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INTRODUCTION: GLOBAL CRISES AND TWENTY-FIRST-
CENTURY WORLD LITERATURE

Hansong Dan and Ewa Wojno-Owczarska

In his 2017 Nobel Lecture, Kazuo Ishiguro makes a slightly lugubrious remark on the new century we are living in, before reaffirming the importance of literature and appealing for more diversity in our common literary world. To the Japanese-born British novelist's dismay, the present world is a "much smaller" place than he had ever imagined, and our time is "of dangerously increasing division."¹ Having taken "the unstoppable advance of liberal-humanist values" in Europe and America for granted, Ishiguro admits that it may have been "an illusion," and that he has been "living for some years in a bubble."² His pessimism is not unusual in our time, and with good reasons—the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the financial crash of 2008, the European Union (EU) refugee crisis, and the proliferation of Far Right ideologies and nationalisms in Europe, to name but a few. Even meteorological disasters like Hurricane Katrina could develop into devastating man-made crises, owing to New Orleans' notorious social imparity and civic mismanagement. Ishiguro finally reassures his audience, however, that our twenty-first-century literature, if opened up to "what remain today unknown literary culture," will be particularly important and give us a leg up "as we cross this difficult terrain."³

Without specific reference to the term "*Weltliteratur*," this Nobel appeal entails a similarly ideal vision of literary writing which goes beyond, diachronically and synchronically, the boundaries of national literatures in our crisis-ridden age. Crisis and world literature have been entangled with each other in various ways since the concept was first formulated by Goethe, and later consecrated by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in *Das kommunistische Manifest* (*The Communist Manifesto*, 1848). For the former,

world literature was meant to end a nationalist crisis, that is, German's "cultural dependence on France," and was a solution to the dilemma of a German intellectual "caught between metropolitan domination and nativist nationalism" in the 1820s⁴; for the latter, world literature, albeit bourgeois, could be valorized, under the force of colonialism and global capital, as a cosmopolitan literary culture *to come*, which would antiquate "national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness"⁵ during the European Revolutions of 1848, another crisis year. Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach, two German philology scholars of Jewish ancestry, who fled Nazism and took refuge in Istanbul, embraced the idea of world literature in their critical works, because it "would help stitch together the torn fabric of Western civilization."⁶ Thus, the rise and evolution of the notion of *Weltliteratur* is directly in response to crisis events in history, particularly in the West. One is tempted to say that world literature, itself a crisis mode of cultural production, continues to engage with crises on the local and global scales over the course of the twentieth century and the present. From epidemics to political scams and scandals, climate change to species extinction, financial crashes to terrorism, world literature reflects, intervenes in, and is being shaped by these crises.

Before turning to the intersection of world literature and global crises, we might pause over the historically slippery and culturally specific meanings of "crisis." Etymologically speaking, "crisis" is derived from the Ancient Greek "κρίσις," the verb form of which originally means "to choose," "to judge," and "to decide." In classical Greek, a term loaded with such a broad spectrum of meanings, as Reinhart Koselleck notes, "was central to politics" of the civic community at that time.⁷ The judicial meaning of κρίσις (*krisis*) was passed down to the Old and New Testaments, but where κρίσις (*krisis*) denotes a decisive moment at court or in a polis, the term in the Christian tradition points to God's Last Judgment, which is believed to be inevitable and "contains a promise of salvation."⁸ The modern usage of "crisis" in the West has also acquired two significantly new meanings. The first global economic crisis of 1857 prompted German lexicographers to register an economic meaning for "*Krise*."⁹ For Marx and Engels, such "commercial crises" are inescapable and recurrent in the capitalist world, and Western capitalism plagued by this vicious cycle is doomed to arrive at a final economic collapse in the long run. Another modern use of "crisis" began to assume a central place in nineteenth-century philosophy of history. Here, "crisis" is not so much an apocalyptic event that leads to the end of time as a transitional phase in the historical process, which points to an unknown future. If taking the form of a techno-scientific revolution, crisis means a Kuhnian "paradigm shift" in a

particular scientific community. In the case of French Revolution of 1789 or the First World War, crisis becomes a sort of threshold time preliminary to a new epoch, unfolding the *telos* of history at its moment of rupture. "Crisis," Koselleck concludes, "becomes a structural signature of modernity . . . [so that] the modern period since the turn of the nineteenth century can be called the age of crisis."¹⁰

