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THE WORK
OF WORLD
LITERATURE

CULTURAL INQUIRY

EMILY APTER

Afterword
Towards a Theory of Reparative Translation

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The 'work' of world literature, as this volume underscores in its title, and as Derek Attridge lays out in his case for translation as 'creative labour', points to theories of translational praxis that challenge the status of a nationally fortressed standard language. In my first foray into translation studies, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (2005), I was interested in non-standard tongues that lie in the hyphenated space of the inter-nation: dialect, creole, pidgin, patois, Rotten English, slanguage, argot, idiom. In their cuts across national borders, in their diasporic dissemination, these diglossia limned what Attridge (taking his cue from J. K. Chambers and Peter Trudgill's 'dialect continua') termed linguistic continua — porous language worlds marked by sites of mutual intelligibility (loan words, common grammar and syntax) as well as geolinguistic conflict zones where minoritarian languages struggle against majoritarian

ones.[1] Such zones were occasions of a 'dialectics of dialect', an expression used by Giancarlo Tursi with reference to dialect translations (proliferating during the *Risorgimento*) of Dante's already dialectal vernacular in *The Divine Comedy*.[2] Antonio Gramsci's theory (in the last section of the *Prison Notebooks*) of 'vernacular materialism' — projecting a kind of South–South continuum in language politics — was equally dialectical, catalysed by the class struggle between the regional-popular ('imminent grammar') and the national-hegemonic ('normative grammar').[3] With this language dialectics come methodologies that pivot from genetic inheritance — language families and trees, rooted etymons, cognates, syntactic deep structure — to dynamical relation, with emphasis on how knowledge alphabets — vowel, letter, script, alphanumeric cipher, algorithm, bitmap, pixel, meme, RNA molecule, transliterative icon, acoustic value, meme, atomic predicates — are themselves epigenetically morphing.

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Attridge's open society, out-in-the-wild vision of *linguisticity as such* fundamentally alters the view of translation relied on by institutions of international

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1   J. K. Chambers and Peter Trudgill, *Dialectology*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 4. As cited by Attridge in this volume, p. 30.

2   Giancarlo Tursi, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Comparative Literature at New York University, develops the notion of 'dialectal dialectics' in his dissertation (in progress), provisionally titled *Dialectal Translations of Dante in the Risorgimento.*

3   'Vernacular materialism' is a term coined by Peter Ives to describe Gramsci's approach, in *Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 4.

diplomacy, academic language and literature departments, or the publishing industry (with its infrastructures of global marketing, distribution, and niche audience-targeting). This is because translation, in its conventional ascription, recurs to distinctions between *a* language of the original or 'source', (a kind of geo-Imaginary of the *Ursprung*), and *a* language of the target (a discretely sited 'elsewhere' or bounded linguistic territory). Attridge and I are on the same page in resisting the view that a nucleated language can be said to exist or assigned a distinct ontology. We are interested in language as a *political construction*, a nationalist contrivance, whose modern development through the lexical instruments of dictionaries and homogenizing grammars is profoundly imbricated in the history of western imperialism. The push to evict and exterminate indigenous tongues through forced linguistic assimilation to 'the one', (the conqueror's sovereign coin of speech), was integral to the eugenicist underbelly of historical philology; with its grammar roots soldered to myths of *ethnos*; to the regionalist, blood-and-soil identitarianism of distinct peoples and races. What we come to realize is the extent to which 'World Literature' and 'World Language' are reciprocally constitutive. As Pascale Casanova indicates in *La Langue mondiale: Traduction et domination* (2015), literature confers prestige-value on select languages (and not just the other way round), elevating them to world-historical significance. [4] In becoming-World Language, a language is further monolingualized.

