Rethinking World Literature:

Reconfiguring a "World Literary Space" through Poststructuralist Thought

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Rethinking World Literature: Reconfiguring a "World Literary Space" through Poststructuralist Thought

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Over the past few decades, there has been a vigorous debate over the theorisation of world literature. Sarah Lawall has noted that in the American tradition world literature is often regarded as nothing more than "a list of works from around the globe that represent, in some indefinable manner, the essential experience of human beings in different cultures."[1] In distinction, David Damrosch regards world literature as a process. He says, world literature is "a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time."[2] Yet, regardless of whether one thinks of world literature as an object or a process, such attempts to define it rely on the continued operation of a binary schema – national versus international; original versus translation; as well as the past versus the present. Given this, it can be argued that contemporary attempts to define world literature continue to neglect the influence of poststructuralist thought. Indeed, this thesis argues that poststructuralism offers us an alternative platform from which one can re-orientate a theorisation of world literature. If poststructuralism does what Jacques Derrida claims for it in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1967) – that is, poststructuralism puts into question the legitimacy of models

[1] Sarah Lawall, *Reading World Literature* (Austin: University of Texas, 1994), 1.
[2] David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 281.

premised on "a centre," "a subject," or "an origin"[3] – then we must rethink such legitimised structures implicit in the contemporary theorisation of world literature. In fact, it means that we must do away with all kinds of hierarchical binary relationships. However, the consequences of doing so are dramatic; it is following such effects that I am interested in here. Given that world literature conceptualised through the lens of poststructuralism inaugurates the collapse of systems and structures, I argue here that world literature is, as Damrosch suggests, a process. However, it is a process that is very different to the one proposed by Damrosch. Where he sees world literature as "an elliptical refraction of national literatures,"[4] the poststructuralist account sees the operation of a hidden system – a system dependent on a dialectic of totalised states. As such, while one might think that "writing […] gains in translation,"[5] it is clear that such writing cannot for there can be no moment in which a text travels *from* one tradition *to* another. The essential claim, then, is that poststructuralist thought demands the encounter of simply one text with one reader. Any thought of "detached engagement"[6] with literature is therefore one that cannot be sustained. Given this, I take world literature to be a radically subjective engagement with the literary text, one that is constituted from but not reducible to the distinct dialectical conversation between the text and a reader. It stands in distinction to a national literature that seeks to add coherency to a process that must always refuse it.

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[3] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Modern Literary Theory*, 1967, trans. Alan Bass, eds. Patricia Waugh and Philip Rice (London; New York: Edward Arnold, 1992), 158.
[4] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.
[5] Ibid., 281.
[6] Ibid., 281.

論文摘要

題目：再思考世界文學：通過後結構主義重新建構「世界文學空間」

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世界文學理論在過去數十年出現激烈辯論。Sarah Lawall 指世界文學在美國被視為「一系列世界各地的作品，透過難以明言的方式表現人類在不同文化中的本質體驗」[1]，而 David Damrosch 則說它是「超脫時地般投入世界的閱讀模式」[2]。 然而，無論世界文學是一物體或過程，Damrosch 和 Lawall 也依賴二元模式 — 國家與國際、過去與現在；其對當代世界文學的定義忽視了後結構主義的影響。本文認為，後結構主義能重新定位世界文學。Jacques Derrida 說後結構主義質疑「中心」、「主題」或「起源」的概念[3]，那我們便必須重新思考並廢除隱含在當代世界文學理論的二元模式。通過後結構主義，世界文學的系統會崩潰成一過程，但與 Damrosch 提出的不同。他認為「世界文學是國家文學的折射」[4]，但後結構主義認為這隱藏一制度。「寫作在翻譯的過程會變得豐富」[5]也是不可能，因為文本不能從一傳統轉化到另一個。任何「超脫投入」[6]亦不可能，相反，世界文學是一完全主觀的活動，只要求一文本與一讀者。因此，世界文學是文本和讀者之間不能還原的辯證對話。它與國家文學不同，旨在增加一致性的過程中必須拒絕區別。

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[1] Sarah Lawall，《閱讀世界文學》(奧斯汀：美國德州大學出版，1994)，1。
[2] David Damrosch，《世界文學是什麼？》(普林斯頓：普林斯頓大學出版，2003)，281。
[3] Jacques Derrida，〈人文科學論述的結構、符號和搖曳〉，《現代文學理論》，1967，Alan Bass 翻譯，Patricia Waugh 和 Philip Rice 編輯 (倫敦；紐約：愛德華阿諾德出版，1992)，1992。
[4] Damrosch，《世界文學是什麼？》，281。
[5] 同上，281。
[6] 同上，281。.

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Introduction – Situating World Literature

The vigorous debate over the theorisation of world literature has never ceased since Wolfgang Goethe gave birth to the concept. In *Goethe and World Literature* (1945), Fritz Strich states that the concept was first introduced to the world early in 1827 when Goethe coined the term – *Weltliteratur*. At that period, Goethe was experiencing a time of change in terms of the mode of exchange of critical opinions in academia. Authors, critics and other intellectuals were beginning to exchange ideas with each other through periodicals instead of letters. Such an increase in the efficiency of communication probably gives Goethe an increasing sense of connection with other writers in the world and thereby triggers him to introduce the concept of word literature.[1] Theo D'haen, on the other hand, argues in *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (2012), that the fundamental reason why Goethe came up with such a concept is because he concentrated on the "complementarity of the local and the universal."[2] D'haen continues, Goethe

> bypasses the level of the nation because "Germany" in his day is not a unified country, and therefore in the eyes of Goethe German literature is at a disadvantage in comparison to English and French literature, both of which can count on the backing of a powerful national identity which they can and do give expression to.[3]

Whatever reasons are assigned to the birth of *Weltliteratur*, the most important

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[1] See Fritz Strich, *Goethe and World Literature*, trans. C.A.M. Sym (London: Routledge, 1949), 3-16.
[2] Theo D'haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 11.
[3] Ibid., 11.

feature of it was that it heralded a tremendous change to the field of literature. When Goethe pronounces that "national literature doesn't mean much: the age of world literature is beginning, and everybody should contribute to hasten its advent,"[4] the significance of "national" literature begins to be slowly replaced by that of world literature. The study of literature was then given a new and ground-breaking perspective.

For Goethe, the "essence" of world literature lies in the idea that it serves the function of promoting the circulation of various ideas, themes, and forms in different literatures. People of different nations (basically European countries) are then drawn closer together and hence, a sense of understanding as well as tolerance among each other is promoted. He writes, "the living, striving men should learn to, know each other, and through their own inclination and similarity of tastes, find the motive for corporate action."[5] Put simply, Goethe here stresses that the cultural intellectual "elite" should not be ignorant of each other. Rather, it is necessary for them to identify literature as a realm to interact with each other. In this way, he suggests that literature is the very platform which incorporates cooperation and circulation between different national literatures. At the moment when circulations begin to take place between various literatures, world literature comes into its being. The concept of world literature, therefore, is not static but a dynamic one that integrates various exchanges of ideas between writers of different nations.

As such, Goethe conceptualises world literature as the primary opposite of national literature. Yet, he has never consolidated the concept by offering it either a clear

[4] Wolfgang Goethe, quoted in Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), 148.
[5] Quoted in Fritz Strich, *Goethe and World Literature*, 350.

definition or a way to study or examine it.[6] Nevertheless, it is often with Goethe that critics begin to conceptualise world literature. On one hand, critics credit Goethe for pioneering the concept of world literature. For example, Sarah Lawall, a major contemporary theorist of world literature, writes in *Reading World Literature* (1994),

> Goethe's world literature proposed the idea of a literature to come, a literature that was always being written and was simultaneously a manner of reading for self and other. It was a leap into the future rather than a recuperation of the past, and it was to be created through the play of refracted identities that were inescapably colored by their cultural matrix which then became part of the exchange. Creating such an exchange on the level of letter would help bring about a new stage of global awareness and a broader utopia of society and literature that was still only dimly imagined.[7]

For Lawall, Goethe's idea of world literature is ahead of his time. The reason is it envisions a utopia that makes international communication and circulation between different national literatures possible with an increasing sense of awareness of each other.

On the other hand, David Damrosch, another prominent contemporary theorist of the field of world literature, pinpoints the "mirroring" effect (*Spiegelung*)[8] of German literature mentioned by Goethe. In the introduction to *What is World*

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[6] In *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*, Theo D'haen argues that "Goethe never clearly defined what he means by the term, and consequently it assumed various guises as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wore on." Theo D'haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.

[7] Sarah Lawall, *Reading World Literature* (Austin: University of Texas, 1994), 13.

[8] David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 7.

Literature?, Damrosch quotes Goethe:

> there is being formed a universal world literature, in which an honourable role is reserved for us Germans. All the nations review our work; they praise, censure, accept, and reject, imitate and misrepresent us, open or close their hearts to us. All this we must accept with equanimity, since this attitude, taken as a whole, is of great value to us.[9]

Nonetheless, what Damrosch sees in Goethe is not a new platform that facilitates communications between national literatures. Instead, he criticises it for bearing a sense of "national pride."[10] Goethe's chief purpose, Damrosch argues, "is to stimulate his countrymen to follow the international circulation of works, and he encourages his readers by appealing to their – and his own – national pride."[11] For Damrosch, Goethe's definition of world literature promotes a strong sense of pre-eminence of German literature. In short, world literature serves as a channel of exchange between writers of different nationalities which somehow rejuvenates German literature.

With the advent of globalisation, the heated debate on the theorisation of world literature has become even more vigorous. As a matter of fact, some twenty years after Goethe's articulation of the concept of world literature, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels discussed the material production of literary texts in the era of globalisation in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). "The intellectual creations of individual nations," Marx and Engels argue, "become common property. National one-sidedness and

[9] Ibid., 7-8.
[10] Ibid., 7.
[11] Ibid., 7.

narrow-mindedness becomes more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature."[12] What Marx and Engels remind us here is that it is only when national boundaries of literary works are demolished that world literature can come into being. Indeed, Mads Thomsen also returns to Goethe's visionary statement in *Mapping World Literature* (2008):

> Globalisation will work as an irresistible force in the long run, and that hastening of the new age's arrival need not to be of great concern […] ultimately there is a belief expressed in Goethe's words, that there is literature that has a universal appeal, and which will benefit all cultures.[13]

Thomsen argues that the universality Goethe sees in literature is actually resulted from globalisation in the contemporary world. However, in "Effects of Globalisation on Literary Study" (2002),[14] Joseph Miller offers a more thorough discussion of the interrelationship between globalisation and world literature. He discusses the key features of globalisation and its effects being brought to literature. A major one that would shed light on the study of world literature is that globalisation plays a vital role in giving rise to "[t]he proliferation of transnational corporations"[15] and thereby leads to "a decline in the integrity and power of the nation state."[16] In this fashion, Miller suggests that "[t]he older separate study of national literatures to be displaced by new forms of multicultural comparative literature or by the study, for example, of

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[12] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. 1848, trans. Samuel Moore and Frederick Engels (New York: Cosimo, 2009), 421.

[13] Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature* (London; New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 12.

[14] The article was delivered as the Wei Lun Lecture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in April 1997. See Joseph Hillis Miller, "Effects of Globalisation on Literary Study," in *Sights of Contestation,* eds. Kwok-kan Tam, Wimal Dissanayake, and Terry Siu-han Yip (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002), 311-333.

[15] Ibid., 313.

[16] Ibid., 315.

worldwide literature in English."[17] Yet, however close the relationship between world literature and globalisation seems to be, the debate over the notion of world literature is far more complicated than simply considering the role played by globalisation.

The Contemporary Debate

In the United States, a considerable number of critics and universities conduct courses and research in the study of world literature probably because of its citizens' increasing diversity in terms of ethnicities and nationalities. However, the American tradition of theorising world literature is very often criticised for oversimplifying the concept of world literature as nothing more than a body of texts – a collection of literary works of different nations. For example, Sarah Lawall condemns it for reducing the concept of world literature into "a list of works from around the globe that represent, in some indefinable manner, the essential experience of human beings in different cultures."[18] Claudio Guillén also writes that seeing world literature as "the sum total of all national literatures" is "a wild idea, unattainable in practice, worthy not of an actual reader but of a deluded keeper of archives who is also a multimillionaire."[19] It is right for Lawall and Guillén to disapprove of such a definition of world literature. In fact, if we accept it, the concept of world literature would become nothing more than a collection of literary works of different nations. To put it simply, such a definition would collapse the field of study of world literature into piles of anthologies of different national literatures which, in concert, can only ever remain beyond the comprehension of any reader or critic. Nevertheless, the

[17] Ibid., 324.
[18] Lawall, *Reading World Literature*, 1.
[19] Claudio Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 38.

ways Lawall alongside Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti, and David Damrosch conceptualise world literature seem to be more widely accepted.

In *Reading World Literature* (1994), Sarah Lawall collects a number of significant essays that discuss various controversial issues in the study of world literature – including the canonisation of literary works in the realm of world literature as well as their use of languages. Although she does not include her own essay in the collection, she thoroughly discusses her definition of world literature in the introduction to the book. Apart from condemning the American tradition for defining world literature as discussed above, she also rejects the idea of canonising literary texts found in the world. She argues that world literature is an incomplete process. Such a process, she argues, allows readers to have "a global discovery" of worldviews "by comparing other systems of reality, […] imagin[ing] and bring[ing] about change by examining reciprocal reflections and their intervening space of exchange."[20] Lawall justifies her rejection of the canonisation of world literature based on the simple fact that such an act will undoubtedly give rise to a "centralised base of understanding."[21] In other words, Lawall stresses that the canonisation of world literature confines the realm of the study of world literature in a designated area while marginalising other literary texts. As such, she defines world literature as,

> a process of reading for the world: of recognising the worlds involved in the text, or in the reading of texts. Not that such worlds can be grasped as homogeneous or unchanging, any more than the literary texts; they merge, overlap, metamorphose, and offer multiple layers of inclusion and absence. […]

[20] Lawall, *Reading World Literature*, 48.
[21] Ibid., 2.

> For readers outside a particular tradition, samples from the tradition are taken as the expression of the authentic cultural "Other."[22]

For Lawall, the very process of reading world literature is one that reflects the world. She underlines that the process is not static but one that is always changing and demands a "dynamic approach" by stressing that an important criteria in the study of world literature is to provoke "examination."[23] This, thereby, "encourag[es] more comprehensive inquiry" through "combining texts from various cultures [which] usually elicit a sense of difference faster than one book."[24] In this way, she argues that readers can "construct new worldviews by comparing systems of reality"[25] while they read and compare literatures from different nations.

In *The World Republic of Letters* (1999), Pascale Casanova proposes an idea that is similar to Lawall's concept of "global discovery" – Casanova frames it as the "world literary space."[26] She suggests,

> [e]ach work that is declared to be literary is a minute part of the immense "combination" constituted by the literary world as a whole […] It is the global configuration, or composition, of the carpet – that is, the domain of letters, the totality of what I call world literary space – that alone is capable of giving meaning and coherence to the very form of individual texts.[27]

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[22] Ibid., 3.
[23] Ibid., 46.
[24] Ibid., 46.
[25] Ibid., 48.
[26] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, London: Harvard UP, 1999), 3.
[27] Ibid., 3.

Here, Casanova argues that all literary texts are in fact integral parts of a world of texts. This "world literary space," she highlights, is not "a body of literature expanded to a world scale," but "a set of interconnected positions which must be thought and described in relational terms."[28] She thereby calls for a need to "think outside conventional frameworks and to conceive of literary space as a worldwide reality."[29] She underlines that this actually implies "the rejection of established national categories and divisions" and "demands a trans- or inter-national mode of thought."[30] Given this, the "world literary space" serves as an "international literary space" where the political and linguistic boundaries between different national literatures efface.[31] However, she also suggests the writers have to detach themselves from these political and linguistic forces to forge a realm of literary freedom. As such, this "world literary space" – the "autonomous international space of literature"[32] – cannot be forged everywhere. Rather, it only exists in countries that do not reduce literature to political interest to suit any kind of national purposes. In this sense, she problematically directs the major focus of examination of world literature to the United States and other developed European countries.

