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Five Economies of World Literature

(A synopsis)

The project will look at the concept of world literature from a peculiar angle: that of the various economic models that its 19th-century formulations were informed by, relied on, or interacted with. What I want to demonstrate is that the inherent conceptual diversity of *Weltliteratur* has corresponded to an inherent diversity of its economics right from the beginning, and that these correspondences have remained operative throughout the long and intricate trajectory of the term and the various practices it has referred to. While the 19th-century ideas of a world literature drew on economic thought, the political economy of the era, in turn, found in the concept of world literature a site for further theorization. Although ending up with a more or less clear-cut structural-theoretical typology, what I offer is a historical investigation aiming to uncover yet uncharted elements in the genesis of the concept.

[Background]

Recently, world literature studies have explored economic aspects both as interpretive frames and as ideological targets. In the wake of Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti and their approach to literature as a global system alongside a systemic world economy (à la Immanuel Wallerstein and Fernand Braudel), world literature has been increasingly associated with world commerce.¹ The global circulation of authors, works, forms, themes, and genres, as well as the material and symbolic capitals produced and distributed by them, have been approached as analogous or complementary to the global trade of commodities: “the world literary system (...) is the product of a unified market”.² (Material convergences of literary and economic markets are manifest in the global book trade.³) In a more figurative vein, Damrosch’s emphasis on the dynamic of *gain and loss* in world literature as transcultural *circulation* also employs economy-charged metaphors.⁴ (Even if “circulation”, as most

¹ Pascale Casanova. *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, Harvard University Press, 2004; Franco Moretti. ‘Conjectures on world literature,’ in *Debating World Literature*, ed. Ch. Prendergast, Verso, 2004, 148–62;

² Franco Moretti, “World-Systems Analysis, Evolutionary Theory, *Weltliteratur*,” in *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins, and Nirvana Tanoukhi, Duke University Press, 2011, 75.

³ Cf. Stefan Helgesson, Pieter Vermeulen (eds.). *Institutions of world literature: writing, translation, markets*, Routledge, 2016.

⁴ Cf. David Damrosch. *What is World Literature?*, Princeton, 2003.

metaphors in economics, harks back to the 19th-century terminology of physics, in this case, hydrology.⁵)

The idea of world literature as a transnational market dates back to Goethe.⁶ For him, the concept of *Weltliteratur als Weltmarkt* promised a mutually advantageous exchange of cultural products; others, lately, have perceived it as the vehicle of domination, masking the convergence of global political, economic and cultural hegemonies. Just as the (supposed) legal equality of free trade has been shown to conceal “unequal exchange”, the (supposed) humanism of world literature has also been debunked as a cultural mask on fierce international rivalries and the subordination of peripheries to centers. The exchange-based concept of world literature has been condemned for the felt standardization it would bring, or has brought, about (linking the Auerbachian fear of homogenization to market-driven globalization);⁷ for serving imperialist/colonialist appropriations of the “non-European”;⁸ and for providing “ideological justification, or even legitimation” for worldwide material and intellectual exploitation.⁹

Alongside political criticism laying bare oppressive and exploitative tendencies in the *economy of world literature*, objections have also been raised with regard to the methodological use of *economics* in *world literature studies*. Driven by the fear that economic frames would absorb the autonomy of literary cultures, the hope of incommensurability between literary and economic trades is usually maintained even when pointing out their shared logic of exchange. (Even Casanova was reluctant to fully identify the geopolitics of global capitalism with that of the literary domain, the latter supposedly trading in non-economic but “cultural or civilizational capital”.) Accordingly, economic framings have been deemed “cynical” as opposed to “idealistic” methods;¹⁰ economic analogies have been dismissed as overstressed metaphors one should “not press too hard on”,¹¹ or as simplifying the complexity of literary systems by reducing their diversity to the uniformity of exchange value.¹² (Emily Apter’s crusade for regaining the experience of “untranslatability” also targets “universal

⁵ Philip Mirowski. *More Heat Than Light. Economics as social physics, physics as nature's economics*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁶ cf. Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*, Bern, 1946, 44.

⁷ On the march of world literature collapsing into global standardization: Erich Auerbach, “Philology and *Weltliteratur*,” trans. Marie Said and Edward Said, *Centennial Review* 13 (1969): 13-14.

⁸ Aamir R. Mufti. ‘Erich Auerbach and the death and life of world literature.’ = *The Routledge Companion To World Literature*. eds. Theo D’haen, D. Damrosch, Djelal Kadir. London–New York: Routledge, 2012, 75.

⁹ Chris Andre. ‘World literature and economic hegemony’ *Paroles gelées* 14(2): 75–85 (1996).

¹⁰ Mads Rosendahl Thomsen. *Mapping World Literature. International Canonization and Transnational Literatures*. London: Continuum, 2008, 13.

¹¹ Christopher Prendergast. ‘The World Republic of Letters’ = *Debating World Literature*, ed. Ch. Prendergast, London: Verso, 2004, 7.