In the post-Cold War era, the seemingly total triumph of liberalism in the West drove Francis Fukuyama to boldly prophesy the "end of history," a thesis that in a way amounts to the "end of global crises." Nevertheless, the ideological dominance of liberal democracy did not turn into the remedy against the "sickness" from which Europe, Asia, and the other parts of the world had suffered in the first half of the twentieth century. Be it classical or progressive, liberalism cannot cure the global crises encompassing all aspects of the contemporary world. What is worse, it has turned out that liberalism is *the* problem that inflicts us. David Harvey, a famous critic of today's neoliberalism, points out that there is "an inner connection . . . between technological dynamism, instability, dissolution of social solidarities, environmental degradation, deindustrialization, rapid shifts in time-space relations, speculative bubbles, and the general tendency towards crisis formation within capitalism."¹¹ The tragedy of liberalism, as Patrick J. Deneen poignantly contends, is that "a political system that trumpets liberty [. . .] inescapably creates conditions of powerlessness, fragmentation, mistrust, and resentment. The liberated individual comes to despise the creature of its making and the source of its powerlessness—whether perceived to be the state or the market."¹² It is liberalism that bred the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street, two dissident groups who come from different ends of the political spectrum but feel similarly dispossessed. Also, it is liberalism that emboldened American lower middle-class house buyers to turn to "responsibility- and cost-free loans" in the mortgage bond market before the 2008 financial crisis.¹³ For Deneen, the most unsettling effect of liberalism in the twenty-first century is not an economic but a cultural one. On the one hand, liberalism brings about "the liberation of the disembedded individual, a pervasive and encompassing market," and on the other, results in "the dissolution of culture," a culture that otherwise provides people with local norms, manners, and morals that existed to regulate and govern our reckless use of freedom.¹⁴ To put it simply, having destroyed local cultures and replaced them with "a pervasive *anti-culture* in which remnants of cultures would be reduced to consumer choice," liberalism "achieves not liberation but bondage."¹⁵ Since liberalism, when true to itself, is oppressive in terms of its inner logic, it will never be short of violent rebels from the periphery

of such an economic order—the rise of global terrorism in the new century is a case in point.

If liberalism itself is a generator of inequality, resentment, displacement, mistrust, and consequently, various crises, the globalized capitalist world, in turn, makes crisis a kind of discourse, or in Ruth Cruickshank's terms, "the trope of the turning-point [which is] continually generated and manipulated by the media and the market in order to perpetuate the global market economy."¹⁶ The reason why the contemporary consciousness of crisis is different from the experience of our fathers' generation is not that today those world-changing events—9/11, Syrian Civil War, the Greek debt crisis, North Korea's nuclear tests, to name but a few—are, in terms of intensity and magnitude, no longer comparable to, say, the World War I, during which 41,435,000 people were killed.¹⁷ With the new world order, it is unlikely for the millennials to experience those apocalyptic ordeals people in the twentieth century had undergone. What is new about crises today is that they are usually mediated and mediatized in such an unprecedented way that crises are turned into a postmodern spectacle, or *mise-en-scène*. Crisis, or turning-point, discourse abounds in breaking news on live TV, general election speeches, Silicon Valley's new product launch events, Hollywood blockbusters, Tweet feeds, or amateur footages circulated on YouTube. Nowadays, we are so crisis-addicted that crisis has become a staple of our everyday diet. Once a crisis event is conceived as a rhetorical construct, the prospect of social revolution will be reduced to commodified and manipulated narrative in mass media, devoid of any real revolutionary charge. No wonder Stuart Hall and his colleagues argue that in 1970s England "the 'crisis' came finally to be appropriated—by governments in office, the repressive apparatuses of the state, the media, and some articulate sectors of public opinion—as an interlocking set of planned or organized *conspiracies*."¹⁸

