

GOETHE, MARX, IBSEN AND THE CREATION OF A WORLD LITERATURE[☆]

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“The age of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.” This is what Goethe famously said to Eckermann in 1827, launching the career of the term “world literature” (Eckermann 1955). The formulation contains a paradox or at least a tension that would continue to characterize world literature to this day: world literature is at hand, it is ready to be grasped, and yet we cannot quite get hold of it yet; we cannot take it and its arrival for granted. On the contrary, we, every one of us, must strive to hasten its approach. Without such striving, which is reminiscent of Faust’s most salient feature, the arrival of world literature will be delayed, perhaps indefinitely.

This future-oriented temporality of world literature seems to have disappeared when Marx and Engels pick up the term just a few decades later, in 1848, in their account of the bourgeoisie. Now world literature has arrived, through a process described in one of the *Communist Manifesto*’s most famous paragraphs. The revolutionary effects of bourgeois capitalism are rendered in the dramatic present tense, as culminating in the arrival of world literature: “and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature” (Marx and Engels 2005). But despite the dramatic present tense, the *Communist Manifesto*, too, describes an ongoing process, one that has not quite played itself out yet, and the two authors speculate about its future course. In 1848, world literature is still in the process of emerging.

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The recent surge of interest in world literature raises the question of whether now, in our current phase of globalization, the age of world literature has finally arrived. In the past 10 years, there has been an explosion of interest in world literature, certainly in the USA, but also increasingly elsewhere. World literature institutes, conferences, and journals, as well as anthologies that cater to large, introductory courses, abound.¹ This field of world literature is driven by a number of different developments. On the one hand, it responds to accelerated processes of globalization in the domain of literature, the increasing “interdependence of nations,” as Marx and Engels put it in the paragraph quoted previously in the text, leading to an increasingly integrated world market of literature ranging from Stieg Larsson and J.K. Rowling to the system of international prizes headed by the Nobel Prize in Literature (English 2005). At the same time, traditional topics in comparative literature are not only newly urgent but also present themselves in a new light. Consider for example the case of translation. Long an occasion for hand-wringing professions of difficulty and impossibility within comparative literature circles, translation has now acquired a new dominance because a new species of global authors addresses a single, though by no means homogenous world-wide audience, and does so by writing texts calculated to be translated. Not infrequently, these works are now published in several languages at once (see Walkowitz 2009). We are currently living through a new version of what Pascale Casanova has termed the “World Republic of Letters,” except that these new global authors do not form a republic at all, but rather a particular type of world market, one organized not by French connoisseurs, but by Anglophone marketing departments (Casanova 2007). When it comes to translation, nothing seems impossible or even difficult anymore.

At the same time, world literature is poised to inherit the remains of post-colonial criticism, which many see as having exhausted its critical potential. Using the condition of post-coloniality as a general paradigm for literature and culture around the world was important for the age of decolonization, the age when many of the most prominent scholars of that paradigm, from Edward Said to Gayatri C. Spivak, came of age. But the singular focus on colonialism seems out of date in the post-1989 world of rapid globalization. In this context, world literature is more

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nimble theoretically, and it also offers a deeper history of empires by virtue of its emphasis on ancient literature. In retrospect, post-colonialism, especially as it has been practised in the USA, seems too exclusively interested in modern empires and in particular in the British Empire and its aftermath, to account for either the deep history of literature or its present reconfiguration.