¹² Alexander Beecroft. *An Ecology of World Literature*, Verso, 2015, 17–20.

equivalences”, the emblematic example of which is money.¹³) In his systematic dismissal of (what he sees as) world literature studies yielding to markets and ubiquitous commodification, Pheng Cheah calls for reclaiming the “normative force” of world literature from neoliberal capitalism.¹⁴

[Methodology]

In my view, much of this alleged reductiveness is due to a *reductive view of economy itself*. What is usually identified by the trope of “economy” in literary studies roughly coincides with commercial market-exchange based on homogenizing monetary equivalences in free trade (liberal) capitalism. (Casanova’s tautological counter-concept “non-economic economy” for a literary “market where non-market values are traded” is emblematic of this reductive understanding.¹⁵) What is thus, tacitly, criticized or dismissed as the economy *per se* (that is, the tendency of translating real-life heterogeneity into a radically homogeneous field of utilities) is itself a historical phenomenon, mainly informed by late-19th century neoclassical economic thought.¹⁶

My aim, therefore, is to *diversify* and *historicize* the economic dimensions in concepts of world literature. Following Karl Polányi’s classic argument on the fallacy of identifying economy with modern markets,¹⁷ and by drawing on insights from the *history of economic ideas* and *economic anthropology*, I want to uncover the historical contexts in which various 19th-century conceptualizations of *Weltliteratur* utilized or confronted the economic thought of their time, mainstream or marginal. This variability (in which laissez faire ideologies constituted only one element) did not occur on merely theoretical levels. Even seemingly utopian features have been realized, or remained persistent, in the 20th-century, or have become relevant again in the present. Accordingly, the historical diversification of the economic ideas that underpinned, informed, or gave rise to various concepts of world literature will be accompanied by the study of their impact on future world literary developments.

¹³ Cf. Emily Apter. *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. Verso, 2013.

¹⁴ Cf. Pheng Cheah, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, Duke University Press, 2016.

¹⁵ Pascale Casanova. ‘Literature as World’, *New Left Review* 31 (2005), p. 72.

¹⁶ Cf. Scott Meikle. ‘Quality and quantity in economics: The metaphysical construction of the economic realm,’ *New Literary History* (31) 2000, 247–268.

¹⁷ Karl Polányi, *Primitive, archaic, and modern economies*, Anchor Books, 1968.

[Objectives]

In my framing, the 19th-century conceptualizations of world literature as transnational literary and intellectual intercourse were informed by (at least) five economic models. These models and their respective modes of exchange are

- 1) *free trade economy* (and a market-like literary circulation);
- 2) *gift economy* (defining transactions, items exchanged, transactors and their goals in markedly non-market terms);
- 3) *planned economy* (and anti-freemarket cultural barterers);
- 4) *communistic* de-propertyization (and a *sharing economy* of “common possessions”)
- 5) national *protectionism*.

These models correspond to peculiar *institutions*:

- 1) cultural markets (for translations);
- 2) private correspondence via international postal services (conducting the exchange of texts, physical items and symbolic gestures);
- 3) state-subsidized scholarly associations;
- 4) legally unregulated sections of the publishing industry (and/or spaces of non-profit-driven exchange outside regulated markets);
- 5) symbolic or material cultural tariffs (with actual/symbolic restrictions of import).

Each of these institutions deploys peculiar *agents* of intercultural mediation:

- 1) translators (as independent cultural merchants);
- 2) members of a transnational learned community (with various levels of means and prestige);
- 3) scholars as state officials;
- 4) unauthorized publishers, pirates, hackers;
- 5) literary historians (and their literary histories, national or *Allgemeine*).

And, on the whole, these economies also tend to correspond to various *political realms* which they entail or in which they could operate:

- 1) *commercial society* (in the state of “natural liberty”);
- 2) a *republic* of letters (embedded in symbolic/actual *empires* of cultural/political colonization);
- 3) *totalitarian enlightened states*;
- 4) transnational/supranational *anarcho-capitalism/communism* (both utilizing and undermining possessive individualism and the global expansion of property rights)
- 5) the *nation-state*.

These five models will be outlined in five chapters, each tracing the key texts where they were formulated and each exploring the past and present practices in which they unfolded or which they have influenced.

1) World literature as *free trade economy*

The free trade model will be examined as it was put forward by Goethe, in his preface to the German translation of Thomas Carlyle's biography of Schiller and elsewhere. After sporadic earlier usage (by Schlözer and Wieland¹⁸) Goethe came to redefine *Weltliteratur* as a transnational marketplace for the literary products of various nations in translation. In describing this, Goethe highlighted *money* and *language* as emblems of national peculiarities mediating and being mediated by international exchange.

