WORLDING COMPARATIVE LITERATURE: BEYOND POSTCOLONIALISM

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436 Edward Said is one of the iconic comparative literature scholars of the second half of the twentieth century, particularly known for his almost single-handed invention of postcolonialism as a critical method. Part of Said's method consisted of re-reading and commenting upon colonial classics. Such reinterpretations not only addressed classics of fiction, but also engaged with the works of historians and geographers. In what follows, I will focus on Said's handling of the work of the British geographer Halford Mackinder, whom Said mentions three times in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993),[1] albeit only second-hand, so to speak, as each time this happens via references to Neil Smith's 1984 *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*. In 1904, Mackinder published an influential paper in *The Geographical Journal*, the official organ of the British Royal Geographical Society. In this paper, Mackinder labelled all of European and Asian Russia and much of Central Asia, then also under Russian rule, as "The Geographical Pivot of History." Mackinder's views represented what we would now, following Heidegger's coining of the term, and especially the use Said himself and Gayatri Spivak have made of it, call a "worlding" of the world according to the dictates of colonialism and imperialism prevalent at the time. My argument will be that Said's reading of Mackinder likewise amounts to a specific worlding for a specific moment in time, and that perhaps now we should move on from there.

Although he never mentions the term in his paper, Mackinder reasoned from the British "Great Game" perspective that had also inspired Rudyard Kipling to write *Kim*, his novel of imperial India, published just a few years earlier, in 1901. Towards the end of the novel, Kim O'Hara, the novel's boy-protagonist of Irish descent but born and raised in India, faces a Russian and a Frenchman who, under the guise of "sportsmen," are scouting and surveying the high passes of India's North-West fron-

tier region. France and Russia, and soon also Germany, were Britain's main imperial rivals at the beginning of the twentieth century. Russia's push south through the Caucasus and Central Asia was especially seen as a threat to the British commercial and political interests in Persia/Iran, and to British India, the Jewel in the Crown of Imperial Britain. Perhaps surprisingly, given Kipling's reputation as a British imperialist and jingoist, Said provided a highly appreciative introduction to the 1987 Penguin edition of *Kim*. Said labels *Kim* "a masterwork of imperialism" ("Introduction" 45) and hence "a great document of its historical moment" ("Introduction" 46) but also insists that it is "one of the greatest of novelistic ironies" ("Introduction" 45) that Kipling's "aesthetic integrity" laid bare the impermanence of Britain's hold on India, thus turning *Kim* also into "an aesthetic milestone along the way to midnight 15 August, 1947" ("Introduction" 46), that is to say, Indian independence and partition.

The first mention Said makes of Mackinder, whom he calls "an explorer, geographer, and Liberal Imperialist" (*CI* 23), concerns a series of lectures on imperialism Mackinder gave at the London Institute of Bankers at the end of the nineteenth century. This mention of Mackinder occurs in a parenthetical aside in which Said discusses the opening paragraphs of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which Conrad's narrator Marlow starts to tell his story of the ruthless exploitation of King Leopold II's colonial Congo Free State to "a group of listeners [...] drawn largely from the business world" (*CI* 23). Said speculates on whether Conrad may have known about Mackinder's lectures while writing his great novella in 1898-99. Conrad, of course, was the subject of Said's earliest book-length publication, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966). The way Said discusses *Heart of Darkness* in *Culture and Imperialism* very much resembles the way he discusses *Kim* in his introduction to the latter. He also considers *Heart of Darkness* imperialist and revelatory of imperialism at the same time, and of the latter's transience. Moreover, as with *Kim*, he locates this quality of *Heart of Darkness* in the "ironic distance" Conrad, because of his birth and youth in the then-Russian part of Poland an "outsider" to the colonial Empires of Western Europe, preserved "in each of his works" (*CI* 25). This ironic distance expressed itself in the ambiguities and subtleties of his narrative technique, and in that Conrad "saw his own narratives" as "local to a time and place, neither unconditionally true nor unqualifiedly certain" (*CI* 25). Just as *Kim*, for all its being evocative of imperialism, also somehow marked a stage on the road toward Indian independence, so too did *Heart of Darkness*, Said argues, leave no doubt that "European tutelage" would come to an end, "if only because—like all human effort, like speech itself [and this is a clear reference to both Kurtz's "voice" in *Heart of Darkness* and Marlow's narrative, and indeed to Conrad's own novella]—it would have its moment, then it would have to pass" (*CI* 25-26). "Since Conrad *dates* imperialism, shows its contingency, records its illusions and tremendous violence and waste," Said contends, "he permits his later readers to imagine something other than an Africa carved up into dozens of European colonies, even if, for his own part, he had little notion of what that Africa might be" (*CI* 26).

