The Routledge Companion to World Literature

Second Edition

Edited by Theo D'haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir

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WORLD LITERATURE AND CULTURES OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Ursula K. Heise

The environment, singular: my title presupposes a vision of natural processes and ecological crises as parts of a globally interconnected ecological system – just as the term *world literature*, in the singular, focuses on the global circulation of literary texts beyond their cultural places of origin and their initial audiences and languages. The environmental humanities – the cross-disciplinary field that has developed over the last fifteen years from more disciplinarily defined research – has often pushed back against this conception of natural environments and crises. While techno-scientific approaches to ecological crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, soil erosion, pollution, and toxic waste tend to highlight how they affect a broad range of communities around the globe, environmental humanists have tended to emphasize how these problems are perceived, experienced, and represented in different cultural frameworks, in different languages, radically unequal socio-economic conditions, and against the background of divergent histories. *Cultures* in the plural seeks to foreground this multiplicity and heterogeneity of ecological systems, of environmental perceptions and experiences, and of representations of ecological processes and crises.

I raise these points at the beginning of my argument to highlight the tension between visions of the planet in its ecological entirety, on one hand, and the emphasis on socio-economic and eco-cultural differences, on the other, that any discussion of world literature and environmental cultures has to confront. My exploration of this tension begins with the idea of "environmental literature," a term that is hard to define and even harder to study in the comparatist context that is the foundation of world literature (section 1). It continues with colonialism, postcolonialism, and the Columbian Exchange, the enormous reshuffling of the Earth's species that went along with the creation of global inequalities that shape the world politically, economically, and ecologically to this day, an interface that postcolonial ecocriticism has made great strides in exploring (section 2). Precisely because it glosses over these inequalities, postcolonial as well as Indigenous critics have vigorously criticized the concept of the Anthropocene, which has assumed an outsized importance in environmental debates over the last twenty years. In literary studies, the world literature paradigm has undergone similar critiques. I will compare the two debates so as to show that the Anthropocene concept has outlived its usefulness for environmental writing and research, whereas the paradigm of world literature may continue to thrive if it reconceives itself as "world justice literature."

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1. Environmental world literature and ecocritical reading

A by-now-familiar account of ecocriticism as a subfield of literary and cultural studies would describe its trajectory in four broad stages (cf. Heise 2013, 2017). Emerging in the early 1990s as a focus area in the study of British and American literature – especially nature poetry, creative nonfiction, and Native American writings of the last two centuries – ecocriticism sought to bring the study of literature into dialogue with unfolding environmental crises. In the process, it resisted much of the questioning of realism that was one dominant strain in literary theories of the time, because so much of the environmental literature then being studied was realist. In a second stage that started approximately at the turn of the millennium, the canon of environmental texts expanded enormously to include the literatures of South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean, as well as to a lesser extent Latin America. East Asian literature – especially the literatures of China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan – followed shortly after. Postcolonial as well as comparatist paradigms of literary study transformed ecocriticism and catalyzed the inclusion of urban literatures along with the regionalist, rural- or wilderness-focused texts that had dominated the earlier stage. Experimental and non-realist texts began to feature with greater frequency in ecocritical theory and practice.

From approximately 2008 onward, an increasing focus on the environmental humanities as an area of research began to integrate ecocriticism into the interdisciplinary matrix of the environmentally oriented subsets of anthropology, disability studies, film studies, food studies, gender studies, history, cultural geography, human-animal studies, literary studies, philosophy, and race studies. Across these fields, the Anthropocene emerged as a central concept around which research and controversies about environmental crises crystallized. In the fourth, current stage, environmental justice has taken center stage in the environmental humanities, in part as a counterweight to the universalizing strains of Anthropocene theories, in part as a consequence of the ever more visibly unequal consequences of climate change in different parts of the world.