“Es ist schon einige Zeit von einer allgemeinen Weltliteratur die Rede, und zwar nicht mit Unrecht: denn die sämtlichen Nationen, in den fürchterlichsten Kriegen durcheinandergeschüttelt, sodann wieder auf sich selbst einzeln zurückgeführt, hatten zu bemerken, daß sie manches Fremde gewahr worden, in sich aufgenommen, bisher unbekannte geistige Bedürfnisse hie und da empfunden. Daraus entstand das Gefühl nachbarlicher Verhältnisse, und anstatt daß man sich bisher zugeschlössen hatte, kam der Geist nach und nach zu dem Verlangen, auch in den mehr oder weniger freien geistigen Handelsverkehr mit aufgenommen zu werden. Diese Bewegung währt zwar erst eine kurze Weile, aber doch immer lang genug, um schon einige Betrachtungen darüber anzustellen und aus ihr baldmöglichst, wie man es im Warenhandel ja auch tun muß, Vorteil und Genuß zu gewinnen.“ [Goethe: Einleitung zu Thomas Carlyle “Leben Schillers“]¹⁹

”Was nun in den Dichtungen aller Nationen hierauf hindeutet und hinwirkt, dies ist es was die Uebrigen sich anzueignen haben. Die Besonderheiten einer jeden muss man kennen lernen, um sie ihr zu lassen, um gerade dadurch mit ihr zu verkehren; denn die Eigenheiten einer Nation sind wie ihre *Sprache* und ihre *Münzsorten*, sie erleichtern den Verkehr, ja sie machen ihn erst vollkommen möglich. (...) Wer die deutsche Sprache versteht und studirt befindet sich auf dem Markte wo alle Nationen ihre Waaren anbieten, er spielt den Dolmetscher indem er sich selbst bereichert. Und so ist jeder Uebersetzer anzusehen, dass er sich als Vermittler dieses allgemein geistigen

¹⁸ Weitz, Hans-J. ”’Weltliteratur’ zuerst bei Wieland.” *Arcadia* 22 (1987): 206-8.; Wolfgang Schamoni, “Weltliteratur” – zuerst 1773 bei August Ludwig Schlözer,“ *Arcadia* 43 (2008):2, 288-298.

¹⁹ „Szó esik már egy bizonyos ideje egyetemes világirodalomról, s nem is ok nélkül: mert a nemzetek, melyek a legborzalmasabb háborúkban rázódtak össze-vissza, majd ismét ráálltak a maguk alapjára, okvetlen észrevehették, hogy mindeközben megismertek egynémely idegen dologgal, ilyesmit befogadtak, olykor addig ismeretlen szellemi igényeket kezdtek érezni. Létrejött ebből azután a szomszédtsági viszony érzése, s az addigi elzárkózás helyett a szellem fokozatosan elért ama vágyig, hogy a többé vagy kevésbé szabad szellemi kereskedelmi forgalomban helyet kapjon. Ez a mozgás, igaz, még csak rövid ideje tart, hanem ahhoz mégis eléggé régen már, hogy egyet-mást lássunk belőle s fontolhassuk, majd nemsokára, mint az árukereskedelemlél is ilyképp előny s gyönyörűség háramoljon ránk.” Goethe: Előszó Carlyle Schiller-életrajzához (1830)

Handels bemüht, und den Wechseltausch zu befördern sich zum Geschäft macht.”²⁰
[Goethe to Thomas Carlyle, July 20, 1827]

First, the chapter will examine how this coupling of money and language resonates with the German (and other) traditions of coin and word analogies (esp. Hamann²¹) and how translation, in its intermediary position between target and source languages, figures in ways comparable to the role of money in facilitating the exchange of commodities (e.g. how both create and rely on abstract third-term equivalences between otherwise incommensurable entities).

Then I turn to Goethe’s vision of a market-like *Weltliteratur*. His idea of a transnational circulation of literary works was informed by a transnational circulation of economic ideas, French, British, and German. The direct inspiration for his use of mercantile terminology came from the French journal *Le Globe*,²² yet it also concurred with a shift in German economic thinking. In the course of this the tradition of *Staatswirtschaft* was increasingly supplanted by the adaptation of British political economy (from Adam Smith to David Ricardo) to the historicizing framework of *Nazionalökonomie*.²³ In the face of the two main (18th-century) visions of global trade – 1, the exchange of local particularities fostering mutual knowledge and tolerance among remote trading partners; 2, the “jealousy of trade” among nations offering similar products on the same market²⁴ – Goethe opted for one that promised benign prospects for international exchange. As such, his concept of *Weltliteratur* harked back to Montesquieu’s ideal of *doux commerce* bringing about cultural improvement, political emancipation, and appeasement in international relations.²⁵ Goethe, however, was also aware of the inequality of cultural resources at the disposal of respective national literatures (which their engagement in free trade with other nations would make only more conspicuous). Tackling the (18th-century) dilemma of ‘rich nations v. poor nations’, Goethe’s proposal subscribed

²⁰ „Akármí törekszik is efelé vagy járul ehhez hozzá [ti. az egyetemes emberhez] valamely nemzet költészetében, a többinek igyekezni kell ezt elsajátítania. Minden egyes nemzet sajátosságaival meg kell ismerkedni, és ezeket kell tekintetbe venni annak érdekében, hogy kapcsolatba lépjünk velük; mert egy nemzet sajátosságai olyanok mint a nyelve és a pénznemei, ezek könnyítik meg az érintkezést/forgalmat [*Verkehr*], sőt, ezek teszik lehetővé. (...) Aki a német nyelvet érti és tanulmányozza, a piacon találja magát, ahol minden nemzet a maga portékáját kínálja, s a tolmács szerepét játssza, miközben gazdagítja magát. Így minden fordító viszonteladó a szellemi árucikkek általános kereskedelmében, és a maga üzletével ezt a cserekereskedelmet mozdítja elő.”

