti proposes a deliberately scandalous agenda: literary history must become 'second hand'. The new synthetic comparatism will take shape as 'a patchwork of other people's research *without a single direct textual reading*'. Moretti here deliberately targets the American academy—'the United States is the country of close reading'. Against the 'extremely small canon' of these scholars he asserts that, the more ambitious any given project may be in the scope of what it undertakes to subsume, 'the greater the distance from the text' must necessarily be. Moretti's slogan is to contrast the residual procedure of 'close reading' with the emergent process of what he calls 'distant reading'. The benefit of distant reading is that it 'allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems'.

This methodological ambition of Moretti's to get away from close reading, and thereby to open up systematic issues, recalls the Canadian theorist Northrop Frye, whose *Anatomy of Criticism* employed the metaphor of the telescope as part of its polemic against the 'fetishization of the single work' by New Criticism. Like Moretti's, Frye's concerns encompassed the transtextual at both macro and micro levels. What Moretti, in another programme for his agenda, defines as *form* is articulated in terms very close to what Frye defined as the *archetype*, the basic unit of his literary theory. For Frye, an archetype is what 'recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole'.[4] For Moretti, 'form is precisely the repeatable element of literature—what returns fundamentally unchanged over many cases and many years.'[5]

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[4] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton 1957, p. 365.

[5] 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61, 1, 2000, p. 225.

Moretti's new formalism without close reading retools a kind of thinking best known to current American students of literature through Georg Lukács's Weberian-aestheticist *Theory of the Novel* of 1916. Lukács subtitles this work 'a historico-philosophical essay on the *forms* of great epic literature' (my emphasis), and in it he quotes not a word from his comparatist, multi-lingual array of *Don Quixote*, *Wilhelm Meister* and *L'Education sentimentale*, which together occupy three chapters. Like Lukács, like Weber, Moretti understands himself as a historical scholar, and this is his difference from Frye.

As a historian, Moretti seeks what he calls laws of 'literary evolution'. He proposes one such law:

> In cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means: almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe), the modern novel arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a Western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials.[6]

Let me note one anomaly for Moretti's formulation, which helps to specify his periodization of the modern. For in England, Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) defined itself as a 'comic epic in prose, *written after the manner of Cervantes*'. So Moretti's modern core itself has arisen by adaptation from what, by a later date, had become the periphery. This anomaly points to a larger question about Moretti's use of Wallerstein. The latter's overall project is historical; but in his model, the relation between core and periphery is synchronic—only its relation to the periphery allows the core to be core, and the two together define the system at a given point in time. But in Moretti's law, the centre's relation to the core operates by 'influence'. That is, the centre is earlier than the core: what in Wallerstein is spatial becomes, in Moretti, temporal; and the result comes closer than Moretti might wish to the old priorities of Western comparatism and also to the stadial ('stages') model of development theories.

Nonetheless, in citing the secondary sources on which he will draw for his proposed law, Moretti provides a splendid mouthful, satisfying some quest for a truly global comparatism:

> Gasparetti and Goscilo on late eighteenth-century Eastern Europe; Toschi and Martì-López on early nineteenth-century Southern Europe; Franco and

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[6] 'Conjectures', p. 58.

> Sommer on mid-century Latin America; Frieden on the Yiddish novels of the 1860s; Moosa, Said and Allen on the Arabic novels of the 1870s; Evin and Parla on the Turkish novels of the same years; Anderson on the Filipino novel *Noli me tangere* of 1887; Zhao and Wang on turn-of-the-century Qing fiction; Obiechina, Irele and Quayson on West African novels between the 1920s and the 1950s (plus of course Karatani, Miyoshi, Mukherjee, Even-Zohar and Schwarz). Four continents, two hundred years, over twenty independent critical studies, and they all agreed.[7]

For Moretti, it is important that these scholars be 'independent', that each develop his or her argument directly from their limited materials. In Moretti's division of intellectual labour, the single-language scholar reads the texts in that language, but does not read the scholars of other languages; and the comparatist alone reads all the scholars.