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4   Pascale Casanova, *La Langue mondiale. Traduction et domination* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

In *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013), my polemical sequel to *The Translation Zone*, I neglected to take full measure of how notions of vernacular materialism, language continua, and linguistic *mondialisation*, conceived as dialectical and dynamical processes, can be used to critique institutions of World Literature. I focused instead on 'World Lit' as an approach that promoted large-scale ventures in literary studies that had become (much like globally sited art biennials) 'too big to really succeed'.[5] For a number of critics who revived World Literature (among them David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, Djelal Kadir, Mads Rosenthal, Theo D'haen, Susan Friedman, Karen Thornberg, Alexander Beecroft), there was an underlying presumption that 'more is better': more languages, more literatures, more genres, more translations. Inclusion, pluralism, and infinite comparison, taken as given values, were married to world systems sorted by language type, and lent coherence by means of literary genealogy, literary ecology, and translingual analyses of pre- and post- modernities. While this ambition often produced compelling axes of comparatism, the scope of research, enhanced by new technological capabilities in the digital humanities, fostered, I argued, a kind of managerial approach to literary studies that reconfigured[6] Eurocentric dominance in the choice of style, period, and

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5   Andrew Stefan Weiner, 'The Art of the Possible: With and Against *documenta 14*', pre-circulated review essay.

6   Pheng Cheah adds ballast to this thesis by stressing (in relation to Heidegger's notion of world), that the 'proliferation of interpretations' brought about by enhanced circulation together with the lack of a 'normative horizon' 'quantitative increase in the meaning of mobile literary works' leaves unexplained 'how a world brings into relation and how the world's meaningful unity comes about'. See his *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 103.

genre categories or in the geopolitics of reading, literacy, and comparative epistemology.

David Damrosch, one of the strongest advocates for a revived World Lit paradigm, was susceptible to falling into this flattened groove. In *What Is World Literature*? he had maintained that a work's translation into other languages was a gauge of its global traction. Texts with a high quotient of translation became worthy of comparison according to criteria of likeness: 'rich nodes of overlap', 'family resemblances', and 'emergent patterns'. The effect of this approach was to turn unruly groupings of texts into manageable, relatable entities.[7] Damrosch's expository smoothness, pleasurable to read, tended to foreclose the possibility of discordant textual encounters. Gone was the unsettling 'suspensive' effect in the experience of reading evoked by Derrida in an interview with Attridge in 1989 titled '"This Strange Institution Called Literature"'. Derrida insisted that 'poetry and literature have as a common feature that they suspend the "thetic" naivety of the transcendent reading'.[8] In Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* it is hard to imagine how the estranging action of literarity could disrupt transcendent reading or resist the effects of 'irreducible intentionality', 'thetic and naïve belief in meaning or referent', as described by Derrida. In 'the play of foldings that is inscribed in the difference between literatures, between the different textual types or moments in non-literary texts', in the 'noematic' (ontologically inflected) structure of a text, Derrida gave us a version of literature — a Derridean world literature (without capit-

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7   David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature*? (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 281.

8   Jacques Derrida, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature', in his *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 33–75 (p. 45).

alization to demarcate it from the institutional form) —
that resisted readability and propaedeutic story-telling.[9]
When he confided to Attridge: 'I like a certain practice
of fiction, the intrusion of an effective simulacrum or of
disorder into philosophical writing, for example… [but]
telling or inventing stories is something that deep down (or
rather on the surface!) does not interest me particularly', he
demarcated a space for a literary difference disruptive to
philosophy, that World Literature, at least as it is promul-
gated by many of its adherents, would tend to ignore or to
neutralize.[10]

The attention accorded by Derrida to literature's 'sus-
pensive function', has, on the face of it, little to do with
the World Literature debates in their contemporary guises,
but it helped provide the terms for a theory of untrans-
latability that arises in the breach of literature's effect on
philosophy. Literature, or at least a certain poetic function
within some literary forms, deconstructs the transcendent,
philosophical concept and points the way to 'philosoph-
izing in languages'.[11] This last expression was coined by
Barbara Cassin to define a particular way of doing philo-
sophy that emphasized retranslation, non-translation, and
mistranslation.[12] An example of this kind of work is found