We are not suggesting that an ecological crisis such as global warming is merely a conspiracy. Rather, we argue that the nature of crisis has been transformed because our conceptions of reality and ways of communication have greatly changed. The Twin Towers collapsed when countless people all over the world were watching live TV news. Minutes after the mass shooting in Las Vegas happened, survivors uploaded horrific video clips onto YouTube or Facebook. Through the audience's three-dimensional (3-D) glasses, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, in his 2014 disaster film *San Andreas*, flies a rescue-and-search helicopter above a Los Angeles devastated by a magnitude 9.1 earthquake. In other words, we are now living in a globalized digital age saturated with Internet-based audiovisual media, an age

when billions of computers and smart phones instantly connect people to a deluge of information, and an age when artificial intelligence and big data are widely employed in civic crisis management. Global crises today are not necessarily immense and cataclysmic changes, but can be “end-directed” discourse that enters our imagination, unconscious desire, narrative schemas, and epistemological frame.

We have briefly discussed what crisis is and how it has evolved in the new century. Likewise, world literature has gradually assumed a new face and form in the new millennium, and its relationship with crises on a planetary scale deserves fresh reflection and reconsideration. To start with, literary scholars are still debating what world literature is. World literature, as René Wellek notes, “may mean simply all literatures,” and if so, “aims at an impossible capacious object of inquiry.” Or, with “an unhelpfully narrow” definition, it may invoke “a canon of excellent works from many languages, as when one says that this or that book or author belongs to world literature.”¹⁹ If endorsing the *inclusiveness* of world literature, one might concur with Franco Moretti that “world literature is not an object, it’s a problem, and a problem that asks for a new critical method.”²⁰ For Moretti, we cannot count on human readers to tackle the vast amount of *unread* texts produced by all national literatures of all time. With the help of digital humanities, the new hope of overcoming the disciplinary crisis of world literature lies in the so-called “distant reading,” which “allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems.”²¹ The beauty of the conjunction between distant reading and world literature, as Moretti puts it, is “they go against the grain of national historiography,”²² which usually goes hand in hand with *close* reading and blocks a distant view of national literatures in the broader system of world literature.

If tilting toward the view that world literature means *exclusiveness*, one might be tempted to blame world literature for Orientalism. Although the latest edition of *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* now runs a dazzling length of 6,000 pages, the “treasure-trove of world classics” is translated and compiled by Anglo-American scholars, published by an American press and largely taught in North American institutions. Gayatri Spivak has made some poignant remarks on the US-style world literature: “[I]n the wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest . . . [T]his happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of with-it translatese, so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan.”²³ In a similar vein, Aamir R. Mufti in

his new book, *Forget English!: Orientalism and World Literature*, situates the emergence of world literature in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the historical context of the formation of Orientalism as an assemblage of humanistic knowledge about Asia, arguing that the two are, if not the same thing, inseparable. Apart from laying bare the dark truth about world literature's "genealogy that leads to Enlightenment-era intellectual and literary practices," Mufti goes further to contend that world literature also "marks a contemporary field of study, predominantly, though by no means exclusively, in the academic humanities in the North Atlantic countries, a field that has seen a stunning success since the beginning of the new millennium, disseminating its discourse widely throughout the worlds of teaching, research, writing, publishing, and reading."²⁴ It is evident that where Moretti appeals for a divorce between national historiography and world literature, Mufti insists on welding the two more firmly in the twenty-first century.