In elaborating the implications of this evolutionary model, Moretti reckons in a third term, which allows him further to define the relations between comparative and national literary studies. The core–periphery model of the evolution of the modern novel manifests itself in three interacting components: 'foreign plot, local characters, and the most unstable, the local *narrative voice*'. But, Moretti notes, this local narrative voice requires for its analysis 'linguistic competence'; and, as a matter of close—that is, in the terms of my argument, *critical*—reading, falls outside the scope of comparative literature. So a specific sphere for national study has been demarcated, a place for criticism. But is it a place with a future?

Shifting from the nation to the viewpoint of the disciplinary project of comparative literature, the thrill of Moretti's essay is to argue that what the latter needs is to *lose* its languageness—leave that to the national literatures. Comparatists nowadays know that the model of language-competence dominant from the Second World War into the 1980s no longer holds: Greek, Latin, French and German are no longer the four posts that support the structure. In the debate provoked by the 1993 Bernheimer Report, 'Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century', many divergent proposals were offered for how to cope with a new global politics of language.[8] Moretti offers to cut the Gordian knot.

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[7] 'Conjectures', pp. 59–60. The writers in parentheses had already been discussed.
[8] Charles Bernheimer, ed., *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, Baltimore 1995. See also the comments on pp. 55, 62, 66, 110, 113, 130, 135, 145, 160, 178, 196.

Yet Moretti's essay treats language only in the abstract. It ignores the actual role of English in contemporary globalization, even though English is the crucial enabling medium that makes possible his survey of all those continents and years. For of the twenty critics Moretti cites, one is quoted in Spanish, one in Italian, and eighteen in English. The impressive diversity of surveying some twenty national literatures diminishes into little more than one single means by which they may be known. English in culture, like the dollar in economics, serves as the medium through which knowledge may be translated from the local to the global.

Moretti's purely abstract attention to the issue of language in globalization—specifically, the failure to highlight and problematize the role of English—is not his alone. The ambitious political inquiry into globalization by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire*, never, so far as my attention may be trusted, mentions the English language, even in a passage that defines the historically unprecedented 'radical and profound commonality' that 'today we participate in', a 'productive world' that is 'made up of communication . . . and common languages'. In the world Hardt and Negri delineate, 'communication has increasingly become the fabric of production' and therefore 'the control over linguistic sense and meaning . . . becomes an ever more central issue for political struggle'. In a moment of apocalyptic hope such as might be found in Blake or Shelley, in which the 'human community' is constituted as 'a multicoloured Orpheus of infinite power', the climax comes as a 'secular Pentecost': 'the bodies are mixed and the nomads speak a common tongue.'[9] But never a word about global English, even as what Frye would call the demonic parody of this blissful hope. Now that's theory!

Expansion of the knowable

I have compared Moretti's project to Northrop Frye's; another unacknowledged mid-century parallel comes even closer, for Moretti's essay updates the problematic of Erich Auerbach's 1952 essay 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*.' (Alternative statements of the same concerns appear in Auerbach's Introduction to *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin*

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[9] Negri and Hardt, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA 2000, pp. 302, 404, 362.

Antiquity and In the Middle Ages.)[10] In this work, Auerbach defines himself in relation both to his inspiration, the *New Science* of Giambattista Vico (1744), and to his contemporaries among the German Romance philologists of the earlier twentieth century, especially Leo Spitzer, Ernst Robert Curtius and Karl Vossler. He traces from Vico's definition of philology its place in German culture as *Geistesgeschichte*, which has as its concern 'mankind'. Auerbach recognizes that his work occurs at a certain moment in history—what he calls 'our time', the years after the Second World War—defined by the obsolescence of the European culture that had formed the horizon for centuries of earlier scholarship and speculation: 'European civilization is approaching the term of its existence; its history as a distinct entity would seem to be at an end, for already it is beginning to be engulfed in another, more comprehensive unity'. This 'world civilization' is so encompassing that any radically innovative incursion would 'have to come from another planet'.[11]

Because of the 'enormous amounts of material' associated with this new opportunity for knowledge, 'no one can hope, in a single life span, to accumulate all the available knowledge in a given subject and reduce it to a synthesis'. At this level of formulation, Auerbach seems less optimistic than Moretti's Wallerstein. Rather than a system, Auerbach proposes as the basis for producing contemporary knowledge nothing more than 'unsystematic, open-minded effort'. For Auerbach, this effort above all requires determining what he calls a 'starting point' (*Ansatzpunkt*) that will allow the practice of his method—which, like Moretti's, is historical in ambition. This means the following: 'I never approach a text as an isolated phenomenon; I address a question to it, and my question, not the text, is my primary point of departure'.[12] This seems close in practice to Moretti's Weber, but the level of synthesizing ambition has been set lower—no science, no laws.