9   Ibid., p. 45.

10   Ibid., pp. 39–40.

11   Barbara Cassin, 'Philosophising in Languages', *Nottingham French Studies*, 49.2 (2012), pp. 17–28.

12   In the context of her collaborative project titled the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (2004), Bar-bara Cassin developed a nuanced account of the Untranslatable as a deterritorialized, site-sensitive, dynamically infused *term* (over and against the static *concept*). Cassin identified Untranslatables according to their nontranslation (a carry-over to other languages, as in the case of Heidegger's term *Dasein*), their mistranslation, and their perpetual retranslation. It is worth noting that Lawrence Venuti consistently misconstrues Cassin's notion of the Untranslatable in typecasting it

in François Jullien's *Entrer dans une pensée ou Des possibles de l'esprit* (2012) (translated as *The Book of Beginnings*), which draws out the meanings of the Mandarin word for the concept of the cosmos (yúzhòu) by focusing on perceptual coordinates of orientation and directionality: propinquity, propensity, declension, inclination, intending in imagined space or community.[13] In my own work, this kind of philosophizing in languages led to a renewed politics of translation in which 'political' is taken as a way of retrieving nonpolitical vocabulary that may be newly marked with political function, or as a way of judicially hearing language, such that one picks up its exclusionary and policing structures in border controls and shibboleth-testing.

World Literature as it has become institutionally embedded and vocationally vested, struck me as apolitical or political in problematic ways. In returning to a Goethean humanist project, it restituted the model of the translator as cultural universalizer, evangelizer of transcultural understanding. Though I was well aware that many partisans of World Lit endorsed it for sound political reasons — as a way of militating against the latest harmful forms of exclusionary cultural nationalism resurgent in the wake of mass migrations, heightened fears of economic destabilization, and the mainstreaming of racism by Trumpism and its ilk — they remained vulnerable to the charge of complacency toward market-driven models of literary culture

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as 'invariant' and part of an 'instrumental' (as opposed to a 'hermeneutic') apparatus of translation praxis. See Lawrence Venuti, *Theses on Translation: An Organon for the Current Moment*, FlugSchriften, 5 (Pittsburgh, PA: Flugschriften, 2019), p. 9 <https://flugschriften.com/2019/09/15/thesis-on-translation/> [accessed 10 September 2020].

13 François Jullien, *Entrer dans une pensée ou Des possibles de l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 31.

and education. They risked falling prey to a globalism that favours research protocols that zoom out (master of the universe-style): the manipulation of large data sets, statistical modelling and measuring, distant reading, algorithmic translations that benefit corporate monolingualism (a by-product of what Alexander Galloway calls 'digital chauvinism', a gendered privileging of algebraic mathematization over geometric, non-Euclidean intuition).

For Pheng Cheah, World Literature is salvageable as a *Weltliteratur* that renews the Kantian political program of perpetual peace (construable today as planetary justice). It redounds to Marx's conceptualization of praxis, or world-making, cast as a 'movement stirring in the current world and its actuality (*Wirklichkeit*)', that directly hails 'from the proletariat's effectivity as a material agent'.[14] Pressing further, I would replace the whole rubric of World Literature with a problem-based approach to 'literatures of the world' that takes up the issue of 'to relate to' within community. The emphasis is on the making and unmaking of affinate grammar: on undoing myths of *genos* and *Geschlecht*, that stipulate belonging to a species, kind, *anthropos*, people, race, nation, or *nomos* within a given language.

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Robert Young has analysed how complicated it is to belong in language or to move between languages because, as the Soviet linguist Nikolai Trubetzkoy intimated, affining in language — what he called *Sprachbund*, 'linguistic alliance' or 'language union' — is a fluid process. Trubetzkoy posed *Sprachbund* against the biologically grounded concept of a

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14   Pheng Cheah, 'What Is a World? On World Literature as World-Making Activity', *Dædalus*, 137.3 (Summer 2008), pp. 26–38 (p. 34).

