

“LOVE FOR THE WORLD”:
SHAKESPEARE, NATIONAL LITERATURE,
AND *WELTLITERATUR*

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- 522 To become morally independent of one's formative society [...] is the grandest theme of all literature, because it is the only means of moral progress, the establishment of some higher ethical concept.
—William Empson, “*Volpone*” (72)

WELTLITERATUR AND GLOBAL MODERNITY

Earlier conceptualizations of world literature manifest forms of determinism that were prevalent in the nineteenth century, including Goethe's idea of world literature as consequences and effects of the global practice of translation, and Karl Marx's reading of world literature in the context of global capitalism, the significance of which had yet to be fully understood for the emerging international community of literature.¹ However, neither Goethe nor Marx had anything specific to say about world literature. What does it mean to have a world literature? What could it do for us? How should we understand the relationship between world literature and national literature? These are some of the questions Goethe and Marx failed to address.

This essay proposes to revisit Erich Auerbach's seminal essay “Philology and *Weltliteratur*,” published in 1952, and rethink the idea and practice of world literature as a historical process, with reference to cross-cultural appropriations of Shakespeare as means of facilitating the development of national literatures in Germany in the late eighteenth century and in China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When Johann Gottfried Herder “discovered” Shakespeare in the 1770s, Germany was at a crucial juncture in the development of a new cultural identity. About a century later, China too was faced with the similar question of how to expedite the

birth of a new national literature that was different from its classical counterpart but fully conversant with modern European literature. In both cases, Shakespeare was a crucial force for the encouragement of a cosmopolitan literary outlook. Despite vast differences in the cultural conditions of Germany in the late eighteenth century and China in the late nineteenth century, both seem to have shared the desire for an expression of what Auerbach calls "man unified in his multiplicity" ("Philology" 4). Auerbach's essay is a text originating in the early years after World War II, which were marked by the rapid disintegration of the colonial empires, the expansion of the global system of nation-states with the founding of new nation-states that had achieved full independence in defeating colonialism or internal despotism such as India and China, and the memories of the war, particularly of the Holocaust, in which millions of Jews were slaughtered. In the aftermath of the humanitarian disaster of the war came a renewed urgency to develop a new concept of *Weltliteratur* that could more adequately respond to the post-war global order.

After World War II, standardization became a universal phenomenon, as Auerbach notes: "The process of imposed uniformity, which originally derived from Europe, continues its work, and hence serves to undermine all individual traditions" ("Philology" 1). In a veiled reference to European imperialism, Auerbach directs attention to the experiential paradox that even though nationalism was on the rise in the world, the world was becoming more standardized: "it is clear to the impartial observer that the inner bases of national existence are decaying [...] Standardization, in short, dominates everywhere" ("Philology" 2). Today, the globalized world is only an intensified version of the type of "standardization" Auerbach had observed more than half a century ago. It is not possible, for example, to escape from the same kinds of shopping malls, with the same window exhibitions of fashion brands such as Hermes and Chanel, in major international cities such as Shanghai, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, London, and New York. Auerbach thus takes as a starting point the paradox that the defining characteristic of the era of supposed national differentiation turns out to be a sort of levelling out of cultural diversities, and the pressure to replicate and reproduce the same political models and cultural forms everywhere. "Our earth, the domain of *Weltliteratur*," warns Auerbach, "is growing smaller and losing its diversity" ("Philology" 2), and in response to an increasingly homogenized world, he points out that "*Weltliteratur* does not merely refer to what is generally common and human; rather it considers humanity to be the product of fruitful intercourses between its members" ("Philology" 2).

It is precisely because the world is increasingly unified that we must understand literature not just in terms of what is common, but also as the product of significant and meaningful interactions between different cultures. In other words, we must first accept literary diversities as the condition of *Weltliteratur*, which emerges from the historical process of contact and interaction among cultures, languages, and nations. Both commonality and diversity should be acknowledged and emphasized. The only way to understand, practice, and protect world literature is to recognize and accept

cultural differences. If there were ever one single literary culture, “*Weltliteratur* would be at once realized and destroyed” (Auerbach, “Philology” 3).