In addition to these scholarly concerns, world literature, especially in the USA, is driven by a different primarily pedagogical imperative: large introductory courses in world literature and their attendant world literature anthologies. Although I have thought about world literature from the Goethe–Marx perspective, my recent involvement with world literature has come from this second quarter, when a few years ago, I took over the oldest and largest world literature anthology, the *Norton Anthology of World Literature*. This is a 6000-page enterprise spanning everything from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to J.M. Coetzee and Orhan Pamuk, the two last items in the table of contents of the new edition (Puchner 2012). In contrast to the new “global authors,” which are a genuinely international phenomenon, these types of world literature anthologies and courses are still rather local; whereas there are occasionally world literature courses offered elsewhere – for example, there is a growing interest in world literature in China – most of these courses, and hence the anthologies that are designed for them, are largely restricted to the USA.² The main reason for this restriction is that the US liberal arts education, with its resistance to early specialization, accommodates large, synthetic courses of this kind much more easily than the more specialized university education offered in most other countries. Some countries are beginning to import this type of liberal arts education, even to the point of creating and paying for satellite campuses of US liberal arts colleges, including New York University–Abu Dhabi and the collaboration between Yale and the National University of Singapore.³ Even though this pedagogical dimension of world literature tends to play less of a role in scholarly debate, it constitutes an enormously important pillar of world literature and one of its most important economic drivers.

In what follows, I will try to use these several developments in world literature to look at Henrik Ibsen. Let me start with the last item: world literature courses and anthologies. I am happy to report

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that Ibsen has a firm place in world literature anthologies, including our new *Norton Anthology of World Literature*, 3rd edition, where we proudly feature *Hedda Gabler*.⁴ In the smaller, more specialized *Norton Anthology of Drama*, which I co-edited, the same play is featured (Ellen Gainor et al. 2009). In the forthcoming new edition of that anthology, we are going to increase the representation of Ibsen, turning him into one of the few authors to be featured with two plays, thus putting him on a par with Sophocles, Euripides, and Shakespeare. When seen from the pedagogical perspective on world literature, Ibsen is faring well. The same is true when it comes to the number of theatrical performances, where he ranks second only to Shakespeare – although a somewhat distanced second.

How did Ibsen come to occupy this exalted position? World literature as a scholarly, as opposed to pedagogical, perspective can provide some answers. I would like to suggest the following three approaches. First, world literature lets us rethink the relation between cultural centres and the periphery. Here I will argue that Ibsen's peripheral position was not only a disadvantage but also a crucial position from which he launched his world-wide career. It turns out that a peripheral position is in some ways a privileged one in world literature. After all, the term world literature was coined by Goethe in the small town of Weimar. Second, I will explore how this provincial position motivated Ibsen to undertake a life of exile on the continent, and how this change related to his sudden use of reading or closet dramas, a crucial step in his development as a writer. Finally, I will use the notion of world literature in a somewhat eccentric manner, by focusing on the ways in which Ibsen constructed his own dramatic worlds. Throughout these three meditations, I will be using the history of the term world literature, as it was coined by Goethe and further developed by Marx and Engels, as a reference point. Through this focus, I mean to demonstrate what happens when the new interest in world literature is related to one of the undeniable success stories of modern drama.

The Provincial Ibsen and World Literature

How could it be that Ibsen became the number two most played author after Shakespeare, Ibsen for whom access to the world

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literature market would seem to be an uphill battle, writing as he did in a language spoken by only a few million people, in the northern periphery of Europe? I want to suggest that this provincial provenance of Ibsen as a world author does not, in fact, constitute a paradox; rather it was one of the key aspects of his later triumph.

My argument begins with the observation that there is a crucial relation between the cosmopolitan centre and the periphery at work in the history of world literature. Tore Rem has recently detailed the importance of provincialism for Ibsen's reception in England (Rem 2004). I want to build on this argument, and Goethe himself may be called on as a crown witness. It was, I think, no coincidence that the term world literature was coined not by someone residing at the centre of nineteenth-century culture, in Paris or London, but by someone living in a small Duchy in eastern Germany, numbering about 7000 people. In an essay on world literature from 2005, Milan Kundera talks about the provincialism of small nations (Kundera 2005). Predictably, the provincial position sees the world at large as far away. At the same time, the small provincial nation imposes onto its writers a small national context with which they are asked to identify. So far, there is nothing surprising here. However, Kundera explains that in addition to the provincialism of small nations there exists also a provincialism of large nations. Of such nations, he writes, "their own literature seems to them sufficiently rich that they need take no interest in what people write elsewhere (30)." What I have in mind is a somewhat modified version of this distinction. I would define the provincialism of the centre as a feeling that the world comes to you anyway, a provincialism associated with cultural (as well as political) hegemony. The cosmopolitan centre acts as a magnet, drawing everything towards it. At the same time, the world gravitating towards the centre is filtered through the hegemonic culture, which is simultaneously being exported everywhere. In the drama of the nineteenth century, Eugene Scribe is a good example, probably the most played author of the nineteenth century, the most successful export product of Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century, as Walter Benjamin called it. But Scribe cannot be found in any world literature anthology today; in fact, he cannot even be found in specialized drama anthologies.