The definition of "environmental literature" during the last three decades has never been unequivocal – and one would not expect it to be, given the "fuzzy logic" of many genre designations in literary studies. Obviously, environmental literature is related to writing about nature broadly understood, which is a standard component of many cultural traditions. And indeed, a great deal of work produced by ecocritics – especially but not only those who work on periods preceding colonialism and industrialization – has engaged with works of nature writing across diverse genres ranging from orature and poetry to creative nonfiction. Issues such as land ownership, forest management, agriculture, natural disasters, famines, epidemics and other concerns about health and illness, speaking and acting animal characters, deities that appear in the form of animals, human-animal or human-plant metamorphoses, interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters, and appreciations of nature's beauty or wisdom appear in many cultures and literary texts. While they precede the emergence of environmentalism in its modern sense, they often give important clues about how particular cultural communities positioned their own past, present, and future with regard to nonhuman species and inanimate nature.

For ecocritics in the 1990s, mostly focused on British and American texts, Lawrence Buell formulated a guideline with four criteria. In *The Environmental Imagination,* he suggested that in environmental texts, the nonhuman environment functions not merely as a setting but as an agent that suggests the imbrications of human with natural history, the human interest is not the only legitimate focus, human accountability to the environment forms part of the text's ethical orientation, and the environment is not portrayed as a static constant but as a dynamic

process (Buell 1995: 6–8). While these criteria have served as a useful guideline for many studies of environmental literature, they notably do not include a sense of human threat to the natural environment or modern alienation from nature – arguably the characteristics that have most clearly distinguished environmental thought in the centuries since colonialism and industrialization from earlier nature philosophies. In this sense, Buell's definition encompasses many kinds of nature writing that might not have been created with environmentalist purposes in mind. While his four criteria may possess a certain genre specificity in the Western European and North American canon, they also easily include ancient myths and Indigenous storytelling on a variety of continents. Such texts can and have been analyzed from an ecocritical perspective, of course, but they would not necessarily be referred to as "environmental literature."

Karen Thornber identifies a different issue concerning the thematic definition of environmental literature in her book *Ecoambiguity* (2012), which focuses on East Asian literatures. Thornber emphasizes that Asian societies have a deep history of destructive human impacts on nature, as well as a long tradition of concern over such impacts. In a sense, one might argue that an "environmentalist" perspective dates back farther in the Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean traditions than in the Western one. But this long history also yields paradoxes and contradictions in the protection and conservation of nature that Thornber focuses on – for example, when one kind of nature is destroyed to conserve another kind. She emphasizes that such paradoxes are by no means limited to East Asian cultures and literatures of nature:

> Environmental ambiguity is a hallmark of everything from brief poems to multivolume novels; from the work of writers known globally to those scarcely recognized within their own societies; from texts discussing relatively isolated ecological damage to those concerned with ruin on a global scale; from those focusing on environmental distress, including ecological life narratives, to those mentioning it only briefly; from works that celebrate ecodegradation to those that decry it; in texts published everywhere from the Americas to Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. To be sure, ecoambiguity appears more prevalent in literature from East Asia than in other textual corpuses. And its irony is certainly deeper, considering the region's long cultural history celebrating the intimate ties between humans and nature even as its peoples severely damaged environments.
>
> *(Thornber 2012: 3–4)*

By framing her analysis with the concept of ecoambiguity – ambivalent or contradictory engagements with the degradation of nature – Thornber identifies a much deeper historical concern with the damaging human impacts on nature than ecocritics focused on Western literatures typically do. It allows her to include in her analysis "works that celebrate ecodegradation," not a category usually included under the label of environmental literature. Depending on which regional and national literatures take center stage, then, quite different histories of environmental concern and writing come into focus – though for her part, Thornber foregrounds surprising parallels and similarities more than divergences between different regional traditions in their encounters with environmental crises.