In his discussion of the development of world literature, Auerbach takes the roles of a philological humanist and a critic of remarkable sensitivity towards cultural diversities, even though his real emphasis is on the rejection of total devotion and blind attachment to the viewpoint of national language and national literature. The task for scholars of world literature is to develop a proper understanding of national culture in its global ramifications. Indeed, *Weltliteratur* cannot be the final product that is realized at one (national) point, but rather as a historical process in which humanity begins to develop an understanding of its own history. As far as Auerbach is concerned, *Weltliteratur* is rooted in early modern European humanism and its intellectual manifestation, philology, which is first delineated, articulated and developed by Giambattista Vico and then greatly advanced by Johann Gottfried Herder in the eighteenth century. Auerbach considers Vichian philology as foundational to the humanistic spirit of world literature. In *New Science*, Vico defines philology by foregrounding how it differs from philosophy:

Philosophy contemplates reason, whence comes knowledge of the true; philology observes that of which human choice is author, whence comes consciousness of the certain. This axiom by its second part includes among the philologists all the grammarians, historians, critics, who have occupied themselves with the study of the languages and deeds of peoples: deeds at home, as in their customs and laws, and deeds abroad, as in their wars, peaces, alliances, travels, and commerce. (63)

Unlike philosophy, which is preoccupied with the knowledge of metaphysical truth, philology is concerned with the development of human understanding of what Vico calls “the certain”—historical truth—and with human agency in creating, modifying, or changing institutions humans have made. That understanding, furthermore, must be sought through a whole range of historical documents. What characterizes philology is its holistic view of human history and human experience, of the totality and historicity of human knowledge. This Vichian philological humanism, Auerbach says, is the true purpose and method of *Weltliteratur*:

Our knowledge of world literature is indebted to the impulse given that epoch by historicist humanism; the concern of that humanism was not only the overt discovery of materials and the development of methods of research, but beyond that their penetration and evaluation so that an inner history of mankind—which thereby created a conception of man unified in his multiplicity—could be written. Ever since Vico and Herder this humanism has been the true purpose of philology: because of this purpose philology became the dominant branch of humanism. (“Philology” 4)

Subscribing the knowledge of world literature to the philological inquiry into the human past, Auerbach intends to remind us of an effective origin of world literature and its purpose and method in the development of human science. Philology becomes the privileged discipline for a critical humanism that seeks to comprehend the works of humanity in history. And because we can only have access to the human

past through and in language, the study of human history is, in effect, the study of the human past in language. Auerbach considers Vico and Herder the most significant figures of philological studies and the historical humanism that he was hoping to revive in the twentieth century. Emphasizing his situation at the margins of Europe (and then the US), Auerbach extracts from Vico and Herder a historical humanism, with "the human" understood not as given, but rather as developed through social and cultural actions and interactions.

Of the major issues Auerbach discusses in his essay, two assertions prove particularly significant and useful for my purposes here. First, as a form of philological inquiry, world literature, by definition, must rely on the totality of historical materials and documents available to us without privileging one form of writing over others, or one collection of materials from one place over those from elsewhere. Second, Auerbach's emphasis on the acceptance of and respect for cultural diversity in an increasingly globalized world is complementary, rather than contrary, to his holistic vision of human knowledge. This acceptance might be achieved, and even enhanced, by the efforts to localize what would be global in literary thought and practice. It would be instructive, therefore, to consider how foreign literature might be denationalized and made practical and useful as a model of one's own (national) literature. In his grand analysis of the development of philological humanism, Auerbach, in several places, emphasizes the centrality of Herder,² whose argument for the recognition of the significance of modern literature as different from its classical counterpart, and whose discovery of Shakespeare as a "German" poet, must be seen as two of the most significant historical moments in the development of the idea and practice of world literature.