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Let me pursue this question of the centre and the periphery a little further. Kundera emphasizes that world literature blithely works with translation:

Do I mean . . . that to judge a novel one can do without a knowledge of its original language? Indeed, I do mean exactly that. Gide did not know Russian, Shaw did not know Norwegian, Sartre did not read Dos Passos in the original (30).

He also adds that in foreign language departments “the work of art is most intractably mired in its home province.” I note in passing that in this quote Kundera subsumes Ibsen’s plays under the category of the “novel.” But the main point is that Kundera identifies two types of provincialism and considers translation as a way out of it. Indeed, for drama, translation has been, if anything, less of a problem than for the novel because language is only one component of theatrical performance, where it is joined by acting and the other arts that together make up a theatrical event. This is especially the case with Ibsen. There is an abundance of translations of Ibsen in many languages, leaving theater directors plenty of choice. In English, for example, the William Archer translation, the idiom of Ibsen’s success in England, is in the public domain and available everywhere. At the same time, new translations are being undertaken all the time. Penguin, for example, is in the process of a three-volume edition of Ibsen in all-new translations under the general editorship of Tore Rem. I know of no theatrical production of Ibsen that has been prevented or significantly hampered by a problem of translation. This is not to say that translating Ibsen is an easy proposition. It is only to say that it has never been considered an insurmountable obstacle.

So far, we can draw two conclusions. First, for world literature, it is not necessarily an advantage to come from a large nation; there is a provincialism of the centre as well as a provincialism associated with the periphery. Second, writing in a minor language, and therefore being dependent on translation, is not necessarily a disadvantage because translation dominates world literature anyway.

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When it comes to the role of translation in world literature, Goethe, in fact, anticipated the current shift in emphasis. For several decades now, literary studies has been obsessed with the notion of “untranslatability” as it was formulated, without much evidence, by post-structuralism and post-colonial studies, both of which inherited this obsession from the more traditional forms of comparative literature. The problem with the assumption that translation is, at heart, impossible is that all evidence is against it. Far from being an insurmountable obstacle, translation actually happens all the time, with notable success. Yes, there is no such thing as a perfect translation. But in much literary theory, the perfect has been the enemy of the good in the sense that the impossibility of a perfect translation (but even this is not proven: there might well be perfect translations) is used to draw the conclusion that all translation is not only imperfect but impossible.

Goethe recognized that far from being disabled by translation, world literature is in fact driven by it.⁵ It is through translation that the texts produced by different nations are made available to all and thus enhance their mutual understanding. Translation also happens to concern the provincial position of Germany. For Goethe, translation is one of the ways in which Germany in particular will contribute to world literature: “. . . whoever knows and studies German inhabits the market place where all nations offer their products [Ware]; he plays the translator even as he reaps profit [sich bereichert].”⁶ Goethe does not consider world literature to be something that concerns only the production of literature but also its distribution and translation. In other words, world literature is not only written, but made – made by a marketplace. One can recognize in this vision an effect of Goethe’s provincial location on the semi-periphery of culture; although he cannot expect too much of Germany in terms of original literary contribution, which is dominated by France, he can expect much from the talented German linguists and translators.