Environmental concern, in many literary traditions, is not neatly separable from other social and political issues, as ecocritical perspectives on Latin American literature make clear. David V. Carruthers has noted that, to begin with, environmental advocacy in many Latin American countries emerged not as a separate social movement but as part of movements that were also, and often more centrally, focused on other issues: from Indigenous rights and sovereignty to women's movements, *campesino* protests, or urban shanty dweller organizations (Carruthers

2008: 9–14). Literary texts that address environmental issues are for this reason not always as easily identifiable as separate subgenres as they are in the Western European and North American traditions.

Take, for example, Ignácio de Loyola Brandão's *Não Verás País Nenhum (Memorial Descritivo*) (*And the Earth Stood Still;* 1981), which was recently included in an anthology of essays on "cli-fi," climate fiction. Brandão's novel describes a slightly futuristic Brazil afflicted by lethal heat and drought, partly as a consequence of the total deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, which has become the world's largest desert in the fictional storyworld: a prescient portrayal of contemporary climate change, one might think. Mark Anderson clearly approaches it as such in his essay on the novel, as does editor Axel Goodbody, who commissioned the essay for the *Cli-Fi* anthology (Anderson 2019). But Brandão wrote the novel well before global warming became a dominant concern even for the environmental movement, let alone for global geopolitics. It is perfectly possible to understand the novel mainly as a political satire of the Brazilian military dictatorship that was then in its last years, and the deadly heat and water scarcity in the storyworld as mere allegories for political oppression. Along similar lines, is Nicaraguan writer Gioconda Belli's *Waslala* (1996) a text about the environmental consequences of the drug trade and toxic waste or about the search for a political utopia? Is the Argentinean novelist Pedro Mairal's *El año del desierto* (2005) a novel about urbanization and its environmental impacts or an allegory of the Argentinean financial crash in 2001? All of these are fictions that include elements of environmentalist critique, but it often remains ambiguous whether the material deterioration of the natural environment is an object of concern in its own right or only – or mainly – a metaphor for social, economic, and political crises.

Imagining what the canon of environmental world literature might look like is not just a complex undertaking in terms of thematic concerns. Concerns over the exploitation, damaging, and possible destruction of nature also express themselves differently in terms of literary form. In American ecocriticism, the tradition of nonfiction nature writing that reaches from Susan Fenimore Cooper, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Mary Austin to Annie Dillard and Barry Lopez has received particular attention. Such nonfiction nature writing, prominent in the American literary tradition as well as, to a lesser extent, in Britain and Germany, plays a minor role or is absent from other literary cultures. In Latin America, where the genre is less dominant, portrayals of nature appear instead as part of Spanish colonial writings and in the manifestoes and documents surrounding struggles for independence and the foundation of nation-states, as French and Heffes' excellent *Latin American Ecocultural Reader* (2021) demonstrates. While nature writing, "petrofiction" (novels and stories focused on oil production and consumption), cli-fi, or elegiac poems on the disappearance of species may emerge as recognizable subgenres in some literary traditions, their underlying concerns are expressed in different genres and forms depending on the cultural tradition.

Arguably, in fact, the genre that has exerted the greatest global influence on the emergence and development of environmental movements are texts that are difficult to classify as world literature, such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) or Donella Meadows et al.'s *Limits to Growth* (1972): difficult because these are nonfiction works of popular science, and because especially *The Limits to Growth* has few literary qualities, even though the international translation and circulation of both exceeds that of many works of literature in the narrow sense (for a more detailed discusssion of nonfiction as part of world literature, see Heise [2017: 295-6]).