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THE GERMAN INVENTION OF SHAKESPEARE

The discovery of Shakespeare in Germany was a national event, and soon afterward he was, as A.W. Schlegel put it, "naturalized" (345) in Germany. That the German appropriation of Shakespeare contributed immensely to the formation of its national language and national literature must be a compelling example of world literature in practice in the European context. In 1770, Herder was growing increasingly tired of French classical theatre, and to his immense joy, discovered the works of the English playwright Shakespeare, whom he believed Germany should emulate and appropriate in order to develop its own literary culture. Shakespeare's rude vitality, unconstrained imagination, and lack of respect for theatrical rules and regulations formed a striking contrast with the well-mannered and highly refined French theatre, which had served as a model for German literature. Shakespeare was an attractive alternative, and a better example of theatrical representation. Herder began to see the convergence of Homer, the poets of the Old Testament, and Shakespeare as key points in the development of a new tradition of literary imagination (Moore 17).

Herder's enthusiasm for Shakespeare is profusely expressed in his famous essay "Shakespeare" (1773). The essay is not only a reassessment of Shakespeare, but also offers an example *par excellence* of how Shakespeare could be invented and moulded for local utility, and how a new and geohistorically specific theory of dramatic art might be developed and formulated. For Herder, Shakespearean criticism up to the 1770s had been drastically flawed: whether he was praised as a genius or rejected as a drunkard, Shakespeare was invariably, and dogmatically, valorized in accordance with classical theatrical conventions, especially the unities of time, place, and action, which Shakespeare had disregarded and ignored. David Hume, for example, considered Shakespeare rude, unpolished, uneducated, and incapable of "furnishing a proper entertainment to a refined or intelligent audience" (152).³ More consequentially, Voltaire rejected Shakespeare following the same line of argument. When Voltaire came to England in the summer of 1727, French neoclassical theatre dominated Europe: "Corneille and Racine had been translated, adapted, and played in London for fifty years" (Green 57). Voltaire thought of Shakespeare as "barbaric" and uncivilized, though he was widely believed to be jealous of Shakespeare and to have plagiarized him. Voltaire, himself an accomplished neoclassical playwright, must have judged Shakespeare in terms of those rules he had inherited from the classical dramatists. But how could it be appropriate to judge and rate Shakespeare with the same rules Shakespeare had not learned, or if he had, he would have refused to subscribe to? Just as Shakespeare should not be framed by the classical theatrical rules, modern national authors, German or otherwise, must not disregard their geo-historical conditions and follow rules that belonged either to a different age, or to a different place, or both. To compare him with Sophocles, for example, would only reveal a lack of understanding of how drama itself was the product of the age. "Sophocles's drama and Shakespeare's drama," says Herder, "are two things that in a certain respect have scarcely their name in common" (292). Herder's powerful defence of Shakespeare would soon establish a critical tradition in which Shakespeare's genius should be appreciated without reference to the accepted formal decorum. Ironically, therefore, Shakespeare was, in one sense, invented by the efforts to reject him, including Voltaire's attempt to destroy him.⁴

Thus, Shakespeare was given the task to create a national literature afresh, one that was far more complicated and challenging than that of the Greek dramatic artists: "Shakespeare was confronted with nothing like the simplicity of national manners, deeds, inclinations, and historical traditions that formed the Greek drama" (Herder 298). He had no model, no example, nothing that he might use even as a point of reference or comparison. The grandeur of his creativity is the kind of creation accomplished on the basis of nothing external, a God-like creation. He is "a son of the gods": "The very innovativeness, originality, and variety of his work demonstrate the primal power of his vocation" (298). Herder says of Shakespeare as "interpreter and rhapsodist" (298):

