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# World Literature, Globalization, and The Loss Of Stories: On the Political Economy of Narrative Today

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'World literature' has several distinct meanings. Most important for the present study, it may refer to the products of increased interaction across literary traditions in a globalized political economy. The resulting 'global literature' involves extensive convergence in narrative practices. The result is a diminishing of cultural diversity in storytelling. Globalization may also lead to certain sorts of divergence. This may seem to partially counterbalance the convergence. However, in an unequal, global economy, divergence is most often guided by hegemonic cultural practices, even if this occurs negatively. Specifically, such divergence commonly operates through identity-based repudiation of global standardization with a consequent simplification and distortion of putatively indigenous traditions. Thus, in unequal global conditions, both convergence and divergence have the effect of reducing the diversity of narrative cultures. In consequence, the globalization of literature may have deleterious effects on the aesthetics – and indeed the ethics and politics – of narrative. The essay ends with some possibilities for reversing this trend.

**Keywords:** world literature, globalization, universals, diversity, cultural extinction, hegemony.

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A few years ago, I was watching a Hindi movie, *Akele Hum Akele Tum* ('Us Alone, You Alone'). A little bit into the movie, I began to think: this is not entirely unlike *Kramer vs. Kramer*. The feeling became stronger as the film progressed. At one point, the father is preparing breakfast for his son and himself. Watching this, I remembered a scene in *Kramer vs. Kramer* where the son complains about the father getting shells into the eggs. The father replies, pretending he intentionally added eggshell as an ingredient, that this is actually good because it makes the eggs crunchy. Just then, the boy in *Akele Hum Akele Tum* complained that his father had gotten shells into the eggs. The father replied, pretending he intentionally added eggshell as an ingredient, that this is actually good because it makes the eggs crunchy.

No doubt, many people have had the experience of having seen a particular movie or having read a particular story before – not only within, but also across traditions. I am not referring to the sorts of cross-cultural patterns that arise spontaneously in different literatures. (I will return to these in a moment.) I am referring, rather, to a sort of literary or cinematic 'bandwagon' effect. Something is successful, so other authors begin to imitate it – or, more accurately, something is successful, so publishers and film producers begin to pour money into projects (novels, screenplays) that seem to share the crucial, profit-generating quality.

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Remakes and partial remakes, such as *Akele Hum Akele Tum*, are cases of this sort, but somewhat unusual ones. Most often, the resulting uniformity is a matter of topic, theme, style, narrative structure – not a specific plot or particular moments of dialogue. For example, it is commonplace to remark that the financial and critical success of *Midnight's Children* prompted publishers to recruit Indian authors, prompted Indian authors to write in English, fostered the spread of certain stylistic techniques and 'postmodern' approaches to writing 'postcolonial' novels, and so on. Indeed, even *Midnight's Children* is a peculiar example. Homogenization is rarely the result of a single work. For instance, the spread of Hollywood-style cinematic and narrative techniques is well known. Certainly some films were more important than others in producing this result; but no single movie, nor even a small set of movies, was primarily responsible.

The general point here is, of course, well known. The globalization of political economy tends to foster a sort of global literature and culture: a 'world literature', in one sense of the phrase. In the bulk of this essay, I will consider what this means. I will also consider, more briefly, what problems it might pose, and, very briefly indeed, what one might do in response to such problems.

## 1. WHAT IS WORLD LITERATURE?

In order to begin this consideration, it is useful to contrast world literature with something that might seem to be its equivalent: literary universals. Though only a handful of scholars have been actively engaged in research on literary universals, interest in the topic has grown considerably in the past decade or so. It may seem that this sort of research and interest are inseparable from the idea of world literature. Certainly, there are senses of 'world literature' that do go hand in hand with the study of literary universals; but there are also forms of 'world literature' that are actually incompatible with such study.

Literary universals are properties or relations that recur across genetically and areally unrelated literary traditions with a frequency that is greater than chance, at a statistically significant level.<sup>1</sup> Genetically unrelated traditions are traditions that do not have a common source. Areally unrelated traditions are traditions that did not influence one another, at least with respect to the putative universal. Universals may result from shared biological predispositions, but also from spontaneously convergent patterns in group dynamics, cross-culturally recurring tendencies in child development that are not genetically determined as such, trans-historical propensities in the trajectories of interpersonal relations, and so on.