In *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005), Franco Moretti deploys a statistical approach to conceptualise world literature. By studying different literary texts across time, nations, and cultures, he examines how similarities and differences of various national literatures develop, presenting the trends in the forms of graphs and maps. In the introduction to his book, he argues that "distant reading" includes "fewer elements" of the texts and hence allows readers to have "a sharper sense of [the]

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[28] Casanova, "Literature as a World," *New Left Review*. 31 (2005): 72.
[29] Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, 5.
[30] Casanova, "Literature as a World," 87.
[31] Casanova,*The World Republic of Letters*, 3.
[32] Ibid., 86.

overall interconnection" of the texts.[33] However, instead of elucidating the significance of his approach further, Moretti deploys the majority of the book to illustrate the figures and graphs of the relations he found between different literary traditions. Nevertheless, his essay published earlier, "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000), serves as a "prologue" of his ideas. He argues that world literature cannot be "bigger" than literature because it implies that the concept of world literature is nothing more than a collection of different national literatures.[34] Rather, he emphasises that world literature is not an "object," but "a *problem* that asks for a new critical method."[35] He therefore suggests that the more dominant close reading approach is not suitable because "it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon."[36] By contrast, "distant reading" allows him to "focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes — or genres and systems."[37] Throughout the essay, he constantly asserts that "less is more" because "if we want to understand the system of world literature as a whole, we must accept losing something."[38] As such, he stresses that it is only by forsaking the traditional method of close reading that we can "see the beauty of distant reading plus world literature" which "go against the grain of national historiography."[39] In short, Moretti's approach is distinctive in the sense that it invites readers to abandon "close reading" but deploy "distant reading" to construct a panoramic view of literatures in the world across time and space.

David Damrosch is arguably one the most prominent contemporary theorists of

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[33] Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (London; New York: Verso, 2005), ix.
[34] Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review.* 1 (2000): 54.
[35] Ibid., 54.
[36] Ibid., 55.
[37] Ibid., 57.
[38] Ibid., 57.
[39] Ibid., 61.

world literature today. Apart from running the Institute of World Literature at Harvard University, he has also published a number of significant works on world literature. He is the founding general editor of the six-volume *Longman Anthology of World Literature* (2004) as well as the co-editor of *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (2011) with Theo D'haen and Djelal Kadir. However, his most influential theories are introduced in his first publication on world literature – *What is World Literature?* (2003). Damrosch defines world literature as "a process, a mode of reading" that has a perpetual sense of incompleteness.[40] Similar to Lawall, Damrosch rejects the canonisation of world literature. He argues that world literature is a mode of reading that includes traditional close reading as well as comparative reading of different literatures despite their temporal and geographical origins. Damrosch offers a tripartite definition of world literature in terms of the world, the text, and the reader. He argues,

i. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures;
ii. World literature is writing that gains in translation;
iii. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time.[41]

For him, when the process of reading takes place and fulfils all of these three criteria, we will arrive at a truly global vision of world literature. Such a global vision, he argues, is primarily achieved by inducing conversations among authors and inside the minds of their readers. He writes,

[40] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.
[41] Ibid., 281.

> [t]he great conversations of world literature takes place on two very different levels: among authors who know and react to one another's work, and in mind of the reader, where works meet and interact in ways that may have little to do with cultural and historical proximity.[42]

As such, the concept of world literature is defined as a process that not only fulfils the three criteria Damrosch outlines, but it incorporates a strong sense of fluidity – it is always happening and to-be-completed.

Poststructuralist Thought and World Literature

This, then, is the general landscape of the controversies of the theorisation of world literature as it stands today. As Christopher Prendergast insightfully points out, world literature,

> belongs to no-one in particular by virtue of the fact that its determinate shape and content are as yet far from clear. By the same token, what we make of it today is necessarily open to indefinitely extended reflection and debate.[43]

In this way, the conceptualisation of world literature almost necessarily resists closure. Although Damrosch's theorisation is the most wide-respected understandings of world literature in use today for the three-sided definition of world literature he comes up with incorporates some of the important views of Lawall, Casanova, and Moretti. My thesis is thereby writing against this definition. As a matter of fact, his conceptualisation of world literature, as a continuous process,

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[42] Ibid., 298.

[43] Christopher Prendergast, introduction to *Debating World Literature* (London; New York: Verso, 2004), viii.

hints at a perpetual sense of volatility. Such a sense of variability actually echoes many poststructuralist ideas. However, Damrosch's orientation of world literature is still very much confined by a structuralist binary mode of thinking. As such, what I am interested in is re-examining the concept of world literature through the lens of poststructuralist thoughts. Indeed, if we take a close look at the general approaches taken by Lawall, Casanova, Moretti, and Damrosch again, it is obvious that all of them rely on the continued operation of a binary schema – national versus international; original versus translation; as well as the past versus the present.

Lawall's orientation of world literature is primarily based on the binary opposition of national versus international. Although she attempts to consider the significance of the role played by the reader while theorising the concept – arguing that it is the reader who compares different national literatures and eventually gives rise to a global discovery – her conceptualisation is actually fundamentally founded on the basis of "nation". She stresses that one of the many key features of the study of world literature is "encouraging [a] more comprehensive inquiry" of literary texts by inviting readers to "combin[e] texts from various cultures"[44] and, hence "construct new worldviews by comparing systems of reality."[45] In this sense, the distinctive boundaries between different national literatures still exist. What the reader does, therefore, is merely combine and situate these national literatures into the realm of "inter-national" literature. Given this, Lawall's orientation of world literature may only give rise to a process which is primarily about conducting various comparisons of different national literatures. The result is, hence, very similar to that of comparative literature.

[44] Lawall, *Reading World Literature*, 46.
[45] Ibid., 48.

By the same token, Casanova's theorisation of world literature also relies on the binary opposite of national versus international. The majority of her arguments lie in investigating why and how the ideal "world literary space" can be forged by demolishing the national and political boundaries of different literatures and hence arrive at an intercultural conversation. Yet, she also puts a lot of emphasises on arguing that French literature is a significant capital of the process of world literature. In *The World Republic of Letters* (1999), Casanova stresses the idea that Paris is a major hub for immigrants and travellers, making it a major source of creative and innovative ideas of literature. She therefore argues that French literature should be taken into significant account in the discussion of world literature. Simply put, Casanova asserts that the study of world literature should be centred on how it relates to French literature. In fact, this is the very reason why many critics criticise her for her "Paris-centeredness."[46] So, it can be argued that her conceptualisation of world literature indeed relies heavily on national literature, or to be more precise, French Literature. She therefore shares a similar view in orientating world literature with Goethe – both of them regard the realm of world literature as a sort of reflection of the literature from their home country.

The macroscopic "distant reading" methodology deployed by Moretti basically aims at constructing a panoramic landscape of world literature. Yet, similar to Lawall and Casanova, his model is also founded on the basis of the binary of the past versus the present as well as national versus international. Moretti's approach speculates on the similarities and difference of various national literatures during a particular period of time so as to highlight and examine significant trends and transformations shared by

[46] Damrosch, "Frames for World Literature," 507.

them. In this way, his examination of the relationship between literary texts is very much restricted by the temporal axis. The interconnection of literary works across different periods of time may thereby risk being overlooked. More importantly, the legacy of the constraints of national boundaries also remains strong in his model of world literature. Moretti constantly stresses the idea that "there will always be a point where the study of world literature must yield to the specialist of the national literature."[47] In this sense, it seems that his orientation of world literature inevitably includes the consideration of national literature. As such, similar to the theorization of Lawall and Casanova, Moretti's model of world literature also does little more than re-represent national literature as an "inter-national" literature instead of delivering a portrayal of "world literature."

Although Damrosch's model is the most widely celebrated one in academia, his threefold definition can also be agued to be engaged with the subject/object hierarchy. By claiming that "[w]orld literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures,"[48] he implicitly hints that the binary relationship of national versus international still exists and thereby underlines the operation of a system dependent on the dialectic of totalised states. The second definition, "[w]orld literature is writing that gains in translation,"[49] is also based on the opposition of "original" versus "translation." In the last point of his definition, Damrosch argues that "[w]orld literature is a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time."[50] Such a claim clearly idealises the role of the reader and speaks directly against what Derek Attridge argues regarding the role of the reader. In

[47] Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," 66.
[48] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.
[49] Ibid., 281.
[50] Ibid., 281.

the introduction to *Acts of Literature* (1992), Attridge asserts that the literary text is not a "sealed space."[51] Instead, it is "a kind of emptying-out of meaning that remains potently meaningful."[52] In other words, the reader is always situated in the discourse of reading and is called upon to play the significant role of "actualising" the text.

Given this, it can be argued that contemporary attempts to define world literature continue to neglect the influence of poststructuralist thought since they all primarily operate through a binary schema. In *On Deconstruction* (2007), Jonathan Culler notes that poststructuralism "suggests that we need to look beyond our assumptions about literature and criticism to understand the forces at work."[53] As such, this thesis proposes that poststructuralist thought offer us an alternative platform from which one can re-orientate a theorisation of world literature. If poststructuralism does what Jacques Derrida claims for it in the renowned essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1966) – that is, poststructuralism puts into question the legitimacy of models premised on "a centre," "a subject," or "an origin"[54] – then we must rethink such legitimised structures implicit in the contemporary theorisations of world literature. In fact, it means that we must do away with all kinds of hierarchical binary relationships. Yet, the consequences of doing so are dramatic; it is following such effects that I am interested in here. It is only with the consideration of poststructuralist thought that we can interrogate the contemporary theorisations of world literature.

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[51] Derek Attridge, "Introduction: Derrida and the Questioning of Literature," in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Reading* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 16.
[52] Ibid., 16.
[53] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 19-20.
[54] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," 1966, in *Modern Literary Theory*, eds. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), 158.

Although poststructuralism is a rather broad subject matter, this thesis is only interested in ideas that intersect with world literature to demonstrate that poststructuralist thought has the potential to refashion the theorisation of world literature. So, in Chapter 1, I will examine how world literature departs from and transgresses the constraints of national literature in light of Derrida's ideas on deconstruction and then go on to argue that it allows us to interrogate and finally collapse the legitimisation of subject/object hierarchy. In Chapter 2, I will examine how Julia Kristeva's ideas on "intertextuality" change the relationship of literary texts by disintegrating the temporal and geographical borders among them. In Chapter 3, I will move on to examine how the collapse of binary oppositions alters the relationship between authors, readers, and texts in the realm of world literature. I will first focus on the dynamic roles played by readers and authors in light of the work of Roland Barthes, and second examine the interactions of the reader and the text, and the production of meaning through the lens of Wolfgang Iser's "Gap Theory." In the final chapter, I will focus on ideas offered by Kathleen Davis, Lawrence Venuti, and Jacques Derrida to argue that the very process of translating is far more complex than a question of "original" versus "translated texts" would suggest. Hence, I argue that it is necessary to destabilise the hierarchy of the "original" text over its translation by emphasising that the translated text is a newly created work in its own right – a discrete entity that is independent of what many consider to be its "predecessor."

So, given that world literature conceptualised through the lens of poststructuralism inaugurates the collapse of systems and structures, I argue here that world literature is, as Damrosch suggests, a process. However, it is a process that is very different to

the one proposed by Damrosch. Where he sees world literature as "an elliptical refraction of national literatures,"[55] the poststructuralist account sees the operation of a hidden system – a system dependent on a dialectic of totalised states. As such, while one might think that world literature is a "writing [that] gains in translation,"[56] it is clear that such writing cannot. For there can be no moment in which a text travels *from* one tradition *to* another. The essential claim, then, is that poststructuralist thought demands the encounter of simply one text with one reader. Any thought of "detached engagement" with literature[57] is therefore one that cannot be sustained. As such, I take world literature to be a radically subjective engagement with the literary text, one that is constituted from but not reducible to the distinct dialectical conversation between the text and a reader. It stands in distinction to a national literature that seeks to add coherency to a process that must always refuse it.

[55] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.
[56] Ibid., 281.
[57] Ibid., 281.

Chapter 1 – Deconstruction and World Literature

The first definition of world literature David Damrosch suggests in *What is World Literature?* (2003) is that world literature is "an elliptical refraction of national literatures."[1] Yet, he does not offer a clear differentiation between world literature and national literatures in his conceptualisation. Nonetheless, when we take a look at the point where the concept originated, Goethe hints at a rather clear distinction between the two concepts. As mentioned in the introduction, Goethe introduces *Weltliteratur* when he finds that "national literature doesn't mean much" because the significance of "national" literature is slowly being replaced by that of world literature. Indeed, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels also underlined the difference between world literature and national literature in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). They argue, as "national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible," a world literature would arise "from the numerous national and local literatures."[2] Put simply, it is only when national boundaries of literary works are demolished that world literature can come into being. Thus, it is actually important to "denationalise" literary texts by "detaching" them from their "national roots." Otherwise, the study of world literature becomes the study of "inter-national literature."

As such, in this chapter, I argue that world literature is not what Damrosch argued – "an elliptical refraction of national literature."[3] Rather, I will demonstrate that world literature departs from and transgresses the constraints of national literature in light of Jacques Derrida's ideas on deconstruction. I will look at, first, how Benedict

[1] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.
[2] Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party,* 11.
[3] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.

Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm attempt to question the normalised concept of "nation" and show that it is in fact a mythical idea. Secondly, I will examine how deconstruction compels us to rethink the concepts of "structure" and "centre" which, thereby, unveils the arbitrariness of the concept of "nation" and the dramatic effects of doing so. Lastly, I will look at how such a fundamental destabilisation of the concept of "nation" refashions the relationship between national literature and world literature claimed by Damrosch.

Locating the Concept of "Nation"

In *Nations and States* (1977), Hugh Seton-Watson discusses the formation of nations and the effects it entails. He suggests that "[a] nation is a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness."[4] In other words, "nation" calls for a unity based on a shared collective identity which ultimately gives rise to a sense of national consciousness. Seton-Watson then suggests that this leads to a phenomenon of "nationalism" which he defines as either "a doctrine about the character, interests, rights, and duties of nations" or "an organised political movement, designed to further the alleged aims and interests of nations."[5] The latter definition insightfully reminds us that "nationalism" is always closely related to politics. As a matter of fact, Seton-Watson argues that these "organised political" and "national movements," are designed to "implant in [their own populations] a national consciousness and a desire for political action."[6] Given this, to reinforce the sense of unity of the people in a nation, it is necessary to develop a sense of national consciousness among them. To create a national consciousness and national unity, Seton-Watson suggests that many new

[4] Hugh Seton-Watson, Nations and States (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1977), 1.
[5] Ibid., 3.
[6] Ibid., 9.

nations in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe actually rely on language.[7] Yet, Timothy Brennan argues that language is not the only means to forge a sense of solidarity. He writes,

> the political tasks of modern nationalism directed the course of literature, leading through the Romantic concepts of "folk character" and "national language" to the divisions of literature into distinct "national literatures."[8]

Hence, Brennan reminds us that national literature of a nation is very often deployed as a means to construct its national consciousness. In fact, nation-building projects of some newly-found nations, which have just gained independence from colonial rule, clearly illustrate how such a process takes place.

Zimbabwe, a former British colony, demonstrates itself as a vivid example of how national literature is employed to serve the machine of state. When the civil war ended in 1979, the revolutionary Zimbabwean Government began a nation-building project to stabilise the worn-torn country. The project aimed at reuniting the fractured elements of Zimbabwean society. As Fay Chung, the former Minister of Education of Zimbabwe makes clear, a large part of this restorative process worked through the barrel of the pen. Explaining the "necessary" function of literature in the new independent Zimbabwe, she says,

> writers cannot play a truly positive and constructive role in the building of socialism in Zimbabwe unless they take it upon themselves to be informed

[7] Ibid., 9.
[8] Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 45.