Sprachfamilie, 'language family', that helped equip national languages with the kinds of gates and patrols that keep monolingualism intact. *Sprachfamilien* inscribe a raced genealogy of tongues that harks back to the ancient Greek consignment of 'barbarian' languages to the outback of the unintelligible. As Young reads him Trubetzkoy offers a countermodel of affinate affordances:

> a nonnational, nonracial union that operates across language borders [...] continually reacting and interacting, colliding and combining with other systems in its zone, compounding 'the processes of divergence (the breakdown of a language into dialects) and convergence (the rapprochement of languages in contact)' in a dialectical movement of centripetal and centrifugal forces.[15]

Following the work of Nicolay Smirnoff a rather more complicated political agenda emerges from Trubetzkoy's version of the language continua model. His promulgation of Eurasianism — a middle-continental (Russia-Eurasia) *geosophy* (positioned against Europe's imposition of 'Romano-German culture as universal, which it did through chauvinism and cosmopolitanism)' — turns out to be hardly exempt from regional chauvinism. Arguably, it merely substituted a supranational or extrastate version of language boosterism for the older nationalist one.[16] But let's for the sake of argument allow Young's tendential reading of Trubetzkoy as a voice for dialectal dialectics; for a language theory of mobile

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15   Robert J. C. Young, 'That Which Is Casually Called a Language', *PMLA*, 131.5 (2016), pp. 1207–21 (p. 1215).

16   Nicolay Smirnoff, 'Left-Wing Eurasianism and Postcolonial Theory', *e-flux journal*, 97 (2019) <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/97/252238/left-wing-eurasianism-and-postcolonial-theory/> [accessed 10 September 2020].

decipherment across plurilingual entities similar in some respects to what Yuri M. Lotman ecumenically dubbed the 'semiosphere' and 'world semiosis'.[17] Young places renewed political emphasis on the possibilities offered by the philological continuum, no longer sectorized by ontological nationalism or oblivious to the political histories of, as he puts it, 'minoritized groups who choose to work with standard languages by breaking them.'[18] Young's projection of the continuum contains the kind of emancipatory thrust registered by the testimony of a speaker of Yenish, a dialect found in the Swiss and French Alps comparable to Yiddish or Romani insofar as its predominant speakers are travellers. Interviewed by Martin Puchner, the Yenish Chief denounces the desire on the part of normative grammarians 'to make distinctions within Yenish; to cut something into different parts'. He calls out such efforts as 'the vice of the city', conjuring a carceral, stiflingly domesticated architecture of standard language as roofed-over, blocked by the ceiling from the open sky and landscape vistas illuminated by the moon.[19]

As a dialect of the open road Yenish is posed as a continuum, a pick-up language of places names, country accents, outlier inflections harvested from other mar-

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17   See Ilya Kliger's discussion of Lotman's 1984 essay 'On the Semio-sphere' (or world semiosis) in 'World Literature Beyond Hegemony in Yuri M. Lotman's Cultural Semiotics', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 7.2–3 (2010), pp. 257–74. Kliger underscores Lotman's understand-ing of linguistic relatedness '"along the spectrum which runs from complete mutual translatability to just as complete mutual untrans-latability"'. Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. by Ann Shukman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 125. As cited by Kliger, p. 264.