Considering "the ongoing institutionalization of world literature in the academic humanities and in publishing,"²⁵ is it fair to accuse the world literature of a new type of "cultural imperialism," or merely take it as a victim of the cultural hegemony of English, the global literary vernacular? We would prefer not to hazard an answer here. Yet, Mufti is certainly right to point out that the early twenty-first century has seen a strong boom of "one-world thinking," which imagines the world "as a *continuous and traversable space*."²⁶ When Goethe and Marx speculated on the birth of world literature, the hypothesis was hinged on the advent of the world market, a market still nascent for Goethe's and Marx's contemporaries. Even when Werner P. Friederich famously disparaged world literature in 1960 as "a presumptuous and arrogant term,"²⁷ he had no idea how the world would be integrated by the Internet and global capitalism in the coming decades. The critical insight of Mufti's book is that it interrogates world literature at the millennial crossroad, a threshold which must be carefully qualified lest we confuse twenty-first-century world literature with its historical precedents. Admittedly, not only has the world market predicted by Goethe and Marx become the *status quo*, but the liquidity of literary publications—as "cultural commodity" in Pierre Bourdieu's sense—is at an unprecedentedly high level around the globe. Just imagine how an Amazon Kindle user in China uses "Whispersync" to buy an e-book published in the United States and within seconds the book is ready to be read!

More importantly, Mufti proceeds to warn us that the aforementioned "one-world thinking" and the "invocation of the borderless world"²⁸ in the age of globalization are largely problematic, if not completely illusory. Only capital can move more and more swiftly across the world, whereas "the

conditions of the physical movement of populations, which is necessitated by the economic and political imbalances of contemporary capitalism and the needs of capital itself, become ever more differentiated and, for large numbers of human beings, ever more perilous.”²⁹ This argument obviously resonates with Zygmunt Bauman’s differentiation between “tourists,” the elites who can travel with jet planes for pleasure, and “vagabonds,” those living at the bottom, either lacking mobility or forced to migrate. The human consequences of globalization, therefore, disabuse us of the naïve notion that world literature is a republic free from borders and undemocratic regimes. In this sense, Mufti’s book definitely poses a bold challenge to the ideas of Pascale Casanova and David Damrosch, two of the most influential scholars of world literature in our time.

For Casanova, world literary space “lies in recognizing that its boundaries, its capitals, its highways, and its forms of communication do not completely coincide with those of the political and economic world.”³⁰ Unlike Mufti who emphasizes how world literature today is disciplined by global capitalism, Casanova charts a preexisting “literary field,” the history of which is somewhat detached from our geopolitical reality and even national politics, and “is one of the incessant struggle and competition over the nature of literature itself.”³¹ This “world republic of letters” is a spiritual kingdom, its privileged citizens (such as Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes, Joyce, Faulkner, and Beckett) holding literary capitals that are “nonnational and ahistorical.”³² Although literary production, transaction, competition, and circulation in Casanova’s “literary space” is still economy oriented, this “spiritual economy” entails a self-contained world literature market, along with a set of laws and principles independent of the historical progress of national politics. While Mufti makes the case for politicizing and historicizing twenty-first-century world literature in the grip of economic globalization, Casanova suggests autonomy and singularity of world literature and appeals for depoliticization and dehistoricization.

For Damrosch, world literature is less a field of study or a concept than “a mode of reading.”³³ In his opinion, works becoming world literature means departing from “a national sphere into a new worldly context,” a journey during which “works take on a new life . . . [and] the work is newly framed, both in its translations and in its new cultural contexts.”³⁴ As works are emancipated from local literary and cultural history, it does not mean they are customized for the interpretative communities from host culture. To understand world literature would require one’s breakaway from the established aesthetic and cognitive patterns and active engagement with alien literary forms and subaltern perspectives. The travel of Third World literature in the

West, albeit characterized by inequality and immobility, is not necessarily subject to orientalist prejudice or hegemonic otherization. From Damrosch's vantage point, Mufti probably accords too much explanatory power to orientalist thinking and postcolonial power relationship, without believing that the Western academia could take the initiative to reflect on and renew its Eurocentric reference frame of humanities, in spite of the institutionalization of world literature. After all, scholars like Edward Said, Spivak, and Mufti, with tenured professorships in the most prestigious American universities, are an integral part of such institutionalization.