In fact, the marketplace and translation depend on one another. This interdependence leads Goethe and has led many others, to connect world literature with a particular fear, namely the fear of homogenization.⁷ Although Goethe hails world literature for doing away with a narrow-minded fixation on national literatures, he

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wants to preserve their distinctiveness: "I do not think that the nations should all think alike, they should simply become aware of one another and understand one another."⁸ Goethe recognizes the fear of homogenization, but he dismisses it, surprisingly perhaps, with reference to the market in translation. It is the specificity of nations, he argues, not their similarity that makes them valuable to others: "The peculiarities of each [nation] are like its languages and coins, they make commerce easier, in fact they make it possible in the first place" (86). World literature traffics not in sameness but in difference: it is difference and originality that is being marketed by German translators, and it is a difference that makes national literatures circulate. Different languages guarantee the kind of specificity that circulates well, just like coins, provided that there are translators who ensure that they are translatable and thus exchangeable. No wonder that translation is such a good business.⁹ Goethe was of course also interested in the pedagogical effects of reading world literature, and even harboured hopes that it might bring about a new cosmopolitan culture as Kant had hoped 30 years earlier. But it is remarkable, especially in light of our current form of global literature, to what extent Goethe is willing to think about world literature as a phenomenon driven by a market.

Kundera is right in his observation that the small nations are often defensive with respect to their national traditions, which are sometimes seen as being betrayed when an author acquires the status of world literature. This was perhaps even partially true of Ibsen's reception in Norway. A more extreme example would be someone like Orhan Pamuk. Every time I go to Turkey a significant number of people seem to believe that he has betrayed Turkey by becoming a world author. Goethe himself was a recipient of similar complaints. Wilhelm Grimm, the collector of German folk tales, wrote to his brother Jacob in utter confusion about Goethe's latest doings: "he is into Persian stuff, composed a collection of poems in the manner of Haifez, and is studying Arabic," he wrote with astonishment, and all this on top of "reading from and explaining Haoh Kioh Tschwen," a Chinese novel, of course. "Did Goethe say anything about the fairy tales?" the brother wanted to know. No, not really. No one knew how to respond to Goethe's lack of interest in German fairy tales until someone had a great idea; it was Goethe's

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birthday, let us give him a turban. If you show no interest in German fairy tales, if you insist on exotic far-flung reading habits, we will mock you to death, is the message here.

Centre and periphery are usually caught in a relation of export and import of cultural products. But one can respond to this relation in different ways. One standard response is by emulating the centre, and Ibsen certainly participated in this process. When he worked in the theaters of Christiania and Bergen, he was at the receiving end of French dramatic export in the form of Scribe and other French plays. Scribe and other representatives of the so-called well-made play was his school of drama, and it is well known how much he owes to them. A second, typical response is an obsession with the provincial cultural and its origins, an interest in national history or mythology. Ibsen's early historical plays participate in this as well.

There is a particular aspect to the provincial position and all its dynamics: the provincial position with respect to the centre turns out to be nearly universal because this is something that it shares with the rest of the world. So even while looking to its own past, the province can become aware that it shares its provincial nature with other nations. This, I suggest, was what drove Goethe to the coinage of world literature, his keen interest in Chinese novels, or Persian poetry, in addition to the Greek and Roman classics. This dynamic might also have been at work in the case of Ibsen.

Travel, Exile, and Closet Drama

I want to look at Ibsen's relation to world literature from a related, but different angle, namely travel. The cosmopolitan position is a stable one: the world comes to you. In the provinces, you need to travel. This was certainly the case with Goethe, for whom world literature was not just something you read or write, but it was also something you traveled to. All his life, Goethe had dreamed of disentangling himself from his many responsibilities in Weimar, and he finally stole away clandestinely to travel to Italy. Here was a chance to travel to the lands of his beloved Roman authors, and in Sicily he re-read the *Odyssey* and even started to write a play based on the Nausicaa episode of the *Odyssey*. A provincial position is being translated into a program of literary travel.

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This fascination with travel would continue to dominate his work. Goethe wrote more and more about travel, expressing a yearning for the wider world. Inspired by the Persian poet Hafiz, Goethe wrote a collection of poetry called *West-Eastern Divan*. In it, Goethe bemoans that he cannot travel to Persia as he would like to do, and he tries to bridge the distance through imaginary leaps based on his intense study of the poet. With his “brother” Hafiz, he wants to wander the roads of Persia, from the oases to the great cities of the Orient. Goethe’s most famous creation, *Faust*, does pretty much the same thing. Thanks to his pact with the devil, Faust can fly through the air with his new companion, although sometimes the ride is a little rough, prompting him to complain to Mephistopheles. Goethe also adds several prefaces and preambles to *Faust*, one of them inspired by another one of his far-flung readings: the Indian play *Shakuntala*.