18   Young, 'That Which Is Casually Called a Language', p. 1219.

19   Quoted by Martin Puchner in his *The Language of Thieves: My Family's Obsession with a Secret Code the Nazis Tried to Eliminate* (New York: Norton, 2020).

ginalized bohemian communities. If we extrapolate here from language to literature, we discover a model that S. Shankar calls 'literatures of the world' that foregoes 'canons and lists' and emphasizes 'mystery' over 'mastery', or, as Michael Allan advocates, that levels the playing field between national traditions, genres, and scripts.[20] In place of triage efforts as typically found in World Lit anthologies — classifications of literary forms by national geographies, traditions, and styles, literary histories based on formal typologies hooked on to western classics — there would be attempts to read literatures through the lens of what impedes translation through incommensurability, nonequivalence, the history of violent erasure, carried-over silences, and nonwords, or the effects of nontranslation. Rebecca Walkowitz gets it right when, in her book *Born Translated*, she hails the emergent field of 'nontranslation studies', a term coined by Brian Lennon to highlight what Lennon calls 'a renewed emphasis on idiolectic incommensurability'. Walkowitz explains that Lennon 'values books that refuse to participate in standards of linguistic, typographical or semiotic accessibility'. 'The most original books,' according to Lennon, 'will be barely publishable. [...] [N]on-translation scholarship would eschew its own monolingualism by producing "plurilingual" works.'[21] Lennon and Walkowitz gesture toward a utopian horizon of *translation continua* that register the happening

20   S. Shankar, 'Literatures of the World: An Inquiry', *PMLA*, 131.5 (2016), pp. 1405–13 (p. 1412); Michael Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

21   Brian Lennon, *In Babel's Shadow: Multilingual Literatures, Monolingual States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). As cited by Rebecca Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 32.

of *parole in libertà* — speech freed into the wild of un-translatability (pure linguicity) at the expense of market-friendly readability. I see the attraction of surfing the zone of untranslatability, but would insist on underscoring the political role played by Untranslatables in the history of anticolonialism, specifically, their dissolution of regimes of what Ann Laura Stoler calls 'lettered governance', glossed by Baidik Bhattacharya as 'literary sovereignty'.[22]

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A concrete way of mobilizing nontranslation involves sub-tractive reading and resistant translation. As Benjamin Conisbee Baer has noted, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her foreword to her translation from Bengali into Eng-lish of Mahasweta Devi's story collection *Breast Stories*, alludes to the challenge of distinguishing between tribal exclusion and caste functionalism in relation to the broad category of the 'untouchables'. She takes as an example a line in the short story 'Draupadi': 'The untouchables don't get water.' While the original draws an important distinc-tion between the untouchables who tend funeral pyres and those who dig graves, Spivak does not try to express this distinction in English. Noting that the caste term *untouch-ables* is highly problematic in Indian languages (giving rise to Mahatma Gandhi's assimilation of untouchables to tribals through the name *Harijan*, 'God's people' (a mistranslation insofar as tribals should not be confused with untouchables), Spivak underscores Devi's decision to

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22   Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 1. I refer as well to Baidik Bhattacharya's current book project *The Literary Sovereign: Colonial Histories, Critical Idioms, and Cultural Differences* sample chapters of which he kindly shared with me.

follow 'the Bengali practice of calling each so-called untouchable caste by the name of its menial and unclean task within the rigid structural functionalism of institutionalized Hinduism'. She then declared bluntly: 'I have been unable to reproduce this in my translation.'[23] Spivak's affirmation of untranslatability implicitly challenges the reading posture of all-knowingness directed by western anglophone readers in relation to texts in Indian languages. By acknowledging her act of translation manqué, Spivak marks out non-comprehension and un-understandability in her rendering of Devi's tale and discloses the pressure exerted on other languages by global English to submit to laws of equivalency on its terms. The not-translated reads no longer as an admission that translation is difficult to the point of impossibility but instead as a tactic of withholding deployed against the predominance of global English, or Globish. Globish promotes frictionless communication in business, research, and technology, much like the algorithmic codes of big data. In this context, translation is both a facilitator of Globish (a tool of monolingualism) and the name of a practice that is obsolete and no longer necessary since Globish already prevails as the world's lingua franca. Nontranslation under these conditions is weaponized against the unequal playing field induced by Globish.