> about the forms and function of literature in a socialist society.[9]

Chung suggests that Zimbabwean writers are responsible for constructing a national consciousness in the country. However, this does little more than provoke critics and theorists to examine the concept of "nation" and highlight its arbitrariness.

Both Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm assert that the idea of "nation" is a construction. In *Thought and Change* (1964), Gellner argues that "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness," instead, "it invents nations where they do not exist."[10] In *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), he also stresses that "nationalism is primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent."[11] What Gellner underlines here is the idea that "nation" is an invention which paradoxically serves the function of forging a nation. In this way, nationalism is not a self-evident concept that has an inherent essence of national consciousness. Eric Hobsbawm also suggests that nationalism is created into existence. He writes,

> it is clear that plenty of political institutions, ideological movements and groups – not least in nationalism – were so unprecedented that even historic continuity had to be invented, for example by creating an ancient past beyond effective historical continuity either by semi-fiction or by forgery. It is also clear that entirely new symbols and devices came into existence […] such as the national anthem […] the national flag […] or the personification of "the nation"

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[9] Fay Chung and Emmanuel Ngara, *Socialism, Education, and Development* (Cape Town: African Publishing Group, 1995), 116.
[10] Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 169.
[11] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Cornell UP, 1983), 1.

> in symbol or image.[12]

Here, Hobsbawm stresses the idea that nationalism is an institutionalised yet fictive belief. Nationalism alongside national anthem and flag are sets of beliefs created to symbolise the imagined "essence" of the nation. As such, Gellner and Hobsbawm share similar beliefs as they both highlight a sense of "unrealness" underneath the concept of nation.

Indeed, Benedict Anderson also interrogates and destabilises the essentialised concept of "nation." In *Imagined Communities* (1983), Anderson famously defines "the nation" as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[13] He continues,

> [t]he nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human begins, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations […] It is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm […] It is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.[14]

Anderson's argument denies the idea that the nation is an intrinsically limited and

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[12] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition, e*ds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 7.
[13] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 123.
[14] Ibid., 123.

sovereign community. Rather, he stresses that the concept of nation is an arbitrary dogmatic integration which is fabricated and mythologized with an inherent essence of "national consciousness."

So, Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson actually do a kind of deconstruction to the concept of "nation." They observe and try to demonstrate that the idea of "nation" is indeed mythic. Nevertheless, Derrida's ideas on deconstruction show us the effects of embracing the concept of "nation" as an arbitrary idea. In *Of Grammatology* (1974), Jacques Derrida argues that deconstruction is always "a matter of undoing, desedimenting, decomposing, deconstituting sediments, artefact, presuppositions, institutions."[15] Given this, the ideas of deconstruction compel us to question and destabilise presumed ideology and eventually interrogate any premised structure or framework. Hence, deconstruction has the potential to revise the way we orientate world literature in the sense that it allows us to re-examine the idea of "nation" from a different perspective.

Unfolding Deconstruction

As Jacques Derrida himself states in his short essay, "Letter to a Japanese Friend" (1985), the concept of deconstruction is hard to define. He writes, "[w]hat deconstruction is not? Everything of course! What is deconstruction? Nothing of course!"[16] Yet, we can still examine the effect brought by the concept by looking at how Derrida and his disciple, Jonathan Culler, discuss it. In elucidating the "nature" of the concept, Derrida notes that "[d]econstructing is not a method and cannot be

[15] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 1974, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), 27.
[16] Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," 1983, In *Deconstruction,* Volume 1, ed. Jonathan Culler, 23-27. (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 24.

transformed into one."[17] What Derrida means here is that deconstruction is neither a way of conducting analysis, a critique nor a method. Instead, it should be recognised as an event which "takes place" without waiting for "the deliberation, consciousness, or organisation of a subject, or even of modernity."[18] In other words, the idea of deconstruction cannot be manipulated or executed by a "doer." Rather, it has a certain sense of autonomy and happens in its own way.

In *Positions* (1982), Derrida offers up a general landscape of deconstruction. He writes,

> [t]o "deconstruct" philosophy is to work through the structured genealogy of its concepts in the most scrupulous and immanent fashion, but at the same time to determine, from a certain external perspective that it cannot name or describe, what this history may have concealed or excluded, constituting itself as history through this repression in which it has a stake.[19]

Here, Derrida reminds us that although we cannot analyse a certain concept by deconstruction, we can examine the structure of a concept so as to speculate the mechanism of deconstruction and see if there is something being concealed or excluded underneath that structure. In fact, Jonathan Culler suggests a major feature of deconstruction in the introduction to *Positions*. He argues, "[t]o deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the hierarchy."[20] As such, what deconstruction offers is the potential to interrogate any premised structure of

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[17] Ibid., 3.
[18] Ibid., 4.
[19] Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 15.
[20] Culler, introduction to *Positions*, 56-7.

concept or idea. It also serves a platform to expose anything being neglected by reversing the violent binary hierarchy it engages in. In this way, the concept of deconstruction is significant to the theorisation of world literature because it allows us to interrogate and destabilise any essentialised structure and legitimised hierarchy embedded in institutionalised values. However, it is important to have a general understanding of the mechanism of deconstruction – what it does and how it works – in a more thorough manner before examining how it sheds light on the conceptualisation of world literature.

Structure and Centre

"Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1966) – one of the very first essays on deconstruction of Derrida – helps us portray a general picture of the concept.[21] Derrida starts the essay by identifying the problem of the tradition of western metaphysics – relying on the very concept of structure which he then elaborates as "the function of structure – or structuralist."[22] He observes that the idea of "structure" is an "event" in history which has its "root thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language."[23] By underlining the long history of the existence of the concept of "structure" in the study of philosophy and science, Derrida demonstrates that the concept has been institutionalised in our mind without being examined or questioned. He writes,

> structure – or rather the structurality of structure […] has always been

[21] The essay was presented as a lecture at Johns Hopkins University in 1966 and published in *Writing and Difference*. See Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[22] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, (1967), trans. Alan Bass, eds. Patricia Waugh and Philip Rice (London; New York: Edward Arnold, 1992), 149.

[23] Ibid., 150.

> neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin.[24]

In other words, Derrida asserts that the essentialisation of the concept of "structure" consequently gives rise to an unquestioned existence of a "centre" which not only "orient[s], balance[s], and organize[s] the structure"[25] but also serves as the "origin" of the "structure." Such a conceptualisation thereby gives rise the phenomenon that even today, "the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself."[26] Simply put, Derrida reminds us that the "centre" plays the most important role in consolidating and crystallising a structure – the "centre" is the centripetal force that stabilises the structure and integrates it into an entity.

Derrida observes that the "centre" is not governed by the correspondent "structure." The "centre," he argues, is "the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible" and makes "the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) forbidden."[27] Hence, the "centre" is an inherently self-evident concept that does not entail any variations within the structure. Yet, Derrida argues that this conceptualisation of the "centre" violates the principle of structuralism. Ferdinand de Saussure – the founder of structuralism – proposes that words are "signs" made up of two parts: "the signifier (a written or spoken mark) and a signified (a concept)."[28] He also asserts that these signs are "differential" because meaning is "a matter of difference" – a language user recognises concept A because it is not

[24] Ibid., 150.
[25] Ibid., 150.
[26] Ibid., 150.
[27] Ibid., 150.
[28] Ibid., 97.

concept B.[29] In short, the system of signs is operated by sets of binary oppositions. Nonetheless, Derrida points out that the conceptualisation of the "centre" is in fact paradoxical. He writes,

> it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which governs the structure, while escaping structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center.[30]

What Derrida means is that the self-evident "centre" has always been essentialised as an independent totality that offers gravity to the structure. However, it does not lie within the system. Instead, it escapes the "structure" and becomes a signifier that does not have a signified idea. By underlining such an irony, Derrida demonstrates that the "centre" is a transcendental signifier – self-evident and essentialised to be an entity with inherent essence.

Nevertheless, Derrida suggests that the reliance on the "centre" is deeply rooted in human history. He argues that it is because the "centre" creates "a reassuring certitude" which generates "the force of a desire."[31] Thus, the "centre" gives rise to a "certitude anxiety"[32] which serves as an urge to attach oneself to a "centre," an

[29] Ibid., 97.
[30] Ibid., 150.
[31] Ibid., 150-1.
[32] Ibid., 151.

"origin," or a "structure." Derrida observes the fact that we constantly rely on the "centre." For example, he points out that the "centre" appears as "the determination of Being as *presence* in all the senses of this word" in the history of metaphysics.[33] He explains,

> [i]t would be possible to show that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated the constant of a presence—*eidos, arché, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth.[34]

In this sense, Derrida points out that the "centre" has continuously been playing a significant role in western metaphysics without being questioned. He therefore asserts that it is necessary to bring about a radical destabilisation of the "centre." The effects of abandoning these concepts are demonstrated by his concept of "play."

The idea of "play" can only come into place when the reliance on the "centre" and the "structure" is abandoned. Derrida makes clear that we arrive at "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world"[35] when we recognise that,

> there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the centre had not natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of

[33] Ibid., 151.
[34] Ibid., 151.
[35] Ibid., 164.

> sign-substitutions came into play.[36]

Here, Derrida underlines the need to "decentre" any structure that relies on a "centre." Once we do away with the "centre" or "origin" of a structure, he argues, "the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought" and gives rise to "the event called a rupture."[37] He then explains in a more detailed manner that,

> [p]lay is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always an interplay of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence.[38]

Put simply, "play" takes place when the differentiation between absence and presence of the "centre" of a "structure" is disrupted. Once the structure is decentred, it will arrive at, in Derrida's terms, "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and the innocence of becoming" – which is "the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, without origin, which is offered to an active interpretation."[39] So, if the "centre" in the tradition of western metaphysics is the centripetal force that integrates the "structure" as a stable entity, the idea of "play" is the very event that takes place when the fixation and desire of a "centre" as well as the resulting "structure" is unshackled and deconstructed.

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[36] Ibid., 151.
[37] Ibid., 151.
[38] Ibid., 164.
[39] Ibid., 164.

Rethinking National Literature and World literature

Thus, the key act of deconstruction is that of an undoing. In "Letter to a Japanese Friend," again, Derrida stresses that deconstruction is primarily about "disarranging constructions."[40] He asserts that the prime focus is "how an 'ensemble' was constituted and to reconstruct it to this end."[41] In other words, it is through deconstruction that structures can be "undone" and studied rather than destroyed.[42] By questioning and destabilising the normalised hierarchical binary oppositions found in various thoughts and ideas, the act of decentering of deconstruction not only revolutionises traditional western metaphysics but many other disciplines as well. The study of feminism and post-colonialism are cases in point. As a matter of fact, deconstruction also destabilises Damrosch's idea that world literature is "an elliptical refraction of national literatures,"[43] – because the notion of "nation" is nothing more than a myth (a centre).

Although Derrida has not discussed the subject matter of "nation" in a thorough manner in his writings, Dana Hollander observes that Derrida does examine the concept of "nation" in "Onto-Theology of National- Humanism" (1992). In his essay, "On the Philosophical Ambition of Nationality Affirmation" (2008), Hollander reviews Derrida's ideas and writes,

> Derrida makes clear that his interest in the implications of national "boundaries" of difference for philosophy concerns at the same time the "boundaries" of "the philosophical as such" […] Derrida wants to call into question this

[40] Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," 24.
[41] Ibid., 25.
[42] Ibid., 25.
[43] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.

> "beautiful order of dependence," whose "territorial" rhetoric is itself "not far off" from "the schema of the relations between state and nation."[44]

What Hollander points out here is that Derrida's primary interest in nationalism and philosophy lies in how the ideas of "boundaries," "dependence," "order," and "territory" crystallise the concept of "nation." Hollander continues and argues that Derrida conceptualises nationalism as a concept that belongs to "the structure of national consciousness that a nation 'posit[s] itself'."[45] In this way, the idea of nation actually serves as the "centre" of the structure of a "national consciousness." Together with the essentialised concepts of "boundaries," "dependency," "order," and "territory," the structure of "national consciousness" is forged based on these normalised systems. Hence, Derrida demonstrates that the idea of "nation" is an edifice which bears no inherent essence – or, in other words, is a transcendental signifier.

Nevertheless, if we re-examine Damrosch's definition of world literature by underlining the intricate relationship with world literature and national literatures, it is obvious that he basically ignores poststructuralist thought. Indeed, he falls into the fallacy of presupposing a mythic "center" – the "nation" – in theorising world literature. In *What is World Literature?*, he stresses that there is an intimate relationship between national literatures and world literature. He proposes that having "an understanding of world literatures as an elliptical refraction of national literatures can help to clarify the vital, yet also indirect, relation between the two."[46]

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[44] Dana Hollander, "On the Philosophical Ambition of Nationality Affirmation," in *Exemplarity and Chosenness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 102-3.
[45] Ibid., 104.
[46] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 283.

So, if world literature refracts national literatures, it is important to understand what "nation" is first. However, Damrosch's conceptualisation of "nation" does not seem to be very clear. He writes,

> [t]he modern nation is, of course, a relatively new development, but even older works are produced in local or ethnic configurations that have been subsumed into the national traditions within which they are now preserved and transmitted.[47]

Such an argument indeed leaves the question of what is "nation" unanswered. What is highlighted here is nothing more than the idea that he assumes there is an inherent essence embedded in the concept of "nation" which can be kept and carried through the temporal axis. As a matter of fact, by suggesting that national traditions can be "preserved and transmitted," Damrosch implicitly implies that such a conceptualisation is founded on the belief that they have always existed. He continues and argues that,

> [a] "nation" itself […] could designate an ethnic group or culture […] Understanding the term "nation" broadly, we can say that works can continue to bear the marks of their national origin even after they circulate into world literature.[48]

Upon appealing to "ethnic group" and "culture," Damrosch's conceptualisation of "nation" becomes even more ambiguous. In fact, it can be argued that Damrosch's

[47] Ibid., 283.
[48] Ibid., 283.

definition relies on anchoring himself to the concept of “nation” which serves as the mythic “centre” of a “structure” of that will eventually forge the existence of “national literature” and world literature.

Indeed, Damrosch’s definition of world literature as an “elliptical refraction of national literature” [49] depends heavily on a mythic “centre” by building a geographical locus of nation state in literary texts. When he explains what “elliptical refraction” means, he implicitly reveals that his ideas hinge on an “origin” of literary texts – the nation state the texts originate from – and develop the relationship of national and world literature upon it. He writes,

> works become world literature by being received into the space of a foreign culture, a space defined by many ways by the host culture’s national tradition and the present needs of its own writers. Even a single work of world literature is the locus of a negotiation between two different cultures.[50]

Obviously, Damrosch here retains the idea that there is a mythic “centre” in the literary text – its host country and culture – while defining what world literature means. He then continues to argue that “world literature is thus always as much about the host culture’s values and needs as it is about a work’s source culture.”[51] In other words, Damrosch suggests that the legacy of the host culture of the text remains strong and patent in the study of world literature. In this way, the concept of world literature becomes merely a combination of literatures from different nations.

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[49] Ibid., 281.
[50] Ibid., 283.
[51] Ibid., 283.

Later in the essay, Damrosch reasserts the importance of anchoring oneself to the geographical and cultural "origin" of a literary text while studying world literature. He stresses that it is important

> to understand the work effectively in its new cultural or theoretical context while at the same time getting it right in a fundamental way with reference to the source culture.[52]

Here, Damrosch underlines that before studying what a literary text means in the new context it is situated in, it is vital for the reader to first acknowledge and refer to the meaning of the text in its host country and culture. However, such a claim almost immediately gives rise to the question of whether the meaning of the text lies in its host culture or its new context. So, if we accept how Damrosch orientates world literature – a realm that is somehow built upon the geographical locus of nation state – it is hard to deny that such a conceptualisation of world literature is actually still overshadowed by its national or cultural "origin." Nonetheless, by recognising the significance of deconstruction on the idea of "nation" offered by Derrida I argued earlier in this chapter, it is clear that world literature cannot be "an elliptical refraction of national literatures."[53] Rather, it is vital to remember that the concept of "nation" is in fact an arbitrary fabrication.