²¹ Cf. Richard T. Gray. *Money Matters. Economics and the German Cultural Imagination, 1770-1850*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008.

²² Heinz Hamm. *Goethe und die französische Zeitschrift "Le Globe". Eine Lektüre im Zeichen der "Weltliteratur"*. Weimar: Böhlau, 1998.

²³ Keith Tribe. *Governing Economy: The Reformation of German Economic Discourse, 1750-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

²⁴ Cf. István Hont. *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective*. Harvard University Press, 2005.

²⁵ Cf. Albert O. Hirschman. *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph*. Princeton University Press, 1977.

to, if only unwittingly, the political economy of a David Ricardo (who, in the 1820s, elaborated on the findings of Hume and Adam Smith) according to which “mutual gain” obtained through unrestrained commerce would level up initial inequalities.

The chapter will also explore Goethe’s familiarity with the conflictual traditions and tendencies in economic thought available to him (from *Kameralismus* to physiocracy and the apologies of unrestrained commerce) as a privy counselor (and, for a short time, as a minister of finance) pursuing economic reform agendas in the Duchy of Weimar, and as a literary author (e.g. the economic imagery of *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister*).²⁶

As to the institutional form of this economy of world literature: just as his *Weltliteratur* is the interaction of national literatures, Goethe’s *Weltmarkt* is a conglomerate of national markets. The chapter will examine whether his concept of *cultural markets* was rooted in his experience of *fairs*. Continuing a rich medieval tradition, in Goethe’s lifetime fairs were still prevalent in German lands. Unlike the permanent and ubiquitous, abstract and ideal “market”, fairs are concrete and physical, temporary and localized events, confined to specific periods of the year and taking place in specific (urban or rural) sites, with a limited circle of individuals permitted to be involved. Discussing market- and fair-like features of *Weltliteratur* the book fairs of Leipzig and Frankfurt (Goethe’s hometown) will be cases in point.

In this model, the agent of intercultural mediation is the *translator*. The chapter will explore Goethe’s figure of the translator as an independent and self-interested *merchant* in the light of Adam Smith’s vision of commercial societies where *everyone*, regardless of profession, needs to act like a merchant. How does Goethe’s portrayal of translators as merchants serving the interest of mankind while pursuing their personal (spiritual and material) “enrichment” echo the Smithian reconciliation of private and common good?

As to the political realm: Whereas free trade could operate in *commercial societies* under the rule of Smithian “natural liberty”, this clearly was *not* like the legal-political environment where Goethe spent most of his life; his political views were also far from progressive liberalism. The chapter will examine how his use of free trade terminology (and the liberal individualism that it implies) related to the political absolutism that Goethe supported, served, and benefited from in the Duchy of Weimar.

²⁶ Cf. Heike Knortz, Beate Laudenberg. *Goethe, der Merkantilismus und die Inflation: Zum ökonomischen Wissen und Handeln Goethes und seiner Figuren*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014.

As to the future of the free trade model, the chapter will tackle how Goethe's enthusiasm for a market-based *Weltliteratur* was limited by his disdain of commercialism and popular taste (and his fears of commercial literature flooding transnational markets). How does this tension adumbrate the present criticism of the dominant commercial modes of "global literature"?

2) World literature as *gift economy*

While his correspondence with Thomas Carlyle between 1824 and 1832 gave Goethe the occasion to expound many of his ideas concerning a market-like world literature, their conversation was unfolding through a series of markedly non-market exchange, that of *gifts*.

"Permit me, Sir, in soliciting your acceptance of this Translation to return you my sincere thanks for the profit which, in common with many millions, I have derived from the Original." [Carlyle to Goethe, June 24, 1824]

"For your ideas on the tendency of modern poetry to promote a freer spiritual intercourse among nations, I must also thank you: so far as I have yet seized their full import, they command my entire assent; nay, perhaps express for me much which I might otherwise have wanted words for." [August 20, 1827]

"The daintiest boxie you ever saw! so carefully packed, so neatly and tastefully contrived in everything. There was a copy of Goethe's poems in five beautiful little volumes 'for the valued marriage-pair Carlyle;' two other little books for myself; then two medals, one of Goethe himself, and another of his father and mother; and lastly the prettiest wrought-iron necklace with a little figure of the poet's face set in gold 'for my dear Spouse,' and a most dashing pocket-book for me. In the box containing the necklace, and in each pocket of the pocket-book were cards, each with a verse of poetry on it in the old master's own hand; all these I will translate to you by and by, as well as the long letter which lay at the bottom of all, one of the kindest and gravest epistles I ever read. He praises me for the Life of Schiller and the others; asks me to send him some account of 'my own previous history,' etc. etc.; in short it was all extremely graceful, affectionate and patriarchal: you may conceive how much it pleased us. I believe a Ribbon with the order of the Garter would scarcely have flattered either of us more." [C. to his mother, Aug. 11, 1827]

"My heartfelt thanks to the Poet for his graceful gift, which I prize more than a necklace of diamonds and kiss with truest regard. J. W. Carlyle." [Jane Welsh to Goethe, August 20, 1827]

Material and symbolic presents between Goethe and Carlyle included manuscripts, books, journals, artefacts, landscape sketches, self-portraits, body-parts, favors, emotional gestures, information, and advice. What began as the exchange of personal or personalized gifts (among them: their own works) increasingly gave away to the back and forth flow of studies and reviews on their respective national

literatures. Their reciprocal exchange culminated in two symbolic gift rituals: in 1828 Goethe donated five medals to honor outstanding British mediators of German literature to be distributed by Carlyle; as a counter-gift, in 1831 Carlyle orchestrated the sending of a golden belt as the collective gift of British literati to honor Goethe on his 82th birthday.

