

# Between the World and the Work: Civilisational Analysis in World Literature Studies

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SINCE THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW WORLD LITERATURE STUDIES IN THE EARLY NINETIES, scholars have sought ways of articulating the changing literary relationships of the world, applying the vocabularies of world-systems analysis, transnationalism and globalisation in order to provide additional or alternative epistemological grids to those of the nation. The essential question of this literature has been how the individual work with its unique, untranslatable message can be understood in relation to the literary cosmos, understood as a system or network. Commentators have sought a conceptual framework that enables us to mediate with greater distinction between the work and the world in a global era. What are the intermediate structures between the individual work and the world of reception and analysis in which the nation is no longer (and perhaps never was) the primary defining structure of group cultural and linguistic identity? Discussion continues unabated among advocates of the different versions of literary fields, of relations between putative centres and peripheries, of processes of circulation and dissemination, of 'distant reading' and the 'untranslatability' of the unique work, and of the relationship of world literature to the grand or partial narrative of postcolonial studies.<sup>1</sup> The search continues for explanatory models which can relate the individual work through the specifics of

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<sup>1</sup> See Abu-Lughod, Ahmad, Apter, Bassnett, Casanova, Cheah, Damrosch, Giles, Helgesson and Vermeulen, Jameson, Kadir, Lawall, Moretti, Mufti, Prendergast, Ramazani, Spivak, and Thomsen.

language, culture and the nation in a compelling overarching epistemological framework.

Alexander Beecroft has provided perhaps the most comprehensive sociologically-based, non-hierarchical typology of literary languages and forms, ranging from the simple forms confined to small, autonomous identities through the *longue durée* of history to the emergence of proto-global languages and genres in the current era ('World Literature'; *An Ecology*). Beecroft's 'ecology' of world literature is erudite and persuasive, but I would counter that it fails to provide as much detailed focus on the specificities of historico-sociological development as another model which has as yet not been strongly linked to the world literature debate. Civilisational analysis as practised by figures such as Arnason, based on the work of Weber and Elias, provides models of the interaction of large-scale 'pre-global' structures in order to comprehend the history of the global present—in a way that philological-national models or their derivatives (comparative literature, post-colonial and transnational literary studies) cannot. The former (philological-national) were primarily inward-turned in the process of establishing national identities; comparative literature remained a western phenomenon replete with unexamined biases; and post-colonial explanatory structures by definition focus on the literatures of both the imperial and/or colonial dominant powers and the colonised territories. As a comprehensive model for world literature, post-colonial studies is of limited, albeit ongoing major, importance. Literary transnationalism similarly has offered valuable insights and solutions but remains tied to the concept of the nation. Beecroft's ecological model of *biomes* and *ecozones* resolves many methodological problems, but is less convincing in identifying the historical and cultural determinants of literary works. Its metaphor of ecological adaptation emphasises resolution rather than crisis in the process of generation of literary cultures. Civilisational analysis provides a much-needed comparative critical framework, bringing large-scale cultural breadth and depth to the study of world literatures, mediating between the world and the work.

In the following argument I aim to bring greater specificity to models which otherwise remain abstract in terms of broader cultural issues than language. Working through a detailed analysis of Beecroft's comprehensive 'ecological' model, I suggest the possibilities of interactional civilisational analysis as a means of addressing what I see as gaps which remain despite current theoretical innovations particularly to post-colonial and globalisation models. The categories of interactional civilisational analysis may help to fill these gaps by providing a model of analysis of supranational literary identities, contacts, and interchange that earlier models have failed to provide at a global level.

## Globalisation in Literary Studies

The language of national identity in literary studies has developed over centuries; that of globalisation is still under debate. Its points of reference are less easily fixed in discursive terms than the earlier national philological models. Transnational theory, world systems analysis, dependency theory and other models of international global relationships have influenced the development of world literature theory since the late nineties.<sup>2</sup> However gaps remain in the conceptualisation of how individual works move beyond their language and immediate culture into more or less related and/or new linguistic and cultural environments. Postcolonial scholars in particular have asked what constitutes the 'world' in this field, alerting us to implicit biases and broadening our grasp of the structures inherent in terms such as 'world', 'global' and their cognates and alerting us to the extent of what Said referred to as 'the export of identity'.<sup>3</sup> In an important article in 2010, Aamir R. Mufti explicates Said's Orientalism as the term for Western imperialism's 'establishment of identitarian truth-claims around the world', namely 'those Western knowledge practices in the modern era whose emergence made possible for the first time the notion of a single world as a space populated by distinct civilisational complexes, each in possession of its own tradition, the unique expression of its own forms of national "genius"' (Mufti 461-2). Helgesson and Vermeulen note the extent to which postcolonial theory brought to world literature an understanding of 'the primacy of the socioeconomic relations codified by colonialism and persisting in the postcolony' (Helgesson and Vermeulen 16). However, the postcolonial critique also contained a strongly political focus in its account of imperialist literary history, and the value of accounts such as Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* lies in their broadening of the nature of transcontinental literary exchange to include histories that cannot be comprehended by postcolonial theory alone (Helgesson and Vermeulen 6). For Helgesson, the focus of world literature on global circulation as opposed to the centre-periphery relations of postcolonialism, reminds us that literature must be understood as 'a world of its own and an enabling alternative to other domains of power' and not merely in terms of political power and postcolonial domination (Helgesson, 'Postcolonialism and World Literature' 484).