The second mention of Mackinder in *Culture and Imperialism* occurs in a discussion of *Weltliteratur* or "world literature" (*CI* 47). Said briefly sketches the rise of comparative literature, and of the idea of world literature, as an alternative to the nationalist historiographies dominant throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and as "an almost ideal realm" (*CI* 45). Yet, Said notes, "the field was epistemologically organized as a sort of hierarchy, with Europe and its Latin Christian literatures at its center and top" (*CI* 45), a culture and civilization Said labels "Romania." In his 1952 essay "Philologie der Weltliteratur," Erich Auerbach, a great German philologist who moved first to Istanbul and then to the United States due to the rise of Nazism, expressed a concern about the emergence of "other" literatures than European ones, and, we might add, even if Said makes no mention of this, the possibility that "one" language and literature, that is to say English, because of American hegemony after WWII, might gain such dominance as to suppress all others. Said interprets this as Auerbach's realization that "Romania is under threat" (*CI* 45). By the way, it is **438** Said himself, together with his wife Maire, who in in 1969 translated Auerbach's text as "Philology and *Weltliteratur*," under which title it became famous. A similar feeling of a certain concept of civilization being under threat also speaks from the work with which Auerbach first gained fame, at least in the United States, *Mimesis* (1947 in German, English translation 1948), as well as from another famous work of the late 1940s, by another renowned German philologist, Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948 in German, English translation 1953). What "*Mimesis* immediately reveals," Said argues, is that "the notion of Western literature that lies at the very core of comparative study centrally highlights, dramatizes, and celebrates a certain idea of history, and at the same time obscures the fundamental geographical and political reality empowering that idea" (*CI* 47). For Said, "the idea of European or Western literary history contained in [*Mimesis*] and the other scholarly works of comparative literature is essentially idealistic and, in an unsystematic way, Hegelian" (*CI* 47). Starting from Dante's *Divine Comedy* as the embodiment of a "Romania" founded on a "basic Christian order," Said finds that "class, political upheavals, shifts in economic patterns and organization, war: all these subjects, for great authors like Cervantes, Shakespeare, Montaigne, as well as for a host of lesser writers, are enfolded within recurringly renewed structures, visions, stabilities, all of them attesting to the abiding dialectical order represented by Europe itself" (*CI* 47). This is where Mackinder again enters the picture.

For Said, the "world literature" he saw taking shape in the writings of Auerbach, Curtius, and their contemporaries and predecessors as comparatists, redemptive of a European civilization under threat, "coincides with what theorists of colonial geography also articulated" (*CI* 47). "In the writings of Halford Mackinder, George Chisolm, Georges Hardy, Leroy-Beaulieu, and Lucien Fevre, a much franker appraisal of the world system appears, equally metrocentric and imperial; but instead of history alone, now both empire and actual geographical space collaborate to produce a 'world-empire' commanded by Europe" (*CI* 48). As Said acknowledges, "to their

audience in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the great geographical synthesizers offered technical explanations for ready political realities. Europe *did* command the world; the imperial map *did* license the cultural vision" (*CI* 48). However, he immediately adds that "to us, a century later, the coincidence or similarity between one vision of a world system and the other, between geography and literary history, seems interesting but problematic" (*CI* 48). He therefore asks: "What should we do with this similarity?" (*CI* 48). His answer, of course, is to "reread" the "cultural archive" "not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (*CI* 51). In fact, that is what he has already been doing with Kipling and Conrad in the instances I have highlighted above. It is also what the rest of *Culture and Imperialism* engages in.