The chapter will examine how this intense reciprocity of giving and counter-giving (a gift economy of *Weltliteratur* in the making, transcending their personal nexus) harked back to the early modern tradition of the *republic of letters* and its intrinsic gift economy, in which, according to Erasmus, literati should engage in generously cooperative ventures to distribute further the divine gift of knowledge.²⁷ Based on the immense anthropological literature on the gift (from Malinowski to Mauss to Godelier to Graeber), the chapter will also explore the gift economy of *Weltliteratur* against the background of archaic gift rituals. In indigenous communities, the obligation to give, receive and reciprocate serves to maintain social bonds, negotiate rivalries, and stage the affirmation, or the loss, of prestige and status. Likewise, the gift-based intercourse between Goethe and Carlyle played out their different levels of symbolic capital. Unlike (monetary) equivalences in commerce, here it is symbolic inequalities between the partners that enable the acts of exchange and provide their dynamic. Unlike in market exchange, here the goal of giving away (decommodified) literary items is not the accumulation of profit but that of (symbolic) debt. As his mediator in the British literary scene, Carlyle was simultaneously indebted to Goethe and turned him into his debtor.

Gifts entail a politics of exchange that differs from both the (supposed) legal equality of commerce and the (alleged) democratism of the *republic of letters*. This model of *Weltliteratur* is more reminiscent of clan-based indigenous gift societies under “big men” authority. (These authorities, in turn, represent, as Carlyle put it with regard to Goethe, “mental empires” in search for symbolic cultural expansion fostered by translators as self-colonizers.)

”All this warrants me to believe that your name and doctrines will ere long be English as well as German; and certainly there are few things which I have more satisfaction in contemplating than the fact that to this result my own efforts have contributed; that I have assisted in conquering for you a new province of mental empire; and for my countrymen a new treasure of wisdom which I myself have found so precious.”

[Carlyle to Goethe, April 15, 1827]

The willing submission to authority which determined Carlyle’s position towards Goethe would become his key intellectual theme, reverberating in his major works from *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) to *Past and Present* (1843). As an alternative to *laissez faire* and

²⁷ Cf. Kathy Eden, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the Adages of Erasmus*. Yale University Press, 2001.

“cash nexus”, Carlyle would base his whole social and political theory on the subordination to true masters; his ideas were first put into practice in his world literary gift exchange with Goethe. (Grotesque elements in their communication would be mirrored in Carlyle’s 1836 novelistic parable of intercultural interactions, *Sartor Resartus*, which might be seen not only as a satire in the manner of Jean Paul, but, in a sense, the parody of his relationship with Goethe.)

The physical trajectories of circulating literary gifts maps out the *geography* of world literature at the time. In the case of Goethe and Carlyle, intriguingly, two peripheries, Weimar and Craigenputtock were thus connected. Gift circulation was managed by international postal services (epitomizing the significance that Goethe attributed to the means of communication and transfer in facilitating systemic cultural intercourse) carrying their letters and packages. What this modern agency enabled, however, was reminiscent of an indigenous *kula trade* (à la Malinowski) of world literature. To outline its wider contours, the chapter will look at other gift-based relationships Goethe had in the 1820s (e.g. with Manzoni and Byron);²⁸ the case of the Hungarian-German literary scholar Ferenc Toldy (aka Franz Schedel) – approaching Goethe with a gift copy of his 1828 *Handbuch der ungrischen Poesie* – will be considered a failed attempt to engage in the gift economy of *Weltliteratur* on behalf of an obscure national literature from a European periphery.²⁹

3) World literature as *planned economy*

The *planned economy* model for the transnational circulation of literature will be explored in Fichte’s 1800 treatise *Der geschlossene Handelsstaat* [The Closed Commercial State]. Here Fichte envisions a world system of radically insular nation-states withdrawing from all legal, political and commercial relations, and maintaining exchange only in *the arts and sciences*.

“The only thing that entirely eliminates all differences between peoples and their circumstances and that belongs merely and solely to the human being as such and not to the citizen, is science [*Wissenschaft*]. Through science, and through this alone, men will and should continue to be connected to one another once their separation into peoples is, in every other respect, complete. This alone will remain their common possession [*Gemeinbesitz*] when they have divided up everything else among themselves. No closed state will eliminate this connection. Instead it will encourage it, since the enrichment of science through the unified force of the human race will even advance the state’s own isolated earthly ends. Academies financed by the state will *introduce the treasures of foreign literature* [*die Schätze der Literatur des Auslandes*] into the

²⁸ Cf. Dieter Lamping. *Die Idee der Weltliteratur. Ein Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere*. Stuttgart, 2010.