## Alexander Beecroft's Ecological Model

In an earlier article ('World Literature') and subsequent monograph (*An Ecology*), Alexander Beecroft constructively engaged with Wallerstein's socio-historical

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the origins and development of the new world literature studies, see Morgan, 'World Literature Studies and the Transnational Turn'.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, cited in Mufti 462. On the terminology of 'mondialisation' and 'globalisation' see Vermeulen 83. See also Ahmad Aijaz's critique of Frederic Jameson over the latter's 'Rhetoric of Otherness'; Spivak, 'Rethinking Comparativism' 609-26; Mufti 458-62; Helgesson, 'Postcolonialism and World Literature' 484-6; Cheah 23-45.

world systems model, to offer a set of analytical structures for literature over long periods and across cultures. For Beecroft, Wallerstein's model focuses on the socio-economic characteristics of a specific world-system in such a way as to render it irrelevant to the description of the larger part of the literature of the world.<sup>4</sup> Beecroft, in contrast, advocates a typology of literary systems based not on the modern 'world-system', but on a set of ideal-typical sociological categories to account for 'the multiplicity of strategies used by literatures to relate to their political and economic environments' since their origins in human community ('World Literature' 91). In his later work, Beecroft conceptualises these categories in terms of an ecological rather than an economic system, in order to examine the complex relationships between literature and its human environments (*An Ecology* 18) and to 'link texts together through a series of relationships that usually begins with language and/or the polity, but which also include questions of genre and influence' (*An Ecology* 16). Beecroft constructs a model of overlapping *ecozones* and *biomes*, each adapted to its own particular location and geography, where Wallerstein, Casanova and Moretti operate with a model based on an inherently hierarchical core-periphery model of economic activity.

Beecroft's six 'ecozones' range from the *epichoric* literature of small local communities, typically in early societies, through more complex *panchoric* ('cross-regional') literary ecologies forming in regions with small-scale polities but where literary and other cultural artifacts 'circulate more broadly through a space that is self-aware of itself as some kind of cultural unity and that define themselves by the exclusion of other polities that do not share that culture' (*An Ecology* 33-4). The panhellenic world of the post-Homeric texts or of Beecroft's Panhuaxian stage of ancient Chinese literature comes under this category (*An Ecology* 63-78.) This group represents the first context in which literary circulation is recognised to be a problem since such texts which share a common language must adapt beyond the localised polities of the epichoric ('World Literature' 93). *Cosmopolitan* literary ecologies are found 'wherever a single literary language is used over a large territorial range and through a long period of time' (*An Ecology* 34). As a consequence these literatures 'represent themselves as universal' and yet come into contact with rival cosmopolitanisms, given their broad reach (*An Ecology* 34). The Sanskrit of the first millennium AD and the Latin of the European Middle Ages fit this model. *Vernacular* ecologies develop from within cosmopolitan ecologies at the point when a local language achieves literary expression on the basis of accrued cultural depth. This development often takes place in the context of new political formations, and may compete with the existing cosmopolitan language (*An Ecology* 35). Beecroft's later categories of the *vernacular*, the *national* and the *global* overlap to some extent with those of Casanova and Moretti. The transition

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<sup>4</sup> On Jameson's introduction of Wallerstein's world systems analysis to literary theory in the late eighties, see Buell, 159-62.

from *vernacular* to *national* occurs when a particular language and its literary tradition is mapped onto a particular political state', a process that leads to the marginalisation of dialectal and minority-language literatures within the state, and renders works written in the cosmopolitan language after the emergence of the vernacular increasingly obsolete (*An Ecology* 35-36). In the *global* era, the *national* model itself becomes obsolete as a number of languages and literatures transcend national borders to circulate freely around the planet. This *global* ecology is hypothetical, and will depend on the achievement not merely of a borderless world, but also one in which equal access exists for all regardless of political status or the position of one's native language within the global linguistic ecology (*An Ecology* 36).

Beecroft notes the extent to which languages as discrete entities are a construct of political and other forces. When language makes the transition from pragmatic to literary usage, it begins to participate in a world of literatures. Beecroft adopts the metaphor of the 'ecology' of world literature as more inclusive of complexity than, for example, the 'centre-periphery' structures of Moretti and Casanova. Where economics reduces 'various inputs into the economic system—land, labor, capital' to equivalences by expressing them in terms of value and money, ecology is a system 'in which the various inputs are not in fact equivalent to each other'. Ecology understands 'the distinct and mutually interactive nature of these various inputs, so that changes in the external environment [...] can have complex and shifting impacts on the various species found in a given context' (*An Ecology* 18). Beecroft's 'ecology' thus examines the relationships between literary texts and their human environments (*An Ecology* 20-1). Presumably Beecroft is drawing on Spivak's earlier concept of literary ecology in *Death of a Discipline*, (*Spivak passim*). The ecological metaphor conceptualises multiple environments of existence of texts where Casanova outlines a single adaptive strategy.