When I read him, it seems to me that the theater, actors, and scenery disappear! I see only separate leaves from the book of events, of Providence, of the world, blown by the storm of history; individual impressions of peoples, estates, souls, all the most various and independently acting machines, all the unwitting, blind instruments—which is precisely what we are in the hands of the Creator of the world—which come together to form a single, whole dramatic image, an event of singular grandeur that only the poet can survey. Who can conceive of a greater poet of northern man and of his age? (299)

Shakespeare's genius is understood here as *temporally* specific. His artistic singularity could not be derived from an external source, nor could it be repeated by anyone else, including Shakespeare's followers. What has defined his dramatic quality is precisely that which departs from the model of Sophocles. Shakespeare could not be more different from Greek dramatic artists, not least because they lived in different ages:

And heavens, how far we are from Greece! History, tradition, manners, religion, the spirit of the age, of the people, of emotion, and of language—how far all these things are from Greece! Whether the reader knows both ages well or only slightly, he will not for one moment confuse two things that bear no likeness to each other. (Herder 297)

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Yet, it is precisely for his singular strength that Shakespeare may be universalized. The quality that has defined Shakespeare may at once describe two different versions of Shakespeare: first, he is a great national English playwright, because he stands apart from all the great dramatic artists before him, Greek or French; and second, he is a great global playwright because he is not locally or nationally limited, and his dramatic art is both expression and evidence of a universal sympathy. This is why Herder thinks that, though they are different from one another, Shakespeare and Sophocles are related by a kindred spirit. "Shakespeare is Sophocles' brother," says Herder, "precisely where he seems dissimilar, only to be inwardly wholly like *him*" (303). Herder continues as follows:

Since all illusion is accomplished by means of this authenticity, truth, and creativity of history, then were they absent, not only would illusion be impossible but not a single element of Shakespeare's drama and dramatic spirit would remain [...] Thus, we see that the whole world is merely the body belonging to this great spirit: all the scenes of Nature are the limbs of this body, just as very character and way of thinking is a feature of this spirit—and we might call the whole by the name of Spinoza's vast God: "Pan! Universum!" (303)

Shakespeare is both specific and universal, both national and global; his vigour, his inspiration, and his poetic imagination are of universal sympathy, though the manners in which he embodies his genius are suitable and specific to his time. Herder's intention is unmistakable: he would want to "bring him [Shakespeare] to life for us Germans" (291).

Shakespeare is indeed a global invention. His canonization as *the* English author around the mid-eighteenth century, especially following the Straford (Garrick) jubilee in 1769 and Herder's monumentalization of him in his 1773 essay, was of global

significance. Insofar as he is a collective possession and property on a global scale, Shakespeare is our contemporary. His universality—the collection of qualities that allow him to be valued, admired, and appreciated in any language—justifies and legitimates his translation and localization. If he is a global dramatic artist as he is, is it possible to understand his work as one type of dramatic art that operates and circulates above and beyond national literature? Development of national literature has its specific requirements and needs, but Shakespeare seems able to offer unlimited possibilities and opportunities for appropriation and creation in the local and national contexts. If Shakespeare as a universal author has contributed to the development of various national literatures at different historical junctures, where should we draw the line between national literature and *Weltliteratur*? Shakespeare is universal, despite, or rather because of, the necessity that he needs to be invented and reinvented for local/national uses in order to be the Shakespeare that we know.

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SHAKESPEARE IN CHINA

Shakespeare's influence on the development of Chinese literature, however, came much later; his first textual presence in translation in China occurred in the early twentieth century. The dilatory introduction of Shakespeare in China demonstrates that translation of a major foreign author is never simply an isolated or random act of cross-cultural transmission, but a political decision following the establishment of a critical consensus on the importance of the author in question in the development of a new literature in China. Shakespeare is not just a playwright, an Elizabethan playwright, but an active force in catalyzing the emergence and formation of modern Chinese literature. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China faced the same task of inventing a new national language and national literature as Germany did more than a century earlier. The delay in translating Shakespeare in China is probably in part because China did not have an equivalent to Herder, who would immediately recognize the value of Shakespeare as a model of national literature.