An analytical approach that combines ecocriticism with the world literature paradigm has to be attentive to such formal differences and the underlying divergences in the conceptions of the natural environment that they trace back to. Environmental literature, above all, refers to a practice of reading in the way that other genres, too, have been redefined as readerly practices

and contracts over the last few decades (for an example, see Rieder 2010). Reading environmental world literature entails reading for concerns with nature, specifically concerns over human damages to nature, as they are framed by genres that range from political manifestoes and prose writings to science fiction novels and performance, depending on the cultural context. The role that particular genres have played in different historical and cultural contexts crucially influences how such texts are received. Reading environmental world literature also entails identifying the ways in which concerns with degraded nature are connected to other social struggles or indeed function as metaphors for them, and why they do so. And it should include what has in recent years come to be called "empirical ecocriticism": the study of actual readers of environmental literature, their reading strategies and interpretations, and whether reading affects their beliefs, values, and behaviors. What impact environmental texts have on cognition, perception, behavior, and political action often cannot be accurately inferred just by reading the texts.

2. Colonialism, postcolonialism, and the Columbian exchange

Postcolonial ecocritics revolutionized the field of ecocriticism in the early 2000s, and not just by expanding its canon enormously, particularly to cultures of the Global South whose environmental movements had not been fully recognized as such by environmental organizations in the Global North. Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martínez-Alier analyzed what they called "environmentalism of the poor" in the late 1990s (*Varieties of Environmentalism,* 1997), especially struggles in India and Latin America that combined social with ecological issues. Postcolonial scholars across disciplines took up this recognition to analyze the specific forms of ecological degradation that accompanied colonialism from the 1490s onward and the way in which degraded nature became one of the impulses for what the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo famously called "imperialist nostalgia" (1993), as well as for the first conservationist efforts, and how it shaped struggles for independence, human rights, equity, and conservation in the former colonies. Ecocritics, in particular, highlighted European colonialism as a crucial force that – often violently – transformed natural as well as social systems from the sixteenth century onward in ways that shaped perceptions of and literatures about nature. Beyond the basic recognition that environmental advocacy was by no means limited to affluent societies in the Global North, they argued that the study of colonialism is foundational for any engagement with the state of nature, and literature about nature, today.

There can be no question that European colonialism triggered an upheaval in the world's biosphere, which was theorized by the environmental historian Alfred Crosby in the 1970s as the "Columbian exchange" (2003). Through European colonial ventures, Crosby showed, organisms ranging from viruses to plants and animals were introduced to the Americas. The transfer of horses, coffee beans, bananas, sugar cane, and citrus fruit from the Old World altered agricultures and economies in the Americas. In return, the export of turkeys, potatoes, tomatoes, beans, and cacao, among other products, revolutionized diets and commerce in Asia and Europe. Influenza, typhus, and other viruses caused mass death among American Indians. The decimation of Indigenous populations to a fraction of their former size in turn had serious ecological consequences, since American Indians in both North and South America had for millennia shaped the natural landscape through controlled burning, hunting, and in some cases agriculture. The import of African slaves added a further vector of socio-ecological change. Crosby summarizes:

> In 1491, the world was in many of its aspects and characteristics a minimum of two worlds – the New World, of the Americas, and the Old World, consisting of Eurasia and Africa. Columbus brought them together, and almost immediately and continually

> ever since, we have had an exchange of native plants, animals and diseases moving back and forth across the oceans between the two worlds. A great deal of the economic, social, political history of the world is involved in the exchange of living organisms between the two worlds.
>
> *(in Gambino 2011)*

This global upheaval of the biosphere was in its own way no less consequential than climate change is today, even though many communities are only partly aware that the ecosystems they inhabit were created in their current form a mere 500 years ago. Beyond a fundamentally altered natural environment, postcolonial critics argue, the Columbian Exchange also instated a global socio-economic system that is based on unequal economic exchange and perpetuates radical inequality and injustice to this day.