This typology is flexible enough to pin-point the main determinative features of any given literary work or body of literary works in terms of place and time, while at the same time providing an ideal-typical grid for comparison of the commonalities across different world literatures at similar or comparable states of sociological development. It provides a set of theoretical axes by which to identify and describe literary works in terms of their geo-cultural place and time, enabling us to show how social configurations influence or determine the development of literary cultures. in place and time. As a typology of ideal-typical literary situations, Beecroft's model allows of system and comparison without Eurocentric, postcolonial or Orientalist biases, implicit canon-building or focus on one sociological type, such as the nation, or one literary form, such as the novel, over others. It thus provides the basis for a disciplinary methodology of world literature based on the sociology implicit in the refocusing of the title from 'comparative', or 'general' to 'world'. By replacing the single historical model of

the emergence of a literary 'market' with a systematic set of ideal-typical literary forms, Beecroft creates a flexible and non-binding grid with which to chart the nature of any given literary environment, from the most simple to the most complex. In place of the 'axial division of labour' (Wallerstein) in the literary 'world-system', he provides a set of models for the ways in which the literary work reflects the socio-economic (as well as other) aspects of its host environment.

With this typology Beecroft provides a simple and objective model which avoids many of the current controversies in world literature theory. Ethical as well as methodological issues underpin this proposal: inclusiveness of the world's literatures (the issue addressed by Spivak in particular) as well as the need to find appropriate disciplinary descriptors for all literatures, not merely those of the modern world-system. Beecroft does not develop his socio-literary forms and genres from the Western literary tradition but rather from a set of sociological types or models that are neutral in terms of cultural origin, validated only through the social forms that generate them, thereby addressing Appadurai's critique of 'Eurochronology', the inbuilt ethnocentrism of literary-historical periodisations (Appadurai 30).

As with any ideal-typical construct, the value of Beecroft's model lies in the tension between the theory and the phenomenon, between the 'thick' description of the environmental factors and the manifestations of the individual work. The novel in late Greek antiquity, in Rome, in early modern Germany or throughout Western Europe since the seventeenth century, can be compared in terms of the type of group identity which molded it. Beecroft's model can indicate the conditions which led to the rise of the novel, without at the same time implying that all forms of prose description of the relationships between individual and society are forms of the western novel, i.e., without 'reinscribing a hegemonic cultural centre' to the form (Beecroft, 'World Literature' 88). In this reading, the novel is the form par excellence of the European middle classes, but it relates to prose forms across broad fields of world literature as the form in which societies at different stages of development describe the relationship of the individual and the group. The panchoric or cosmopolitan novel in Beecroft's typology will document and interpret the world differently to the national or global novel. But they are all prose forms representing individuals in relationship to their social and physical environments, and they can be compared and contrasted in these terms. As individual works of literature, of course, they retain their uniqueness and can be interpreted in terms of their individual characteristics.

To some extent the unspoken object of Beecroft's approach is not merely to provide a more objective set of ideal-typical structures than those developed by Moretti, Casanova, Damrosch, and others, but also to provide an alternative resolution to the conflict between the systemic globalisers of world literature such

as Damrosch and Moretti, and those critical of the power-relations implicit in the undertaking, including Apter, Spivak and Kadir.<sup>5</sup> Behind his argument lies the earlier and broader opposition of post-colonial literary theorists to world literature theory on the basis of its perceived endangering of recognised insights into the power-relations inherent in primarily Western evaluations of the literature of the world. The advantage of this 'ecological' typology is that it recognises a multiplicity of organic systems of literature globally and over the duration of history, marking a decisive shift from the hierarchies implied in core-periphery models, and including historical, political and socio-cultural elements into the literary environment. The disadvantage, perhaps, is that the ecological metaphor pays insufficient attention to significant structural aspects of human cultural history to which recent theories of interactional civilisational analysis have drawn attention.

Beecroft is able to model adaptable large-scale structures while avoiding the unchanging and unhistorical aspect of civilisational theories such as Toynbee's categorisations or Huntington's model of a static 'clash of civilizations'. This aspect of his argument becomes clear as he introduces the idea of the *biome* vis-à-vis the *ecozone*. The *ecozones*, he writes, are the eight large geographic regions of the earth that have developed distinct profiles. Alongside and overlapping these are the *biomes*, 'a collection of fourteen types of environments, sharing conditions of climate, landscape and major plant types'.

Each ecozone contains samples of a variety of these fourteen biomes, and regions of a particular biome the world over tend to share similar kinds of animal and plant life, which has evolved over time [...] in response to the particular ecological constraints of the biome.<sup>6</sup>

Beecroft thereby avoids a model of major cultural identities in favour of one which focuses on the smaller *biomes* which are common to diverse *ecozones*, but in different combinations. For Beecroft 'the boundaries between cultures represent just as complex a question as that of those between languages'. Culture, he writes, has been applied to 'relatively small groups of people situated in space and time' whereas 'civilization' is reserved 'for larger-scale assemblages of cultures'.

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<sup>5</sup> On the divergence in world literature studies between the work with its unique, 'untranslatable' message, and the literary cosmos, understood as a single, quantifiable, positivistically described system or network see, Morgan, 'World Literature Studies and the Transnational turn' 1-13.

<sup>6</sup> 'In terrestrial ecology the ecozones are the eight large-scale geographic regions into which the earth's land surface are divided [...] These large regions [...] have evolved quite distinct genetic, taxonomic, and historical profiles. Overlapping this classification are the series of *biomes*, a collection of fourteen types of environments, sharing conditions of climate, landscape and major plant types [...]. Each ecozone contains samples of a variety of these fourteen *biomes*, and regions of a particular *biome* the world over tend to share similar kinds of animal and plant life, which has evolved over time [...] in response to the particular ecological constraints of the biome' (Beecroft, *An Ecology* 22).