The third and final mention of Mackinder in *Culture and Imperialism* occurs again only parenthetically, and via a reference to the book by Neil Smith mentioned above, *Uneven Development*. When giving some examples of how imperialism transforms the world, Said recounts how "Neil Smith brilliantly formulates how capitalism historically has produced a particular kind of nature and space, an unequally developed landscape that integrates poverty with wealth, industrial urbanization with agricultural diminishment" (*CI* 125). Said notes:

> The culmination of this process is imperialism, which dominates, classifies, and universally commodifies all space under the aegis of the metropolitan center. Its cultural analogue is late-nineteenth-century commercial geography, whose perspectives (for example in the work of Mackinder and Chisolm) justified imperialism as the result of 'natural' fertility or infertility, available sea-lanes, permanently differentiated zones, territories, climates, and peoples. (*CI* 125)

The latter, of course, continued a trend set already in the eighteenth century in the works of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Herder, which culminated in the early nineteenth century in Hegel's "Introduction" to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Marlow puts it more succinctly, and more brutally, in *Heart of Darkness* when, starting upon his tale, he meditates that "the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much" (Conrad 20). Marlow continues, "what redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" (Conrad 20). The embodiment of this "idea" in *Heart of Darkness*, of course, is Kurtz, to "the making" of whom "all Europe contributed" (Conrad 83), and the novella goes on to reveal the complete moral failure of the man. Following Said's dichotomous reading of Conrad, we can interpret this failure as that of the man, who fell unfathomably short of the "idea" he represented, or of the very idea itself. This is where the "ironic distance" Said mentions with regard to Conrad comes into play. The irony is compounded by the fact that Marlow himself, when he utters these words, has assumed "the pose of a Buddha"

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(Conrad 20), an idol, just as Kurtz has become to the natives, and that in the course of telling his story, as a result of the falling darkness, Marlow will become a mere voice to his listeners, similarly to what Kurtz eventually became to Marlow himself. If we stop to think that the final words of Kurtz are "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad 112), and that when Kurtz's Brussels fiancée, the firmest believer in the nobility of Kurtz and what he was supposed to stand for, in fact in her turn the very embodiment of Europe's belief in the "mission civilisatrice," asks Marlow what Kurtz's last words were, he replies "the last word he pronounced was—your name" (Conrad 123), we cannot but subscribe to a Saidian contrapuntal reading of *Heart of Darkness*.

Postcolonialism, then, leads us to read world literature, and in the cases we have been looking at, colonial world literature, "differently" and "contrapuntally" to Mackinder's imperial world system. However, just as Said argues that Kipling's and Conrad's fictions can thus be read as "local to a time and place, neither unconditionally true nor unqualifiedly certain" (*CI* 25), so we may try and reread Mackinder, and especially the latter's seminal essay "The Geographical Pivot of History," contrapuntally. As mentioned earlier, the region Mackinder saw as "pivotal" to world dominance spans a huge area, from present-day Poland, then partially under Russian rule, over southern European Russia to Central Asia. Mackinder's vision was inspired by military, colonial, and imperial motives having to do with Iran and India. Just as Kipling and Conrad, to different degrees, reveal the "counter-part," or what, playing a little on Said's term, I will call the "contra-part," of the imperial vision, so too can Mackinder be read as doing the same thing. Using what is, undoubtedly, too grand a term for what is in essence a very simple operation, this may be done by applying a "deconstructive" reading to "The Geographical Pivot of History." By the way, I think Said himself may never have read this essay, as he nowhere mentions it, nor indeed, as I have intimated before, any specific piece of writing by Mackinder; in the three instances I have listed, he merely references Mackinder through Neil Smith's *Uneven Development*. Moreover, Said concentrates on the colonial and imperial implications of what, through Smith, he gathers from Mackinder's theories, whereas Mackinder, certainly in the essay with which I am here concerned, actually sees things in a much larger frame.

So let us first have a look at what Mackinder in fact says in "The Geographical Pivot of History." In line with ideas prevalent around the turn of the twentieth century, Mackinder sees human history as largely driven by geographical givens, such as landmasses, oceans, mountains, rivers, climate, and natural vegetation. After a circumstantial description of what he calls Euro-Asia, he arrives at the following statement: "The conception of Euro-Asia to which we thus attain is that of a continuous land, ice-girt in the north, water-girt elsewhere, […] whose centre and north […] have no available water-ways to the ocean, but, on the other hand, except in the sub-arctic forest, are very generally favourable to the mobility of horsemen and camelmen" (Mackinder 431). This is what Mackinder calls "the heartland," "to east, south, and west of [which] are marginal regions, ranged in a vast crescent, accessible

to shipmen" (Mackinder 431). Mackinder further notes:

> For a thousand years, a series of horse-riding peoples emerged from Asia through the broad interval between the Ural mountains and Caspian sea, rode through the open spaces of Southern Russia, and struck home into Hungary in the very heart of the European pensinsula, shaping by the necessity of opposing them the history of each of the great peoples around—the Russians, the Germans, the French, the Italians, and the Byzantine Greeks. (427)

It is only with the discovery of the possibility of circumnavigating Africa at the turn of the sixteenth century, Mackinder posits, that it became possible

> in some measure to neutralize the strategical advantage of the central position of the steppe-nomads by pressing upon them in the rear […] the one and continuous ocean enveloping the divided and insular lands is, of course, the geographical condition of ultimate unity in the command of the sea, and of the whole theory of modern naval strategy and policy. (432)

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The latter, of course, was precisely what made possible the British Empire ("Rule, Britannia," etc.), and therefore was of vital importance to Mackinder's era. At the same time, with the rise of Germany and especially Russia as naval powers, the British position became increasingly tenuous, as Mackinder went on to argue: "but the land power still remains, and recent events have again increased its significance" (433). Furthermore, "The Tudor century, which saw the expansion of Western Europe over the sea, also saw Russian power carried from Moscow through Siberia […] the eastward swoop of the horsemen across Asia was an event almost as pregnant with political consequences as was the rounding of the Cape, although the two movements long remained apart" (Mackinder 433). At the time Mackinder was writing, Russia had the clear advantage, as "the Russian railways have a clear run of 6000 miles from Wirballen in the west to Vladivostok in the east […] the Russian army in Manchuria is as significant evidence of mobile land-power as the British army in South Africa was of sea-power" (Mackinder 434). Moreover, Mackinder reasons, "the spaces within the Russian Empire and Mongolia are so vast, and their potentialities in population, wheat, cotton, fuel, and metals, so incalculably great, that it is inevitable that a vast economic world, more or less apart, will there develop inaccessible to oceanic commerce" (434).

Mackinder concludes his essay with the following observation:

> As we consider this rapid review of the broader currents of history, does not a certain persistence of geographical relationship become evident? Is not the pivot region of the world's politics that vast area of Euro-Asia which is inaccessible to ships, but which in antiquity lay open to horse-riding nomads, and is to-day about to be covered with a network of railways? There have been and are here the conditions of a mobility of military and economic power of a far-reaching and yet limited character. Russia replaces the Mongol Empire. Her pressure on Finland, on Scandinavia, on Poland, on Turkey, on Persia, on India, and on China, replaces the centrifugal raids of the steppemen. In the world at large she occupies the central strategical position held by Germany in Europe. (434-36)

By the way, it is the recognition of the central position and increasing power of Germany in Europe that, shortly after the publication of Mackinder's essay, would lead Britain to enter into the Triple Entente, with Russia joining the Entente Cordiale, signed between Britain and France in 1904, in 1907. And it is Nazi Germany's subscribing to Mackinder's geopolitical views, which in any event were largely shared by military and other strategists in the first half of the twentieth century, that led to its invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, with the aim of capturing the wheat fields and other economic resources of what is now the sovereign state of the Ukraine, but which at the time constituted the southern part of the Soviet, and earlier the Russian Empire.

What interests us here in the first place, though, is to note that in all he says, Mackinder is reasoning from a specific strategic position inspired by Britain's interests as a naval and colonial power, dependent upon, as he himself puts it, "oceanic commerce." From this position he experiences the renewed rise of his "pivot region of the world's politics" as a threat to continued European, which in his particular case we can read as British, hegemony. His reference to "a vast economic world" emerging there, "more or less apart," is significant in this respect. Obviously, although unspoken, Mackinder's desire is that the hegemony of the "ocean commerce" powers, primarily the British Empire, should persist. Yet, one may look at this very "pivot region" with very different eyes. Mackinder sees it as a rising impediment to world commerce. More recent commentators, reasoning from different perspectives, see it as the very condition for a truly "global" commerce, and this in both the past and the present. For an example of the former, I turn to Janet Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony* (1989); for an example of the latter, I refer to Peter Frankopan's *The Silk Roads* (2015).