What about world literature, then? One may distinguish at least three distinct senses of the phrase. The first is simply the expansion of comparative literary study beyond Europhone literatures to traditions of verbal art from all areas of the world. In this sense, 'world literature' is not something separate from all

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion, see (Hogan 2003).

the literature that is already available. It is not a selection from that literature or a new sort of literature. It is simply a new, encompassing categorization designed in opposition to other, restrictive categorizations. It has consequences for literary study, but not necessarily for literature itself. (The point of this will become clear when I consider other senses of the phrase.) One of the prime critical areas in which it has productive consequences is the study of literary universals. It provides the only basis on which one can hope to isolate cross-cultural and trans-historical literary patterns. Indeed, the point is consequential outside literary study *per se*. Literature is in some respects an irreplaceable source of information on certain aspects of the human mind, human society, human relations, and related matters. As such, world literature in this sense is, or should be, of central importance not only for criticism and interpretation, but also for cognitive and affective science, anthropology, and other fields. One may use ‘literature of the world’ to refer to this sense of ‘world literature.’

A second meaning of ‘world literature’ is narrower. It refers to that set of literary works that have importance across traditions.<sup>2</sup> For example, the *Rāmāyana* has passed across languages and cultures, assuming significance in different literary traditions – not only the various language traditions of India (comparable to the various national traditions of Europe), but non-Indian traditions (e.g., Indonesian) as well. As such, it is a part of world literature in this second sense. The same point could be made about *Tales of the 1001 Nights* or *Hamlet*. In order to distinguish it from other ideas of world literature, one may refer to this as ‘transnational literature.’

Transnational literature is certainly a valid object of study. Indeed, one potentially has a great deal to learn about literary reputation, the dissemination of literary works, literary influence, and other topics, by studying cross-cultural reception. However, the very things that make this a valuable field of study also make it a problematic category, if one tries to give it normative or even the wrong sort of intellectual weight. Almost all major Hollywood films are ‘transnational cinema’ in this sense, but brilliant works of Malayalam cinema are not. Discrepancies such as this are just the sorts of thing that one can come to understand by research on transnational art. But it is important to recognize that the greater transnationality of a particular work or tradition is not necessarily an indicator of, so to speak, greater ‘universality’ in either the descriptive sense of ‘universal’ or in the normative sense. Works of literature and film become transnational in part due to what languages are known across cultures, what publication outlets and distribution circuits there are for different works, what groups have higher prestige, who controls education policy, and so on.

Beyond the creation of a transnational canon, discrepancies in economic power, social hegemony, and other factors produce further effects. In the proper circumstances, one of these effects may be the increasing assimilation of one literary tradition to another. For example, as more Hollywood films become transnationally canonical, the films of other traditions become increasingly similar to Hollywood films.

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<sup>2</sup> This is, for example, David Damrosch’s (2003) usage.

This is likely to occur for the simple reason that each new non-American filmmaker makes films in relation to a set of prior works. That set is not limited by the filmmaker's nationality. Rather, it is affected by the salience or prominence of different films in the author's memory, the prototypes that have been formed in that author's mind by watching films (national and transnational), etc. (I will consider this process in greater detail below.) As such, the works of any new filmmaker are likely to be highly influenced by Hollywood. Moreover, these new films will contribute to the further 'Hollywoodization' of cinema through their own subsequent influence.

This leads to the third sense of 'world literature': literature that is the product of intertraditional influence. This is the sense alluded to at the outset of this essay. In order to keep this sense distinct, one may refer to it as 'global literature.' Global literature is a body of literature that represents the convergence of different traditions. However, it does not represent *spontaneous* convergence. Rather, it is results from what one might call *contact* convergence.

One should consider these forms of convergence in greater detail.

## **2. COMING TOGETHER: SPONTANEOUS CONVERGENCE AND CONTACT CONVERGENCE**

Spontaneous convergence is the result of processes that occur in each tradition separately. It begins with cycles of practice within a tradition. Those cycles lead to innovations that are retained because they fulfill certain purposes of verbal art that recur cross-culturally. For example, our emotion systems appear to be structured such that emotional effects are, in part, contrastive. If Jones anticipates winning a big prize, then does not win it, he may feel sad – even though his objective situation is precisely the same as before. Indeed his situation is the same as when he anticipated some harm then felt happy when that harm did not occur. Given this emotional propensity, and given our enjoyment of certain sorts of emotional experience, one might expect different cultures to develop narratives for emotional engagement. Moreover, one might expect those cultures to develop those narratives in such a way as to begin with some sort of default emotional normalcy, move to some degree of emotional pain, then conclude with some sort of emotional pleasure. In a narrative trajectory of this sort, the pain is enhanced by contrast with the initial normalcy, and the final pleasure is enhanced by contrast with the intervening pain. Thus, one might expect a structure of this sort to recur across cultures. At the same time, this structure is clearly not innate. If it comes to be standard in different traditions, that probably results from the separate development of the practice in different places, as people improved their storytelling through cycles of production and revision.

In contrast with such spontaneous convergence, other forms of similarity development result from the influence of one tradition on the other. This is ‘contact convergence.’ This occurs most obviously through the transmission of particular literary works across traditions.