Cultures thus are *biomes* and civilisations are *ecozones*, in which the latter have the conceptual problem of positing too much coherence (Beecroft, *An Ecology* 24). Like language, cultures blend into one another, with the inhabitants of each town or village sharing some customs with their neighbours and innovating some of their own' (Beecroft, *An Ecology* 23).

Like many of the commentators on the new globalisation, Beecroft seeks something other than the local (the *biome*), and different in quality to the mode of production (the *epichoric* etc), in order to describe similarity as well as diversity on the large scale of 'civilizations' or 'cultural regions' as opposed to smaller 'cultures' (Beecroft, *An Ecology* 23). The larger the cultural area, he writes, the more difficult it is to define the boundaries. These larger entities, which he refers to metaphorically as *ecozones* are made up of a relatively stable but not unchanging or inflexible mixtures of *biomes* including alongside language and the structures of literary production and distribution, economics, politics, religion, and culture. The conceptual embrace of a metaphor of zones of transition becomes more illuminating than fixed lines of demarcation for the analysis of world literary relationships. Beecroft thus introduces the *ecozone* as the larger unit, but breaks it up metaphorically into its more significant component parts, the *biomes* (Beecroft, *An Ecology* 59-85). (Interestingly, earlier civilisational commentators have also sought recourse to botanical and/or biological vocabulary such as 'biota' and classification schemes such as the Linnaean to describe the relationships of larger to smaller units in civilisational entities. See Westcott's analysis of the dominant civilisational taxonomies.)

Beecroft's *biomes* operate in terms of politics, economics, religion, and culture in addition to language, and hence constitute at some level, large-scale structures, or civilisational *ecozones*, as he himself notes above. Indeed Beecroft critically invokes the 'history of civilisations' approach of earlier commentators such as Toynbee, who identified forty-three civilisations in world history on the basis of empirical characteristics. The fundamental flaw in Toynbee's approach for Beecroft is that human societies are 'interlinked' and 'continuous' around the inhabited world, and cannot be broken up into 'discrete spatiotemporal units' as Toynbee and later civilisational theorists such as Huntington, would do. Ecology becomes the counter-paradigm to the conceptualisation of civilisations as hard and fast entities. For like languages, 'cultures often blend gradually one into the other, with the inhabitants of each town or village sharing some customs with their neighbours and innovating some of their own' (Beecroft, *An Ecology* 23). However the conceptualisation of civilisations as unchanging blocs in the manner of Toynbee and, later, Huntington, represents a selective view of this field of historical and cultural analysis.



### **The Return of *Civilisations***

In fact the concept of civilisation has made a comeback as a mode of analysis in global history after a period of desuetude since the sixties.<sup>7</sup> Krishnan Kumar identifies Toynbee not Huntington as the dominant force behind this revival, despite the latter's controversial appearance in the late nineties, and notes the extent to which twentieth-century practitioners of civilisational analysis, including Toynbee himself (Kumar 839), pre-empted later criticisms of some of the value-systems associated with earlier usages of the term. Freud had launched a ferocious critique of the concept (Kumar 827; see also Mazlish 298), and even Spengler's concept of decline could hardly serve as the basis for Western supremacism and Eurocentrism (Kumar 829). Kumar's point is that while Huntington's thesis sparked new interest and a great deal of controversy, it by no means initiated or exhausted the conceptual and exegetic possibilities of civilisational analysis (as Beecroft's own reference to Toynbee suggests.) 'Whatever the weaknesses of Toynbee's general approach', Kumar summarises, 'the civilizational perspective he adopts allows him to cast an illuminating light on many important historical questions'. Moreover Toynbee's recognition of the equal value of civilisations is a corrective to common current perceptions of the inherent Eurocentrism of civilisational analysis (Kumar 843). Kumar demonstrates convincingly that the use of civilisational terminology underlies in large part the re-emergence of globalisation studies, concluding that at the very least 'one can say that "globalization" creates the conceptual space, and opportunity, for a reconsideration and reinsertion of civilizational analysis'.<sup>8</sup> Implicit in this re-introduction is the recognition of the inadequacy of national and post-colonial models as the primary means of conceptualising contemporary global relations.

Civilisational analysis can be used to bring together the disciplinary-epistemological aspect of the 'literary' with a globally all-embracing understanding of environment, collectivity and consciousness that is appropriate,

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<sup>7</sup> Kumar 815. Among Kumar's modern commentators are the classical sociologists and social psychologists, Durkheim, Mauss, Weber, Freud and Elias, followed by a succession of commentators since Arnold Toynbee and Oswald Spengler, including Purim Sorokin, Fernand Braudel, Joseph Needham, Bruce Mazlish, William H. McNeill, Ian Morris, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, Jack Goody, and Anthony Pagden, as well as the more controversial and polemical interventions of Samuel P. Huntington and Niall Ferguson.