It is generally accepted that the history of modern China began with the end of the First Opium War (1842). The war did not colonize China, but it did create a colonial enclave within China: Hong Kong. In a colony subject to English culture, “‘Doing Shakespeare’ was an unquestioned, if unofficial, thread in the fabric of British expatriate colonial life” (Levith 93). In the colonial context of Hong Kong, Shakespeare was a cathartic object of nostalgia for those posted in the remote colony. As Levith demonstrates in *Shakespeare in China*, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both visiting professional companies and local amateur performing groups staged versions of Shakespearean plays. Hong Kong adopted English as its official language, and Shakespeare inevitably featured in entrance examinations for overseas universities and the University of Hong Kong, the oldest university in the territory,

which was established in 1912. Memorable soliloquies from Shakespeare's plays would be extracted and used to help local students improve their English. The appointment of the distinguished English poet Edmund Blunden as Chair Professor of English in 1953 was a significant cultural event in the history of the University of Hong Kong and, to some extent, Hong Kong as a whole. Teaching Shakespeare was a curriculum focus in the Department of English under his headship. During his eleven years at the University, a drama group known as the "Masquers" was active in theatrical production and staged a number of Shakespeare's plays (Levith 93-95). Localization of Shakespeare went so far as to translate his works into the local tongue, Cantonese. It is through such instruments of institutional establishment as colonial universities, teaching, and public performance that Shakespeare was transported beyond linguistic borders to Hong Kong.

Though the use of Shakespeare in Hong Kong is not typical of his dissemination in China, it does show the trajectory of his introduction to China. In the mid-nineteenth century, under the massive pressure imposed on the Qing government by the Western powers, which sought to employ forces to secure trade privileges in China, the necessity of knowing and understanding these "aliens" was an urgent matter for Qing officials and scholars. Translations of general information about the nations of the West—their geography, history, society, government, and culture—were proliferating. It is in this context that Shakespeare appeared first in the Chinese translations of general descriptions and accounts of Britain, its history, culture, and society.⁵ But the name of Shakespeare was, by and large, an occasional occurrence throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and it hardly meant anything more than an abstract sign. His plays were available neither in translation nor on the Chinese stage; there is no evidence that anyone had ever seen or read Shakespeare in the nineteenth century within China. The first Chinese who got to know Shakespeare was, notably, the first Chinese ambassador to London and Paris, Guo Songtao, an open-minded mandarin—a rare phenomenon in the nineteenth century—who did not even conceal his admiration for the management of Hong Kong's prison system and of the Oxford style of teaching. On 11 August 1877, Guo wrote in his diary about a visit to a London exhibition of printing technology and machinery, at which he saw early collections of English literature, including Shakespeare's works. He inserted a comment that Shakespeare was comparable to Homer in England. On 18 January, 1879, Guo saw a performance of *Hamlet* in London: "In the evening, Margaret invited me to go to Lyceum Theatre in London to see the production of one of Shakespeare's plays. The emphasis was on the plot and not on spectacles" (743). Guo's comments might be perfunctory. During the tenure of his ambassadorship, Guo studied British industrial civilization, its institutional structure, and its literature. The historical conditions under which Shakespeare (though just the name) was brought to China should be noted: China's defeat in the Opium War catalyzed and expedited the country's early globalization, and Guo's appointment as first Chinese ambassador to the West by Ci Xi marked this reluctant opening up of China.⁶

However, China remained ambivalent about Shakespeare. He was frequently referred to, but there is no evidence that any of those who mentioned Shakespeare in the early years of the twentieth century had read him seriously, perhaps apart from the translation/adaptation of Charles and Mary Lamb's reduced versions of Shakespearean stories by Lin Shu, a "translator" who did not even know English. Lu Xun was especially unhappy with the fragmented and inconsistent reception of Shakespeare: "Yan Fu mentioned Shakespeare, but that was all. Liang Qichao spoke about Shakespeare, but without attracting much attention. Tian Han translated a few works by Shakespeare, but they seem out of fashion now" (559).