Certainly, it can be argued that deconstruction has the most tremendous and immediate effect in terms of destabilising the relationship between national literature and world literature. Yet, the significance of deconstruction on world

[52] Ibid., 288.
[53] Ibid., 281.

literature goes far beyond this. The very immediate question we need to ask is what world literature is if the "nation" and hence the concept of "national literature" is destabilised. As such, the next chapter argues that the concept of "intertextuality" redefines world literature by refashioning the way we think about the relationship of different texts. It allows for Derrida's articulation of a text – not as "a finished corpus of writing" but as "a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces."[54] As a matter of fact, if we take the concept of deconstruction into account when we theorise world literature, not only is the idea of "nation," but every other presupposed idea in the contemporary conceptualisation of world literature, open to such destabilisation. In *On Deconstruction* (2007), Jonathan Culler also asserts that,

> [t]o deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept of premise.[55]

Given this, the idea of deconstruction provides the potential to re-examine world literature further. I will, therefore, look at how ideas offered by Derrida, alongside his writing fellows of *Tel Quel*, illuminate the orientation of world literature by decentering the concept of "origin" and thereby destabilising the hierarchical relationship of the authoritative author and text over the passive reader in Chapter 3 as well as deconstructing the binary opposite of the "original" over the "translation" in Chapter 4.

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[54] Derrida, "Living on / Border Lines," in *Deconstruction and Criticism,* ed. Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Continuum, 1979), 84.
[55] Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 86.

Chapter 2 – Re-relating a World of Texts

In "Planetarity" (2003), Gayatri Spivak criticises the disciplinary organisation of the study of literature in the world in terms of nation, culture, and area. She argues that the concept of "planetarity" – which is "best imagined from the precapitalist cultures of the planet"[1] – can remind us that "the Earth is a bigger concept-metaphor than bounded nations."[2] Nevertheless, David Damrosch stresses on the significance of national boundaries in the study of world literature. In "Toward a History of World Literature" (2008), he argues that "[w]orld literature has always been created through a dynamic interplay among national and regional literatures."[3] He emphasizes that by studying what world literature is, "national literatures will be seen in new ways, as will the individual authors who work within and across them."[4] However, if we re-examine Damrosch's claim through the lens of deconstruction, one might begin to understand the grounds of such destabilisation by turning to the ideas of Roland Barthes. In "From Work to Text" (1977), Barthes points out that there is a need to reorientate the relationship between literary works. Instead of regarding them as literary "works," there is a trend of conceptualising them as "texts."[5] In discussing what literary "texts" mean, he underlines that the Latin etymological root of the word, "text," is "a tissue, a woven fabric."[6] Hence, he implies that the "text" is not a sovereign entity but is always in "plural" form.[7] He explains, "[t]he plural of the Text depends not on the ambiguity of its contents but

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[1] Gayatri Spivak, "Planetarity," in *World Literature: a reader*, eds. Theo D'Haen, César Domínguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (New York; London: Routledge, 2013), 215.
[2] Ibid., 212.
[3] Damrosch, "Toward a History of World Literature," *New Literary History.* 39.3 (2008), 485.
[4] Ibid., 494.
[5] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 155.
[6] Ibid., 159. See also *Oxford English Dictionary*, the Latin origin of "text" refers to "Latin *textus* (*u*-stem) style, tissue of a literary work (Quintilian), lit. that which is woven, web, texture."
[7] Ibid., 159.

on what might be called the *stereographic plurality* of its weave of signifiers."[8] In short, Barthes here illustrates the idea that a literary work cannot be simply conceived as a distinct entity but should be regarded as an integrated network made of interwoven literary influence(s). As a matter of fact, Kristeva also examines the interrelationship of literary texts and introduces the concept of "intertextuality." She argues that "any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations."[9] What she suggests is that literary texts are no longer distinct entities but interrelated. The idea of "intertextuality" thereby compels us to rethink the premised boundaries in considering the interrelationship of literary texts.

As such, in this chapter, I argue that by bringing about a radical disruption of the system of literary texts, Kristeva's ideas on "intertextuality" highlight the interrelationship of texts and thus insist on a reorientation of world literature. I will look at, first, how Kristeva, alongside other significant contributors in the *Tel Quel* group, revolted against Ferdinand de Saussure's model of semiology. Second, how Kristeva's ideas on "intertextuality" refashion the normalised relationship of literary texts by disintegrating the temporal and geographical borders among them and, thereby, destabilises the fixation on "originality" of translated texts. I will then demonstrate how the concept of "intertextuality" significantly changes the interface of the study of world literature by comparing Kristeva's model with the conceptualisations of world literature offered by Pascale Casanova and Damrosch. I will show that it is only by unveiling the intricate relationship among literary texts that Kristeva's ideas on "intertextuality" allow us to interrogate the concept of national literature and, hence, collapse the conceptual necessity of national

[8] Ibid., 159.
[9] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language,* trans. Leon Roudiez, eds. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon Roudie (New York: Columbia UP, 1980), 66.

boundaries in studying world literature.

Situating "Intertextuality"

Indeed, Jacques Derrida also contests the concept of text as a sovereign entity in his renowned essay – "Living On" (1979). Similar to Barthes, Derrida invites his readers to rethink the concept of the literary text by asking where the "edge" of a text lies. He writes,

> [i]f we are to approach a text, for example, it must have a *bord*, an edge. Take this text, what is its upper edge? Its title ("Living On")? But when do you start reading it? What if you started reading it after the first sentence (another upper edge) which functions as its first reading head but which itself in turn folds its outer edges back over onto inner edges whose mobility – multilayered, quotational, displaces from meaning to meaning – prohibits you from making out a shoreline? There is a regular submerging of the shore.[10]

By highlighting the impossibility of providing a concrete boundary in defining a text, Derrida reminds us that no text exists as an independent totality. Texts should be considered as an interconnected network that displays an array of displacement of meanings from text to text. In this way, Derrida asserts the interconnectedness between literary texts. Nevertheless, it is only with the concept of "intertextuality" offered by Kristeva that we can thoroughly examine the interrelationship of literary texts.

Although Kristeva wrote on structuralism before starting to write on the idea of

[10] Derrida, "Living on / Border Lines," 81.

"intertextuality," she clearly states the way in which she differentiates herself from the school of structuralism. When asked about why she shifted her study from studying "the signifying phenomenon" of structuralism to leaning towards poststructuralism in an interview conducted by Ina Lipkowitz and Andrea Loselle in 1985, Kristeva began to think that structuralism was "based on a misapprehension."[11] She explains,

> it is impossible to have the same type of "scientificity," the same type of rigor in the domain of interpretation and in the humanities in general as in the domain of the exact sciences, since the position of the observer and of the theoretician is not at all neutral. A complex dynamic is at play in the relation between text and the observer.[12]

By highlighting the rigidity and arbitrariness at play if we orientate literary texts through structuralist theories, Kristeva suggests that it is impossible to study humanities in a scientific way. Rather, she stresses the need to acknowledge the complexity and interactions between literary texts. On this, it is important to note the influence of Mikhail Bakhtin on Kristeva's work.

Bakhtin's conceptualisation of the idea of "dialogism" is probably the most important one to Kristeva's model of "intertextuality."[13] The most noteworthy part is how

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[11] Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, eds. Mitchell Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 19.

[12] Ibid., 19.

[13] To unfold the concept of "dialogism," Bakhtin argues that "any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualification, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension filled environment of alien words, value-judgments and accents, and weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others,

Bakhtin theorises the meaning of "words" and the intricate relationship between them. He writes,

> the word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of those concrete contexts into which it has entered. When a member of a speaking collective comes upon a word, it is not as a neutral word of language, not as a word free from the aspirations and evaluations of others, uninhabited by others' voices. No, he receives the word from another's voice and filled with that other voice. The word enters his context from another context, permeated with the interpretations of others.[14]

Here, Bakhtin demonstrates the fact that the "words" are always value-neutral. It is therefore impossible to regard the meaning of a word as a stable entity for the "word" is not a stable signifier. Instead, he argues that there is an intricate relationship between its contexts of usage as well as how it is used in different contexts. Put simply, there is a certain sense of dynamics integrated in the concept of "words" – its meanings always vary with the user and the interpreters. As such, the "words" cannot carry a static meaning.

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intersects with a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse. See Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 276.

[14] Bakhtin*, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 201.

The significance of Bakhtin's idea lies in the fact that it exposes the intricate relationship between the meaning of words and its social and historical contexts. The concept of "dialogism" allows us to reorientate the meaning of "words." Instead of regarding it as a stable entity, Bakhtin regards the process of producing the meaning of words as an incessant event which is continuously being (re)appropriated and thus refashioned by its users. In this sense, the use of any word can never be entirely possessed by one single user. By contrast, its meaning is always infused with traces of other meanings produced from other usages. Although the foundation of Bakhtin's dialogic model is primarily founded on the basis of linguistic level, it actually entails a radical destabilisation of the process of the production of meaning of words. It is this revolution on the conceptualisation of meaning that Kristeva develops further, extending it to the realm of literary texts in order to destabilise the preconception that every text is a unique distinct object.

Kristeva , "Intertextuality," and Boundaries

Bakhtin's ideas basically start from a revolt against the Saussurian structuralist approach towards language. Similarly, Kristeva also regards the system of language as one that is always differential and cannot be stabilised or viewed as a coherent system.[15] She identifies that Saussure presupposes "a vertical (hierarchical) division between signifier and signified" without examining the idea of the "definition" and the "truth" of words.[16] What Saussure relies on, she argues, is "the signifier/signified dyad" as "the minimal unit of poetic language."[17] As a matter of fact, Kristeva remarks that most of her ideas regarding the inter-relatedness of literary texts descend from Bakhtin's theories in the interview, "Intertextuality and

[15] Ibid., 33.
[16] Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 69.
[17] Ibid., 69.

Literary Interpretation" (1985) conducted by Margret Waller. She says,

> personally, I had found Bakhtin's work very exciting […] He was moving toward a dynamic understanding of the literary text that considered every utterance as the result of the intersection within it of a number of voices, as he called them.[18]

Kristeva highly credits the sense of vibrancy found in Bakhtin's ideas and regards it as a significant inspiration to her own theory on "intertextuality" of literary texts. Indeed, Graham Allen also points out the similarities shared by them. He writes,

> Kristeva employs Bakhtin's emphasis on the doubleness or dialogic quality of words and utterances to attack notions of unity, which she associates with claims to authoritativeness, unquestionable truth, unproblematic communication and society's desire to repress plurality.[19]

What Allen underlines here is not only the intricate relationship between Kristeva's theory on "intertextuality" and Bakhtin's, but also reasserts the fundamental idea of "intertextuality" lies in the radical destabilisation of any claim of imposition of an authoritative unified meaning on words.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Kristeva also differentiates herself distinctively from Bakhtin. Graham Allen argues, Bakhtin's work "centres on actual human subjects employing language in specific social situations;" whereas Kristeva's

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[18] Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 189.
[19] Allen, *Intertextuality,* 43.

concerns "textuality and their relation to ideological structures […] she seems to evade human subjects in favour of the more abstract terms, text and textuality."[20] In fact, Kristeva does go far beyond simply looking at the meaning of words alone but looks at how meaning takes place. In Margret Waller's interview, she clearly articulates how her theories on "intertextuality" differentiate from Bakhtin's dialogic model in terms of the forms of interactions involved. She writes, Bakhtin recognises that,

> a textual segment, sentence, utterance, or paragraph […] is the result of intersection of a number of voices, of a number of textual interventions, which are combined in the semantic field, but also in the syntactic and phonic fields of the explicit utterance. So this is the idea of this plurality of phonic, syntactic, and semantic participation.[21]

However, Kristeva stresses that "such an intervention of external plurality" should be extended to the level of syntax and phonics.[22] She argues that apart from "identifying texts that participate in the final texts," it is equally important to understand "a dynamics of the subject of the utterance."[23] Hence, her fundamental concern lies in the "subject in process" involved in the dynamic process of achieving a "*re*-creation of the poetic text" through achieving "free association, reconstitution of diverse meanings" between literary texts. Put simply, the key feature that differentiates Kristeva's theory on "intertextuality" from Bakhtin's dialogism is that Kristeva transcends the linguistic boundary offered by Bakhtin and contests the

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[20] Ibid., 36.
[21] Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 189.
[22] Ibid., 189-190.
[23] Ibid., 190.

dynamic movement involved in the process of re-inventing the meaning of literary texts.

Kristeva suggests that the effect of extending the dynamic movement of generating meaning into literary texts is that the relationship between texts is refashioned. "Any text," she suggests, "is constructed of a mosaic of quotations" and "is the absorption and transformation of another."[24] In other words, all literary texts are not only interwoven and integrated as a network, they also carry a sense of vibrancy. Kristeva interprets the interrelationship between literary texts as a kind of "permutation" between them in which "several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another."[25] The orientation of literary texts is therefore not a steadfast model but an interactive mechanism. As a matter of fact, Kristeva recognises that there is an intimate relationship between the literary text and the society it is situated in. She points out that the dimensions of a literary text can never be thoroughly examined by merely looking at its "sources" or "influences" stemming from what traditionally has been styled "background" or "context."[26] Rather, she asserts that the text serves as "ideologeme" which she employs to suggest "the intersection of a given textual arrangement with a border set of 'exterior text,' or what she terms the 'text of society and history'."[27] She explains,

> [t]he concept of text as ideologeme determines the very procedure of a semiotics that, by studying the text as intertextuality, considers it as such within (the text of) society and history. The ideologeme of a text is the focus

[24] Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 66.
[25] Ibid., 36.
[26] Ibid., 36-7.
[27] Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, Peter Brooker, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, (Harlow: Person Education Ltd., 2005), 161.

> where knowing rationality grasps the transformation of utterances (to which the text is irreducible) into a totality (the text) as well as the insertions of this totality into the historical and social text.[28]

In short, the texts – the "ideologeme" in Kristeva's terms – cannot be regarded as distinct entities in their own right but a product of the society. So, if we examine literary texts through the lens of "intertextuality," no texts offer a stable and unified meaning in its own right. By contrast, they are infused with the historical and social conflict over the connotations of words and the very event of reading thereby becomes a continuous cultural and social processes.

Envisioning a World of Texts

Now, if we take a closer look at how Pascale Casanova conceptualises world literature, it can be argued that she does not take Kristeva's ideas into account. Although she constantly emphasises that world literature is invented when the erasure of national boundaries takes place, she does not offer a thorough examination of how different national literatures become world literature. In *The World Republic of Letters* (1999), Casanova introduces the concept of "world literary space."[29] To unfold the concept, she notes that,

> [t]he world of letters is a relatively unified space characterised by the opposition between the great national literary spaces, which are also the oldest – and, accordingly, the best endowed – and those literary spaces that

[28] Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 37.
[29] Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, 3.

> have more recently appeared and that are poor by comparison.[30]

Here, she underlines the idea that by situating these different national literatures together, the literary texts will be integrated into a "world literary space." In this way, such a "world literary space" indeed operates on the binary opposite of the more recognised literary texts versus the less. More importantly, her conceptualisation of literary texts is still rigidly bound by the national boundaries. Put simply, it does little more than demonstrate the model as an inter-national literary space.