Ibsen, of course, followed in Goethe’s footsteps by traveling to Italy, but while Goethe returned to Weimar, dreaming about world literature, Ibsen stayed on the continent for the better part of his life. This form of exile, which anticipates what we have come to know as modernist exile, certainly played a decisive role in his career. It helped him, among other things, to escape from the provincialism of the periphery.

This form of modernist exile should not be confused with forced political migration. Neither Ibsen nor James Joyce, or Samuel Beckett or the American writers living abroad such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein were forced to leave their home countries by brute force or other forms of sheer necessity. The exile of this generation of modernists was a matter of choice, although it was experienced by them as some kind of cultural necessity. Perhaps, it would be best to term it “cultural” exile, a form of exile driven by these writers’ recognition that they could not become the writers they wanted to be at home.¹⁰

Ibsen, the father of modern drama, inaugurated this cultural form of exile, which became crucial for the modernists who followed after him. This exile had an important side effect: Ibsen left the theater, and this meant among other things that he left the cosmopolitan influence of Scribe. Ibsen’s relocation to Italy and then to Germany cut him off from the whole theater system in which he

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had made his home. One might say that at least initially, Ibsen exiled himself from the theater. Instead, he opted, for the time being, for the closet drama. The closet drama was a form of exile from the theater, and yet these closet dramas, *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* but also *Emperor and Galilean*, were crucial for his development. Indeed, I think it is difficult to underestimate the significance of this break with the theater. Ibsen was not merely exchanging one genre of drama for the other: he was giving up the institution within which all his work had occurred. In deciding, for the time being, to write closet dramas, he was in effect deciding *against* theater and *for* literature.

I think that these two breaks, the break with the theater and the break with Norway, were important in his self-conception as a literary author and as a producer of world literature. *Peer Gynt*, is a programmatic play in this respect because it takes its readers on a world-wide travel extravaganza, leading them all the way to Morocco and Egypt (much farther than Goethe went). *Peer Gynt*, of course, is also a response to Goethe's own closet drama, *Faust*, as has often been observed, and drama played an important role for Goethe's notion of world literature as well. One of the first things Goethe did after arriving in Weimar was to become involved with the local amateur theatrical troupe. Together with his friend, the playwright Friedrich Schiller, he later turned drama into the master genre of what is now called Weimar Classicism, and some of his plays from the period are actually set in the classical world, emulating the Greek playwrights. Under Goethe's directorship, the Weimar Court Theater became a vehicle for world theater, presenting the plays of Shakespeare, Calderon, and Goldoni to his provincial but reasonably sophisticated audience.

It is interesting to note that at no point did Goethe envision *Faust*, his only true world drama, as something to be performed at his theater. He conceived of it entirely as a closet drama, a play intended for reading (in one's closet or drawing room) only. *Faust* roams freely in literary history, with scenes set in the world of Greek mythology, in the underworld, among witches and other ancient creatures of the earth. Of course, all this somehow could be shown in the theater, as Goethe well knew. After his death, there have been innumerable productions of the first part, a more tightly structured

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tragedy, even as it took many decades until directors dared to tackle the second. But Goethe's choice of closet drama wasn't a question of changing tastes or of audiences' unwillingness to submit to long and difficult performances. Goethe somehow did not want to think within the strictures of theatrical production. His most all-encompassing theatrical work needed to be unencumbered by stage props and lighting and acting and the architecture of the theater.