530 In retrospect, it is a little surprising that it should have taken longer than expected to recognize the genius of Shakespeare in China, and for critics and scholars to reach a general consensus over Shakespeare's value for modern Chinese literature. The popularity of Western authors in China corresponded to their perceived value, especially with regard to the development of national literature. Translation of Western literature was thus measured in terms of its practicality and suitability for directing the development of a modern Chinese literature. Shakespeare was slow in coming to China partly because of a critical indecision over whether he would have a role to play in the May Fourth New Literature Movement. An essay published in 1919 in the *avant-garde* intellectual outlet *New Youth*, Zhi Fei's "The Place of Theatre in Modern Literature," dismissed Shakespeare's plays as unrealistic, and argued that a play such as *Hamlet*, for example, could offer the modern reader nothing apart from gross stimulants (see Li 153). What would be good for the construction of modern Chinese literature was modern realist literature from Europe, rather than dated classical authors. Zheng Zhengdu, a distinguished critic and writer in the early decades of the twentieth century, claimed in 1921 that Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Goethe's *Faust* were not suitable for translation into Chinese, for there was, he argued, a visible gap between these texts and China's reality (see Li 153), though he was not certain as to what that gap was exactly. For him, two types of works should be prioritized for translation: those that could contribute to the transformation of Chinese literary tradition, and those that could orient Chinese readers towards thinking about contemporary issues and bring them into contact with modern thought. Hu Shi, the US-educated champion of the New Literature Movement, whom one would have good reasons to expect to like and promote Shakespeare, also had strong reservations about bringing him to China because, though this English playwright possessed an enormous amount of creative energy, he had very little respect for the principles of realism. Yet, it was Hu Shi who organized the translation of Shakespeare as a national project, when he was appointed Chair of the Translation Committee that was established with the returned funds of the Boxer Indemnity in the 1930s. The translator Liang Shiqiu, who participated in the project, created translations that, though faithful to the originals, lack Shakespeare's gusto and virtuosity. There are mainly two reasons for the change in the perception of Shakespeare in the 1930s. First, the discovery of Marx's endorsement of

Shakespeare's genius was influential on the community of literature and criticism, which, at the time, was increasingly inclined towards left-wing politics. Second, and perhaps more significantly, was the news that translations of the complete works of Shakespeare had already been produced in Japan, producing the belief that even if China should lose militarily to Japan, it should not replicate that defeat in the translation of Shakespeare (Li 160-61).

Whether for or against the translation of Shakespeare into Chinese, however, the consensus in the early twentieth century was that literature should have a prominent social and political role to play in the transformation of China's identity. The argument against translation of his work hinged on the idea that Shakespeare would not contribute to the development of a new national literature, while those who argued for it believed that Shakespeare would be instrumental in building a modern national literature that would be globally significant. Yet, what is this "new national literature"? Is there such a thing as modern literature that is entirely national? Just as modern German literature is not purely or entirely German, modern Chinese literature cannot be entirely Chinese. The notion of "national literature" must not be taken as a self-sufficient ontological category. It would be perhaps historically more accurate to speak of the division between a classical literature and a modern literature, than that between English and Chinese literatures. The difference between Shakespeare and Sophocles, as Herder has noted, is as substantive as that between *The Orphan of the Zhaos* (赵氏孤儿) and *Thunderstorm* (雷雨) in Chinese literature, and modern/contemporary Chinese novels such as *Wolf Totem* would be more similar to Victorian novels such as George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* in their form and their adaptation to the conventions of the modern novel than to classical Chinese novels such as *The Water Margin*, except that *Wolf Totem* and *The Water Margin* are written in Chinese. Even with that observation, one needs to be cautious, for these two works are written in two Chinese languages: one in modern *Baihua* (vernacular) and the other in *Wenyan* (classical Chinese). Typically, differentiations among national literatures are made in terms of national language without taking into account the generic and formal conventions that modern Chinese literature shares with its counterparts elsewhere. The idea of classical Chinese literature would be perhaps more distinctively national, if "national" is understood only as language-based, but modern Chinese literature is manifestly part of a global literary system, a composite formation, that is possible only at a time when literature can no longer be entirely national and when *Weltliteratur* is recognized as a different form of production and circulation, which Pascale Casanova describes in *The World Republic of Letters*. It should be noted that Herder's idea of national culture complicates the notion of world literature. However, the very notion of national culture depends on its other: world culture. To argue for any form of cultural purity, along the lines of national language, is to confess the very impossibility of retaining it, especially in the age of globalization.