Still, can we find a middle ground between Casanova's depoliticized, autonomous, Eurocentric "world literary space" and Mufti's perhaps over-politicized, jaundiced critique of English-dominant "world literature," a middle ground in which the priority is neither to convict twenty-first-century world literature of complicity in cultural imperialism, nor to idealize it as a politically neutral pantheon of world canons, governed by *a priori* aesthetic rules? Yes, but only if we stop taking world literature merely as a historical construct or a mimetic schema. Rather, what we seek to tease out is the agency of world literature, or how it can exert power on the global crises we have identified earlier on, and how it can participate in the formation and transformation of our contemporary world, a world unseen by Goethe, Marx, Auerbach, Spitzer, and other old heralds of world literature. At this point, we might concur with Martin Puchner, General Editor of *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* (3rd Edition), an icon of "US-style" world literature. When Puchner offers his new definition—"World literature is literature insofar as it pertains to the world: a worldly literature"³⁵—he intentionally steers away from "the critique traditionally launched against world literature's aspiration to totality."³⁶ In light of the new concept, world literature is not found in an otherworldly domain, as perhaps believed by Casanova, nor is it purely fostered and subjugated by the capitalist world we are living in. World literature, a subset of all literature, emerges from, borrowing Lionel Trilling's brilliant words, the "dark and bloody cross-roads where literature and politics meet."³⁷ The worldliness of world literature partly means the conquest and coercion of new imperialist discourse in our age of globalization. However, that is not to say world literature has no other choices but to be servile to this world. Foregrounding "the world-creation power of world literature,"³⁸ Puchner argues that "one of the ways in which—all literature, but perhaps particularly world literature—concerns itself to our world is by constructing alternatives to it."³⁹

Thus, the *raison d'être* of world literature in the present century is not simply to document global crises, but to engage with, intervene in, and if

possible, help to alleviate them. What matters here is no longer “what is world literature,” but “what world literature does.” World literature, as a world-changing event, rises from its tenacious struggle against the contemporary world it finds fault with, and as Pheng Cheah suggests in his critically acclaimed 2016 book, *What Is World: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, constitutes “a normative worldly force” which is meant “to contest the world created by different flows of global capital,”⁴⁰ and to disrupt and resist the teleological time presumed by capitalist globalization. It is worth noting that Pheng Cheah does not embrace a somewhat politically naïve notion of world literature’s empowerment. He acknowledges that in our age such “a normative worldly force” ascribed to world literature is rather feeble and fragile, because the world market seems to be at the height of its might, and because “Western modernity’s unrelenting march of progress and capitalist time and violently destroying other worlds and their temporalities”⁴¹ is anything but empty talk or bubble. However, we must not shrink from the seemingly bleak prospect of battling this monstrous enemy. At any rate, storytelling in the form of world literature is still “the most appropriate narrative form for communicating the openness of world,”⁴² particularly when compared with those co-opted, standardized nonliterary crisis narrative—say, a Hollywood-made genre film or disaster reportage circulating in mass media—about the current world. Geoffrey Hartman’s recent remark on the potency of art in the age of global terrorism also applies here. “Could art-mediated representations defuse the fatalism or sense of impotence produced by extreme events, at least events ascribed to human agency, and declared to be ‘facts on the ground?’” asks Hartman in his 2013 article, following up with a positive answer: “To regain control we adapt or create a narrative, change a storyline.”⁴³ The reason why world literature matters even more today is that crisis events have been “reconstructed via the spectacular medium of motion pictures or other visual representations,” and as a result such events are converted “into simulacra of the original event.”⁴⁴ No other media or narrative genres are more suitable than world literature to interrogate and demarcate the limits of media representation of this crisis-ridden world, and to counteract, thanks to the aesthetic distance and sublimity entailed in such literature, the horror of global crises and man-made catastrophes.