<sup>8</sup> Kumar 820. 'As for globalization studies as a whole, contributions are roughly evenly divided between those that consider abstract global processes—information and financial flows, cultural homogenization, and the like—within a single global system, and those that, in effect if not always by name, refer to civilizational units as the most important components of a world that has increasing elements of convergence but also a persisting plurality based on civilizational legacies. What both schools share is a dismissal of nation-state approaches in favor of larger complexes that are economic, cultural, or political. At the very least, then, one can say that 'globalization' creates the conceptual space, and opportunity, for a reconsideration and reinsertion of civilizational analysis'.

accurate and acceptable in terms of representation of the social and cultural complexities, the regional and global power structures, the specificities of language and culture and the innate characteristics of any given group. The work of Arnason, Eisenstadt and others on the development of cultures and civilisations and the emergence of modernities might provide an example, namely of a socio-genesis model for literary works that focuses on the 'world' literally as the specific human socio-cultural environment from which literary works emerge. Such a model would answer specific sets of questions focusing on literary comparability across human societies, and would thus represent one methodology of literary interpretation among many. The aim of this model will not be to simply juxtapose texts (as was the case with the older comparative literature). Rather it will recognise situational comparability and difference in literary production and interpretation without privileging one system over another and hence with no hierarchy of implied value systems in the identification and discussion of individual works. This would be a social theory in which group structuration is used as a comparative key for spatially separate literatures, namely the 'world' of world literature understood as a geo-spatial concept, a conceptualisation of literature understood in terms of its spread across the human societies of the globe in their similarities, comparabilities and differences.

### **Civilisational Analysis in World Literature Studies**

World-systems theory from Wallerstein through Casanova and Moretti to Becroft fills the nebulous conceptual space of globalisation with structures that mediate between the world and the work. These hermeneutic frameworks bring broad socio-economic structures such as regions, states, nations and supra-national groupings into the conceptual framework, enabling us to ask questions about interrelated human structures that have internal coherence but that are more complex, diverse and extended than merely the nation-state. However, as Becroft implicitly recognises, larger, longer-term structures exist which change over time, but nevertheless retain certain broad characteristics. Within these *ecozones* his literary modes develop.

How, we might ask, does literature operate as a series of *ecozones*, each with its particular mix of *biomes* and each interacting at some level of complexity with others, especially as they develop over time? How, that is, do we move from the metaphoric structure to concrete analysis and interpretation? Civilisational approaches can help answer this question by providing the broader models of interaction between larger, historically established cultural entities than the nation or the empire. The terminology of civilisation originates in the Enlightenment writings of figures such as Mirabeau and Gibbon to mean both specific 'civilizational' value systems conceived as blocs and as a synonym for human progress, against 'barbarism' (Mazlish 293-6). 'Culture', by contrast,

emerges as a later term in the writings of Herder and the German romantics, drawing on Rousseau, as a counter-argument to early conceptualisations of 'civilisation'. Max Weber brought the term into modern historical sociology through his comparative analysis of Orient and Occident (Tiryakian 283-5), and later sociologists including Durkheim, Mauss and Elias made important contributions. Historian Arnold J. Toynbee embedded the concept in the global historiography of the mid-twentieth century with his monumental *A Study of History*. In the move from Marxist and post-colonial models to global models of literary analysis since the nineties, the category of civilisation seems indispensable as a means of avoiding Kumar's 'methodological nationalism' or privileging of the nation-state as the framing object of literary study while offering a set of large-scale analytical structures with which to negotiate the otherwise nebulous area of globalisation.<sup>9</sup> And while Becroft's model takes the larger picture of 'ecozones' or civilisations into account, the metaphor remains descriptive; it provides little by way of concrete analysis of structures larger than nations or more culturally detailed than language-units.

Civilisational analysis supplies the terminology for the conceptualisation of sub-global entities based on historical experience, religion, language and culture, across national groups, without necessarily reducing them to nations, or specific 'world-systems' and 'empires', and without the leveling of difference that approaches such as postcolonialism or Marxism have entailed in the past. Moreover the 'thick description' of civilisational analysis enables a level of focused, specific analysis and interpretation that the ecozones metaphor does not. What are the intermediary structures between the local, national and the global in literature, especially in an era of decline of the nation-states? How do regional identities and/or civilisational structures relate to the changing situation in terms of literature, the mediation and negotiation of national identities confronting blocs of power—economic, political and socio-cultural—larger and more powerful than themselves? Do civilisational structures play a role here? Can we valorise older civilisational models in order to provide transcultural conceptual structures for globalisation processes?

Borrowing the expression coined by Bernard Lewis after Albert Camus, Samuel P. Huntington re-introduced culture into international relations through his controversial model of the 'clash of civilizations' in the mid-1990s after the end of the capitalist-communist global divide.<sup>10</sup> One of the main criticisms of Huntington's model, working within a contemporary international relations framework, was that it failed to account for social and historical change and presented a world-view predicated on difference and conflict (Árnason,

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<sup>9</sup> Kumar 859. For Toynbee the only unit bigger than 'civilization' was humankind itself: see Szakolczai 369.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis. Albert Camus, 'Ni victimes, ni bourreaux', cited in Payette 51.