To introduce questions of equality and the uneven distribution of linguistic shares in world languages and literatures is to foreground the political in translation theory. Non-equivalence, the right not to translate, cultural incommensurability: these topics not only anchor the problem-

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23   Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Translator's Foreword', in Mahasweta Devi, *Breast Stories: Draupadi, Breast-Giver, Choli ke Pichhe*, trans. and intro. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1997), p. 13.

atic of untranslatability in world literature (and comparative literature more generally), they also engender the broader question of what it means 'to relate to' literarily. Useful here is François Noudelmann's notion of 'disruptive kinship', which interrogates the grounds of elective affinity, the ways in which preference, proximity, and likeness (and their negative correlatives — recoil, difference, and incommensurability) are tallied to shore up foundational aesthetics.[24] Untranslatability in this context may be construed as a process of disruptive kinship, a mode of antigenealogical thinking that prompts a rethinking (if not a return to) Derrida's theories of linguistic iterability, singularity, and relations of non-relation, as well as Jean-François Lyotard's conception of the differend. Translation and nontranslation, plotted as antinomies within complex geographies of reading, reveal emergent solidarities among readers as well as philologies that ceaselessly interrogate the legal and political statutes defining what border exists — and where — in language, or how the barrier of a frontier or checkpoint is geoterritorially inscribed as a site of nontranslation, linguistic derivation, and differentiation.

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24 François Noudelmann, *Les Airs de famille. Une philosophie des affinités* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012). Noudelmann argues that affinities have been taken philosophically as disruptors of kinship and genealogical connection; capable of interfering (by virtue of their open relationality) in the bloodlines of philological inheritance and signifying grammar. Kant's initial uneasiness toward affinities is traced by Noudelmann to his suspicion that they muddied the clarity of concepts. He then describes how Kant changed his view with the help of a dinner party experiment consisting of throwing out non-following topics of conversation and observing how his guests would reestablish colloquy and congeniality. Affinities were thereafter cast as a unifying force of heterogeneous elements, as conduits of social harmony and mutual understanding. See, chapter v, 'Philosophies des affinités', pp. 257–305.

Attridge makes a convincing case for casting translation as 'creative labour'. A galvanizing telos of that labour is the application of the language continua model to literary studies, and more specifically, to translational praxis within an institutional critique of World Literature.

Translation continua, as we have seen, can be variously construed: as dialectal dialectics (a vernacular materialism defined by spontaneous outbursts against normative grammar); as one long Heraclitan stream of expressionism; as porous language worlds that emerge from coparticipant speech communities or 'world semiosis'; and as a program to decolonize monolingualism. In this instance monolingualism is adduced as a gathering term for ethnocentric unities conducive to management by neoliberal language policy.

To decolonize translation, to invent a decolonial translation theory responsive to the imperatives of newly-energized indigenous and racial justice movements, one must grapple with the ethnonationalist assumptions of linguistic epistemology. One must recognize (as Derrida did in his classic essay 'What Is a "Relevant" Translation?'[25]) that the history of translation cannot be divorced from the history of proselytism and forced conversion. And one must reckon to the fullest with how 'language' in the singular *is army*, which is to say, constitutive of regimes of white sovereignty. On this last point Attridge's essay is crucial: it shows how Afrikaans, 'worryingly close to the language spoken by the people known as "Coloureds" — many of them the descendants of slave-women impregnated by their Dutch-speaking

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25   Jacques Derrida, 'What Is a "Relevant" Translation?', trans. by Lawrence Venuti, *Critical Inquiry*, 27.2 (2001), pp. 174–200.

masters' — had 'to be instituted and safeguarded as a pure language spoken by white people'.[26] Attridge writes:

> The white version of Afrikaans [Standaardafrikaans] was promoted and regulated by the Afrikaner Nationalist government that came to power in 1948, and Afrikaans writers did much to create the norms of the language and give it richness and prestige. The speech of the Cape Coloured community, [most often referred to as Kaaps], lacking an army and a navy, could then be safely classified as a mere 'dialect' of Afrikaans.[27]

Here, the common adage that 'language is a dialect surrounded by an army' yields a racially specific reformulation, something like '*white sovereignty* is the hegemony within Language surrounded by an army'. Here, Language capital L becomes not only the default of a nationally denominated, vehicular tongue, it is the name of racist violence in linguistic form.