The seven articles grouped in this volume, which comprises a critical commentary on the conditions of twenty-first-century world literature, can be seen as a step toward such a goal. In his paper, Chris D. Jimenez examines the influence of a nuclear disaster as a traumatic event on global aesthetics. He concentrates on the literary portrayal of such disasters at Hiroshima and Fukushima Daiichi in anglophone literary practice by comparing the

literary style of Gerald Vizenor's *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57* (2003) and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013). Jimenez wonders whether authors still publish texts on the nuclear disaster over seventy years after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In fact, it can now be considered an "Atomic Age," and the literary world has continued to produce a stream of texts on this subject, for example, Arno Schmidt's *Schwarze Spiegel* (*Black Mirrors*, 1950). The literary depiction of nuclear disaster has developed all over the world, "across political and aesthetic borders." Jimenez remarks that some writers see in these horror scenarios an opportunity to articulate racial, ethnic, national, and civilizational identities. He also cites examples of texts on this subject, such as John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, published after the end of the World War II (1946). Moreover, the discourses connected with the use of nuclear power must be seen in the context of the Cold War in Europe. In 1950, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) decided to place some nuclear missile systems in Germany. The danger of nuclear war had become very real and was also discussed in literature, such as, for example, Matthias Horx' *Es geht voran* (*It Goes Further*, 1982), Anton-Andreas Guha's *Ende* (*The End*, 1983), Gudrun Pausewang's *Die letzten Kinder von Schewenborn* (*The Last Children from Schewenborn*, 1983), and Gerhard Zwerenz' *Der Bunker* (*The Bunker*, 1983). Before the catastrophe of Chernobyl, only a few European authors had shown the possible consequences of a nuclear disaster in their texts (e.g., Udo Oskar Rabsch in *Julius oder Der schwarze Sommer*, 1983—*Julius or the Black Summer*). The terrible accident at Chernobyl reminded the public that the development of the technique can lead humankind to an Apocalypse, a question which has been discussed by Christa Wolf and Svetlana Alexievich in their literary works. Using global literary aesthetics as a background, Jimenez focuses on questions such as how the representations of nuclear disaster have changed in contemporary anglophone literature and what place Japan has occupied there. The aesthetics of disaster assumes that contemporary authors have to invent new modes of expression when confronted with unexpected suffering. Gerald Vizenor combines literary forms from around the world—for example, kabuki theater, haiku poetry, and Westernized academic exegesis—to underline the fact that nuclear tragedy belongs to transnational *lieux de mémoires*, which are being recuperated through a collective mourning process taking place across boundaries. Vizenor presents a hero for our times: half-Japanese, half-Native American protagonist Ronin Browne is a homeless wanderer camping out at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park for the purpose of protesting against it by heckling tourists, vandalizing monuments, and otherwise disrupting the park's carefully crafted messages of "peace." In contrast to Vizenor, Ozeki

approaches the theme of nuclear disaster much more indirectly in *A Tale for the Time Being*. The author also references a wide array of literary forms, including historical memoir, digital Internet media, and even Buddhist meditations. Both writers depict the fact that, in the globalized world, identity and memory are determined by a variety of influences and cultures, and therefore include the elements of social critique in their works.