Nevertheless, Casanova stresses the intimate relationship between nation and politics and argues that it is important to free literary texts from politics before unshackling its national boundaries. She emphasises that "the construction of national literary space is closely related […] to the political space of the nation that it helps build in turn."[31] As such, she argues that "autonomy" of literary texts is of fundamental importance to achieve a "world literary space."[32] She writes,

> [t]he most independent territories of the literary world are able to state their own law, to lay down the specific standards and principles applied by their internal hierarchies, and to evaluate works and pronounce judgements without regard for political and national divisions. […] In other words, the structural internationalism of the most literary countries strengthens and guarantees their independence.[33]

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[30] Ibid., 83.
[31] Ibid., 85.
[32] Ibid., 86.
[33] Ibid., 86-7.

In this sense, the freedom from political institutions is crucially important for literary texts to arrive at the "world literary space." Casanova here highlights the idea that the "world literary space" transcends and translates these "political and national issues into its own terms – aesthetic, formal, narrative, poetic – and at once affirms and denies them."[34] She goes on to explain that although it is not possible for literary texts to be completely free from political domination,

> literature still has its own ways and means of asserting a measure of independence; of constituting itself as a distinct world in opposition to the nation and nationalism, a world in which external concerns appear only in refracted form, transformed and reinterpreted in literary terms and with literary instruments.[35]

She emphasises that it is only in the most autonomous countries where "literature cannot be reduced to political interests or used to suit national purposes" that "the independent laws of literature are invented, and that the extraordinary and improbable construction of what may properly be referred to as the autonomous international space of literature is carried out."[36] In short, Casanova regards politics as the most significant force that literary texts have to be freed from in order to do away with their national boundaries and arrive at a world literary space.

Hitherto, Casanova does not clearly articulate how such a political autonomy of literary texts can be achieved. Although she stresses the difficulty of arriving at such a stage by underlining that "this is a very long process, through which autonomy is

[34] Ibid., 86.
[35] Ibid., 86.
[36] Ibid., 86.

achieved and literary capital hoarded,"[37] how such a process can be carried out is not examined. By contrast, she has a tendency of idealising the possibility of erasing the political significance of literary texts by arguing that if one "obscure[s] the political origins of literature" and "cause[s] the link between literature and nation to be forgotten," we can then "encourage a belief in the existence of a literature that is completely pure, beyond the reach of time and history."[38] In other words, although the concept of "world literary space" proposed by Casanova envisions a literary sphere that is not restricted by any political or national boundaries, she does not concretise the concept by demonstrating how the process is carried out. What she offers is merely the effect or consequence of arriving at such a domain.

In fact, David Damrosch holds a similar point of view to Casanova in the sense that he also agrees that world literature arises from national literatures. Yet, Damrosch offers a more complicated model. In the introduction to *How to Read World Literature* (2009), he argues that "literary traditions themselves are often highly culture-specific."[39] Such a claim reveals his basic assumption towards literatures that most literary texts have an inherent cultural origin embedded underneath. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the way he conceptualises world literature is also primarily about the unshackling of national boundaries. He actually discloses the conviction that "a work of world literature has an exceptional ability to transcend the boundaries of the culture that produces it."[40] Given this, his approach to world literature also emphasises the importance of transcending national boundaries to make a literary text become a piece of "world literature." However, if we revisit one

[37] Ibid., 86.
[38] Ibid., 86.
[39] Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature* (Chichester; Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1.
[40] Ibid., 2.

feature of his frequently quoted definition – "world literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures"[41] – his model is indeed a little bit more complicated than Casanova's. He indeed proposes several ways through which national literatures can be eclipsed and become world literature.

Damrosch stresses that both globalisation and translation play a fundamental role in the process of transforming national literatures into world literature. He argues that,

> [t]he ongoing acceleration of economic and cultural globalisation has brought the scope of world literature to a new level today, in the older imperial networks, literature usually flowed outward from the metropolitan centre to the colonial periphery […] but literature now circulates in multiple directions, and writers even in very small countries can aspire to reach a global readership.[42]

In this way, he illustrates that modernisation and advancement of technology and various uses of the communication networks of the contemporary world take an active role in the realm of world literature. He also observes that the writer of the text also bares a strong sense of significance and they may need to deploy a variety of strategies.[43] "To write for a global audience," he argues "involves a conscious effort of cultural translation, and often entails direct linguistic translation as well."[44] Put in simple terms, Damrosch suggests that if writers want their works to reach the

[41] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.
[42] Ibid., 106.
[43] Ibid., 107.
[44] Ibid., 109.

majority of the readers in the rest of the world, they must be aware of the gaps in cultural differences as well as the linguistic features of their potential readers.

As a matter of fact, Damrosch argues that his comprehension of world literatures cannot be simply envisioned by removing the national boundaries of literary texts. Instead, he writes that,

> [t]he complex process of elliptical refraction means that the circulation of world literature is much more than what René Wellek disparaged as merely "the foreign trade of literature," and it doesn't lead to a transcendent universalism in which cultural difference is a mere "heresy" that should wither away as Marx and Engels expected the state to do.[45]

Given this, his conceptualisation of world literature is not only different from that of Wellek, Marx and Engels, but is also distinct from Casanova's. Instead of aiming at arriving at a unified realm integrated from different national literatures, Damrosch stresses that national boundaries still exist in the realms of world literature but are eclipsed. He writes,

> [t]he ellipse of world literature may seem comprehensible enough when we are thinking of only a single text or group of texts, but as we begin to look more widely we soon find ourselves amid a multitude of partially overlapping ellipses, all sharing one focus in the host culture but with their second foci distributed ever more widely across space and time.[46]

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[45] Ibid., 284.
[46] Ibid., 284.

Simply put, Damrosch is proposing the idea that world literature serves as a unique domain where different national literatures intersect and supplement each other without completely eradicating their national significance.

"Intertextuality" and the World of Texts

At this point, it is not hard to notice that neither Damrosch nor Casanova consider the idea of "intertextuality" when they examine the relationship between literary texts. Both of them attempt to re-relate literary texts from different nations and integrate them into a realm of world literature. Yet, they are both preoccupied by the idea that there is an inherent national "origin" of literary texts and thereby anchor the literary texts to that very "origin." Both Casanova and Damrosch envision a domain of world literature by transgressing the national boundaries between literary texts. However, what their models succeed in creating is merely a sphere of inter-national literature where different literary texts are being situated together. Julia Kristeva's theory on "intertextuality" compels us to reject the idea that a text is an independent object. Rather, they are all connected with and transformed from other texts as well as the discourses they are situated in. This not only does away with the presupposition held by Casanova and Damrosch by interrogating the boundaries of texts but also brings about a radical destabilisation of the meaning of texts.

As I have already said, Kristeva reminds us that there is an intricate relationship between literary texts and the society the text is situated in. Such a view refashions the way we orientate the boundary of a text. In an interview titled "Cultural

Strangeness and the Subject in Crisis" (1989) with Suzanne Clark and Kathleen Hulley, Kristeva states that,

> there is an incontestable interaction between discourse and society, and I myself would consider that the fact of taking society as a generalised text permits us to see how, for example, a literary text does not live in an autistic fashion, closed on the interior itself, but borrows always from the discourses of the press, form oral discourses, from political discourses, and from other texts that preceded it, that provide vehicles in turn for these cultural and political texts of history.[47]

What she reminds us here again is that a text is not a sealed entity because it is impossible to separate a text from the discourses that are related to it. Interestingly, Jacques Derrida also proposes a similar point of view. In "Living on / Border Lines" (1979), he writes,

> [t]he question of the text, as it has been elaborated and transformed in the last dozen or so years, has not merely "touched" "shore," *le bord* […] all those boundaries that from the running border of what used to be called a text, of what we once thought this word could identify, i.e., the supposed end and beginning of a work, the unity of a corpus, the title, the margins, and so forth.[48]

Hence, Derrida demonstrates the impossibility of locating the boundaries of literary texts. In fact, such an unfeasibility of drawing concrete border lines of the text leads

[47] Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 53.
[48] Derrida, "Living on / Border Lines," 83-4.

to the rendering of Derrida's famous pronouncement – "there is nothing outside the text."[49] Derrida argues that no one can get outside of the text because the text is everywhere – everything in the world is indeed textualised. As such, the world is integrated from a differential field of texts. Derrida's proposition therefore echoes the complexity and fluidity found in Kristeva's model. Both of them highlight the impracticality of defining where a text begins and ends because they are indeed situated in a web of texts.

Apart from unveiling the idea that literary texts do not respect borders, "intertextuality" also interrogates where the meaning of a text lies. Kristeva argues that it allows

> an interplay of content and not of forms alone […] as a content that may be dispersed, traceable to different points of origin; the final meaning of this content will be neither the original source nor any one of the possible meanings taken on in the text, but will be, rather, a continuous movement back and forth in the space between the origin and all the possible connotative meanings.[50]

Put simply, the meaning of a literary text is never a stable inherent entity. Instead, it is constantly being reshaped and re-appropriated. Significantly, Graham Allen reminds us that the meaning of a text is "always at the same time 'inside' and 'outside' the text."[51] This, thereby, contributes to "jouissance" – the status of being "released from the shackles of singular, monologic notions of identity and of

[49] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.
[50] Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 191.
[51] Allen, *Intertextuality,* 37.

meaning. Plurality, of self as well as of meaning, is seen as the source of liberation and joy."[52] Thus, literary texts bear not innate meaning as it is always in-progress. Given this, the national significance and cultural origins stressed by Pascale Casanova and David Damrosch do not exist.

Undoubtedly, Kristeva's theories on "intertextuality" bring about tremendous changes in the way we orientate the relationship between literary texts. It is indeed right for Roland Barthes to credit Kristeva's revolutionary ideas. He writes,

> [she] always destroys the last prejudice, the one you thought you could be reassured by, could take pride in; what she displaces is the already-said, the *déjà-dit*, i.e., the instance of the signified, i.e., stupidity; what she subverts is authority – the authority of the monologic science, of filiation.[53]

As a matter of fact, the concept of "intertextuality" is crucially significant in interrogating the existing conceptualisation of world literature. It unveils the intricate relationship among texts in the world by exposing the idea that literary texts indeed bare no inherent boundaries and meaning. Upon embracing the sense of uncertainty and indeterminacy embedded in literary texts, world literature can no longer be conceptualised as any kind of refraction of national literatures. Rather, it is unshackled from all kinds of premised borders. Indeed, such a complexity underlined by the inter-relatedness of literary texts reveals that world literature has to be understood as a process. Nevertheless, Kristeva goes further to examine where the meaning of literary texts lie and proposes that the majority of the meaning of a text

[52] Ibid., 56.
[53] Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 168.

indeed lies in its readers. Alongside other theorists such as Wolfgang Iser, the following chapter will then discuss how this issue changes the presumed interface of world literature. I will look at how the destabilisation of the authoritative role of the author liberates readers from the “violent hierarchy” which, thus, has a possible autonomy of actualising the text.

Chapter 3 – Rediscovering World Literature via Readers

In discussing how to study global literary history, Zhang Longxi underlines the importance of understanding the plurality of world literature and stresses that the text is always "the object of aesthetic experience and interpretation [that] offers the space for the fusion of horizons."[1] Interestingly, another definition of world literature David Damrosch proposes is that it is "a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time."[2] This claim envisions world literature as an on-going process of reading that has the capacity to transcend geographical and temporal boundaries. Damrosch stresses the idea that such a process is conducted with a kind of detachment. However, it is important to note that such a form of detachment speaks directly against reader-oriented criticism, which is indeed associated with Julia Kristeva's concept of "intertextuality." As I mentioned earlier, Kristeva states that intertextuality "points to a dynamics involving a destruction of the creative identity and reconstitution of a new plurality."[3] She also proposes that the reader actually participates in the very same dynamics. She writes,

> [i]f we are readers of intertextuality, we must be capable of the same putting-into-process of our identities, capable of identifying with the different types of texts, voices, and semantic, syntactic, and phonic systems at play in a given text.[4]

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[1] Zhang Longxi, "Toward Interpretive Pluralism," in *World Literature: a reader*, ed. Theo D'Haen, César Domínguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (New York; London: Routledge, 2013), 137.
[2] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.
[3] Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 190.
[4] Ibid., 190.

Kristeva here emphasises the idea that the reader participates in the dynamics involved in creating the "plurality" of intertextuality. The text and the author are no longer the authoritarian parties of the process of reading. In this sense, conceptualising the reader as a zero-point object that can perform a "detached engagement" with the literary texts is somewhat infeasible. In fact, Derek Attridge argues that it is only with the participation of the reader that "the literary *event*" can take place.[5] He explains,

> [i]t is only when the event of this reformulation is experienced by the reader as an event, an event which opens new possibilities of meaning and feeling, or, more accurately, the event of such opening, that we speak of the literary. […] This is what a literary work "is": an act, an event, of reading, never entirely separable from the act-event (or acts-events) of writing that brought it into being as a potentially readable text.[6]

Attridge asserts that the presence of the reader is vital to give rise to the singular *event* of literature. As a matter of fact, both Kristeva and Attridge identify the significant role played by the reader in the process of reading. Given this, world literature is not and can never be a detached act of reading.

As such, in this chapter, I argue that reader-oriented theories have the potential to reorientate the study of world literature by deconstructing the dichotomy of the author/text versus the reader. I will first take a brief look at the landscape of contemporary reader-response criticism, noting how it differentiates from its older

[5] Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 58.
[6] Ibid., 59.

tradition as well as how Roland Barthes and Wolfgang Iser theorise the relationship between the text, the author, and the reader. Second, I will then look at how Damrosch and Sarah Lawall frame the relationship of the text, the author, and the reader and how it forges their conceptualisations of world literature. Lastly, I will examine in what ways reader-oriented theories refashion the realm of world literature by exposing the dynamic roles played by the reader and thus demonstrate how the *event* of world literature takes place when the reader's subjectivity intersects with the text. Upon interrogating the realm of world literature through reader-oriented theories, I argue that by foregrounding the subjectivity of readers as the sole element that gives birth to the *event* of world literature, each event of world literature become unique and what Attridge calls, "a repeatable singularity that depends on an openness to new contexts and therefore on its difference each time it is repeated."[7] Instead of regarding world literature as a mode detached engagement with reading, I will show that it is indeed a situated *event* that takes place at the very point of contact between the reader and the text.

Tracing the Reader's Autonomy

Nevertheless, the empowerment of the reader during the process of reading is neither an entirely new concept in the study of literature nor a unique product of the twenty-first century. Rather, the reader's autonomy over literary texts during the process of reading was articulated as early as Aristotle's *Poetics*. Jonathan Culler observes that Aristotle's approach towards evaluating a drama very much depends on the reader. Culler suggests what Aristotle primarily argues is the conviction that "the reader's or spectator's experience of pity and terror, at certain moments and

[7] Attridge, introduction to *Acts of Reading*, Jacques Derrida, eds. Derek Attridge (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 16.

under certain conditions, is what makes possible an account of tragic plots."[8] In this way, the spectator has to actively participate in the tragedy so as to actualise the tragic plot of the play. Apart from Aristotle, Culler also points out that the need of the reader's participation is particularly explicit in texts written by modernist writers. For example, he argues that most of T.S. Eliot's poems involve copious images, and that he has almost "thrown his burden upon the reader himself, demanding that he relate the two scenes in his own imagination."[9] Both examples provided by Culler suggest that readers to take an active part in the process of reading and play the fundamental role of creating meaning.

Julia Kristeva's approach of intertextuality has been explored in the previous chapter in terms of its effects on the interrelationship between literary texts. Yet, it is important to note that she also refashions the relationship between the author and the reader to a certain degree. She writes of the author as the creator who "produces a text by placing himself or herself at the intersection of plurality of texts on their very different levels."[10] Hence, a literary text indeed originated from a plurality of other texts and what the author does is merely synthesise them into his/her text. She stresses that the reader is the one who contributes to the dynamic process of literature – "a destruction of the creative identity" – by identifying "the different types of texts, voices, and semantic, syntactic, and phonic systems at play in a given text."[11] However, she also emphasises that the reader has to be "reduced to zero, to the state of crisis that is perhaps the necessary precondition of aesthetic pleasure, to the point of speechlessness […] of the loss of meaning" before entering

[8] Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 35-6.
[9] Ibid., 35-6.
[10] Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 190.
[11] Ibid., 190.