Something similar can be said about Ibsen's plays in the phase following his move to Italy. Yes, they have been performed since, and Ibsen was not against such performances. But my point is that Ibsen did not write these plays for the institution of the theater. Calling them dramatic poems, he wrote them as world literature. Although in some countries, such as Italy and France, Ibsen's early fame rested primarily on theatrical productions, in other places, including Germany and Scandinavia and England, it rested to a significant extent on Ibsen being read. Ibsen's transformation from a writer of scripts to be performed to a literary author was crucial for his development and for his worldwide reception. In a sense, both Goethe and Ibsen tried to assimilate drama to the novel, and to this extent, Kundera's slip of assimilating Ibsen's plays to novels is indicative: Ibsen was very much read and seen in the theater.

This move into the literary, as opposed to the theatrical market place can be pursued even further, for Ibsen followed up *Peer Gynt* with yet another type of closet drama that signals that genre's ambition for world literature: his "world-literary drama" *Emperor and Galilean*. What matters here is that Ibsen wrote a play that identifies a key moment in world history: a world-historical drama. Strindberg would follow Ibsen and begin a cycle of plays centred on world-historical figures including Moses, Socrates, and Jesus.¹¹ Ibsen approaches the same material, the relation between classical antiquity and Christianity, through a play centred on Julian the Apostate.

As in the case of *Faust* and *Peer Gynt*, calling this play a closet drama only describes its original appearance. Although *Emperor and Galilean* has played almost no role in theater history, this is beginning to change with the recent notable production at the National Theatre in London, prompted perhaps by Toril Moi's passionate defense of the play (Moi 2006). The production itself was a bit of a mixed blessing, and confirmed, I think, the status of this

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play as a closet drama. The National Theater had to cut the dialogue to such an extent that the motivation of the characters, their reasoning, became underdeveloped and obscure, while turning the play into a world-historical spectacle. Be this as it may, the play is Ibsen's foray into world history. One might say that if *Peer Gynt* is Ibsen's *Faust I*, *Emperor and Galilean* is his *Faust II*.

At the end of *Peer Gynt*, of course, the protagonist returns home, and so did Ibsen, at first with his plays, and then in person. He also returned to the theater. The so-called realist plays that secured his place in world theater are all set in Norway. Did this mean that Ibsen abandoned his experiment with world literature as represented in *Peer Gynt* and *Emperor and Galilean*? I don't not think so. He only shifted course.

Ibsen's World

Ibsen not only lived in different parts of the world and wrote plays that ranged even further, he also constructed dramatic worlds. This is my final and from the point of view of world literature somewhat eccentric approach Ibsen. No longer interested in Norwegian history or folklore, but also no longer interested in world history, Ibsen opted to aim his drama at the Norwegian bourgeoisie. But isn't the Norwegian bourgeoisie a highly particular subject, of little interest to worldwide audiences? Famously, Stanislavski imported Norwegian furniture to present authentic productions of Ibsen's plays. But he need not have bothered. For the point about these plays is not their Norwegianness, a particular style of Norwegian furniture. Their point is something much more universal: furniture as a central element of bourgeois life. This means asking: how did you acquire this piece of furniture? Did you inherit it? Did you buy it on credit? Does it signify bourgeois values? And of course, what kind of house, or home, is this furniture part of?

To understand this well-nigh universal appeal, we can go back to Marx and Engels, for whom the bourgeoisie had become a kind of universal class, the only real existing class against which now a new class had to be created: the proletariat. But this new class was still in the making, and the *Communist Manifesto* was meant to help in this creation. For the time being, the bourgeoisie was the only real class,

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and also, as it happened the class that had brought about the interdependence of nations that would result, among other things, in world literature.

Marx and Engels had hoped to replace this bourgeois world literature with a communist one, exemplified in the *Communist Manifesto* itself. At the end of the preamble, Marx and Engels demand that the *Manifesto*, “be published in English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Dutch” (5). German here appears in the middle of a list of six languages, without any indication that it is the *Manifesto*’s original language. One might even say that Marx and Engels place German in the middle of this list to hide that it is the *Manifesto*’s original language. Given that the first editions of the *Manifesto* concealed the identity and thus the nationality of its two authors, one wonders whether they did not actually seek to obscure that the *Manifesto* was written in a specific language at all and that there was an original language from which it then had to be translated into all the others. This new type of literature has no original and is being published in many languages simultaneously. In a way, Marx and Engels anticipate our current phase of world literature.