In her article, Corina Stan concentrates on the political crisis in the “translation zone,” as shown in Abbas Khider’s work, through a comparison of his novels *Der falsche Inder* (*The Village Indian*, 2008) and *Brief in die Auberginenrepublik* (*Letter to the Eggplant Republic*, 2010). The author considers whether world literature itself can be interpreted as being in a crisis mode of cultural production. Khider shows the global scale of the social and political problems of our times by choosing migrants as the main protagonists of his novels. The main character of *The Village Indian*, an Iraqi political prisoner travelling all over the world (illegally and under invented names), including Libya, Tunisia, Jordan, Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Germany, symbolizes the global scale of the problems depicted in the novel, as well as a crisis of refugee identity, especially in the “translation zone.” Moreover, in *Letter to the Eggplant Republic*, Khider recounts the story of a letter sent by a former political prisoner, an Iraqi student, to his fiancée, which never reaches its intended addressee. In her analysis of the literary portrayal of migration, Stan bases her article on some theoretical works, such as Thomas Nail’s critique of the misrepresentation of migration as A-to-B trajectories in *The Figure of the Migrant*. Considering the specific situation of Arab migrants in Germany, the author states that the figure of the refugee appears to be “born translated,” that is, inhabiting a temporality of precedence (cf. Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake*, 2016). Migration, a problem to be solved at the global level, is also one of the most popular subjects in contemporary literature. The deep crisis of today’s society is connected with the fact that civilized Europe rejects refugees by treating them as intruders. Nevertheless, not only the suffering of political refugees is shown by contemporary authors; they also portray migration as a result of ecological disasters and climate change, from Doris Lessing’s *Mara and Dann* (1999) to Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006). The “former political prisoner and illegal immigrant” living in Germany, Abbas Khider, shows in his works recent historical events from the perspective of the individual, not from that of the politicians or the media. Moreover, he pictures migration as one of the symptoms of today’s global crisis. In her article, Stan also considers the question of the problematic identity of writers with a migration background. Furthermore, she points out the fact that migration, nowadays a global phenomenon, will

have a long-lasting impact on future generations, resulting in the loss of their cultural roots, problematic identity, and cultural development.

Providing a comparison of two novels by contemporary German writers, Ernst-Wilhelm Händler's *Wenn wir sterben* (*When We Die*, 2002) and Kathrin Röggla's *wir schlafen nicht* (*We Never Sleep*, 2004), Ewa Wojno-Owczarska demonstrates that these writers depict through their works (which can be seen as representative for the literature in German language countries) a kaleidoscope of the symptoms of the remarkable global crises of the twenty-first century, by pointing to the many consequences of globalization as a contemporary phenomenon visible in the economic, social, and cultural spheres. However, both authors focus mainly on the influence of economic globalization on individual lives: on one hand, there is an insecure situation for average people terrified by economic processes of the "virtual economy" (cf. Jean Baudrillard) and by the failures of global players; on the other hand, small businesses try to gain independence by taking advantage of the new opportunities of the global economy and are often disappointed when confronted with the difficult conditions in the free market. Using the development of German literature of the twentieth century as a background, Ewa Wojno-Owczarska manages to prove that this critique of the financialization of everyday life started in German language literature even before the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008. She makes a detailed analysis of the critical picture of the New Economy era pictured by Händler and Röggla, whose novels have not been previously compared, and their special role. Both authors point out the development of free market and the extraordinary situation in Eastern Germany, where neoliberalism has been introduced after its reunification, causing social and financial crises. In their novels, both writers also portray flexibility (characterized by Richard Sennett in *The Corrosion of Character*, 1998) as the essential character trait enabling one to survive in the conditions of strong competition of the neoliberal job market, while also underlining the fact that such concentration on the career causes the alienation of individuals. In contrast to comparable texts by contemporary German language authors, both of these writers depict interesting female characters, who at first are impressed by the media's success propaganda but then later become disillusioned by the strong competition of the New Economy era. Furthermore, they describe the consequences of cultural globalization as an additional symptom of crisis, questioning the dictates of media and mass culture as well as the achievements of women's emancipation, which often results in the loss of family bonds and moral values in a profit-oriented society. As Ewa-Wojno-Owczarska notes, Händler and Röggla come to the conclusion, similar to that of the great prophets of a coming Apocalypse—Oswald Spengler and

Günther Anders, that consumption-oriented civilization is nearing its end. The negative results of globalization processes indeed influence the cultural, economic, and social spheres; according to Händler and Röggl, it should be reflected in literary texts as well.