In order to understand contact convergence, one needs to consider the general processes by which people create works of art. Storytellers, for example, draw on multiple levels of cognitive structures to make stories. These levels include broad schemas, prototypes, and instances or exempla. The broad schemas are the sorts of things that can be affected by general ideas (e.g., aspects of normative aesthetic theories, such as the Neoclassical unities of time, place, and action). However, both schemas and prototypes are usually abstracted from instances: which is to say, particular works. Specifically, prototypes result from a process of weighted averaging across instances. The averaging is ‘weighted’ in the sense that some features are usually more prominent in the prototypes than in the instances themselves. These features may be more emotionally consequential or more distinctive of the category. To take an ordinary example, the prototypical man is probably more masculine than the statistically average man.<sup>3</sup>

Schemas are more abstract than prototypes; but they are not, in general, quite so minimal as dictionary definitions. First of all, schemas give one the features of the central distribution of the category. They then delimit specific alternatives that fall outside the central distribution, but include all or many of the remaining cases. Consider, for example, the central distribution of birds fly. In keeping with this, our schema for birds includes ‘can fly’ as a default value. However, some birds are injured and some types of bird cannot fly. These are included as non-default alternatives in schemas.<sup>4</sup>

Our thoughts about birds, our expectations of birds, and so on, are guided by complex interactions of prototypes with schemas and with the constantly shifting sets of instances or exempla from which they derive. The same point holds for the events, characters, scenes, styles, and other features of literary works. Our understanding and imagination of any story we read or write is also guided by prototypes, schemas, and exempla. Within this list, exempla are particularly important, for they are the primary source of the other two structures. Moreover, not all exempla are equal. Some works have drawn our prolonged and repeated attention, while others have not. Individually, the former are more cognitively consequential than the latter. The distinction here is roughly equivalent to that between ‘canonical’ and non-canonical literature. On the other hand, there is never a perfect alignment between the works that someone has studied, re-read, etc., and the canon of literary works taught in schools or studied individually by other people. Indeed, one’s ‘idiolectal canon’ – the set of works that one has studied, discussed, reviewed, and so forth – will never encompass the entire official canon of one’s society. Even if Smith somehow manages to read the entire official canon, she will give most works only passing attention. In this way,

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<sup>3</sup> See (Kahneman and Miller 1986: 143) on the case of lettuce as a prototypical diet food. Clearly, lettuce has far fewer calories than the statistically average diet food.

<sup>4</sup> See (Holland, Holyoak, Nisbett & Thagard 1986) on schemas and defaults.

they will have no greater effect on her prototypes and schemas than will episodes of television programs that she saw once and never reconsidered. Moreover, there are going to be other stories to which she has devoted such attention – for example, television programs that she taught in class – stories that are, therefore, part of her idiolectal canon, but that do not have social canonical status.

Related to this, one's understanding and imagination of verbal art has an important normative or evaluative component; but this is not a matter of one's entire idiolectal canon. Rather, there is a further, still more restricted set of works that define literary excellence for any given person. This is not simply the set of works that one would *say* define literary excellence. (That is largely a matter of what one believes other people think are the best works.) These are the works that actually have a place of high esteem in one's experience, works that are readily activated as evaluative standards in one's representational and emotional memory. These are not works that one has judged primarily in terms of some list of qualities. They are, rather, works that have given one the sort of experience one wants from literature. One may refer to these as 'paradigms'.

More exactly, then, one may say that each of us has a hierarchy of exempla, ranging from a limited set of idiolectal paradigms, through a broader idiolectal canon, down to a set of increasingly peripheral instances of various literary categories. To some extent, different people in a given society will share such paradigms, canons, and peripheral instances. One may refer to these as the social paradigms, etc., of a given group. Note that even these will only partially overlap with the official or publically acknowledged paradigms, canon, and so forth, which therefore form a further category.

Authors, again, draw on schemas, prototypes, and exempla in producing new works. These include schemas, etc., from a range of non-literary areas, such as the routines of daily life. They also, very importantly, include the schemas, prototypes, and exempla of literature: narrative, character, and so forth. The production of works of verbal art includes at least two complexes of principles that guide this process.<sup>5</sup> The first is the complex of principles that generate the characters, events, and larger narrative trajectories initially. The second is the complex of principles that allow the author to judge the success of that generation. The former may be called 'development' principles; the latter, 'evaluation' principles.<sup>6</sup> The evaluation principles make particular reference to paradigms and to the author's experience of paradigms. Put simply, the author's relation to paradigmatic works sets a sort of standard for that author's own evaluation of the effectiveness of the new work.