²⁹ Dávidházi, Péter. *Egy nemzeti tudomány születése: Toldy Ferenc és a magyar irodalomtörténet*. Bp., Akadémiai-Universitas, 2004.

country, with the treasures of domestic literature offered in exchange [*ausgetauscht werden*].

Once this system has become universal and eternal peace is established among the different peoples, there is not a single state on the face of the earth that will have the slightest interest in keeping its discoveries from any other, since each will only use these for its own needs inside its boundaries, and not to oppress other states and provide itself with superiority over them. Nothing, it follows, will prevent the *scholars and artists* [*die Gelehrten und Künstler*] of all nations from entering into the *freest communication* [*die freiste Mittheilung*] with one another.”

Fichte, of course, never uses the term *Weltliteratur* and his vision of a global intellectual intercourse is not confined to imaginative writing but encompasses scholarship of all kinds and scientific discoveries as well. The chapter will argue for Fichte’s relevance on the grounds that he draws on a Herderian dynamic of the particular and the universal in the concept of *Humanität* just as Goethe will. And, like Fichte, Goethe, occasionally, also would include natural sciences in his definition of world literature (witness his 1828 address to the assembly of German physicians).

Whereas Goethe embraced free trade market exchange for the circulation of world literature, Fichte built on its outright dismissal. Unlike models 1 & 2 where this circulation is triggered by individual initiatives, here it is pulled under the supervision of the state and its centrally planned-directed economy. In the absence of international commerce and with the abandonment of transnational means of payment (replacing *Weltgeld* with *Landesgeld*), Fichte’s scheme tacitly assumes that the transnational circulation of intellectual products will be conducted by the *barter* exchange of the “treasures” (*Schätze*), i.e. not wares, of particular national cultures. (Conversely, these intellectual treasures would inevitably function as universally valid symbolic *Weltgeld*, otherwise banned from Fichte’s system.) For Fichte, the institutions that would conduct these cultural barterers are the *academies*, that is, state-subsidized associations of scholars. The chapter will examine how this institutional model refigures the republic of letters tradition: While in models 1 & 2 the agents of world literary circulation are self-supporting individuals, here they are civil servants on the payroll of the state. (Throughout the 18th century, the concept of the republic of letters as a state-affiliated, formal institution with scholars as civil servants had a rich intellectual tradition in Protestant Northern Europe.³⁰) The political realm adequate to Fichte’s planned economy is the *totalitarian enlightened state* governed by the tyranny of reason. Unlike the model of world literature as a system of self-driven markets, Fichte’s vision is more informed by the 18th-century German tradition of absolutist states imposing happiness on their citizens via myriads of *Polizeiordnungen*. On the

³⁰ cf. Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, “How Germany Left the Republic of Letters,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (65):3 (2004): 421-432.

analogy of placing total control on their habits of consumption, Fichte's world literature would give people what they *need* to read, instead of what they might *want* to read.

How could these academies, while conducting transnational exchange in the arts and sciences, reconcile the state's political interest with their professional concerns? How does the lack of market freedom relate to artistic and scholarly autonomy? The chapter will address these questions by looking at the ultimate historical realization of Fichte's utopia/dystopia, that is, the system of cultural barter among the countries in the Warsaw Pact. Ever since 1919 when Gorky, with Lenin's support, set up a publishing house for the popularization of "the literatures of the world",³¹ communist regimes have attributed great ideological importance to the concept of world literature. After 1945, similar projects were launched in most socialist states: The pedagogical program based on the *internationalism of literature* thus came to serve the *global expansion of the Bolshevik revolution*. The infrastructure of world literature under Soviet hegemony relied, to an extent, on the Fichtean blueprint: Alongside other multilateral treaties for the exchange of industrial and agricultural products, transnational literary circulation within the Bloc (through the translation of carefully selected authors) was conducted by state/party publishing offices (also operating as agencies of censorship).³²

4) World Literature and Communism

Further affinities between world literature and communism will be approached through an analysis of the *Communist Manifesto*. Here Marx and Engels posit *Weltliteratur* as the outcome of the global expansion of capital, which, while making both national industries and cultures obsolete, gives rise to a global market of literature produced for "cosmopolitan taste". (That is, whereas the other models focus on distribution and consumption, here world literature is also a mode of production.)

"Die Bourgeoisie hat durch ihre Exploitation des Weltmarkts die Produktion und Konsumtion aller Länder kosmopolitisch gestaltet. Sie hat zum großen Bedauern der Reaktionäre den nationalen Boden der Industrie unter den Füßen weggezogen. Die uralten nationalen Industrien sind vernichtet worden und werden noch täglich vernichtet. Sie werden verdrängt durch neue Industrien, deren Einführung eine Lebensfrage für alle zivilisierten Nationen wird, durch Industrien, die nicht mehr

³¹ Maria Khomitsky. "World Literature, Soviet Style: A Forgotten Episode in the History of the Idea." *Ab Imperio*, 2013/3. 119-154.