Attridge's 'South African example' stands in for innumerable examples of racist quarantining, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing. It points the way to a long and ongoing history of linguistic persecution in which dialects and vernaculars, pidgins and creoles, argots and secret codes were hunted, incarcerated, and consigned to extinction. As Martin Puchner shows in his consideration of Rotwelsch, a language of migrants and travellers, mixing German, Hebrew, and Yiddish and stigmatized by the Nazis as a language of thieves, the affirmation of Aryanism — impossible to disintricate from National Socialist language policy — provided an exemplum for the subjection of nonconforming dialects to the laws of apartheid and the rule of white

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26   Derek Attridge, in this volume, p. 35.

27   Ibid., p. 36.

sovereignty.[28] For translation studies — a field that is all about administering systems of regulative judgment that separate 'good' from 'bad' language — decolonizing translation (and with it World Literature as a literary heuristic) means demonstrating that the attachment to standard language distinctions perpetuates the *staying white* of language worlds.

In my own ongoing project on justice and translation I experiment with notions of reparative translation as a poetics of repair in the spirit of Fred Moten's lines 'Wrapped in the radiated weave of sackcloth as prayercloth [...] we're all right here, outside your jurisdiction, criminal in the work and out of phase, at prayer, in preparation, of repair'.[29] Christina Sharpe's notion of 'wake work' as care work — a problem of thinking 'of and for Black non/being in the world' — is equally a guiding thread.[30] Crucial too is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's call to redress 'translation-as-violation'. Spivak uses the example of Rudyard Kipling's 'pidgin Hindusthani', a subclass of British pidgin guaranteed to sound 'barbaric to the native speaker, devoid of syntactic connections, always infelicitous, almost always incorrect' and above all an effect of 'the mark of perceiving a language as subordinate'.[31] Pressing further, we could say

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28   See Puchner's fascinating, autobiographically inflected history of Rotwelsch as idiolect of travelers and system of *Zinken* (lookout pictographs used to alert hoboes to danger, food, or shelter), in his *The Language of Thieves*. For theoretically and aesthetically attuned analyses of outlaw tongues, see Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers* (New York: Zone Books, 2013) and Daniel Tiffany, *Infidel Poetics: Riddles, Nightlife, Substance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009).

29   Fred Moten, 'Nobody, Everybody', in *Black and Blur* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), pp. 168–69 (p. 169).

30   Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 17 and 5 respectively.

31   Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 162.

that reparative translation can be seen as wound-dressing (*soins, pansements*) for racism as a pre-existing condition detrimental to mental and physical health. A 'creative labour' of reparative translation seeks to redress modes of social harming in speech that include rape-speech, hate-speech, violations of sacred tongues, abrogated rights to language, and unfree talk. Miles Ogborn, examining the long history of slavery, qualifies unfreedoms of speech as 'bondage made through speech', communicative practices that define 'social relations […] underpinned by violence', talk whose disciplinary boundary lines produce 'another geography of slavery'.[32] In a complementary vein Tiphaine Samoyault's *Traduction et violence* explores translation's curtailment of free speech, noting the unfree condition of what Salman Rushdie called 'translated men' in sites of colonial domination.[33] Samoyault poses the challenge of an ethics of translation that plots the lines of translation polit-