'Civilizational Patterns' 397-8). Huntington was taken to task for presenting civilisational units as monolithic structures in which change, progress and development do not occur and whose boundaries are hard and fast (see Melleuish 109-20). Nevertheless, in re-introducing civilisational fields into international relations, as Kumar notes, Huntington ignited debate regarding the nature of conflict after the end of the East-West global divide. Much of the criticism of Huntington focused on the nature of the predicted conflict, rather than on the use of civilisational model *per se*; indeed relatively little of this material in the field of international relations seriously questioned the concept of civilisations.<sup>11</sup>

A more flexible and sophisticated approach to these questions has been adopted by cultural theorists and historical sociologists S.N. Eisenstadt, Jóhann Árnason, Björn Wittrock and others working with Weberian and civilisational models of global cultural relations. These commentators seek to compare and contrast civilisations through 'interactionalist' approaches that are more sensitive to the specificities of culture than are the models drawn from the economics and politics of nation-states and global developments (Árnason, 'Civilizational Patterns' 387.) For Árnason, 'the unfinished state of the sociological theory of civilizations makes it vulnerable to amalgamations of the kind proposed by Huntington', in which 'civilizations are described as 'the ultimate tribes' [...] and their re-emergence after a period of forced assimilation to the West appears as a return of history to its normal intra-cultural course' (Árnason, 'Civilizational Patterns' 397-8.) This approach may help us to orient literary studies between the Scylla of globalisation and the Charybdis of the nation-state (Árnason, 'Civilizational Patterns' 397).

In the wake of the collapse of Soviet socialism, Árnason developed his earlier work on Marxist and Weberian cultural theory to an extended analysis of long-term socio-cultural patterns, or civilisations, and their influence on modernising processes. Árnason's *Civilizations in Dispute* draws on the author's earlier sociological studies of Soviet, Japanese and European civilisations to outline a theory of long-term identities based on Weberian concepts with input from the cultural sociology of Durkheim, Mauss, Elias and Castoriadis. By 'civilisation' is meant 'configurations that integrate the social, political and cultural traits of societies or regions', characterised by 'an exceptional historical durability', and 'a high degree of consensus' regarding values and cultures (Allardt 483-4). Civilisational analysis focuses on 'the directionality of social change by identifying distinctive civilizational processes and rationalities', and aims to understand 'the diversity of developmental patterns by such devices as comparative typologies' (Arjomand 309).

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<sup>11</sup> Fox, 428-35, lists in detail the types of critique of Huntington.

A recent special issue of *International Sociology* reclaims for sociology 'the heuristics of comparative civilizational analysis as a lever for macro-sociology in the new century', over and beyond the 'limited' models of 'world system analysis' and 'globalization analysis' (Tiryakian 279). For Edward Tiryakian, civilisational analysis supposes that 'the reality of the world we live in has dynamic and interactive socio-cultural units larger than nation-states and smaller than a single socio-economic totality' (Tiryakian 280). Civilisations provide a means of introducing specific detail to Beecroft's metaphorical *ecozones*.

In the case of European literature such a sociology of culture would enable us to identify, for example, those environmental factors which prepared for and accompanied the emergence of the colonial ventures, while at the same time identifying those factors that rendered the various European colonial cultures different both from each other and from other imperial entities such as the Ottomans in the Balkans or the Japanese in China.<sup>12</sup> A nuanced reading of civilisational contacts would avoid the over-simplifications of Orientalist approaches while retaining both the historical perspective on colonialism and recognising the qualities of eastern civilisations as something more than the West's 'civilizational Other'. What does it mean to write as a 'European', for example? From what discrete sets of cultural resources do writers individually construct their discourses? (Clifford 276). For Braudel, European civilisation is determined from the tenth century onwards by 'the stubborn growth of private 'liberties', franchises or privileges limited to certain groups, big or small. Often these liberties conflicted with each other or were mutually exclusive' (Braudel 307). For Alberto Martinelli, Europe is characterised by a high degree of 'multiplicity and cross-cutting of cultural orientations and structural settings' as well as simultaneously 'a high degree of commitment [...] to common ideals and goals', for example 'the tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders and the definition of the individual as an autonomous and responsible entity' (Martinelli 584).

Literature has functioned as an essential transmitter of civilisational material, and civilisational interpretative frameworks provide a means of debating issues within a comparative world literature framework, such as the development of certain types of representation of group and individual dynamics, or the emergence of multiple modernities, in which civilisational characteristics are

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<sup>12</sup> This would be in contradistinction to Said's thesis of the binary opposition of Orientalism and the West ('a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and [...] "the Occident"' and as 'the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient', namely, 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'. (Said 3). Later Orientalism is defined as 'the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority' (Said 42, cited in Árnason, *Civilizations in Dispute* 336). See also Ahmad's 'Orientalism and After,' and Clifford's 'On Orientalism,' 256-266, for detailed critiques in particular of the contradictions in Said's conception.

included in the mix of factors determining or influencing individual processes of modernisation, including, but not subsumed into late capitalism (see Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities' 1-22; Ben-Rafael and Sternberg *passim*). In light of the engagement of civilisation and modernisation theory, it might even be argued that world civilisations themselves are now a thing of the past, having been transformed by the spread of capitalist production during the late 19th and 20th centuries. Alternatively, we might argue with Eisenstadt that the present is constituted of not one, but multiple modernities, as different civilisations engage with the internationalisation of capital and the related processes of globalisation (Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities' 1-29).

The above discussion suggests that world literature theory has come into close proximity to globalisation theory and civilisational analysis, but not engaged directly with the latter in particular. For Árnason, interactional civilisational analysis is a means of explaining large-scale historical change and hence the origins of global history and consciousness. In his discussion of the concept since Toynbee, Árnason emphasises the state of incompleteness of this theoretical framework.