I can now give a more technical statement regarding contact convergence. Contact convergence in verbal art becomes possible when there is an influx of exempla from one tradition to another. Of course, these new exempla produce only a minimal, passive alteration unless they affect the production of new

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<sup>5</sup> See (Hogan 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Though they are conceptually and even to some extent temporally distinct, the processes of generation (or development) and evaluation are, of course, tightly integrated in practice. In other words, evaluation begins almost the moment that generation begins and it has continuous effects on generation.

works in the recipient tradition. Thus they have a significant convergence effect only if they alter the cognitive structures that produce works of verbal art: which is to say, only if they alter the development and evaluation principles that govern such production, as well as the related structures that guide understanding and response on the part of readers. This suggests that the exempla will be more consequential to the extent that they are established as canonical or, beyond that, paradigmatic. On the other hand, a very large number of peripheral works may collectively have significant consequences as well.

In recent years, globalization has had just these effects. Specifically, there has been an enormous influx of Europhone and particularly English-language works into the paradigmatic (at least the official paradigmatic), canonical, and peripheral bodies of exempla in virtually every tradition.

### 3. CONTACT CONVERGENCE, EVALUATION, AND HEGEMONY

This brings me to a consequential point about varieties of contact convergence. Contact convergence comes in at least two types. One may refer to them as ‘exchange convergence’ and ‘hegemonic convergence.’ In exchange convergence, the contact is limited and the status of the ‘source’ and ‘recipient’ societies is roughly equal – in terms of political economy, cultural prestige, and so on. In these cases, it seems reasonable to assume that the transmitted literary work, form, or idea appeals to some interest already present in the recipient tradition. For example, it may be that Sanskrit drama, particularly *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, provided some impetus for the development of romantic dramas in China (see Liu 1972: 13 and Dolby 1976: 4), though the literary contact was limited and not economically or culturally hegemonic. If so, this suggests a prior propensity for, or openness toward, relevant sorts of aesthetic practice in Chinese society: not necessarily romantic drama *per se*, but romantic story creation and something along the lines of dramatic performance.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, there is a clear influence of English poetry on Indian poetry in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. This influence resulted from extensive contact including political and economic domination and cultural hegemony, ranging from diffuse matters of prestige to particular curricular programs in educational institutions.<sup>8</sup> This suggests nothing about the prior interests or needs of the recipient culture – and of course nothing about the quality of the particulars that influenced that recipient culture.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> As Mackerras puts it, ‘that there is influence from India need not be doubted. But to ascribe this influence as the *reason* for the rise of Chinese drama at this time and place is quite another matter’ (1990: 30).

<sup>8</sup> On colonialism, hegemony, and English literary study in India, see, for example, (Viswanathan 1989).

<sup>9</sup> When I have presented these ideas publicly, I have invariably been asked if the currently popular notion of hybridity does not pose a challenge to what I am saying. The idea appears to be two-fold. First, there is a descriptive point. Every culture – thus every literary tradition – is always already hybrid. In consequence, there is no point in longing nostalgically for a condition of cultural purity. The second point is normative. An attempt to achieve cultural purity is always a matter of purging hybrid cultural formations of putatively foreign elements in an attempt to limit and control a cultural mixing that one should celebrate rather than condemn.

Globalization has clearly led to such hegemonic contact convergence. It is widely recognized that the direction of transmission of cultural items through globalization has been disproportionately from Euro-American culture to other cultures and from Europhone – particularly English-language – literature to other traditions of verbal art. Most of us have anecdotal evidence of this discrepancy. One expects professors from India, Japan, or China to be familiar with Euro-American cultural products, from the paradigmatic works of literary canons to blockbusters of popular culture; but the reverse is not the case. For example, one expects an Indian professor to recognize the name ‘Homer,’ and perhaps even ‘Homer Simpson’; but an Indian professor would not expect an American colleague to recognize the name ‘Vyāsa’. Statistics are available – and they are consistent with the anecdotes. A 2005 study from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) points out that ‘developing countries account for less than 1% share of exports of cultural goods’ (‘International’ 9). Consider the book trade: the U.S. exports almost 2 billion dollars worth of books every year, as does the U.K. In contrast, China exports only about 35% of that, Japan under 6%, India about 2%, South Africa less than 1%, and the exports of countries such as Turkey, Kenya, and Ethiopia are almost insignificant (e.g., Ethiopia exported only \$13,000 in books during the year covered by the study). A more recent UNESCO document reports that Europe and North America account for 84% of all printed media export; East Asia accounts for 10.7%; Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 0.35% (Kutukdjian and Corbett 2009: 131). The point is not confined to books. The UNESCO study ‘International Flows’ notes that ‘Africa as a whole has produced only 600 movies... in its history’: roughly the number produced by the U.S. in 18 months. Moreover, ‘more than one-third of all countries in the world do not produce any films at all’ (47); indeed, the percentage is closer to one-half (88 out of 185, according to the more recent report: Kutukdjian and

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The descriptive point presents ‘hybridity’ as if it is – or is at least part of – a well-developed theory of cultural interaction; but it is not. Homi Bhabha introduced the term into current theoretical discourse. He presented it as an alternative to ‘a world conceived in binary terms’ (1994: 14); but, as a theoretical concept, it hardly goes beyond a vague, approving gesture in the direction of syncretism (set in binary opposition to everything else, which is reductively characterized as binaristic). Given this vagueness, the fundamental descriptive claim (of universal cultural hybridity) is undoubtedly true: every culture develops in some interaction with other cultures. But that tells nothing about the nature, proportions, or processes of ‘hybridization.’ Moreover, the alternatives are wrongly framed. The point of criticizing cultural hegemony is not to assert the importance of absolute cultural purity. Indeed, rather than supporting or simply dismissing affirmations of purity, part of the point is to understand just how such affirmations come about in reaction against largely coercive forms of syncretism.