Be this as it may, their project of creating a new, international, communist world literature was not able to displace the bourgeois type of world literature, which has only grown stronger ever since. Ibsen’s continuing success owes much to this general development.

But how did Ibsen manage to turn the Norwegian bourgeoisie into something compatible with the bourgeoisie all over the world? The category I would like to use here is that of world making. Unlike the novel, which had come to dominate the literary field by the time Ibsen was writing, drama is a genre of restraint. It starts with an empty stage, bare boards that now have to be populated and populated sparingly. Drama can accommodate only a limited number of objects, stage props, and a limited number of characters. All this Ibsen had learned from Scribe and others. The rule of the well-made play was not plenitude, but minimalism. So the challenge was: how can drama capture the richness of bourgeois life, with its accumulated objects, its sophisticated world of production and circulation?

One prominent technique is exemplarity. A single exemplary object, let’s say a piano, can stand in for all the others. Objects are isolated and evaluated, and they play a huge role in furnishing the

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bourgeois life. But objects don't only signify. Ibsen paid crucial attention to how they were acquired, how much they cost, whether they were acquired on credit, and how that credit was obtained. Another way of saying this is that objects become commodities that circulate while the conditions of their production is suppressed in a manner that Marx analyzed through the notion of the commodity fetish (Marx 2000). My argument here is that Ibsen mobilizes an inherently theatrical tool, the stage property, stage props as they are called in English, objects that are the property of the theater.¹² He mobilized stage props in order to capture the particular role commodities play in bourgeois life.

For all his interest in the minimalism of stage props, the way they are isolated and then put on stage, Ibsen was clearly influenced by the novel. This led him, I believe, to the writing of a whole cycle of plays, all set in the same world of the bourgeoisie. That Ibsen's plays are interestingly interlinked has often been observed. Shaw was one of the first, and he pointed out that even though the protagonists of different Ibsen plays seem to argue different positions, there is in fact an underlying political ambition unifying them all, thus turning Ibsen into a Shavian reformer. Others have seen in them a covert response to Hegel's world-philosophical system (Johnston 1992). More recently, a US avant-garde theater group called the Neo-Futurists presented a work called "The Last Two Minutes of the Entire Work of Henrik Ibsen," in which they subjected his work to a kind of structuralist analysis, pointing out, through performance, the pattern of suicide in which so many Ibsen plays end.

For me, what matters is the consistency not of position, or of philosophy, or of structure, but of the world, the world created by Ibsen's plays. I would compare Ibsen here to writers such as William Faulkner, who sets his novels in an imaginary county, Yoknapatawpha County, although it was closely modeled on his native Oxford, Mississippi. Like Ibsen, Faulkner had left this place, only to make it the protagonist of his fiction. What is at issue is not so much the supposed consistency of the political positions taken by Ibsen's protagonists, which had so much worried Shaw, but the consistency of the world.¹³

Ibsen's success as an author of world literature depended not only on his decision to create a cycle of plays set in an abstracted version

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of the bourgeois world but he also added a certain twist to it. Like no one before him, he captured the fantastic element of the bourgeoisie. This is an aspect that Franco Moretti has recently discussed in his incisive piece on Ibsen, where he pointed to the fantasies and hallucinations of the bourgeoisie (Moretti 2010). This manifests itself formally as well, through the sudden appearance of allegorical figures like the Rat Lady; the apparitions in *Rosmersholm*; the overwrought fantasy life, often verging on hallucination, of so many Ibsen characters. The world of John Gabriel Borkman would be one example, his vision of restitution, entirely disconnected from reality. One might call this the hallucinatory dimension of the bourgeoisie, but perhaps it is more a meditation on the discontents of the bourgeoisie, its fantasies of flight, of escape from bourgeois life. One form is the famous slammed door of *A Doll's House*, but there are many others, including, in *Ghosts*, the flight from family inheritance, but also the climb up the mountain in *When We Dead Awaken*, which is anticipated in the Master Builder's climb upwards.