An analysis of world environmental literature is therefore unthinkable without according a crucial role to colonialism and its aftermath. Critics such as Susie O'Brien, Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, Rob Nixon, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Pablo Mukherjee, George Handley, and Jennifer Wenzel, among many others, have therefore focused on the nexus between the colonial oppression of non-Europeans and the degradation of nature in the literatures of Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands. Following the principle that texts do not have to conform to any pre-established definition of environmental literature, they have analyzed how histories and present realities of humans' engagements of nature as they emerge in a range of texts: from the disruption of African nature-bound traditions in the works of Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe to the memory of precolonial conditions in the poetry of Pablo Neruda; from the aftermath of nuclear testing as reflected in the songs, poems, and stories of Pacific Island authors to the portrayal of chronic oil pollution in the Niger Delta in the writings of activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and Helon Habila's novel *Oil on Water* (2011) and the fictionalization of the Bhopal disaster in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007); and from the precarious status of certain animal species to the equally precarious one of colonized individuals and communities in texts such as Mayra Montero's *Tú, la oscuridad* (1995) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2005).

Such analyses foreground not only the links between colonialism, racism or caste systems, and ecological degradation, but in some cases also the legacies of racism and colonialism in environmental protection. What the Indian activist Vandana Shiva has condemned as "green imperialism" (1993), essentially the continuation of colonial structures and inequalities in the name of nature conservation, shows up, for example, in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh embeds a fictionalized account of a historical incident from the 1970s into the novel: the Marichjhãpi massacre, during which several thousand Bangladeshi refugees on an island in the Sundarban wetlands underwent a police blockade, famine, and eventual violent eviction because the area was designated as a tiger reserve. In the novel, one of the refugees complains that the preservation of Bengal tigers seems more important to the national and international communities than the preservation of human lives (2006: 216–17). While a great deal of postcolonial ecocriticism focuses primarily on the devastations of colonialism and the continuing depredations of global capitalism on former colonies, then, a part of this work is also directed against continuing colonial and racist assumptions in environmentalism from the Global North.

Unlike other postcolonial analyses, studies by postcolonial ecocritics also frequently interrogate the conjoined damage to humans and nonhumans and the blurry boundaries between them. In this vein, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have argued that

> if the wrongs of colonialism – its legacies of continuing human inequalities, for instance – are to be addressed, still less redressed, then the very category of the *human*,

> in relation to animals and environment, must also be brought under scrutiny. After all, traditional western constitutions of the human as the 'not-animal' (and, by implication, the 'not-savage') have had major, and often catastrophic, repercussions not just for animals themselves but for all those the West now considers human but were formerly designated, represented and treated as animal.
>
> *(2010: 18–19)*

In arguments such as these, postcolonial ecocritics have not just pushed against the European- and North American-centric foci of much preceding ecocriticism but also against the foundations of humanism and the humanities as a group of disciplines, and they have in some cases connected with theories of posthumanism, human-animal studies, and animal welfare activism. Questions of justice that emerge from this work – how justice is defined, to whom it is granted and from whom it is withheld, and who is involved in the decision-making about such issues – reach across species taxonomies in what some theorists have called "environmental multispecies justice" or "multispecies justice" (Haraway 2016; Heise 2016).

Because of their central concern with global inequality and with questions of justice as they play out in literature, postcolonial ecocritics – like other postcolonial and Indigenous scholars – have tended to argue against the world literature paradigm.

> I do feel some concern about how the categorical turn, in literary studies, to world literature often ends up deflecting attention away from the anti-imperial concerns that materialist postcolonial studies foregrounded . . . we should be watchful that . . . neo-liberal acts of violence . . . are not hastily euphemized as "global flows,"

postcolonial critic Nixon cautioned in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011: 38). Similarly, Wenzel worries that "gestures toward universality or planetary community that do not grapple with . . . unevenness can effect a *gentrification* of the imagination, displacing communities and epistemologies in the name of breaking down barriers" (2020: 9). The attention to how issues of global environmental injustice are articulated in texts, films, and images, then, has turned postcolonial ecocritics against the idea of world literature, whose theorists and practitioners often do not appear to acknowledge either the fundamental difference that colonialism has made for both humans and nonhumans or the continuing importance of inequality and injustice in global culture – including literature.