This brings me to the normative point. Xenophobia undoubtedly leads to intellectual desiccation and cultural rigidity; but that is hardly the result of someone affirming the value of non-hegemonic traditions and opposing their increased attenuation; it is hardly the result of someone saying that, for instance, particular languages should be cultivated so that they do not become extinct. Moreover, a general presumption in favor of the hybrid seems misplaced. For example, the history of colonialism attests that hybrid cultural formations may take, not the best, but the worst of both worlds. Thus one often finds that women in colonized societies took on the disabilities of many European women (e.g., economic dependency); but their hybrid culture did not relieve them of indigenous disabilities (e.g., those associated with polygamy). (On this point, see Amadiume 1987 and Van Allen 1972, 1976, as well as Hogan 2000: 173-212.)

Corbett 2009: 132-133). In keeping with this, a list of the 398 top grossing films in the world ('All-Time') includes only four non-English language works. The first of these comes in at number 268.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of many very small language communities and associated traditions of verbal art, these discrepancies have contributed to the actual extinction of the indigenous tradition.<sup>11</sup> In other cases, they have involved the reconfiguration of the disproportionately recipient traditions to such an extent that their new products are perhaps better understood as variants on a global literary discourse than as developments of local traditions. Indeed, even earlier works of the tradition come to be understood in terms set by the hegemonic culture – as in the recent fad of arguing that such-and-such a non-Western tradition was always already fully in keeping with the ideas of Jacques Derrida.

To a great extent, this discrepancy is due to concrete political, economic, and social factors: ownership of publishing and media, language domination, and the legacy of colonial schooling practices. It is also involved with prestige (what Bourdieu 1993 referred to as 'symbolic capital'). This, too, can be spelled out in cognitive terms. An author's evaluation processes include placing him- or herself in the position of potential readers and altering features of the work that would be likely to be idiosyncratic: features that would be unlikely to have the desired effect on a reader. Part of the communicative skill of an author is in – consciously or unconsciously – recognizing such features and revising them as needed. Suppose, for example, that a given author happens to find dark hair and dark eyes particularly contributory toward beauty in women. That author is perfectly free to give a character dark hair and dark eyes and to make her beautiful, even connecting these features with the beauty. However, such an author could not expect a reader to infer beauty because of these features. Contrast the suggestions of 'there she was, all blonde haired and blue eyed' and those of 'there she was, all black haired and brown eyed.'

As this example suggests, one component of such an evaluation process concerns not individual idiosyncrasy, but rather socially recognized values: prominently, prestige. Once a given property or practice becomes prestigious, it tends to be identified with other values as well. For example, if light skin is prestigious (i.e., if it is socially prized), it will tend to come to be thought of as beautiful, in contrast with alternatives. The same points hold for cultural prestige and literary evaluation. This then enters into both the development and evaluation principles by which writers judge and revise their works. At least initially, the prestige-based evaluation principles will be separate from, and perhaps opposed to, the authors' own spontaneous aesthetic response.

Thus, contact leads to convergence by altering literary prototypes, schemas, and so on. Moreover, insofar as contact alters prestige standards in the direction of the hegemonic society (and that is commonly part of hegemony), it is likely to produce convergence in output that goes beyond convergence in attitudes

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<sup>10</sup> There are, of course, partial exceptions to these trends (see Kutukdjian and Corbett 2009: 131-135); but these do not significantly affect the overall picture.

<sup>11</sup> On efforts to preserve at least some works of verbal art in dying traditions, see (Spolsky 2004: 214).

(i.e., the resulting works are likely to be more similar than the aesthetic feelings of their authors). Put somewhat crudely: authors may, in a sense, come to deface their works relative to their own evaluative responses. They may do this in order to make those works conform more fully with what they take to be common evaluative responses – or they may simply be aiming for increased sales. In any case, this occurs even in cases where actual general evaluative responses are not in keeping with the prestige standard: cases in which that standard is, rather, solely part of hegemonic ideology.