How can civilisational analysis, which draws on historical sociology as a discipline and which is so relevant to current literary theory, be related to the analysis of literary works, periods and traditions? What will be the ongoing function of literature in 'the emergent global reality of the civilization of modernity' (Tiryakian 288)—or in the temporary or enduring withdrawal of civilisational entities into retrogressive attitudes and positions? In the final section of this essay, I explore briefly the example of Albanian writer, Ismail Kadare, who turned his experience of the competing civilisational structures of his nation into a narrative strategy of critique in the context of an Eastern European post-war dictatorship. The political context of Kadare's work was the regime of Enver Hoxha, whose communist program promised modernisation on the Stalinist model. Albania was a Balkan Christian country split between Catholic and Orthodox confessions after the fall of Rome, and occupied by the Ottomans in the early 15th century.<sup>13</sup> In his work over almost half a century under the dictatorship, Kadare set about creating a critical foil to Hoxha's communism by generating an alternative Albanian social imaginary in literary texts to that advocated by the regime. He did so by quoting competing civilisational aspects of Albanian identity in his writings, on the one hand evoking the ancient Illyrian-Greek culture of the Western Balkan peninsula in order to link modern Albania to Europe as its point of origin as well as its point of destination, and on the other evoking the Ottoman occupation as a metaphor for Soviet communism, an invading force which subordinated native culture to

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<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed cultural history of Albania as the context of Kadare's fiction, see Morgan, *Ismail Kadare* 5-13.

imperial civilisation. Underlying this critique of both Ottoman imperialism and Soviet communism is a continuity between past and present of the Albanians, between the ancient Illyrian culture with its reflections and refractions of Greek myth and the modern versions of the Albanian rhapsodic epic, and between Ancient Greece and modern Europe, of which Albania is a part by its heritage.<sup>14</sup>

Having returned to his native Albania from Moscow where he had trained as a socialist writer at the Gorki Institute for World Literature in 1959 and 1960, the young Ismail Kadare (b. 1936) was attracted to the possibilities of communist modernisation along the Soviet model for his country. However Kadare had also witnessed the Pasternak affair in the Soviet Union and recognised the potential dilemmas of the writer working within a communist system. Even at this early stage of his writing career, Kadare began to play off different civilisational identities as a means of offsetting versions of modernity in his writing. Essential to Kadare's oppositional concept was the representation of the Albanian symbolic imaginary in terms of a disrupted history since the antique era when the southern and south-western peninsula was unified in a common Greek-Illyrian civilisation. This symbolic history preserved the link between Albanian and Greek civilisation and represented a fictive counter-history to that of Ottoman occupation or communist modernisation. The former typically functioned as an allegory of the latter in works such as *The Palace of Dreams* or *The Niche of Shame*.

In his socialist realist novel, *The Great Winter* (1973), Kadare enlists the early figure of dictator Enver Hoxha as a communist moderniser, representing Soviet communism as a specific form of Russian modernity in the sense advocated by Johan Arnason in *The Future that Failed* namely as one of three versions of modernisation of Eastern civilisations—along with Habsburg and Ottoman modernisation effort (Arnason, *The Future that Failed* 22).<sup>15</sup> After Hoxha's 1961 break with the Soviet model of communist modernisation, Albania was launched into an unknown future. The dictatorship took the form of an increasingly isolationist national communism with only superficial links to its new ally, Maoist China. In Kadare's novel, Albanian society becomes increasingly alienated from the outside world. By the end, the only remaining link for the protagonist and Albanian everyman Besnik Struga is the sense of participation in an ethno-cultural tradition that is nourished by its roots in an epic tradition extending back to Homeric times.

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<sup>14</sup> Kadare expands upon this thesis in detail in his Aeschylus essay of 1985; however, the idea is present in *The Monster* (1965), *The Winter of Great Solitude* (1971) and the revised *Great Winter* (1973), *The Niche of Shame* (1976), *The Three-Arched Bridge* (1977), *The File on H* (1981) and *The Palace of Dreams* (1981). For a detailed analysis of Kadare's speculative linkage of Illyrian (Albanian) and Greek civilisation, see Morgan, 'Greek Civilisation as a Theme of Dissidence in the Work of Ismail Kadare' 16-32, and 'The European Origins of Albania in Ismail Kadare's *The File on H*' 101-13.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed analysis of Kadare's *The Great Winter* in the social and political context of the Hoxha dictatorship see Morgan, *Ismail Kadare* 139-55.

The subversive point of Kadare's novel lies in the juxtaposition of the failing model of Eastern (Russian) modernity and the barely extant Albanian cultural memory of a civilisational alternative in the evocation of the Greek-Illyrian past. This opposition is ubiquitous in Kadare's work and depends on the symbolic power of the Albanian rhapsodic tradition understood as a last remnant of a civilisational tradition that has been damaged by the depredations of Albanian history of occupations. In Kadare's great political allegory, *The Palace of Dreams* (1982) the processes of capture of political power in the dictatorship of the modernised Ottoman Sultanate are shown to be incompatible with the ethos of individual and ethno-cultural identity embodied in the ancient Albanian epic, whose stories reflect those of Greek myth and tradition. The consistent line of political dissidence throughout Kadare's *oeuvre* under the dictatorship is thus to be found in the evocation of a damaged but still deeply embedded strain of cultural consciousness linking the Albanians to an alternative civilisational tradition to that represented by either Ottoman imperialism or authoritarian communism. As narrative allegory this strategy brought civilisational traditions—as opposed to political principles—into the argument against authoritarian, dictatorial and absolute forms of control of power.