We may even further consider the translation of Shakespeare as a global project characterized by such projects as China's appropriation of Shakespeare in the

early twentieth century and German discovery of Shakespeare in the late eighteenth century. Both attempted to construct and develop their respective modern national literature through Shakespeare; and Shakespeare in China, as in Germany, is an exemplar of world literature. His sinification and localization demand a reconsideration of the notion of Chinese literature and of the categorical division between Chinese and foreign literature, which has long been the conceptual basis for scholarly and critical inquiry in China. National literature cannot be simply understood as that in the national language. Even the modern Chinese language, in which the whole of modern Chinese literature is written, is inescapably a product of “globalization,” precisely because its invention in the early twentieth century was inspired and catalyzed by European comparative philology formalized first by Sir William Jones in 1786, about the same time Herder was trying to turn Shakespeare into a northern German poet.⁷ World literature is rooted in the common efforts of humanity, though its manifestation is national and local, which is crucial in maintaining cultural diversities on a global level.

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LOVE, LITERATURE, AND THE WORLD

Commitment to the sovereignty of national literature remains a major challenge for the practice of world literature, as it was for Auerbach in the mid-twentieth century. Auerbach had experienced and witnessed the devastation of the war and the Holocaust. The question of human diversity arose amidst the larger process of the production and management of diversity, and it appears to resurface from time to time in the history of the modern world. World literature is, or ought to be, an effective model for examining this history and its manifestations, as well as a counterbalance against cultural nationalism and chauvinism. One of the risks of comparative literature (as compared with world literature) is that, in its impulse to compare, it could become a field of contest between national literatures or a propaganda tool to promote the achievements of national literatures. Refusal to recognize human connectedness and willingness to accept the fragmentation of the world would lead to the same path of human destruction brought about by the extermination of diversities in World War II and in the ongoing “clashes of civilizations” in the Middle East and elsewhere. World literature is not a finished concept but an unresolved problem, precisely because it is willing to embrace the seeming paradox of conflict between particular and universalist impulses. National literature, if defined as that which is inscribed in national language, would not only destabilize the idea of world literature, but would also destroy the very notion of national literature that it intends to essentialize, ontologize, and sacralize.

We are thus able to return to Auerbach’s history of exile and his idea of love as the foundation of philological humanism and world literature. Auerbach concludes his essay by quoting Hugo of St. Victor’s remarks about the “perfect” human being’s will-

ing detachment from any particular place in the world:

The great basis of virtue [...] is for the practical mind to learn, bit by bit, first to change about in visible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be able to leave them behind altogether. The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. (qtd. in "Philology" 17)

Auerbach comments and expands on Hugo's remarks thus: "Hugo intended these lines for one whose aim is to free himself from a love of the world. But it is a good way also for one who wishes to earn a proper love for the world" ("Philology" 17).