3. World literature, justice, and the Anthropocene

Questions of justice arguably accompanied the rise of the world literature paradigm as part of the broader attempt to make the discipline of comparative literature more genuinely global and inclusive, starting with the Bernheimer Report for the American Comparative Literature Association (1993). The publications that pioneered world literature as a concept—for example, Franco Moretti's "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000) and "More Conjectures" (2003), David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* (2003), or Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (2004)—were perceived to engage less with such questions, and this alleged lack of engagement with inequality and other reservations about the concept generated a series of critiques over the following decade. Some critics see world literature as a paradigm that replicates the logic of international capitalist markets in the realm of the literary (Apter 2013; Wenzel 2020), that perpetuates the colonialist logic of orientalism with an emphasis on anglophone literature (Mufti 2016), that does not sufficiently grant writers and texts the freedom of *not*

circulating beyond their place and language of origin (Aching 2012; Apter 2013), and that does not sufficiently take into account the difference between globe and world (Cheah 2016). While these critiques diverge a good deal from each other, I think it is fair to say that they share a perception of world literature as a mode of reading that does not pay sufficient attention to economic mechanisms and geopolitical inequalities that make the international circulation of literary texts possible in the first place. It seems to me questionable whether these critiques respond to more than a superficial reading of the seminal texts: Moretti's approach is based on Wallerstein's world-systems theory and a Marxian perspective that takes global inequality as its basic premise (although Moretti's occasional use of biological metaphors has tended to obscure this foundation); Damrosch's reading of Rigoberta Menchú's writings, her editors, and her translators is finely attuned to questions of unequal prestige and power (2003: 231–59); and Casanova is centrally concerned with the struggle for recognition of writers from countries that have undergone colonialism. But many critics of the world literature paradigm have argued that these concerns are not central enough to make its perspective truly inclusive and that the world literature approach therefore contributes to hiding and perpetuating such inequalities.

Yet other critics have positioned themselves not so much against world literature as to its side by emphasizing "worlded literature or a literature of worldedness" (Moraru 2015: 14): texts that project a vision of the planet from specific cultural-historical conditions and geographic-linguistic locations. "Reading for the planet," a phrase that both Christian Moraru and Wenzel champion, seeks out such textual constructions of the entire world from a wide spectrum of locations, even as they also ask how the "world" of "world literature" differs from "planet," "planetarity," and "planetarism" (Moraru 2015: 12–15, 39–76; Wenzel 2020: 1–46). Wenzel, in particular, emphasizes visions of planetarity that have emerged from politically disempowered communities.

In the sphere of environmental discourse, a parallel controversy has arisen around the concept of the Anthropocene during the same time period. The ecologist Eugene Stoermer and the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen first proposed this concept in a brief article in 2000, suggesting that the current epoch of geological history deserves a different name than the Holocene, the period from roughly 12,000 years ago to the present. The "Age of Humans," they argued, has changed global ecological systems to such an extent that traces of our species' activities will be visible to putative future scientists in Earth's geological strata. No doubt intended as a wake-up call regarding the magnitude of human impacts on nature, the Anthropocene has not to date been adopted by geologists as an official term and may never be. But even absent such institutional confirmation, the term has taken intellectual, cultural, and artistic circles by storm, especially but not only in the Global North, and has generated what ecocritic Elizabeth DeLoughrey calls an entire "cottage industry" of applications, critiques, and defenses (2019: 1). Stoermer and Crutzen included a broad range of phenomena in their definition of the term, from changes in the nitrogen cycle to land use and biodiversity loss. But in the term's cultural uptake, it is often simply equated with one of its dimensions, climate change, which has become the dominant shorthand even for environmental changes that are causally unrelated (chemical toxification, for example, or biodiversity loss, most of which is caused by habitat destruction). The Anthropocene reduced to climate change has thereby turned into the major meme proxying for a whole range of global environmental crises.