When hegemonic contact convergence occurs, prestige standards spread from the hegemonic society to recipient societies. This is part of the broader spread of hegemonic ideologies. But there is a complication here, already suggested in the example of hair color. Hegemonic ideologies tend to involve denigrating evaluations of at least certain aspects of subordinated or non-hegemonic cultures. Indeed, it is difficult to see how this could be avoided, given that hegemonic ideology, by its nature, affirms the superiority of the hegemonic culture. That said, ideology does not automatically crush the pride of subordinated peoples. Indeed, quite the contrary: it is likely to lead at least some members of a subordinate group to an enhanced sense of their group identity and an enhanced pride in that identity. One result of this is that hegemonic works may come to serve as *negative* models, rather than (or in addition to) being positive models.

To get an idea of how negative models operate, consider the following simple case. Suppose Jones is very concerned with being manly. He notices a woman checking her fingernails by opening her hand and holding it palm outward. Later, he catches himself doing the same thing – then quickly shifts to the more manly method of making a fist and turning the palm inward. Jones is using a negative model based on gender categorization.<sup>12</sup> Less trivial instances are ubiquitous in literature. One case may be found in Rabindranath Tagore's short story, 'Housewife'. A young boy, Ashu, is discovered playing at dolls with his younger sister. As a result, he is given the humiliating nickname 'Housewife'. The point of the nickname is to hold up such behavior as a negative model for masculinity.<sup>13</sup> Negative modeling not only guides characters and events in stories; it may have consequences for the production and reception of literary works themselves. If strong sorrowful emotions (e.g., in 'melodrama') come to be associated with female writers for example, such emotions may be avoided by male writers, or by publishers of male writers. When this sort of thing occurs across literary traditions, it may give rise to forms of *contact divergence*.

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<sup>12</sup> The example is not wholly fanciful. As a boy, I remember a schoolmate pointing out this difference to me. It seems I had inadvertently looked at my nails in the wrong way. He was providing brotherly advice so that I could avoid future embarrassment.

<sup>13</sup> I should note that Tagore is not supporting but criticizing this use of negative modeling to enforce norms of gender ideology.

#### 4. MOVING APART: SPONTANEOUS DIVERGENCE AND CONTACT DIVERGENCE

Just as one may distinguish between spontaneous and contact convergence, one may distinguish between spontaneous and contact divergence. Spontaneous divergence is the ordinary way that traditions become different. Certain biological, cultural, group dynamic, and other universals give verbal art common initial conditions. Other universals foster convergence through the historical changes that occur in literary traditions, as already noted. However, not all aspects of the initial conditions are identical, and certainly not all aspects of historical change are subject to convergent pressures. Even slight differences in the initial canon of works accepted by two groups, or slight differences in environment or population, may accumulate to quite significant differences over generations.

Spontaneous divergence is important for a number of reasons. Among other things, it is probably not too much of an exaggeration to say that, without spontaneous divergence both across and within traditions, art is likely to stagnate. For example, one crucial spur to creativity has been contact following divergence. The European ‘discovery’ of Indian literature and philosophy at the end of the Eighteenth Century provided one important impetus for the development of philosophical idealism and literary romanticism. European contact with African and East Asian visual art in the early Twentieth Century contributed significantly to the development of Modernism. Going in another direction, in the Tenth and Eleventh centuries the influence of Greek thought gave new vitality to Arabic philosophy and literary theory. Such examples could easily be multiplied.

This is unsurprising, given cognitive accounts of creativity. Traditions develop and become crystallized in shared canons. This process tends to produce a strong set of widely shared proximate associations for any given literary topic, genre, etc. For example, in Petrarchan love poetry, the beloved came to be linked with a highly stereotyped set of features, famously parodied by Shakespeare in sonnet 130 (‘My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun’). According to writers in creative cognition theory,<sup>14</sup> creativity is a matter of accessing more remote associations that are also fitting for the task at hand: e.g., writing love poetry. Creativity becomes increasingly difficult as proximate associations become entrenched, both individually and socially. Contact with other traditions alters this situation. First, due to spontaneous divergence, it is likely to present authors with quite different complexes of association. Second, due to universal constraints on such divergence (e.g., due to the way our emotion systems operate), these new associations are likely to be apt for the recipient poet’s purposes.

In contrast with spontaneous divergence, contact divergence is usually less a matter of chance than choice. It may result from prestige and ideology, as mentioned earlier; but, in each case, including cases of prestige and ideology, it commonly results most fundamentally from identity categorization or – in social

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the essays in (Sternberg 1999) and (Smith, Ward & Finke 1995).

psychological terminology – in-group/out-group division. Here one may return to the example of looking at one's fingernails. Why did Jones feel the need to change from one method of fingernail observation to another? The fundamental reason was that Jones assigned people, including himself, a categorial identity based on sex. He then encoded certain aspects of their and his behavior in terms of that categorial identity and its associated norms. The same point holds for Ashu's humiliation at the nickname 'Housewife' and his resulting sense that 'to play with your little sister on a school holiday was the most shameful thing in the world' (Tagore 1994: 57).