"into a process of free association, reconstitution of diverse meanings, or kinds of connotations that are almost indefinable – a process that is a *re*-creation of the poetic text."[12] Put simply, Kristeva here envisions an intangible reader. Instead of bringing any consciousness into the process of reading, what the reader does is merely serve as an essential point that facilitates all texts to come together. As such, although Kristeva attempts to highlight the role played by the reader, it is obvious that her primary focus lies in the relationship between literary texts. Nonetheless, what the reader-oriented theorists – Roland Barthes and Wolfgang Iser – offer is not merely a radical destabilisation of any sort of autonomy of the text and the author but also the empowerment of the reader as the only party responsible for animating and actualising the text with a meaning.

Locating the Reader's Autonomy

Although the concept of the reader's autonomy can be dated back to Aristotle's *Poetics* and also seems to be patent in modernist writers, I am interested in how contemporary reader-oriented theories differentiate from them. Whilst previous thoughts on the reader's role offered by different critics earlier see a sheer empowerment of the reader in interpreting the literary text, the contemporary theorisation of reader's role starts with a radical destabilisation of the god-like figure of the author and entails a reversal of the hierarchical relationship of the text and the author over the reader. Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1977) is one of the most significant essays of reader response criticism. Here, he interrogates the legitimised reliance on the author. He begins the essay with a fundamental enquiry of the fallacy of literary criticism, arguing that,

[12] Ibid., 190.

> [t]he author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the "human person."[13]

Barthes highlights that literature has been "attached the greatest importance to the "person" of the "author" and thereby gives rise to the phenomenon that "the *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it."[14] In this sense, such a heavy reliance on the author reveals the fact that the reader is very much confined by the figure of the author.

Rather, Barthes tries to demonstrate that the significance of the literary text does not rest in and can never be emancipated from the author's mind or his/her background. He attempts to destabilise the god-like figure of the author by announcing that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination."[15] He stresses that it is with the death of the author and the birth of the reader that a literary text is reanimated. The reader, as Barthes argues, plays an active role. He writes,

> a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation. […] The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.[16]

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[13] Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 143.
[14] Ibid., 143.
[15] Ibid., 148.
[16] Ibid., 148.

In other words, a text comes together only when its meaning is assembled by the reader. Hence, Barthes underlines the complexity of the text because it possesses no inherent meaning. Instead, it can only be actualised by the reader. Barthes thus points out the need to differentiate the conceptualisations of "the work" from "the text". He stresses that "the work" is nothing more than "a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books [that] can be held in the hand;" whereas "the text" is "held in language [and] only exists in the movement of a discourse" that can only be "experienced in an activity of production"[17] during which the text is "approached" and "experienced."[18] By highlighting the differences between "the work" and "the text," Barthes hints at the idea that the latter cannot be transformed into the former with the absence of the reader. Nevertheless, he also stresses the idea that the "destination" of the production of meaning of a text is not "personal."[19] Rather, he argues that "the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted."[20] Although Barthes's ideas on the death of the author offer a ground to the development of reader's response criticism in the twenty first century, such a conceptualization also attempts to imagine the reader as a blank agent who is responsible for transforming the work to the text.

By contrast, Wolfgang Iser takes charge of the theorisation of the empowerment of the reader through the "Gap Theory."[21] Iser's primary focus lies in the subjectivity of

[17] Ibid., 156-7. (Italics in original).
[18] Ibid., 158.
[19] Ibid., 148.
[20] Ibid., 148.
[21] Iser is indeed one voice of reader-oriented criticism that privileged the role of the reader. Many other theorists of reader-oriented criticism also participate in the theorisation of the reader's autonomy from the author and the text. For instance, Stanley Fish, Umberto Eco, and J. Hillis Miller

the reader. He argues that the meaning of the text comes from the reader's as he/she reads. In "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" (1974), he discusses how the event of literature is produced by focusing on the reader's experience. He suggests that the process of reading is divided into five parts:

> (i) the text itself has to have something that engages the reader's imagination and triggers the whole dynamic process of reading;[22]
>
> (ii) the reality created as the reader reads the text is relational to his/her life experience;[23]
>
> (iii) the significance of the reader's imagination is produced from both his/her own anticipation and retrospection;[24]
>
> (iv) the process of grouping together all the different aspects of a text to form the consistency that the reader will always be in search of gives rise to the polysemantic nature of the text versus the illusion-making of the reader;[25]
>
> (v) the process of absorbing the unfamiliar material in the text is called the "identification" of the reader with what he/she reads.[26]

Obviously, Iser's model concerns how each individual reader reacts with the text and thus synthesises the text and produces his/her own interpretation of the text. In this sense, the product of each reading is dependent on a particular reader's subjectivity and is thereby always unique.

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also introduce important ideas to this scope of study. See Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980) and Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reade*, 1979 (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984), and J. Hillis Miller, *Theory Now and Then* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

[22] Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," *New Literary History*. 3.2 (1974): 279-281.

[23] Ibid., 281-7.

[24] Ibid., 287-8.

[25] Ibid., 288-95.

[26] Ibid., 296-9.

Yet, Iser also reminds us that the process of reading is almost doomed to be interrupted because "even in the simplest story there is bound to be some kind of blockage, if only for the fact that no tale can ever be told in its entirety."[27] However, he stresses that it is only through these inevitable gaps between the text and the reader that the text can gain its dynamism. The reason is, Iser argues,

> whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections-for filling in the gaps left by the text itself.[28]

Put simply, the meaning of a text is produced at the very moment when the reader encounters difficulties in understanding the text and tries to fill in the gap with his/her own thinking. Iser goes on to stress that this space between the text and the reader entails the "dialectical structure" of literature. He writes,

> [t]he need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity – i.e., we bring to the fore an element of our being of which we are not directly conscious. The production of the meaning of literary texts […] does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated, which can then be taken over by the active imagination of the reader.[29]

In short, literary texts do not possess any inherent meaning or significance. Instead, its meaning only takes place in the process of reading during which the reader

[27] Ibid., 284.
[28] Ibid., 284-5.
[29] Ibid., 299.

actualises the text with his/her very own interpretation. Thus, the reader can never be a vacuumed blank receiver. It is only with the subjectivity of the reader that literary texts can be actualised with a meaning and marks its significance.

As a matter of fact, Iser elucidates his Gap Theory in a more detailed manner in *The Act of Reading* (1978). He argues that although the reader is playing an active role in the event of reading,

> [r]eading is not a direct "internalisation," because it is not a one-way process, and our concern will be to find means of describing the reading process as a dynamic interaction between text and reader.[30]

Iser here once again highlights that the event of reading always involves dynamic interactions between the text and the reader. More importantly, he introduces the idea that the reader possesses a "wandering viewpoint" involved in the process of reading. He explains,

> [t]he wandering viewpoint is a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text. This presence is at a point where memory and expectation converge, and the resultant dialectic movement brings about a continual modification of memory and an increasing complexity of expectation. These processes depend on the reciprocal spotlight of the perspectives, which provide interrelated backgrounds for one another. The interaction between these backgrounds provokes the reader into synthesising activity.[31]

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[30] Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978), 107.
[31] Ibid., 118.

In other words, the event of reading should be considered as a point of convergence at which the intertextuality of the text clashes with the reader who is the product of various concepts, ideologies, and worldviews. At the very moment when the reader encounters the text, the reader synthesises the text with his/her individual life experience. As such, the subjectivity of the reader is integrated into the texts at that particular moment and gives rise to a unique, singular event of literature.

Damrosch, Lawall, and the Reader

One might summarise reader-oriented criticism, then, as the empowerment of the reader. The reader is the only party who is responsible for actualising the text and producing its meaning. Neither the text nor the author possesses any sense of autonomy in the event of literature. Instead, by interrogating and, thus, destabilising the legitimised power of both, the reader is emancipated from the violent hierarchy of being governed by the texts and/or the author. Given this, the reader has the sovereignty of the text in his/her very own process of reading and is able to rejuvenate and actualise the meaning of the text with his/her personal experience.

Obviously, such an idea offers a fundamental attack against David Damrosch's argument that world literature is "a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time."[32] In fact, Damrosch's statement is oxymoronic in nature as it is impossible to attach detach and engage oneself at the same time. Nevertheless, he does explicate what such a condition signifies later in the chapter. The detached engagement, he argues, is "a degree of distance from the home tradition can help us to appreciate the ways in which literary

[32] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.

work reaches out and away from its point of origin."[33] What Damrosch suggests here is that when the reader is reading a piece of "foreign" literary work, he/she is temporarily disconnected from the literary tradition of his/her home country and participates in the activity that allows him/her to appreciate how the "foreign" literary text departs from its "origin." Yet, such a conceptualisation immediately drives the argument back to intertextuality discussed in the previous chapter. If we re-think Damrosch's claim by considering what Kristeva suggests in terms of the relationship of texts, the idea that a text has an "origin" is inevitably disavowed.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that Damrosch is indeed at the edge of articulating the significance of the subjectivity of the reader. He suggests that, when a large and multilayered group of foreign works is circulated in a given culture,

> it is experienced as a private pleasure by individual readers, in ways that may diverge dramatically from the social goals that usually underlie the defining and formal transmission of a literary heritage.[34]

By introducing the idea of "private pleasure" of the reader evolved from his/her individual social goals, Damrosch implicitly hints at a sense of importance of the reader's subjectivity. However, instead of exploring this aspect further, he goes on to elucidate why and how the reader should perform a "detached engagement" with the text. The reading and studying world of literature, he argues,

> is inherently a more detached mode of engagement; it enters into a different

[33] Ibid., 300.
[34] Ibid., 298.

> kind of dialogue with the work, not one involving identification or mastery but the discipline of distance and of difference. We encounter the work not at the heart of its source culture but in the field of force generated among works that may come from very different cultures and eras.[35]

The "dialogue" underlined by Damrosch here is fundamentally different from what Roland Barthes and Wolfgang Iser argue. By contrast, what he suggests is somehow similar to the Franco Moretti's ideas on "distant reading." As I have mentioned in the introduction, such a methodology, as Moretti argues, offers readers "a sharper sense of [the] overall interconnection" of the texts.[36] Indeed, Damrosch also imagines a conversation that takes place in the "field" at which the reader arrives at after reading a couple of literary texts that "originated" from different nations. In this way, "the field of force" introduced by Damrosch hints at a linkage with the field of comparative literature. He actually makes his stance very clear by declaring that "world literature is fully at play once several foreign works begin to resonate together in our mind"[37] because,

> works of world literature interact in a charged field defined by a fluid and multiple set of possibilities of juxtaposition and combination: "intercourse in every direction."[38]

As such, when Damrosch suggests that reading world literature is a form of "detached engagement," what he succeeds in doing is nothing more than blending

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[35] Ibid., 300.
[36] Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, ix.
[37] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 298.
[38] Ibid., 300.

the conceptualisation of world literature into a model of comparative literature which calls for the reader's participation without articulating the significance of world literature.

On the other hand, Sarah Lawall also touches on the dynamics involved in the process of reading in *Reading World Literature* (1994). She notes that the notion of world literature as "an organic whole, a gradual evolution out of smaller social units into a grand design, is visibly static and lacks the dynamic dialects of (for example) Marxian history or post-structuralist performative systems."[39] She then goes on to introduce Johann Herder's idea that,

> all life is coloured by subjectivity as we project our own vision in a kind of experimental poetics. "We don't really see," says Herder, "but we create images for ourselves."[40]

In this regard, Lawall acknowledges the idea that there is a need to rediscover a sense of movement and vibrancy in the realm of world literature. Yet, instead of elaborating this aspect further, she goes back to the approach that regards the text as the most important factor during the process of reading and writes,

> the most relevant practice of this "world literature" is to use texts as a basis for negotiation cultural relationships: to explore a middle ground where the identity of literary works, as of nations, and of individuals, is still to be

[39] Lawall, *Reading World Literature*, 18.
[40] Ibid., 19.

> discovered.[41]

In this sense, Lawall continues to hold the view that the text itself possesses an intrinsic value. Such an inherent value of the text, Lawall argues, "will situate the reader 'in the world,' […] clarify a sense of personal identity through awareness of one's 'situation in the world'."[42] It also teaches readers how to "read for a *new* world in relation to the *old*,"[43] and will thereby ultimately offer them a chance to have a clearer sense of themselves. Her extensive introduction, which begins with an ambition to animate the realm of world literature by highlighting the significance of the reader, ends with merely reminding us of the sense of incompleteness and complications involved in the study of world literature.

Re-locating World Literature in the Reader

In *The Act of Reading* (1978), Wolfgang Iser's conceptualisation of literature articulates what Lawall is on the edge of including in her essay. As such, it stands as the almost opposite of what David Damrosch claims. Iser argues that it is impossible to have a reader detached in any form during the event of literature unless the reader simply takes the text as an informative tool. He writes,

> [t]he literary text, however, takes its selected objects out of their pragmatic context and so shatters their original frame of reference; the result is to reveal aspects (e.g. of social norms) which had remained hidden as long as the frame of reference remained intact. In this way the reader is given no chance to

[41] Ibid., 20.
[42] Ibid., 34.
[43] Ibid., 48.

> detach himself, as he would have if the text were purely denotative.[44]

So, if we accept the idea that a literary "text" (instead of "work") only comes into existence at the very moment when the reader reads and thereby actualises it, then world literature – which is undoubtedly a form of literature – can never present itself as any form of detachment. Instead, the reader's subjectivity has to be taken into account when we conceptualise world literature.

In 1989, Jacques Derrida was interviewed by Derek Attridge. The interview was published as an essay titled, "This Strange Institute Called Literature – An Interview with Jacques Derrida" (1992). It is one of the very few times that Derrida specifically addresses and discusses literature. Although the subject matter is only explored in a rather general sense, his insights into the conceptualisation of literature have the potential to illuminate the notion of world literature. He starts by declaring that,

> I don't dream of either a literary work, or a philosophical work, but that everything occurs, happens to me or fails to, should be as it were *sealed* (placed in reserve, hidden so as to be kept, and this in its very signature, really like a signature, in the very form of the seal, with all the paradoxes that traverse the structure of a seal).[45]

In this way, any text, be it literary or philosophical, can never be regarded as a sealed entity. Rather, they possess no inherent significance. Hence, Derrida here underlines the idea that the text is always opened to readers to actualise it in his/her own

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[44] Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 109.
[45] Derrida, *Acts of Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 35.

process of reading. Such a process, he then argues, entails a discussion of a democratic function of the text. He writes,

> [n]ot that it depends on a democracy in place, but it seems inseparable to me from what calls forth a democracy, in the most open (and doubtless itself to come) sense of democracy.[46]

Put simply, Derrida's orientation of literature allows the reader to be empowered with a certain autonomy in interpreting the text. By the same token, the reader should also be regarded as the only party who is responsible for producing meaning in the realm of world literature. Yet, it is still important to examine how and when a piece of literary text enters the realm of world literature.

Like Wolfgang Iser, Derrida explicitly states that the event of literature takes place only when it makes acquaintance with its reader. He argues that "every text, every discourse, of whatever type-literary, philosophical and scientific, journalistic, conversational-lend itself, every time, to this reading" because "there is no text which is literary in itself. Literarity is not a natural essence, an intrinsic property of the text."[47] By contrast, he stresses,

> it is the correlative of an intentional relation to the text, an intentional relation which integrates in itself, as a component or an intentional layer, the more or less implicit consciousness of rules which are conventional or institutional-

[46] Ibid., 37.
[47] Ibid., 45.