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[32]   Miles Ogborn, *The Freedom of Speech: Talk and Slavery in the Anglo-Caribbean World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), pp. 4 and 5. Reviewing Ogborn's book Fara Dabhoiwala writes: 'Freedom of speech and the power to silence may have been preeminent markers of white liberty, Ogborn argues, but at the same time, slavery depended on dialogue: slaves could never be completely muted. Even in conditions of extreme violence and unfreedom, their words remained ubiquitous, ephemeral, irrepressible, and potentially transgressive. In that sense, even the speech of the unfree was always free. Talk was the most common way for enslaved men and women to subvert the rules of their bondage, to gain more agency than they were supposed to have. Moreover, Africans, too, came from societies in which oaths, orations, and invocations carried great potency, both between people and as a connection to the all-powerful spirit world.' 'Speech and Slavery in the West Indies', *The New York Review of Books*, 67.13 (20 August 2020), p. 23.

[33]   'Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained' (Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands', *London Review of Books*, 4.18 (7 October 1982) <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v04/n18/salman-rushdie/imaginary-homelands> [accessed 10 September 2020]).

ics along overlapping and sometimes historically divergent axes of post-imperialism and post-slavery.

These are axes that Attridge also traces in orienting the labour of translation towards the goals of anti-apartheid and racial justice movements. Theoretical coordinates would include (among others) P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods's 'conceptual aphasia in black', Barnor Hesse's analysis of the 'so-called N-word' as preeminent 'state repetitive violence' against policed black bodies, or Ronald Judy's 'poïesis in black', with 'black' understood in all three uses to refer to processes of languaging outside a discrete or given tongue.[34] 'Black' in these instances is not a synonym for the kind of linguistic essentialism found in national language names, it is rather, a processual dialectics of language whose workings allow us to perceive the warp of white sovereignty on historicized language worlds. 'Black' correlates further to the routing of forms of conceptual apartheid embedded in sectorized institutional infrastructures, such as the ostensibly benign 'languages and literatures' rubric employed by departments and conference organizers (which contributes in no small way to the whitening of literary studies). It's time to recognize the racial violence built into the division of the faculties, and reproduced through pedagogies of World Literature and World Language that take linguistic singularization as pregiven.

This involves an approach to remediation and repair in language that exceeds familiar moves to denationalize the

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34   *Conceptual Aphasia in Black: Displacing Racial Formation*, ed. by P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods (Lenham: Lexington Books, 2016); Barnor Hesse, 'White Sovereignty (…), Black Life Politics: The N****r They Couldn't Kill', *The South Atlantic* Quarterly, 116.3 (2017), pp. 581–604 (p. 582); Ronald A. Judy, *Sentient Flesh: Thinking in Disorder, Poiesis in Black* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

humanities — evident in rubrics like 'Languages', 'Literature' (along the lines of the Lit major at Yale developed in the 1970s by literary comparatists grounded in structuralist linguistics, deconstructive poetics, and narratology) or 'Theory'. These rubrics can facilitate plurilingual heuristics but they do little to frame the political work of repair that translation affords, particularly when it focuses on the history of unfreedoms of speech; linguistic antagonisms in regions of geopolitical conflict and dissensus; protection against verbal violence and microaggression; incommensurate vocabularies of pardonnability and amends-making; and the painstaking labour of restorative justice applied to language politics. Reparative translation, and the literary praxes it indicates, goes beyond the calculative legal logic of indemnity, recompense, damages, and moral hazard used to make whole the subject of a wrong. It looks towards recovery: towards recovering the dynamics of languaging that happen in the interstices of Languages; towards the restitution of extinguished indigenous languages, idiolects, and creoles; and towards recuperation from the myriad forms of translational violence committed in the name of languages surrounded by an army.

Emily Apter, 'Afterword: Towards a Theory of Reparative Translation', in *The Work of World Literature*, ed. by Francesco Giusti and Benjamin Lewis Robinson, Cultural Inquiry, 19 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2021), pp. 209–28 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-19_09>

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