My purpose in adducing Auerbach is first to suggest that the problems he and Moretti see are much the same: the expansion of the knowable produced by the emergence of a truly world-spanning literature, and the

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[10] Erich Auerbach, 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*' (1952), trans. Edward and Maire Said, *Centennial Review* 13, 1969, pp. 1–17; *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and In the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Princeton 1965.

[11] Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public*, pp. 16, 6, 20 and 21.

[12] Ibid., pp. 17, 18 and 20.

need to develop new procedures of knowledge that recognize the impossibility of knowing everything, of reading enough—and which therefore must define imaginatively framed points of entry into the materials in order to make possible historical investigation. The end of the Second World War, it seems, allowed some individuals a moment of global vision—at once unifying and overwhelming—which then closed down into the binary Cold War; and in the 1990s the global more obviously re-emerged. Auerbach seems prescient in defining globality: apparently his erudition, combined with his marginal status as a Jew in his native Germany, his subsequent exile to Turkey and emigration to the United States, gave him unusual insight. His reflections are resolute yet nostalgic. By contrast, the problem Moretti sketches is by now familiar; the novelty comes in his solution and its transgressive euphoria.

Auerbach, we have seen, connects his master Vico to Germanic traditions of *Geistesgeschichte*, allowing us to place Vico in the same intellectual space as that defined by Moretti's advocacy of Weber. Yet Vico was a philologist and Weber a positivist. The tension between philology and positivism (Vico and Weber, Auerbach and Moretti) may be greater than this apparent assimilation would indicate. Certainly, I think, it is so at the level of language, which is where I am situating the tension between criticism and theory. For Auerbach, to answer the questions he addresses to his texts requires his closely reading them. That is, Auerbach practises criticism, Moretti theory. In the nineteenth century, the tension between philology and positivism is evident in Nietzsche. In our time, one place to find this tension would be in a former colleague of Moretti's and an admirer of Auerbach's, Edward Said, who co-translated 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*' and, in *Beginnings*, developed an independent, influential and still challenging use of Auerbach and Vico that goes in a very different direction from that of Moretti. If the latter releases the tension in Auerbach on behalf of an abstract formalism, Said values Vico instead for 'his stubborn habit as a philologist of forcing words back into the messy physical reality from which, because of their human uses, words necessarily emanate.'[13]

Three emphases from *Beginnings* offer a controversial perspective on the problematic I have been defining. First, Said's characterization, over

[13] Edward Said, Introduction to *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge, MA 2001, p. xxi.

twenty-five years ago, of the troubling relations between knowledge and translation:

> We expect the student trained in literature to have a smattering of 'humanities'—in translation—but an urgent sense of other knowledge, paraknowledge, that he assumes lies naturally alongside literature and in some way bears upon it.

And as for teachers,

> *our* fate as scholars today is precisely that of our students, for how many of us can do classical philology? At best we learned Greek or German to pass reading exams, and for most of us Romance philology was something we read about while we took courses in the accelerated reading of French or Italian. The bookstore, with its rack upon rack of translated works (Freud, Nietzsche, Proust, Hesse, Baudelaire) brings us closer and faster to the world of knowledge than any other means readily available.[14]

Although English is not here specified, the book's address to an American academic readership makes clear into which language all this material is being translated.

The second emphasis comes from Said's interpretation of Vico, and it presents a figure less a theorist and more radically a critic than the Vico of Auerbach. Said emphasizes 'Vico's obsession with details', his tendency 'to turn away from schematic methods that could be lifted out of his text':

> Instead he advocated wideness of scope, broad comparisons, the love of detail linked to large universal principles—all intended to load down schemata beyond usefulness. The power of Vico's rhetoric always takes one away from method, rationalistically considered, to knowledge as pathos, invention, imagination—with their pitfalls unobscured.
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> And such a route returns the reader, as it does Vico, to language, which is where Vico teaches us always to begin.[15]

This figure of Vico recalls gestures from Said's admired teacher R. P. Blackmur, whose now classic readings of Modernism demonstrated, especially in Yeats and Joyce, the methodical schemata and then, at the level of language, their collapse into unanticipated felicity and insight. For

[14] Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, New York 1975, p. 7–8.
[15] Said, *Beginnings*, p. 368.