³² A selection of the documents, including lists of Hungarian authors offered for publication in the Soviet Union and Romania, generated by officials at the Directorate General for Publishing (Kiadói Főigazgatóság) in Hungary are available in Gy. Tóth – A. Veres (eds.) *Írók pórázon: A Kiadói Főigazgatóság irataiból, 1961–1970*, Budapest: MTA Irodalomtudományi Intézet, 1992.

einheimische Rohstoffe, sondern den entlegensten Zonen angehörige Rohstoffe verarbeiten und deren Fabrikate nicht nur im Lande selbst, sondern in allen Weltteilen zugleich verbraucht werden.

An die Stelle der alten, durch Landeserzeugnisse befriedigten Bedürfnisse treten neue, welche die Produkte der entferntesten Länder und Klimate zu ihrer Befriedigung erheischen. An die Stelle der alten lokalen und nationalen Selbstgenügsamkeit und Abgeschlossenheit tritt ein allseitiger Verkehr, eine allseitige Abhängigkeit der Nationen voneinander. Und wie in der materiellen, so auch in der geistigen Produktion. Die geistigen Erzeugnisse der einzelnen Nationen werden Gemeingut. Die nationale Einseitigkeit und Beschränktheit wird mehr und mehr unmöglich, und aus den vielen nationalen und lokalen Literaturen bildet sich eine Weltliteratur.“³³

My analysis will tackle a so far less explored tension in this argument:³⁴ While linking the emergence of *Weltliteratur* to global propertization, Marx and Engels describe it as the “common possession” (*Gemeingut*) of all mankind; that is, by using the same phrase with which their *German Ideology* (1846) characterizes the prevailing property relations in the coming era of communism. As such, *Weltliteratur* is placed in a complex position: It is the product of globalizing markets, yet its status as non-property defies marketization.

Grappling with this contradiction (in comparison with the way Goethe uses the phrase *Gemeingut* with regard to *Weltliteratur* and the way Fichte defines the global circulation of the arts and sciences as *Gemeinbesitz*), the following questions will be addressed: Is “common possession” merely a metaphor for the universal accessibility of supranational literary products in global markets? Or, if the global victory of capitalism entails the global rule of individual possessiveness but what it brings about is a *Gemeingut* of all nations, then: Is *Weltliteratur* posited here as the first established form of global communism? Or, is world literature, a product of globalizing markets, assigned the dialectical task of subverting capitalism from within by its very status as a non-property amidst all-pervading propertization?

³³ „A burzsoázia a világpiac kiaknázása által valamennyi ország termelését és fogyasztását kozmopolitává formálta. A reakciósook nagy bánatára kihúzta az ipar lába alól a nemzeti talajt. Az ősi nemzeti iparok elpusztultak és napról napra pusztulnak. Új iparok szorítják ki őket, amelyeknek meghonosítása minden civilizált nemzet életkérdésévé válik, olyan iparok, amelyek már nem hazai nyersanyagot dolgoznak fel, hanem a legtávolabbi égővek nyersanyagát, és amelyeknek gyártmányait nemcsak magában az országban, hanem a világ minden részén fogyasztják. A régi, belföldi termékkel kielégített szükségletek helyébe újak lépnek, amelyeknek kielégítésére a legtávolibb országok és éghajlatok termékei kelleneek. A régi helyi és nemzeti önellátás és elzárkózottság helyébe a nemzetek sokoldalú érintkezése, egymástól való sokrétű függése lép. És ez így van nemcsak az anyagi, hanem a szellemi termelésben is. Az egyes nemzetek szellemi termékei közkinccsé válnak. A nemzeti egyoldalúság és korlátoltság mindinkább lehetetlenné válik, és a sok nemzeti és helyi irodalomból *világirodalom* alakul ki.”

³⁴ Pointing at dialectical tensions invested in the *Mabifesto*'s concept of *Weltliteratur* but failing to address this contradiction: cf. Aijaz Ahmad. ‘*The Communist Manifesto* and “World Literature”,’ *Social Scientist* 28 (2000); Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution. Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*, Princeton University Press, 2006

The implicit problematization of ownership in this concept of *Weltliteratur* reverberates in several mid-19th-century economic, political and literary contexts: the controversies surrounding international copyright (cf. the internationalization of law as a colonizing act, first by bilateral treaties, then by global regulations); the globalization of book trade (with world literature truly entering the world) in the face of global literary *piracy* (i.e. world literature as “common possession” plundered and appropriated by re-privatizing unprotected property for individual gain under the banner of free trade [cf. the case of the US]); the rising concept of the *public domain* (where, unlike in the *piratic* notion of *Gemeingut*, the greatest works could be everyone’s legal, and not only the metaphorical, property). In view of these aspects, the global rule of property rights and the anarchy of unregulated markets in the mid-19th-century were equally instrumental in *Weltliteratur* becoming a globalized “common property” in a variety of meanings.

The *institution* that mediates this notion of world literature is the globalizing publishing industry; its *agents* are unauthorized publishers. Hinting at *communistic* property-relations, this model nonetheless thrives on *anarcho-capitalistic* conditions: How would these give way to a communistic book distribution system? How would world literature as a truly communistic *Gemeingut* look like in the coming world that the *Manifesto* prophesies?