Stoermer and Crutzen's invocation of the human species broadly understood as the agent of global environmental change provoked a set of criticisms, many of which resemble those aimed at world literature. The most important ones include the environmental historian Jason W. Moore's counter-proposal that the current era should be named the "Capitalocene" because most of the environmental impacts of the Anthropocene can, in his view, be traced back to

specifically capitalist exploitations of nature rather than human activity more broadly understood (J. Moore 2016; cf. Žižek 2011: 233–4). A different set of researchers has argued that the Anthropocene, whose beginning Stoermer and Crutzen date to 1784, the year of the invention of the steam engine and thereby the symbolic start of industrialization, should in reality be traced back to the impacts of European colonialism and be more aptly called the "Plantationocene" (S. Moore 2019). And yet others argue that the Anthropocene, by proposing a "grand explanatory species story" (Nixon 2014), glosses over the radical inequalities in who produces the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change and who suffers its worst consequences. Despite some important differences, these critiques converge in seeing the Anthropocene as a concept that, like world literature, glosses over structural inequalities that define and shape every aspect of the current world-system (to use Immanuel Wallerstein's term).

Both debates broadly concern what weight academics as well as activists should give to the analysis of and struggle against systemic inequalities and to the search for cross-cultural commonalities, respectively, as a basis for theory as well as collective action. After two years of a global pandemic and in the aftermath of COP26, the 2021 summit on climate change in Glasgow, it is obvious that the solution cannot lie in an either-or. Both COVID-19 and the ever more visible consequences of global warming have shined a harsh light on national as well as international inequalities, at the same time that both crises urgently require collaboration across geopolitical borders. In this sense, the paradigm of world literature and the concept of the Anthropocene are in and of themselves of less interest in guiding the futures of literary and environmental studies than the debates they have generated.

The more specific question that has arisen from the controversies over humanism and inequality is whether either world literature or Anthropocene studies are able to integrate their critiques to become more nuanced and more accurate and to deliver a better representation of the current state of the world, or whether the critiques highlight inherent weaknesses that neither paradigm will survive. In other words, are the shortfalls of these two globalizing approaches structural or contingent? I would argue that they are structural in the case of the Anthropocene, a concept that no longer makes much sense once socio-economic inequalities are taken into account. But in the case of the world literature paradigm, they are contingent: I do not see anything in the basic assumptions of the study of world literature that would prevent it from analyzing international transfers, exchanges, and markets for literary texts in terms of their underlying inequalities.

Let me explain. In postulating that the current age should be renamed "Anthropocene," Stoermer and Crutzen did something that is both unusual and yet routine in the natural sciences. It was unusual to propose naming a geological epoch after a particular species, *Homo sapiens*: no other geological epoch is labeled in this way. At the same time, Stoermer and Crutzen proceeded according to standard scientific conventions by invoking the entire human species as the crucial agent in triggering – intentionally or unintentionally – current ecological transformations. It is a well-known characteristic of the way in which knowledge is articulated in contemporary disciplinary discourses that natural scientists are far more ready to invoke "humans" and "the human species" in general terms, while it is humanists who tend to insist on the crucial importance of divergences in history, language, class, religion, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, ability, and the cultural frameworks and practices that turn them into distinct ways of life. By virtue of the fact that the Anthropocene inherently universalizes the human, it is difficult to harmonize with this humanities-oriented approach: singular and plural, once again, matter.