Said, Blackmur centrally exemplifies 'the paradox that whatever criticism urges or delivers must not, indeed cannot, be replicated, re-produced, re-used as a lesson learned and then applied'.[16] This means that, for Said, the scholar cannot surf the crests of footnotes that support Moretti's Wallerstein. For Said what is actual in texts resists being made factual.

A covert imperialism?

I conclude with an agenda Said defined in 1975, and which his own work has by no means wholly pursued, but which certainly began in his own first book, on Joseph Conrad. It still seems to me to be at the forefront of the tasks of comparative literary studies, both as it transforms the study of English and as it addresses the current conditions of world literature in a state of globality—

> the formal and psychological question of the interdependence of literary and sociological approaches in dealing with how English . . . is at once a national and a world language (for some writers a first and for others a second language).[17]

I am troubled by several features that I find in Moretti's approach to the challenge of globality for the study of world literature: the unavowed imperialism of English; the diminishment of language-based criticism in favour of a monolingual master scheme. Against this, I am deeply attracted by Said's concern with the idiosyncratic and particular. Yet I also worry about its model of virtuosity, a performance that cannot be taught or replicated and that may seem to isolate the critic as irrevocably as the new-critical model isolated the text. Said's immensely courageous and influential work as a public intellectual stands against this danger of isolation, against which he has himself repeatedly warned; perhaps because of its deep temptations.[18]

Moretti has developed a delightfully stylish and witty prose, yet his intellectual, as opposed to belletristic, ambitions seem those of a German

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[16] Blackmur, *Language As Gesture*, New York 1952 (on Yeats); *Eleven Essays in the European Novel*, New York 1964 (on Joyce). See also Said, *Reflections on Exile*, pp. 246–67.

[17] Said, *Beginnings*, p. 380; see also his *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, Cambridge, MA 1966.

[18] See, for example, 'Reflections on American "Left" Criticism', *boundary 2*, 1978, and the Introduction to *Reflections on Exile*, pp. xvii–xx, in which he regrets how many of the great twentieth-century Western writers about culture 'erected immense theoretical and formal bulwarks' against the experience of history.

professor of the old days: to lead a research team, to head a body of specialist hands. What is rare and wonderful in this ambition for the literary humanities is its capacity to foster and stimulate collaborative enterprise, a real sharing in which one colleague's work actually means something to other colleagues, as it confirms or challenges the hypotheses and syntheses produced by the comparatist. This is the utopian dimension of Moretti's recently founded Centre for the Study of the Novel at Stanford.[19] The readers read closely in all the various languages of the world, and present the findings to the global synthesizer, who becomes the *maestro di color che sanno* ('master of those who know'). In appropriating, and twisting, Dante's praise for Aristotle, I end by asking, what does it mean that those who know are not their own masters?

The language-based criticism residually familiar in the American academy emerges from a deep history but has not actually long existed. For this is *literary* criticism, and it therefore coexists with the modern sense of literature, only some two centuries old. In their different ways both Plato and Aristotle practised something that we recognize as theory, but not language-based analysis of authors or works. The skills of what would become such a literary criticism emerged first and were long elaborated in rhetorical analysis and religious exegesis. When these came together in classical philology in late eighteenth-century Germany, it was the moment of explosive nationalist emergence. Language-based criticism of modern literatures rose and flourished with the modern nation-state. Moretti's essay tacitly acknowledges this history but does not address the further question posed by the globality of world literature and the diminishing place of the nation-state in our times: what can the future hold for a mode of critical performance that is losing its home base? Must it learn the arts of diaspora?

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[19] My own hopes for shared work are specified in 'Shop Window or Laboratory: Collection and Collaboration in the Humanities', in *The Politics of Research*, eds George Levine and E. Ann Kaplan, New Brunswick 1997.