"Love of the world" is a love of something external, a love linked to a specific object, whether it is nation, national language, or national literature, while "love for the world" is a love that is not dictated by any desire to possess, own, or control anything specific, one that transcends the self's narrowness and selfishness. One does not love the world; one loves *for* (or because of) the world; it is the world that inspires one to love. A "strong" or "perfect" person achieves independence and detachment by working through forms of attachment, not by rejecting them. This conclusion testifies to the ethical foundation of Auerbach's notion of world literature in relation to the experience of exile, a cosmopolitan self-understanding of a literary scholar's role and obligation in promoting the wellbeing of the humanity as a whole. We may note that Auerbach lived in exile in Turkey for eleven years. For any distinguished mind, one's home is never the only home, and non-home could be home. The author's personal history of exile constitutes the emotional subtext of this essay.

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Edward Said, in reference to Auerbach's invoking of Hugo in *Orientalism*, elaborates on why it is crucial for a critical intellectual to adopt the exilic mode of thinking:

The more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance. (*Orientalism* 259)

Said himself was an exile; his notion of literature and its ethical responsibility in the globalized world in which local particularities can no longer be isolated from other influences was a point of departure for *Orientalism*. In another work, *Culture and Imperialism*, he reiterates the profound and continuing impact of Hugo's notion of universal love on him:

I find myself returning again and again to a hauntingly beautiful passage by Hugo of St. Victor, a twelfth-century monk from Saxony [...] Erich Auerbach, the great German scholar who spent the years of World War Two as an exile in Turkey, cites this passage as a model for anyone—man *and* woman—wishing to transcend the restraints of imperial or national or provincial limits. Only through this attitude can a historian, for example, begin to grasp human experience and its written records in all their diversity and particularity.... (*Culture and Imperialism* 335-36)

Here, we can make the final connection between *Weltliteratur*, philology, and human-

ism: *Weltliteratur* is the study of historical humanity in language, and its humanism lies in its unflinching attempt to recover and retrieve the human spirit as a form of self-understanding and self-renewal, to “earn a proper love for the world” and in particular for its unity in diversity, which is embodied in the practice of one’s willingness to live and work outside the frame of one’s own native land, culture, and language.

NOTES

1. In 1827, Goethe remarked: “I am more and more convinced that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men. [...] I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach” (Echermann 165-66). About two decades later, Marx and Engels claimed in *The Communist Manifesto*:

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The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. [...] All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. (38-39)

2. See, for example, “Vico and Herder.”

3. David Hume claims of Shakespeare:

In his compositions, we regret that many irregularities, and even absurdities, should so frequently disfigure the animated and passionated scenes intermixed with them [...] A striking peculiarity of sentiment, adapted to a single character, he frequently hits, as it were, by inspiration; but a reasonable propriety of thought he cannot for any time uphold. Nervous and picturesque expressions as well as descriptions abound in him; but it is in vain we look either for purity or simplicity of diction. His total ignorance of all theatrical art and conduct, however material a defect, yet, as it affects the spectator rather than the reader, we can more easily excuse than that want of taste which often prevails in his productions, and which gives way only by intervals to the irradiations of genius. [...] And there may even remain a suspicion that we overrate, if possible, the greatness of his genius; in the same manner as bodies often appear more gigantic on account of their being disproportioned and misshapen. (152)

4. As Kathryn Prince notes, “Shakespeare’s failure to anticipate and to adhere to French neoclassical ideals and notions of decorum, a failure which had once been considered even by English critics as his greatest shortcoming, became one of his chief virtues and in some ways laid the groundwork for the Romantic Shakespeare who was to have such a profound effect on literature and theatre in Voltaire’s country and beyond” (277-78).
5. For example, “In 1856, William Muirhead mentioned Shakespeare in his translation of Thomas Milner’s *The History of England: From the Invasions to Julius Caesar to the Year A.D. 1854*” (Huang 51).
6. For a discussion of Guo’s appointment as the first ambassador to London and his perceptivity and

sympathy to Western learning, see my article "Guo Songtao in London: An Unaccomplished Mission of Discovery."

7. For a discussion of Western perceptions of the Chinese language, see my articles "Myths about the Chinese Language" and "Between Knowledge and 'Plagiarism,' or, How the Chinese Language Was Studied in the West."

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