One might argue in defense of Stoermer and Crutzen that they were *not* thinking exclusively of climate change in proposing the new label but rather of a whole series of changes: deforestation, biodiversity loss, nitrogen fertilization, dam building and river diversion, and human

population growth, among others. Once all of these impacts are taken into account, it becomes more difficult to deny that most human communities have contributed to one or the other of these crises, if not to all of them: the problem of biodiversity loss, for example, cannot be neatly separated from human population growth and land use changes, processes that began millennia before climate change and are tied to patterns of inequality that are not identical to contemporary ones. But given that now, twenty-plus years after the launch of the Anthropocene concept, it has become synonymous with climate change in most public debates, and that the activities that generate greenhouse gases are extremely unevenly distributed over different regions both historically and in the contemporary period, it becomes harder to see that it does any useful descriptive work. If reconceived in its original breadth of meaning, the Anthropocene might be adaptable to other conceptions of agency and causality, but as currently used, rather than as originally conceived, the Anthropocene concept does indeed grossly simplify the structures of agency and causality in global ecological change.

The global vision that informs the world literature paradigm seems to me more adaptable to different modes of analysis. To be sure, J. Moore's "Capitalocene" has its analogue in critiques of the world literature paradigm arguing that it does not take seriously the capitalist market mechanisms that determine what is and is not read in particular cultural and linguistic contexts and beyond them. Pheng Cheah, for example, has accused world literature of simply reflecting and repeating global capitalism through cultural liberalism and thereby undermining what oppositional force literary texts and literary study might have (2016: 43), although he also admits that the globe of capitalist markets is not identical to what he understands as a world of Heideggerian dwelling and that literary texts are not only market commodities (2016: 42). Wenzel, following Moore, uses the term "world-ecology" to highlight the interactions between global capitalism and local sites with their socio-ecological conditions (2020: 28–9) and to draw attention back to the material foundations of markets, including literary ones (2020: 28). Her goal is to bring planetarity back into the study of world literature, not as an undifferentiated universalism but as the study of how planetary visions emerge differentially, especially from disadvantaged sites and communities.

These reservations about world literature are thoughtful and well argued. Yet as I mentioned earlier, the pioneering texts of the world literature approach actually do take a deeper interest in unequal market flows and exchanges than is recognized by some of their critics, if not always in ways a postcolonial scholars would sympathize with (cf. Wenzel 2020: 26). More importantly, if we define world literature as the study of how literary texts are circulated and received beyond the contexts in which they originated, and how this circulation beyond the original context is in some cases anticipated by writers and integrated into the shape of their texts, it is unclear why such an analysis could not take into account or indeed focus on socio-economic inequalities as a major force in structuring literary circulation. In other words, the fact that some of the first theorists of world literature did not approach the intercultural circulation of texts from a Marxian perspective or as a function of capitalist market mechanisms does not mean that the paradigm itself precludes such analyses. Indeed, Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen's *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets* (2016); Gesine Müller, Jorge J. Locane, and Benjamin Loy's *Re-Mapping World Literature: Writing, Book Markets and Epistemologies between Latin America and the Global South* (2018); and Ignacio Sánchez Prado's *Strategic Occidentalism: On Mexican Fiction, the Neoliberal Book Market, and the Question of World Literature* (2018), for example, already perform a good deal of this work. Reimagined in this way, world literature could indeed become part of the study of "world ecology" in Moore's and Wenzel's sense if it more pointedly turns to questions of justice and injustice as an integral part of the paradigm.

By this I do not mean that every study of literary transfers necessarily has to focus on how the transferred texts engage with justice thematically or formally or how their transfer is economically and sociologically shaped by inequalities. Nor am I suggesting that the search for commonalities and successes in transcultural understanding should be abandoned: on the contrary, the aspiration toward "eco-cosmopolitanism" that I articulated over a decade ago – and as part of which I continue to find the world literature approach useful – remains, in my view, a crucial imperative (Heise 2008: 56–62). But there is no universalist freeway that leads to justice or to a more-than-human cosmopolitanism: the itinerary has to follow and indeed map the detours and backroads of inequality and injustice. The study of environmental world literature can do just that by hardwiring the study of inequality into the reading of literary texts in the sense that most readings will include it, and that not explicitly including a consideration of injustice will require an explanation of why it is not relevant to the subject. Reading and writing for the planet require no less.

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