In *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*, Janet Abu-Lughod traces the development, from antiquity onward, of a number of trade spheres which, by the mid-thirteenth century, became interlinked from China to Western Europe in what, after Immanuel Wallerstein's use of the term in his three-volume *The Modern World-System* (1974-89), she calls an emergent world system. These eight trade spheres respectively covered China and Southeast Asia and the South China Sea as far as the Indonesian archipelago, the Bay of Bengal from the Straits of Malacca to the Coast of Coromandel on the Eastern shore of the Indian sub-continent, the Arabian Sea from the Malabar Coast on the Western side of that same sub-continent to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf with Persia, Arabia and the Middle East, the Red Sea and Egypt, the Mediterranean, Western Europe, and finally the steppes and deserts from Mongolia to the Black Sea and Constantinople. In fact, until the early fourteenth century, many of the political and trade units involved were considerably stronger than Europe, let alone any single European "power," and, as André Gunder Frank has argued in *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998), up to the mid-eighteenth century, the world economy, in terms of wealth generated and circulated, continued to be centered on China and India.

The world system as Abu-Lughod sees it operating in the period she focuses upon depends on the dual "silk roads" constituted by the southern maritime route, linking China to Europe by way of the Malay peninsula, India, and various parts of the Muslim world, and the northern desert and steppe route. The latter had been in operation since the time of the Romans and the first Chinese or "Qin" Empire around 200 BCE, but it functioned especially smoothly under Mongol domination from China to the borders of Eastern Europe between the late twelfth and the early fourteenth centuries. The world system Abu-Lughod describes, then, relied upon the trade circle between China and Europe being complete and unbroken because of Mongol rule in China and throughout Central Asia. However, the Yuan or Mongol Dynasty in China in the mid-fourteenth century collapsed under the onslaught of the Black Death, or another epidemic concurrent with the plague ravishing Europe at the same time. Its replacement by the native Chinese Ming Dynasty, naturally suspicious of the Mongols to its north, resulted in the closing of the northern desert and steppe trade route. This led to a weakening of the entire "world system" as it then **443** functioned throughout the Eurasian landmass (extending in fact to North Africa and the coast of East Africa), with only the southern maritime route now remaining active. The Ming Dynasty, for internal reasons, withdrew from the international scene in the 1430s, letting its until then extremely powerful navy, with ships many times bigger than anything then known in Europe, carrying fire-arms, and in effect controlling the China seas and the Indian ocean, rot in its harbours, and forbidding foreign trade. As a result, the maritime side of the thirteenth- to fourteenth-century world system sketched by Abu-Lughod unravelled. The power vacuum this left, especially in the Indian Ocean, was filled some seventy years later by the Portuguese, after Vasco da Gama had rounded the Cape of Good Hope and Portuguese warships routed, and sank, a combined Arab-Indian fleet, effectively taking over trade in the Indian Ocean. Existing trade links were severed, including Egypt and the entire Middle East, and many active trading communities were put out of business and made obsolete. As Columbus simultaneously had opened the way to the Americas for Spain, and soon also for the other parts of Europe with ready access to the Atlantic, the riches flowing from the "new world" allowed "Europe" to come to dominate world trade, and to colonize much of the world. This is the area/era of Immanuel Wallerstein's full "world system." Whereas Mackinder, then, sees rule of his "pivot area" or "heartland" by what he calls the "steppemen" as an impediment to "world trade," and a military threat to the "sea-peoples," in Abu-Lughod's view, it is precisely the military conquest of the heartland by, and its unification under, the Mongols that created the conditions for a true "world system."

Peter Frankopan's ambition in *The Silk Roads* (2015) is, as the subtitle to the book announces, to write "A New History of the World," and to do so precisely from the perspective of Mackinder's "heartland." As Frankopan puts it in the preface to his book, "in fact, for millennia, it was the region lying between east and west, linking Europe with the Pacific Ocean, that was the axis on which the globe spun" (xiv).

This region, he argues, was home to "a sprawling web of connections" that in the late nineteenth century was given the name of "Seidenstraßen—the Silk Roads" by the German geologist Ferdinand von Richthofen (Frankopan xvi). It was "a network that fans out in every direction, routes along which pilgrims and warriors, nomads and merchants have travelled, goods and produce have been bought and sold, and ideas exchanged, adapted and refined […] they have carried not only prosperity, but also death and violence, disease and disaster" (Frankopan xvi). Indeed, they may well have carried the germs of the bubonic plague that caused the Black Death in Europe. The reverse side of the easing and speeding up of commerce between China or the Far East in general and Europe, as a result of Mongol conquest and the dominance of Mackinder's "Heartland," was the greater facility and speed with which diseases could travel and spread. Actually, using a cultural referent no less resonant than Mackinder's "Heartland," Frankopan says that he "could not understand why [he] kept being told of the importance of the Mediterranean as a cradle of civilisation, when it seemed so obvious that this was not where civilisation had really been forged […] the real crucible, the 'Mediterranean' in its literal meaning—the centre of the world—was not a sea separating Europe and North Africa, but right here in the heart of Asia" (xix). If this part of the world has been "forgotten by mainstream history," Frankopan posits, this is