> social, in any case.[48]

In other words, the "essence" of literature cannot be attributed to any legitimised inherent intrinsic values of the text. Rather, it only lies in "the 'acts' of inscription and reading."[49] In this respect, the event of literature is inseparable from and indeed is originated from the reader. Derrida then elaborates the role played by the reader further by stating that,

> [both] poetry and literature have as a common feature that they suspend the "thetic" naivety of the transcendent reading. This also accounts for the philosophical force of these experiences, a force of provocation to think phenomenality, meaning, object, even being as such, a force which is at least potential, a philosophical dynamis – which can, however, be developed only in response, in the experience of reading, because it is not hidden in the text like a substance.[50]

What Derrida suggests here is that the event of literature only occurs in the experience of reading. Likewise, the reader is also the only party who gives birth to the event of world literature. If we recognise how Wolfgang Iser conceptualises the moment of impact between the text and the reader – the intertextuality that integrates the text encounters the unique socio-biographical background that contributes the reader, the text is only unleashed from its geographical and temporal "origins" and becomes a piece of world literature when it is rejuvenated by the faculty of the reader. In this way, world literature can no longer be regarded as any

[48] Ibid., 45.
[49] Ibid., 45.
[50] Ibid., 45-6.

form of detached engagement between the reader and the text. On the contrary, it is an integration of the process of reading which takes place at the very moment when the reader intersects with the text.

So, David Damrosch suggests that world literature is "a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time."[51] However, reader-oriented criticism demonstrates that the reader is indeed very engaged at every point of during the process of reading. As a matter of fact, ideas offered by Derek Attridge, Roland Barthes, and Wolfgang Iser compel us to regard the reader as the only party who is able to "actualise" the text and give birth to the event of world literature. In other words, the *event* of world literature only takes place when the reader takes part in the process of reading. It is when the reader encounters the "gap(s)" between the text and uses his/her subjectivity to synthesise with the text that the literary text can transcend its geographical and temporal "origins" and hence give birth to the event of world literature. As Attridge reminds us, if we accept the dominant role played by the reader in the process of reading, literature is inevitably a "repeatable singularity."[52] In this way, it is important to examine what readers do during the *event* of world literature in a more detailed manner. Although it is impossible to have a case study of the cognitive of the reader unless some scientific methodologies are deployed, we can still examine translation – which is very much a formal product of world literature – in the following chapter.

[51] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.
[52] Attridge, introduction to *Acts of Reading*, 16.

Chapter 4 – Translating World Literature

The intricate relationship between world literature and the translation of written words is very often naturalised. The primary reason is probably the unquestioned belief that translation is the vehicle that "carries" the meaning of a literary text from the language it is written in to another. The process of translation is very often regarded to be one that allows a literary text to depart from its "origin," transcend its national and linguistic boundaries, and eventually become a piece of world literary text. Lawrence Venuti insightfully observes that most readers think that translated texts are originally written in foreign language and immediately come to a conclusion that "translated texts constitute world literature."[1] In fact, David Damrosch argues that world literature is not only closely related to translation but it is a "writing that gains in translation."[2] He stresses that "literature stays within its national or regional tradition when it loses in translation, whereas works become world literature when they gain on balance in translation."[3] By suggesting that the text can either gain or lose in translation, Damrosch reveals that he is implicitly centred on an "original" meaning of the text. In this way, he necessary organises himself at the core idea of framing world literature as a product of the source text it is translated from. Nevertheless, such a claim almost immediately stutters if we rethink it through the logic of reader-oriented theories. As discussed in Chapter 3, reader-oriented theories compel us to reconceptualise the literary work as something that does not possess any inherent meaning until the very moment it is read – "actualised" by its reader. Indeed, it is important to remind ourselves that all translations are initiated by the

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[1] Lawrence Venuti, "World Literature and translation," in *Routledge Companion to World Literature*, eds. David Damrosch, Djelal Kadir, and Theo D'haen, (London: Routledge, 2011), 23.
[2] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*,281.
[3] Ibid., 289.

event of reading[4] – the translator has to read before he/she translates. In this way, the relationship between translation and world literature seems to be much more complicated than a threshold that differentiates national literature from world literature.

As such, in this chapter, I argue that the process of translation is the formal product of the process of reading, and the study of such a process has the potential to refashion our orientation to world literature. Thus, I will first discuss the general principle of translation offered by Walter Benjamin and show how Susan Bassnett and Sergio Waisman redefine translation by destabilising the hierarchy of the "original" text over its translation. Secondly, I will then move on to examine David Damrosch's notion of world literature and its relationship with translation to demonstrate that world literature does not "gain in translation." Lastly, I will show how Lawrence Venuti and Jacques Derrida revolutionise the conceptualisation of translation by showing that translation is far more complex than a question of "original" versus "translated texts" would suggest. Instead, every translated text is a newly created work in its own right – a discrete entity that is independent of what many consider to be its "predecessor." As such, I will demonstrate that the translator is indeed the reader who does not "transmit" the meaning embedded in a text but actualises the texts during the process of world literature. In this way, world literature is a radically subjective engagement with the literary text, one that is constituted from, but not reducible to, the distinct dialectical conversation between the text and a reader.

[4] Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, 58.

Situating Translation

Although the history of translation is rather long,[5] what I am interested here is how its landscape evolves from the principle assumption – the possibility of having a completely faithful translation – to the idea that translation is not derivative of the "original." In "The Task of the Translator" (1923), Walter Benjamin asks for a large degree of equivalence between the source text and its translations. He writes,

> [a] real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not black its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium to shine upon the original all the more fully.[6]

Put simply, Benjamin here defines translation as a process of premised substitution. He regards the source text as a fully coherent system of signification that can be transferred to the target text in a completely faithful manner. In "The Translator's Task" (1923), he goes further and suggests that translations can continue the life of the source text. He argues,

> [t]ranslations that are more than transmissions of a message are produced when a work, in its continuing life, has reached the age of its fame. […] In them [translations] the original's life achieves its constantly renewed, latest and most comprehensive unfolding.[7]

Thus, the significance of translation not only lies in delivering the message of the

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[5] See Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002).

[6] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illumiations*, eds. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken, 1969), 79.

[7] Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 1923, in *TTR: traduction, terminologie, redaction* 10.2 (1997): 154.

source text but also in prolonging its lifespan. To achieve this, Benjamin argues that the translator has to "find the intention toward the language into which the work is to be translated, on the basis of which an echo of the original can be awakened in it."[8] As such, the translation can "shine even more fully than the original."[9] In short, Benjamin suggests that "translation" can indeed outweigh the "original." As a matter of fact, Benjamin's arguments share great affinity with Damrosch's.[10] Both of them stress the importance of locating the "intention" of the source text which is the primary basis that allows the translator to arrive at a "translation" which gains from the "original." This, therefore, implicitly affirms their assumptions that the source text possesses an inherent meaning. However, as I have shown in the previous chapter, reader-oriented criticism invites us to acknowledge that the literary text does not have any "intention." Rather, it is a process that necessarily involves the active participation of the reader. As such, the process of translation may be more complicated than what Benjamin envisions.

In *Translation Studies* (1994), Susan Bassnett begins by highlighting the fact that translation as an academic discipline rises as a consequence of the growth of comparative literature programmes. Critics of comparative literature sometimes have difficulty in finding the translation they need and thus have to translate the text themselves. Bassnett states that this explains why the widely accepted function of translation is rather straight forward – one that,

> involves rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that (i) the surface meaning of the two will be approximately

[8] Ibid., 159.
[9] Ibid., 162.
[10] See Damrosch, What is World Literature?, 157.

> similar and (ii) the structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted.[11]

Such a model of the mirroring of a meaning from a SL to a TL is very similar to what Benjamin suggests. However, Bassnett observes that translation has always been perceived as "a 'mechanical' rather than a 'creative' process."[12] "What is analysed," she explains, "is the *product* only, the end result of the translation process and not the process itself."[13] Focusing on how translation takes place, she argues that "the translation is only an adequate *interpretation* of an alien code unit and equivalence is impossible."[14] Contra Benjamin, Bassnett rejects the possibility of arriving at an ideal equal translation from the source text to the target text. Instead, she suggests that translation is a creative process, and the translator is engaged not only with words, but also with "the context in which those words appear, and any equivalence will have to take into account the two different contexts, that of the source and of the target."[15] In this sense, the process of translation goes far beyond a matter of substitution; it requires the translator to contextualise the source text. Hence, she argues that the experience of reading and writing during translation in fact gives rise to creative writing. She writes,

> I believe this has been the case over the centuries for many writers: translating serves as a way of continuing to write and to shape language creatively, it can act as a regenerative force.[16]

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[11] Susan Bassnett, Translation Studies, 2nd edition, (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.
[12] Ibid., 2.
[13] Ibid.,3.
[14] Ibid., 15.
[15] Bassnett, "Writing and Translating," in *The Translator as Writer*, eds. Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush (London; New York: Continuum, 2006), 96.
[16] Ibid., 179.

In other words, creativity is inevitably involved in the process of translation because the translator is indeed offering a re-creation of the source text while translating it. As a matter of fact, if we remind ourselves of the fact that the majority of the translators at the very beginning of the development of the discipline – the comparative critics and theorists – are in fact the readers, it seems hard to deny: that the translator is indeed, literally not metaphorically, the archetypal reader. The translation is thus a creative product of the reading process.

Talking this idea further, in "Between Reading and Writing" (2010), Sergio Waisman reasserts the idea that the process of translation is a recreation that involves a sense of autonomy of the translator from the source text. Waisman stresses that there is always an ironic sense of "double-ness" embedded in the process of translation. He argues,

> translating a text is a thoroughly odd experience: you produce an entire text that is yours, you write it, you put it down on paper, you undertake your stylistic and syntactic decision – but when you are done, you sign someone else's name to it instead of your own. Or, equally startling, you sign your name in addition to someone else's. Thus, the text – assuming that the translator is recognised at all – gains a double or phantom authorship. More than strange, this erasing of doubling or authorship is thoroughly destabilising.[17]

Here, he highlights the idea that translation is in fact an invention of the translator. Yet, it is always perceived as something inferior and secondary to the "original." Such

[17] Ibid., 70.

a perception necessarily turns translation into an altruistic task and makes the translator at best neglected and worst effaced because translation is a mode of reading:

> [t]ranslation is always at least partially selfish, because translation is a mode of reading that is, by definition, a mode of appropriation. Translation may be an attempt at careful reproduction: translation may involve a hermeneutic motion intended to "compensate" or "restitute" or "recompense" meaning, such that the target successfully transfers the meaning of the source into an analogous texts.[18]

In this way, Waisman demonstrates that translation is much more complicated than it is generally perceived. The translator has his/her own unique position in terms of reading and (re-)writing the meaning of the source text. As such, each translation is a product of an actualisation of a text. During the process of (re-)writing the source text, the translator becomes the reader and the writer simultaneously. Waisman's theorisation of translation thereby not only attempts to do away with the sense of inferiority of the translator, but also highlights the complexity involved by demonstrating the fact that translation is in fact an invention.

Re-defining Translation

The conceptualisations of translation offered by Bassnett and Waisman are indeed quite similar in the sense that both of them stress the complexity involved in translation by highlighting the idea that translation should be understood to have a sense of autonomy from the source text. However, it seems that their

[18] Ibid., 71.

conceptualisations are still pre-occupied by the binary model of the "original" versus the "translation." It can be argued that the primary reason is that they ignore a significant idea offered by post-structuralist theorists on intertextuality and the reader's significance in the *event* of literature – the concept of "originality" is mythical. Instead of normalising the idea that literary texts possess an innate meaning, Julia Kristeva tells us that "any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations."[19] In this sense, the meaning of a literary text is not intrinsic but can only be determined by its readers. Hence, what the translator does is not only fundamentally different from what Benjamin and Damrosch suggest – mirroring the meaning of the source text into the target text – but also more complicated than the conceptualisations offered by Waisman and Bassnett.

In fact, what Kathleen Davis proposes in *Deconstruction and Translation* (2001) is the exact result of thinking translation through the logic of post-structuralism. She argues that it is necessary to consider the idea of intertextuality when one examines the concept of translation because it destabilises the concept of "originality." She writes,

> [n]o element of language, then, let, alone an entire sentence or text, is ever fully "original." In order to exist as meaningful events, texts must carry within themselves traces of previous texts, and are, therefore, acts of citation.[20]

Davis here emphasises the importance of the fact that "originality" does not exist in any text. Rather, all texts are sites of citations of other texts. She thus suggests that since "the source text for a translation is already a site of multiple meanings and

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[19] Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 66.
[20] Kathleen Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2001), 16.

intertextual crossings, and is only accessible through an act of reading that is in itself of translation,"[21] the differentiation between the "original" and the "translation" is not "something pre-existing that can be discovered or proven, but must be constructed and institutionalised. It is therefore always subject to revision."[22] Put simply, by examining the idea of "origin" through the lens of post-structuralist thought, Davis demonstrates that the sites of both the original and translated texts are indeed fabrications. As such, the binary of the "original" versus the "translation" immediately collapses.

Moreover, Davis also reconceptualises the process of translation by focusing on the relationship between the reader, the author, and the meaning of the literary text. She argues,

> [t]he "subject" of writing (such as translator or author) does not exist as a sovereign solitude, a pure singularity that deals with others or with texts fully separate from him or herself. Rather, this "subject" becomes as a relation to systems of difference, which make thinking meaning and "self" possible in the first place.[23]

Davis here questions the concept of "subject" by destabilising the notion of author and translator as god-like figures in the processes of writing and translation. Under such condition, the processes of writing and translation are thereby no longer static. In other words, the "translation" cannot be regarded as derivative of the "original." Instead, they are always deferred to the encounters with readers. It is this that David

[21] Ibid., 16.
[22] Ibid., 16.
[23] Ibid., 91.

Damrosch fails to recognise when he defines world literature.

Damrosch, Translation, and World Literature

Now, if we remind ourselves of the way in which David Damrosch conceptualises world literature through translation, it is obvious that, like Sergio Waisman and Susan Bassnett, he is also entrapped by the hierarchical relationship of the "original" literary text over its "translation". He suggests that one of the three ways to define world literature is that it is "writing that gains in translation."[24] Nevertheless, he begins his arguments with the emphasis on the role of the reader in the act of reading. He argues,

> [a] text is read as literature if we dwell on the beauties of its language, its form, and its themes, and don't take it as primarily factual in intent; but the same text can cease to work as literature if a reader turns to it primarily to extract information from it.[25]

"Information texts," he argues, by contrast, "neither gain nor lose in a good translation" because "their meaning is simply carried over with little or no effective change."[26] Here, he asserts that the process of reading involves the reader's aesthetic appreciation of the text. In this way, he is indeed on the verge of highlighting the active participation of the reader. Yet, he ignores the role played by the reader and argues that the meaning of the text is very much attached to its culture. He asserts that there is an inherent cultural significance in literary texts by highlighting that "literary language is particularly hard to translate since so much of

[24] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.
[25] Ibid., 288.
[26] Ibid., 288.

the meaning depends on culture-specific patterns of connotation of nuance."[27] Hence, although he does touch on the role of the writer, he immediate goes back to emphasise the idea that the text is always culturally specific. He thereby emphasises that "anyone involved in translations or teaching works from other cultures must always weigh how much cultural information is needed and how it should be presented"[28] in order to produce a "good reading" of the text. In short, what Damrosch demonstrates here is that he is relying heavily on the idea that there is an "original" message in literary texts and the majority of them lie extrinsically in its cultural background.

Nonetheless, to interrogate the relationship between world literature and translation suggested by Damrosch, it is important to recognise that the process of translation is not simply a process of extracting and transmitting the "original" message of the source text. Instead, it is a product of a subjective engagement with the text. Damrosch assumes there is an "original" meaning in the literary text and argues, "the balance of credit and loss remains a distinguishing mark of regional tradition."[29] He continues,

> when it usually loses in translation, whereas works become world literature when they gain on balance in translation, stylistic losses offset by an expansion in depth as they increase their range. […] Some works are not translatable without substantial loss, and so they remain largely within their local or national context, never achieving an effective life as world literature.[30]

[27] Ibid., 288.
[28] Ibid., 295.
[29] Ibid., 289.
[30] Ibid., 289.