World literature in its most recent iteration, is a means of explaining globalisation (not the other way around). World literary theory, in taking a retrospective view of the development of literatures, does not aim to supplant earlier epochs of literary consciousness with a universal, timeless model, but rather is the attempt of contemporary global consciousness to explicate itself. It aims, in looking backward, to see the points of contact, influence, and change, rather than the points of conflict or opposition. It is merely a different point of view to earlier ways of categorising literature. In this sense world literature as a concept belongs to Beecroft's *global* era: there was no previous world literature other than 'world-systems' literature—i.e., the literature of discrete world entities (or civilisations). World literature as a concept is tied to the global era, but it looks back over the entirety of human literature to find its own origins. It necessarily reads the literature of the past different to the way national eras read the literatures of the past—their own past and others' pasts.

In terms of the literary work, civilisational analysis opens our eyes to the function of any given work in contributing to the interaction of these larger groups. Clearly, some literary works will fulfill this function more than others, and new canons will emerge. But essential to the criteria will be an inclusiveness of the globe—i.e. an openness to all the literatures of the world (Damrosch and Moretti) as well as an awareness of the power-structures implicit in the analytical framework itself, i. e. a self-reflexive and self-critical moment (Spivak; Apter); and it will seek to engage the socio-historical context of the literary work, namely the extent to which the literary work mediates society and consciousness (Beecroft). Crucially, however,



it will engage with the thick description of the dynamic of the literary work in its civilisational context as it engages with its own or other civilisational identities. Aeschylus' *Persians* rather than the *Iliad* is the foundational text in the European tradition for this aspect of world literature. In fact much recent literary analysis engages with these issues implicitly in discussing the themes of cultural conflict which have moved to the centre of discussion since the re-emergence of identities of the *longue durée* after the end of the global East-West divide. The conflicts here are no longer national, or even post-colonial: they are civilisational. They are the outcome of the increased contact of civilisational consciousnesses with globalisation as a result of modernity: of increased movement, migration, refugee, work-related etc. World literature studies moves from a contemporary to a historical focus in as much as it brings these sensitivities to bear on earlier epochs, in which civilisational identities existed in different relations to each other, but in which these relations were historical, changing and creating the present.

Literature, or a selective aspect of literatures, might, then, be considered alongside language, food and religion, as civilisational phenomena in Mauss's terminology, namely 'international and extranational [phenomena], common to several societies more or less related, related by extended contact and by permanent networks' (Mauss, cited in Tiryakian 285). In as much as literatures cross national boundaries and even languages (through translation), they have an aspect which is potentially civilisational in this sense. Literature represents a bridge across the 'authentic cognitive frameworks' that constitute world civilisations (Tiryakian 285).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion I would suggest three theses regarding the relevance of civilisational analysis for world literature studies:

*Thesis 1:* Literature has carried on an essential function as a carrier of civilisational values beyond political, ethno-cultural and linguistic borders.

*Thesis 2:* Literature has functioned not only as a site of civilisational values, but also as a site of civilisational critique, imagining change as a possibility within its civilisational framework.

*Thesis 3:* The role of literature in global culture will become increasingly that of an interfacing mechanism, moving away from established cultural, social and national paradigms and into areas of increased exploration and experimentation between and among merging civilisations in the global order. In a dialectical process in which the 'civilization of modernity entails the modernity of civilizations' (Tiryakian 290).

The study of literature in a global environment requires more by way of structure and theoretical framework than merely the identification of themes of encounter and engagement of group identities from a national perspective. Post-Westfalian conceptions of the nation are too narrow to encompass literary history, and 'globalisation' is too broad, lacking the disciplinary specificity of the literary and the cultural, and more or less explicitly importing agencies and processes from the social sciences which are not compatible with culture and language. Literary transnationalism must develop structures by which to mediate the analysis and interpretation of 'globalisation' beyond those of the nation-state—even the US-American nation-civilisation, or, in Wallerstein's terms, world-empire. Area-studies, world-systems analysis and civilisational theory offer a possible theoretical framework able to bridge the epistemological gap between the individual literary work and the broader defining and determining aspects of language, culture, and history; a conceptual framework, that is, between the 'world' and the 'work', which recognises the 'global' aspects of literature while not losing sight of the specific socio-historical determinants in forms which enable comparison across time and space. Beecroft's ecological metaphor enables us to compare individual works and genres in terms of literary contact, influence and change, as well as in the broader terms of perception and self-representation. However, it remains defined by language as the unifying category of its ecozones and fails to account for the deep structures of cultural and civilisational consciousness that link groups of works over time and place. World-systems analysis and civilisational theory provide the conceptual tools and theoretical structures by which the global or transnational aspects of literature might be described and analysed in ways that avoid the extremes of positivistic superficiality or theoretical and methodological bias.

'The concept of globalization', like the earlier concept of civilisation, writes Bartelsen, 'functions as a mediating link between the modern world with its crusty social ontology and the brave new world that remains inaccessible and unintelligible not only to the subscribers to that ontology but also to the believers in global change as well' (Bartelsen 192). Literature, as an agent of communication and exploration of the dynamics of civilisational change in the processes of globalisation, helps us to negotiate more clearly the path ahead. In this sense, literary studies must become global in order to remain relevant to the world.

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