> in part, […] because of what has been called 'orientalism'—the strident and overwhelmingly negative view of the east as underdeveloped and inferior to the west, and therefore unworthy of serious study. But, it also stems from the fact that the narrative from the past has become so dominant and well established that there is no place for a region that has long been seen as peripheral to the story of the rise of Europe and of western society. (xvi)

In 1989, Abu-Lughod warned, in both the beginning and the conclusion of her book, that the world, and especially the Western world, should prepare itself for a real change in the world system, similar to the one she traced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: "Much of the literature dealing with world systems seems to treat European hegemony as the end of the story. But from the vantage point of our analysis of a preexisting system, it is possible to speculate on the impermanence of all systems" (369-70). The change she referred to concerned the falling apart of a world system shaped by what, retrospectively, have come to be called the silk roads. As we saw, this at least in part created the conditions for the rise of Europe, and hence for the historical narrative that Frankopan sees as having become so "dominant and well established" that it excludes all other narratives. However, he also warns that "the world is changing around us," and "networks and connections are quietly being knitted together across the spine of Asia; or rather, they are being restored. The Silk Roads are rising again" (Frankopan 521). And, just as Europe was in reality rather peripheral to the thirteenth-fourteenth-century world system Abu-Lughod explored, so it now risks being returned to that position.

Robert Kaplan's *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* (2014) draws similar conclusions in its exploration of the southern, maritime

"silk road" that completed Abu-Lughod's earlier world system of trade. Frankopan muses at the end of his book that "the age of the west is at a crossroads, if not at an end" (519). Just as the collapse of China, or at least of its ruling Mongol Dynasty, and its subsequent withdrawal from the world stage, made room for the rise of the west, so now the re-appearance of China on the global stage may well prefigure the demise of the west, and certainly of "old" Europe. "The west's growing preoccupation with China is not surprising," Frankopan tells us, "for a new Chinese network is in the process of being built that extends across the globe" (218). He continues:

> As late as the middle of the twentieth century, it was possible to sail from Southampton, London or Liverpool to the other side of the world without leaving British territory, putting in at Gibraltar and then Malta before Port Said; from there to Aden, Bombay and Colombo, pausing in the Malay peninsula and finally reaching Hong Kong. Today, it is the Chinese who can do something similar. (518-19)

Specifically, Kaplan contends that the Chinese are putting in for domination of the crucial part of that long maritime road linking Europe to East Asia, that is to say the South China Sea: "The South China Sea functions as the *throat* of the Western Pacific and Indian oceans—the mass of connective economic tissue where global sea routes coalesce" (9). Furthermore, "[h]ere is the heart of Eurasia's navigable rimland, punctuated by the Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, and Makassar straits […] more than half of the world's annual merchant fleet tonnage passes through these choke points, and a third of all maritime traffic worldwide" (Kaplan 9). With the return to a world system in which the economic weight of East and South Asia combined is pre-eminent, as Gunder Frank argues for the pre-eighteenth century world in *ReOrient* and Frankopan argues for the present, as for the pre-European hegemony past described by Abu-Lughod, the importance of the South China Sea can only grow. It is China that increasingly lays claim to the entire South China Sea, and does not hesitate to back its claims with naval power, challenging the dominance of the US navy, and before them the British, which hitherto controlled these waters. Frankopan's new northern Silk Road, not surprisingly, is also primarily the work of the Chinese, and part of the economic and foreign policy of China's current president Xi Jinping via the so-called "Belt and Road" initiative announced in 2013. This project covers "jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road" ("Vision and Actions"), effectively restoring for the twenty-first century the world trade system Abu-Lughod described for the thirteenth and fourteenth, but this time clearly under Chinese leadership, even though the actual terms in which the proposal is couched smooths this over rather nicely:

> The Belt and Road run through the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa, connecting the vibrant East Asia economic circle at one end and developed European economic circle at the other, and encompassing countries with huge potential for economic development. The Silk Road Economic Belt focuses on bringing together China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe (the Baltic); linking China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central Asia and West Asia; and connecting China with Southeast Asia, South

> Asia and the Indian Ocean. The 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road is designed to go from China's coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China's coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other. ("Vision and Actions")

In both these "newer" readings of geopolitical realities over centuries stretching back considerably further than the era of European hegemony, then, the same region that Mackinder saw as pivotal remains so, but for different reasons, along with the "sea-lanes" Said also saw Mackinder (by way of Neil Smith) singling out in his geopolitics.

The interesting thing, of course, is that, just as Said saw parallels between the world picture emerging from the writings of Mackinder and world literature as interpreted by twentieth-century comparatists before the advent of postcolonialism, and just as we may argue for an overlap between the era of decolonization and third-worldism and world literature as re-interpreted by postcolonialism, we can speculate that the era of accelerated globalization we have entered in the 1990s, and the shifts in economic and military power this brings with it, will lead to yet another rereading of the "cultural archive." Such a rereading may take various forms. To begin with, and to stay with the same authors to whom Said has referred, we might read Kipling's *Kim* from a point of view emphasizing the circulation of goods and people in the Indian subcontinent, and the Great Game as an impediment to the same kind of circulation beyond India's North-Western borders, accessing precisely that continental Central Asian "Silk Road" "pivotal" to Abu-Lughod's "old" and Frankopan's "new" world systems. Alongside such a "close" rereading of a single work by a particular author, we might recalibrate the canon of a particular author's work. For instance, with Conrad, we may turn from those works crucial to Said's postcolonial concerns, that is to say, *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo*, to works addressing issues of trade and circulation, not just of goods but also of peoples, in the China Seas, primarily the works highlighted in Norman Sherry's *Conrad's Eastern World* (1966): *Lord Jim, Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands, The End of the Tether, The Shadow-Line,* and "The Secret Sharer," along with *The Nigger of the Narcissus, Victory*, and some of the shorter tales such as "Youth." Together, these stories, novellas, and novels draw a complex picture of the "Southern Silk Road" under colonialism and imperialism. But they may also offer interesting perspectives on the roles played by certain cities, or certain ethnicities, in different contexts. Yet another "rereading" might consist of revaluating the canon of a particular literature. For instance, the "Far Eastern Tales" of Somerset Maugham might be upgraded in the canon of English literature or, as I have suggested elsewhere (D'haen, "J.J. Slauerhoff"), the specific position of J.J. Slauerhoff as compared to that of Adriaan Roland Holst and Martinus Nijhoff in Dutch literature. Most far-reaching of all, of course, would be the changes in the relative positions of specific literatures within the widest field of world literature itself. For example, European literatures, at least certain major ones and especially English literature, may come to occupy a less prominent place than they have occupied ever since the rise of comparative literature and *Weltliteratur*, and the stock of others, par-

ticularly Chinese, Japanese, and Indian literatures, may rise. Indeed, if the "Belt and Road" principle China now follows in the economic sphere would eventually extend to the cultural sphere (as is actually already the case), this may well lead to an uplifting of the literatures related to all countries and communities covered in this policy. In effect, this would amount to a literary, cultural, and scholarly "global" landscape in tune with present geopolitical realities, and consequently to a complete reversal of the hierarchy Said saw as paralleling Mackinder's colonial and imperial world view.

All this is not to say, of course, that Said's readings of Western colonial classics, both literature proper and the more discursive versions of historians and geographers, do not remain valid within the critical paradigm he himself created. It is merely to suggest that, just as Said argues for reading Conrad and Kim contra-puntally, so we might do with Said, and just as he claims that Mackinder's views underpin a certain worldview revelatory of a certain period and serving certain interests, both immediately and more "ideally," so we might posit that Said's views, as they emerged from his critical interpretations, are likewise expressive of a certain worldview indicative of a specific period. And, just as Said's intervention in the "world" of comparative literature aimed to "re-orient" that world away from "orientalism" and a hegemonic Eurocentrism towards a worldview more compatible with the changes wrought by decolonization, so I think the time has come to argue for a comparative literature "beyond" postcolonialism and more "globally" worlded.

Note

1. Hereafter cited as *CI*.

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