By legitimising the existence of a core meaning embedded in the text, Damrosch attempts to show that whether the text gains or loses during translation serves as the indicator that differentiates world literature from national literature. He then goes on to exemplify how and where the text "gains":

> [t]ravelling abroad, a text does indeed change, both in its frame of reference and usually in language as well. In an excellent translation, the result is not the loss of an unmediated original vision but instead a heightening of the naturally creative interaction of reader and text.[31]

Damrosch is right to highlight the significance of the translator's/reader's participation in the process of translation. However, he fails to recognise the fact that if the reader/translator is always engaged in a creative interaction with the text, the meaning of the text is not intrinsic and can only be actualised in the act of reading. As such, translation is always a subjective engagement with the text. As argued in the previous chapter, every single process of reading is a unique and independent event. Hence, the product of the process of translation – the translation of the source text – is always a unique, new creation. Such an independent entity can either "gain" or "lose" when compared with the original text only because they are two distinct entities. So, if world literature does not gain in translation as Damrosch claims, it is important to examine how translation relates to world literature. In the rest of the chapter, I will look at how Lawrence Venuti and Jacques Derrida conceptualise the relationship between literature and translation in order to demonstrate that the process of translation is an illustration of the event of world literature, whereas the

[31] Ibid., 292.

translated text itself is a product of the event of world literature.

Re-locating World literature in Translation

The renowned essay, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?" (2001) is the collaborative effort of Jacques Derrida and Lawrence Venuti. Although it is primarily an interrogation of the possibility of a relevant translation, it also sheds light on how one might refashion the relationship between translation and world literature. Derrida and Venuti begin the essay by turning to Cicero's thoughts on translation. They write,

> in *De optimo genere oratorum*, Cicero freed translation from its obligation to the verbum, its debt to word-for-word. The operation that consists of converting, turning (*convertere, vertere, transvertere*) doesn't have to take a text at its word or to take the word literally. It suffices to transmit the idea, the figure, the force.[32]

Here, Derrida and Venuti remind us of the fact that the process of translation demands an understanding of the text. Yet, such an understanding is different from Damrosch's idea of "good reading" which is culturally specific. Derrida and Venuti orientate the comprehension of the text in a rather subjective way – one that is determined by the reader. The process of translation is therefore complicated in the sense that it demands that the translator actualises the text with a meaning before translating it. This is the very reason why Derrida and Venuti stress that translation is "the very threshold of all reading-writing."[33] The "neutral motif of translation," they

[32] Derrida and Venuti, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," *Critical Inquiry*. 27.2 (2001): 180.
[33] Ibid., 175.

argue, thus not only involves "transfer" but also "transaction."[34] In fact, they elaborate what the involvement of "transaction" entails by highlighting a sense of in-between-ness that is always found in translation. They write,

> any given translation […] actually stands between the two, between absolute relevance, the most appropriate, adequate, univocal transparency, and the most aberrant and opaque irrelevance.[35]

Put simply, similar to every single event of literature, a sense of dynamics between the reader and the text is always present in translation. The translator has to actively participate in the process of reading to negotiate the meaning of the text before presenting it in another language. It is thereby impossible for world literature to be a writing to gain in translation.

As a matter of fact, Venuti refers to Derrida's ideas on *différance* and illustrates how such a sense of dynamics helps in re-orientating world literature in another essay, "Translating Derrida on Translation Relevance and Disciplinary Resistance" (2003). He writes,

> Derrida's answer to the question of exemplarity hinges on the critique of the linguistic sign embodied in his concept of différance. If meaning is an effect of relations and differences along a potentially endless chain of signifiers – polysemous, intertextual, subject to infinite linkages – then meaning is always differential and deferred, never present as an original unity, always already a

[34] Ibid., 176.
[35] Ibid., 179.

> site of proliferating possibilities that can be activated in diverse ways by the receivers of an utterance, and that therefore exceed the control of individual users.[36]

In this sense, the idea that the meaning of a text is a unity inherently embedded in a text is radically destabilised. Rather, Venuti demonstrates that it is always differential. Given this, what the translator does during the process of translation is not re-create the source text. Instead, it is the very product of his/her own unique of reading the text – the result of the way he/she actualises the text. As such, the translated work should always be regarded as a newly created work in its own right.

Upon emphasising that the process of translation possesses a sense of autonomy from the source text, Derrida and Venuti argue that the very idea of a relevant translation is indeed based on the naturalised assumption that there is an "original" message in a literary text. They make clear that,

> [a] relevant translation would therefore be, quite simply, a "good" translation, a translation that does what one expects of it, in short, a version that performs its mission, honors its debt and does its job or its duty while inscribing in the receiving language the most relevant equivalent for an original, the language that is the most right, appropriate, pertinent, adequate, opportune, pointed, univocal, idiomatic, and so on.[37]

In other words, the concept of a "relevant translation" is based on the normalisation

[36] Venuti, "Translating Derrida on Translation Relevance and Disciplinary Resistance," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16.2 (2003): 238.
[37] Derrida and Venuti, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 177.

of "originality" of the source text. It is, thereby, important to do away with the possibility of arriving at a "good" or "relevant" translation. Venuti actually takes this conceptualisation and elucidates it in light of Derrida's ideas further in his own essay – "Translating Derrida on Translation Relevance and Disciplinary Resistance." He writes,

> Derrida argues, the word sheds light on the nature of translation today: because the unity of "relevant" is questionable, because the signifier potentially contains more than one word insofar as it produces a homophonic or homonymic effect, it derails the translation process and makes clear that the so-called relevant translation rests on a particular conception of language, one that assumes the indivisible unity of an acoustic form incorporating or signifying the indivisible unity of a meaning or concept.[38]

In this way, both Derrida and Venuti demonstrate that the production of a "relevant translation" is a process founded on the basis of imagining an intrinsic meaning embedded in the "original" text. Hence, they pronounce by the end of the essay that there cannot be such a concept as "relevant translation." The concept serves as the product of the imagination of "originality." So, if every process of translation demands an active participation from the translator to actualise the source text, the process of translation reveals itself to be an illustration of how the event of world literature happens whereas the translated text is a product of the event of world literature.

David Damrosch argues in his threefold definition of world literature that it is a

[38] Venuti, "Translating Derrida on Translation Relevance and Disciplinary Resistance," 240.

"writing that gains in translation."[39] However, if we re-examine the conceptualisation of translation through the logic of poststructuralism, contra Damrosch, world literature does not gain in translation but is rather the embodiment of world literature. Sergio Waisman and Susan Bassnett attempt to highlight the sense of autonomy of the translator. Yet, they are not aware of the fact that they rely heavily on the hierarchical binary relationship between the "original" over the "translation," and therefore fail to acknowledge they indeed still imply that the latter is always a subordinate of the former. By contrast, Kathleen Davis, Lawrence Venuti, and Jacques Derrida interrogate the existence of the concept of "originality" in a more radical way. They demonstrate that translation is a product of the event of reading because the meaning of a text cannot travel from one to another. Instead, it can only be produced when the reader actualises the text and presents it in his/her own way. In this sense, all translations are discrete entities that are independent of the "original" source text. So, if the process of translation is a process of reading, unlike what Damrosch claims, world literature never gains in translation. Rather, the very process of translation is the embodiment of the event of world literature. Hence, world literature is always a radically subjective engagement with the literary text, one that is constituted from but not reducible to the distinct dialectical conversation between the text and a reader.

[39] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.

Conclusion – World Literature in Progress

As Wolfgang Goethe himself notes when he introduced the term, *Weltliteratur*, the concept of world literature stands as an opposite of national literature. "National literature doesn't mean much," he asserts, "the age of world literature is beginning, and everybody should contribute to hasten its advent."[1] It is hard to deny that such a proclamation is revolutionary as it invites readers to depart from the national framework of literary works and enter the realm of world literature. More importantly, Goethe also hints at a need of transgressing the national boundaries of literary texts. Indeed, Fritz Strich credits the idea of world literature for its sense of emancipation. He writes,

> [t]he term "world literature," coined by Goethe, immediately brings to the mind a feeling of liberation, of such gain in space and scope as one feels on entering a larger and more airy room. However, vague the expression is, it at least suggests the removal of intellectual barriers between peoples.[2]

While crediting Goethe's futuristic vision in introducing the idea of world literature, Strich here also reminds us that Goethe's conceptualisation of the term is indeed unclear. As a matter of fact, although Goethe is the inevitable point to begin with when we examine world literature, he neither consolidated the definition of world literature nor elucidated how it should be studied. No wonder, then, its definition has always been a controversial issue.[3]

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[1] Goethe, quoted in Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," in *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), 148.

[2] Strich, *Goethe and World Literature*, 3.

[3] A number of critics also discussed the concept of world literature in the late 19th and early 20th century. For example, Georg Brandes, "World Literature," 1899, in *Samlede Skrifte. 12* (Copenhagen:

Nevertheless, the debate on the conceptualisation of world literature has become even more ferocious in the late 1990s because of globalisation. In the introduction to *World Literature* (2013), the editors, Theo d'Haen, César Domínguez, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen note that one of the primary reasons for the revival of the discussion of the concept of world literature is,

> the agenda of globalisation and its effects on culture and on conceptions of identity. Seen in this light, the renewed interest in world literature is a response to a need for thinking of literature's role beyond the nation state in a world where cultural exchanges are becoming increasingly more intense and far-reaching.[4]

This, again, reminds us the fact that the concept of world literature invites us to go beyond the boundaries of nation state. As argued, although a number of critics attempt to theorise the concept of world literature, the most widely accepted ideas are those offered by Sarah Lawall, Pascale Casanova, and Franco Moretti. Yet, David Damrosch takes account of their ideas and, is arguably the most influential one among them. Nonetheless, all of these conceptualisations of world literature seem to refuse the poststructuralist perspective. In the three-sided definition of world literature, Damrosch writes,

i. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures;

Glydendal, 1902), 23-28. Richard Green Moulton, *World Literature and Its Place in General Culture* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921).

[4] Theo d'Haen, César Domínguez, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, introduction to *World Literature*, eds.Theo d' Haen, César Domínguez, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), x.

ii. World literature is writing that gains in translation;

iii. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time.[5]

However, after re-examining these three points through the logic of poststructuralism, it seems that the picture of world literature is not quite that pointed by Damrosch.

First of all, world literature is not an "elliptical refraction of national literatures"[6] because such a claim relies heavily on the geographical locus of nation state embedded in literary texts. Jacques Derrida's ideas on deconstruction remind us that the concept of "nation" is indeed mythical. He shows that the idea of "nation" is nothing more than an edifice, which is crystallised by and integrated from arbitrary concepts such as "boundaries," "order," and "territory." Julia Kristeva's theories on "intertextuality" also unveil the fact that the literary texts are actually interconnected in a differential network because "any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations."[7] Hence, it is impossible to rely on a "national origin" of a literary text. This, therefore, compels us to reject the relationship between national literature and world literature claimed by Damrosch.

Secondly, world literature cannot be regarded as "a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time"[8] because what Damrosch assumes here is that the reader can detach himself/herself temporarily from the literary

[5] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.
[6] Ibid., 281.
[7] Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 66.
[8] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.

tradition of his/her home country during the process of reading. Nonetheless, Roland Barthes alongside Wolfgang Iser and Derek Attridge demonstrate that the reader is indeed very engaged at every point of during the *event* of literature. They make clear that the reader is the only party responsible for giving birth to a meaning of a text and, thereby, *actualising* the text. Given this, any "form of detached engagement"[9] imagined by Damrosch almost immediately stutters.

Lastly, world literature is not a writing that "gains in translation"[10] because such a claim assumes the idea that a meaning can travel from its "original" text to its "translation." Kathleen Davis, Lawrence Venuti, and Jacques Derrida demonstrate that the "translation" can never be the derivative of the "original." Instead, the "translation" is always a discrete entity in its own right because the translator has to first understand the text in his/her own way before starting the process of translation. Given this, the meaning of the text cannot be transferred from the "original" text to its "translation." Instead, it is always a unique product of the *event* of literature. As such, world literature does not "gain in translation."[11] Rather, translation is a formal product of world literature.

As mentioned, Damrosch's understanding of world literature is arguably the most widely-respected today. So, one might think if re-considering the conceptualisation of world literature through the lens of poststructuralist thought is so dramatic that it almost revolts against what Damrosch argues in his three-sided definition, what the significance of taking poststructuralism into account is. As a matter of fact, if we go back to the point where the concept of world literature originates, again, Goethe

[9] Ibid., 281.
[10] Ibid., 281.
[11] Ibid., 281.

somehow offers us some insights. In one of his letters to Streckfuss in 1827, Goethe actually suggests that world literature is still under progress. He writes, "I am convinced that a world literature is in process of formation, that the nations are in favour of it and for this reason make friendly overtures."[12] Indeed, it can be argued that such a proclamation is still very true after some two hundred years because the debate on the theorisation of world literature is clearly unsettled. A number of critics have joined the debate of defining world literature after the millennium. For example, Gerald Holden, Shu-mei Shih, Milan Kundera, Nirvana Tanoukhi, Horace Engdahl, and Marandl Siskind.[13] In this sense, the conceptualisation of world literature is certainly a continuous process that is still unceasingly happening and changing.

Nonetheless, as I have argued in the introduction, one of the definitions of world literature offered by Damrosch – world literature is "a mode of reading"[14] – also implies a perpetual sense of incompleteness. He here actually acknowledges that world literature is a process that is always changing, happening, and developing. Interestingly, such a sense of evolving underlined by both Goethe and Damrosch echo the core ideas of poststructuralist thought. The major act of poststructuralism is compelling us to revolt against the static system structuralism relies on – one that is very much bound by a "centre" of a "structure."[15] Poststructuralist thought invites us

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[12] Goethe, "On World Literature," in *World Literature: a reader*, 11.

[13] See Gerald Holden, "World Literature and World Politics: In Search of a Research Agenda," *Global Society.* 17.3 (2003): 229-52. Shu-mei Shih, "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition," *PMLA.* 1 (2004): 16-30. Milan Kundera, "*Die Weltliteratur*," in *The Curtain: An Essay in Seven Parts*, trans. Linda Asher, (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 45-72. Nirvana Tanoukhi, "The Scale of World Literature," *New Literary History.* 39.3 (2008): 599-617. Horace Engdahl, "Canonization and World Literature: The Nobel Experience," in *World Literature: History, Theories, Analysis,* eds. Karen-Margrethe Simonsen and Jakob Stouggard-Nielson, (Aarhus: Aarhus UP, 2008), 195-214. Marandl Siskind, "The Globalization of the Novel and the Novelization of the Global: A Critique of World Literature," *Comparative Literature*. 62.4 (2010)*:* 336-60.

[14] Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.

[15] It is hard to define poststructuralism in a clear manner. Yet, *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* reminds us that "post-structuralism doubts the adequacy of structuralism and, as

to put into question the legitimacy of any system premised on "a centre," "a subject," or "an origin."[16] By contrast, Damrosch, alongside Lawall, Casanova, and Moretti, refuse to take poststructuralism into account. As a result, what they arrive at in their theorisation of world literature is merely crystallising the concept into a static model. As such, this thesis shows that the poststructuralist account of world literature cannot be dismissed. It offers confrontational ways of thinking about the literature of the world. So, to conclude, the landscape of world literature becomes vibrant after taking poststructuralist thought into account. It reveals that all it takes for the *event* of world literature to take place is the encounter of simply one text with one reader. World literature, therefore, becomes a radically subjective engagement with the literary text, one that is constituted from but not reducible to the distinct dialectical conversation between the text and a reader. It stands in distinction to a national literature that seeks to add coherency to a process that must always refuse it.

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far as literature is concerned, tends to reveal that the meaning of any text is, of its nature, unstable. It reveals that signification is, of its nature, unstable." See John Cuddon and Claire Preston, *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 1976 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 691.

[16] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," 158.

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