Ibsen belongs to a group of writers particularly attuned to the dilemmas, but also the glories of bourgeois capitalism. I would include in this group Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*, a novel in which the fortune hunting of impoverished aristocrats in London are confronted with railway speculation in America. Even more pertinent is the *Trilogy of the Wheat* by Frank Norris, in which one stage of agricultural capitalism gives way to a new one, organized by the railroad. But Ibsen also anticipates the expressionist dramas of O'Neill, Sophie Treadwell, or Georg Kaiser, in which the glories and horrors of accelerating capitalism are looked at with equal fascination. Perhaps it was cultural exile that enabled Ibsen to turn the Norwegian bourgeoisie into material for his poetry of capitalism.

When we look at Ibsen through the lens of nineteenth-century world literature, the lens offered by Goethe and Marx, what emerges is a provincial cosmopolitan whose life was crucially marked by exile, exile from Norway and exile from the theater, but who returned to both through his plays. He returned to them with a difference. Having gone through the school of the closet drama, Ibsen returned to the theater by turning old techniques to the new

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purpose of capturing the Norwegian bourgeoisie in ways that were legible to audiences all over the world.

World literature is a growing field, but it is growing in different directions: literary globalization, both high and low; world literature courses; expanded versions of comparative literature; translation studies, and much more. It never ceases to astonish me to what extent Ibsen works as a case study for all of them.

Notes

1. These include six-volume anthologies of world literature published by Longman, Bedford and Norton (full disclosure: I am the general editor of the latter). There is a World Literature Institute at Harvard, founded by my colleague David Damrosch, who is also the author of *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Among the recent collections on world literature is *World Literature: A Reader*, edited by Theo D'haen, César Domínguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013). There is also the charming recent book by Jérôme David, *Specres de Goethe: Les Métamorphoses de la Littérature Mondiale* (Paris: Les Prairies Ordinaires, 2011).
2. This is contrary to the assertion by Gayatri C. Spivak, who claims that they are exported to the rest of the world:

Typically, the entire literature of China, say, is represented by a couple of chapters of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and a few pages of poetry . . . The market is international. Students in Taiwan or Nigeria will learn about the literatures of the world through English translations organized by the United States.

(XII) The *Norton Anthology* includes over 30 Chinese authors. And Norton (as well as the other anthologies, including Longman) does not even have the world rights. The market is largely restricted to the USA. Having said that, there are interesting developments going on around the export and import of a US-style liberal arts education (which was once imported to the USA from Germany and elsewhere).
3. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see my op-ed in *Inside Higher Ed*, 27 August 2012: <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2012/08/27/essay--teaching-world-literature-istanbul>.
4. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, 3rd edition, volume E, pp. 781–838.
5. Among recent scholars of world literature who have moved the discussion beyond the mantra of untranslatability are David Damrosch (2003) and Emily Apter, in her book *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
6. Preface to *German Romance* (Edinburgh, 1827). In *Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Sämtliche Werke*, Münchner Ausgabe, edited by Karl Richter, Vol. 18, No. 2 (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1985–1998), pp. 85–87, 86.

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7. This cautionary view of world literature was first articulated by Erich Auerbach in his essay "Philologie der Weltliteratur" [philology of world literature] which was translated by Maire and Edward Said into English as "Philology and Weltliteratur," *The Centennial Review*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 (winter 1969), pp. 1–17.
8. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Zusammenkunft der Naturforscher in Berlin*, Weimar Edition II, 13 (Weimar, 1828), p. 449.
9. For an elaboration of the relation between Goethe and Marx, see Puchner (2006), on which the preceding paragraphs are based.
10. For a discussion of Joyce and exile, see Cixous (1972).
11. August Strindberg, *Hellas (Socrates)*. Unpublished, premiered in Hannover, 1922.
12. For a discussion of stage props in *Hedda Gabler*, see Sofer (2003).
13. George Bernard Shaw tried to make these positions consistent in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (New York: Dover, 1994).

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