The same general point holds for literary production and reception. People categorize literary works in terms of in-groups and out-groups: most obviously – but not only – nations. In a short essay, one cannot go into the dynamics of hegemonic denigration and counter-hegemonic response in any detail; but here is a simplified outline of one common scenario. The development of hegemonic contact relations between two cultures produces a situation in which many members of the dominated society are likely to feel oppressed by the prestige relations defined in the hegemonic tradition. In connection with this, they are likely to fear that continued erosion of indigenous traditions will produce a particular sort of convergent development: what one might call *reduction*. Reduction refers to a form of convergent development with two main features. First, it leads to a more or less common culture in the two societies, with relatively limited differences. Second, this common culture has conserved overwhelmingly more of one culture than the other.

A growing possibility of cultural reduction tends to elicit a specifiable range of responses.<sup>15</sup> Some of these foster convergence: reductive or non-reductive. However, some varieties reject convergence. One recurrent response of the latter sort is *reactionary traditionalism*. Reactionary traditionalism is, roughly, an attempt to re-establish a declining indigenous tradition (e.g., Igbo tradition) on the basis of a repudiation of the alien, hegemonic tradition (say, English Christian tradition). Of course, the result is not as 'pure' as the traditionalist claims. Indeed, the 'indigenous' tradition in these cases is often understood only in relation to, or by way of, the hegemonic tradition. Thus, the indigenous tradition may be reductively understood as a sort of negation of the hegemonic tradition. For example, if the hegemonic tradition is seen as free in sexual relations, 'true' indigenous tradition may be viewed as tightly and inflexibly chaste. Alternatively, indigenous tradition may be understood in terms of ideologies taken over from the hegemonic culture. For example, reactionary traditionalists may draw on colonialist stereotypes to characterize their culture as ubiquitously religious without any secular tendencies. In the case of reactionary traditionalism, then, the divergence of the dominated culture from the hegemonic culture is largely guided by the principles and practices of the hegemonic culture. In this way, contact divergence is often a part of or a stage in the larger, reductive collapse of different traditions into a global culture with a global literature.

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<sup>15</sup> See (Hogan 2000: 9-23).

## 5. THE FUTURE OF CREATIVITY AND MORALS

I take it that reductive convergence – including forms of convergence masquerading as divergence – is the predominant cultural tendency of globalization. Small languages and their traditions of verbal art are disappearing quite rapidly. At the same time, the ‘healthy’ traditions (including traditions in English, French, German, Japanese, and so on) are converging through contact: largely hegemonic contact from America and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe toward other regions. As this suggests, the growing homogenization is not the result of uniform or proportionate contributions from different traditions.<sup>16</sup> Euro-American cultural hegemony is, of course, bound up with economic, political, and military domination. It is unsurprising that this entire complex is associated with violence: both the violence of reactionary counter-hegemonic practices (such as religious fundamentalism: a form of reactionary traditionalism) and the much greater (direct and indirect) violence of the hegemonic powers.

I do not wish to be an alarmist. There is still considerable diversity out there, and not everyone is engaged in shooting and bombing. Moreover, it is important to note that some forms of contact convergence, including forms that have occurred within globalization (such as global activism for peace), are clearly salutary. However, if the current trend in contact convergence continues, it is likely to have deleterious consequences in a number of areas. For example, an increasing loss of diversity in verbal art, both within and across traditions, would be almost certain to have a degrading impact on creativity throughout the growing global literary monoculture. Even more importantly, diversity in narrative situations and themes often presents people with challenges to their moral assumptions, just as diversity in literary techniques presents them with challenges to their aesthetic assumptions. A decline in the breadth of moral and political alternatives could have practical human costs of a sort that one might not ordinarily associate with a decline in the diversity of verbal art.

Unfortunately, I do not have much to say by way of indicating a solution to these problems. The most important responses obviously concern global economic and information relations. The fundamental change that is needed in this context is something along the lines of what was formerly called a *New World Information Order* (see ‘New World’), though with changes in those aspects of the original program that might have led toward censorship. In such a new order, the flows of ‘information’ – including literary ephemera, canons, and paradigms – would, in principle, be balanced, and the contact situation would be shifted from hegemony to equality of exchange. Complete realization of this goal may not be possible; but it seems likely that consistent effort in this direction might at least partially ameliorate

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<sup>16</sup> In Heritiana Ranaivoson’s (2007) terms, there is a reduction in the ‘variety’ or number of traditions and in the degree of ‘dissimilarity’ across traditions. Moreover, the (increasingly similar) traditions that remain are not ‘balanced’ or proportionately represented globally.