And: how is this dynamic being played out in the current controversies around internet piracy and online public domains? (Cf. the commodification of the republic of letters on sites like academia.edu.) What is the role of illegal online sharing in circulating world literature? How do segments of today’s digital piracy operate as platforms for *anarcho-communism* with the declared aim to fight the global publishing industry?

5) Protectionism and the Nationalization of World Literature

The protectionist model of *Weltliteratur* emerged in the immediate afterlife of Goethe. When from the late 1830s onwards critical interest was increasingly shifting from transnational cultural communication to establishing idiosyncratic national histories of literature, the alleged cosmopolitanism of the concept was either dismissed (by radical nationalists like Arndt or Gervinus) or was subsumed under the primacy of national teleologies (as it were for *Jungesdeutschland* authors like Mundt and Gutzkow).³⁵ The chapter will seek how the refiguration of world literature by

³⁵ cf. John Pizer. *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006; Peter Goßens. *Weltliteratur. Modelle transnationaler Literaturwahrnehmung im 19. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2011.

national philologies intertwined with concurrent trends of economic nationalism, both becoming interested in limiting or regulating transnational circulation, commercially and culturally. As the economic protectionism of a Friedrich List and his followers confronted the idea of a free trade world market as described by British–French political economy, various national literary criticisms were also eager to protect their budding national cultural markets from cultural import threatening national idiosyncrasy. In this model world literature was preferred to be seen as a collective imaginary treasury or warehouse or portrait gallery [*Bildersaal der Weltliteratur*] to which nations contributed with their respective masterpieces representing their national particularities. The organizing principle of this collection was less circulation or *Verkehr* but static addition to a canon (witness the then newborn genre of *Allgemeine Literaturgeschichte*). In this canon the highest spheres of particular aesthetic traditions did not need to interact or mingle anymore: The very best of national literatures could acquire “world literary rank” without necessarily circulating outside the borders of their respective nation-states (and their symbolically and legally protected domestic cultures).

In this frame, minor literatures could also assume a place in world literature, if the label “world literary significance” was only for domestic use. All this has had a special appeal in East-Central Europe, a region busy at the time with consolidating its own national cultures amidst anxieties of irrelevance on the international level and fears of losing national distinctiveness by the flood of unrestricted cultural import. In this regard, the consecutive stages of introducing, then dismissing, then rediscovering the concept of world literature in Hungarian criticism between the 1840s and the 1870-80s, from János Erdélyi to Hugó Meltzl, will be a case in point.

„az irodalom fogalma egyedül mint *különőség* nyilatkozhatik. Ha mégis van szó világirodalomról, (...) ez az irodalomnak bölcsészeti felfogása, (...) a nemzeti és politikai viszontagságok, erkölcsi és társadalmi élet megrendülései, a konkrét állapotok szóba hozása nélkül (...). Így találta fel Goethe a világirodalom eszméjét, illesztve oly nagy írókra, kik tulajdonképp senkit se folytatnak, még inkább olyanokra, kiket senki se folytat. Innen számot tenni a világirodalomban oly kedvező ítélet, melynél kedvezőbb nem is kívánható. A míveltség Hercules-oszlopaihoz jutottunk, melyeken túl nincs tovább. Mégis ez a fogalom gyöngé oldala, mert egyhangúságra, modorra viheti a szellemet, s ellene van a népek egyéniségének, mi az irodalmak fő-fő szépsége. Az irodalom igazán véve különít és választ, s midőn határt von a szellem országában: önségre utal. Mennél inkább szövetkeznek a nemzetek anyagi érdekekben: annál inkább szorítkoznak magokra irodalomban, s ez az ő szellemiségök.”

Erdélyi János: *Egyetemes irodalomtörténet* (1868)

„Ma ugyanis minden nemzet saját ’világirodalmát’ szeretné látni”
Meltzl Hugó: *Az összehasonlító irodalom előzetes feladatai* (1877)

[Conclusions and vistas]

By exploring the diversity of the ways in which world literature theories have interacted with economic discourses and trends of economic realities, I hope to arrive at a more nuanced account of the historical emergence of the concept of *Weltliteratur* as well as a more nuanced adaptation of economic ideas to world literature studies. I also hope that, by its very historicism, my approach could contribute to the present politics of comparative literature.

The concept of world literature acquired new relevance in the post-Cold War era when international relations and transcultural interactions were entering levels of unprecedented intensity and extensity. That is, the term, as it had done in the past, gained new prominence at a time when a new global politico-economic system was consolidating. Today, this system seems anything but consolidated. Discredited alternatives to free market liberalism, triumphant for so long, are apparently back with a vengeance: Economic, political, and cultural protectionisms are on the rise, the appeal of national insularity has been renewed along with anti-capitalist and anti-globalist sentiments and with new controversies surrounding the notion of property. In this light, my project might not only provide a clearer view of latent, neglected or forgotten tendencies in the past of transnational cultural and intellectual interactions, but could offer a more flexible frame for understanding how they might operate in the future.