the current condition. For example, we are unlikely to make any progress if we are not able to diversify ownership relations and distribution practices in literary, artistic, and other information industries. The ideal of democratically owned and controlled media may be utopian. However, as active citizens of our various countries – particularly those of us who are citizens of the hegemonic countries – we are, in principle, able to place at least some democratic limits on the control of media by a few mega-corporations.<sup>17</sup>

There are also things we can do in our capacity as teachers and scholars. First, and most obviously, we can continue our efforts to expand comparative literary study so that it is genuinely a study of ‘literature of the world’. This is a project that has begun in earnest and has made great progress in recent years. As this project continues, it is important that it be integrated with a second task: cultivating recognition of the diversity in cultural practices that characterizes both hegemonic and non-hegemonic societies. In small but hopefully incremental ways, teaching this diversity might help to limit tendencies toward expecting uniformity within one’s own tradition and (falsely) imputing uniformity to other traditions. We can do this in part through (complex, diversity-enhancing) interpretation of individual works and in part by challenging the development of canons that tend to reduce traditions to uniformity. (I think here, for example, of the reduction of Indian fiction to Anglophone fiction – particularly post-Rushdie Anglophone fiction – or the reduction of Indian cinema to Bollywood films made after economic liberalization.) The general idea of internal group diversity seems to be fairly widely accepted in principle. However, it does not seem to be nearly as widely accepted in practice. Indeed, the tendency to make generalizations about group propensities appears to be part of a cognitive predisposition toward categorization. If anything, the tendency is enhanced in in-group/out-group identity categorization. As a result, imputations of group uniformity are highly robust, even in the face of self-conscious beliefs that oppose such generalizations. Teaching against this tendency requires a further, also self-conscious decision and constantly renewed effort.

Finally, one might think back to the Sandinista attempt to involve increasing numbers of ordinary people in imaginative writing. Networks of influence and interaction tend to develop and diverge spontaneously, once people begin to produce literary works. The multiplication of creative writers and the multiplication of creative outlets should tend to generate diverging clusters of – so to speak – ‘mini-traditions’, even within the same encompassing culture. This has the potential to compensate for the loss of diversity elsewhere, at least partially, by functionally recapitulating the relative canonical separation of culturally distinct traditions. This is increasingly possible because literary networks form readily through the Internet and related digital media, generating their own local social canons.

Indeed, there may be a potential for even greater internal diversity within the growing global monoculture than there was in earlier, separate cultural traditions. After all, those separate traditions

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<sup>17</sup> For discussions of these issues, see (Bagdikian 2004), (McChesney 2008), and (McChesney & Schiller 2003).

included their own hegemonies and reductions. Some critics have viewed the post-modern period as an ‘era of repetition’, as Umberto Eco put it in his semiotic analysis of *seriality* (1990: 84). However, Eco rightly points out that ‘each of the types of repetition’ found in post-modernity ‘belongs by right to the entire history of artistic creativity’ (1990: 95). Throughout the world, narratives may be increasingly guided by global hegemonies, but formerly they were often guided by regional hegemonies. Even more importantly, in the past, the vast majority of people were excluded from literary production, or even from forms of literary reception that had consequences for canon formation. New media may loosen some of these constraints.

I do not wish to overstate the possibilities here. Even in small, Internet-based communities, not everyone has the same opportunities for an open reception or general appreciation, whatever the quality of their work. Indeed, not everyone has access to the Internet.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, digital media are no less available as tools for homogenization than for diversity. Nonetheless, there are real possibilities in this direction.

In sum, world literature can mean different things. Most crucially, it can mean the study of literary works from all world traditions or the increasing convergence of literary traditions into a global literature that is part of a reductive monoculture. The study of literary universals is, of course, compatible only with the former sense of ‘world literature’: a sense in which there is great diversity and divergence across traditions, if always diversity and divergence constrained by shared human propensities – biological, group dynamical, developmental, and so on. Indeed, the rise of global literature places a historical limit on the study of literary universals and thus on the insights such study can give into the human mind, human society, and so forth. More importantly, the rise of global literature may produce conditions that are deleterious for the development, or even maintenance, of human aesthetic and ethical creativity.

There are, however, things we can do. As citizens and political agents, we can follow writers and activists such as Sean MacBride in supporting a New World Information Order and a New World Economic Order. As teachers and scholars, we can cultivate our students’ and our readers’ sense of diversity: not only across but within traditions. Finally, we can help to foster the expansion of imaginative writing – not its professionalization in degree programs, but its de-professionalization in networks of ordinary people creating and sharing their own poems and stories. In this way, we can cultivate internal diversity even in the very heart of the monoculture.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> On economic class, education, and other factors bearing on access to new technologies, see Wilhelm 2000: 48-85.

<sup>19</sup> An earlier version of this essay was delivered as the keynote presentation of the 2008 Southern Comparative Literature Association in Auburn, AL. I am grateful to Don Wehrs and the participants for their stimulating questions and comments.

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