Positing that contemporary Chinese fiction is not an outlier in the post-9/11 world literature specializing in terror narratives, Hansong Dan's article brings to the fore a comparative reading of Zhang Chengzhi's and Xiao Bai's novellas, which at first sight have little connection with global terrorism we are confronting in the twenty-first century. By challenging "9/11 fiction" as a genre of "period novels" or anglophone trauma narrative, Dan tends to problematize the spatiality and temporality of 9/11 as a global event, and to situate Zhang Chengzhi's historical thriller, *Investigation of Assassinations in the Western Province*, and Xiao Bai's le Carré-styled espionage story, *Blockade*, in the current framework of world literature mobilized to interrogate the fault line in the long trail of Western modernity. Dan's article examines the two works of fiction in the light of historical crisis and representational crisis, which stand at the core of world literature. His reading of Zhang's novella is historical as much as linguistic, arguing that the revenge plot in the secret history of nineteenth-century Jahriyya is not simply about how the subaltern Hui Muslim fought back in the aftermath of the Tongzhi Hui Rebellion, a crisis moment for the survival of this secretive Sufi Islamic sect in China. More importantly, Zhang's characters take action purely on the ground of *kouhuan*, a mystic narrative event peculiar to Jahriyya. It is Dan's contention that terror narrative is performative and evental, but its trajectory and outcome are impossible to be pinned down. In this sense, Zhang Chengzhi's art-mediated narrative has a clear link with the genealogy of world literature defined as world-changing and world-creation force in a head-on clash with history. Such an evental analysis of Zhang's work is extended to Xiao Bai's 2017 story, which is against a backdrop totally different from *Investigation of Assassinations in the Western Province*. Located in Shanghai, the cosmopolitan center of China's early modernity in the 1940s, Xiao Bai's terror narrative, as Dan contends in the second part of his article, is similarly hinged upon the performativity of imaginative fiction, and in a similar vein focuses on the lost transnational dimension of Chinese literature. Where Zhang Chengzhi and his Hui assassins are awestricken in the face of the incommensurably inscrutable *telos* of history as revealed in narrative event, Xiao Bai more or less slides toward a nihilistic stance, allowing for postmodern suspicion of all grand narratives evoked by the dominant historiography of patriotism and urban myths during the Shanghai Occupation period.

Youssef Yacoubi's contribution "Suspended Crisis in Arab-American and Arabic Literatures: Modernity, Violence and Afflicted Textuality" from the outset expands Koselleck's classic study on the multiple meanings of "crisis" in Western intellectual history, tracing the root of its Arabic equivalent "*a'zma*" in the Semitic language, and finding that in the unmodern, peripheral context of the Middle East the word also connotes "the crisis-maker" and "the crisis-victim." Thus, his critical framework is to confront the structured, organized violence in the schema of Western modernity, which in Yacoubi's analysis historically relies on systematic production of crises in the Third World, in particular the Middle East. The perpetrator-victim dichotomy is central to this article's visceral critique of the crisis discourse in the dark geopolitics of the Middle East, and its problematic representation in contemporary Arabic literature and its displaced sibling, Arab-American literature. Through his exemplary reading of some Arab-American and Arabic texts, Yacoubi's critical work boils down to an intriguing concept, "a poetics of suspended crisis," which constitutes an artistic response to discursive silencing and silence in the Middle East since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Yacoubi reminds us of a stark truth: crisis, supposedly a transitional or emergent state, befalls the modern Arab world in the form of perpetual emergency and militarization. In other words, for Arabic writers crisis in their mother countries is not a "turning-point," but a limbo state of "suspension," which implies infinite deferral and undecidability. No wonder Yacoubi finds much resonance with Amir Mufti's critique of world literature, the agenda of which, according to Mufti, is Euro-centric, biased, and unable to treat Arabic literature in a fair manner. If crisis in Arabic literature means an unnatural condition imposed upon a nation and implicates a Zionist, imperialist perpetrator, or an ingrained Orientalist arbiter, then silencing and silence, dialectically entwined in Arabic war fiction and poetry, must be artistically drawn in such a way that the two can galvanize and detonate each other. At this point, Yacoubi echoes Dan's argument on literature as event, arguing that crisis is not merely an object of representation, but an effect strategically brought about by textual event mastered by Arabic writers within their text. Starting from a counterpoint of Westernized world literature of our age, Yacoubi's article ingeniously contextualizes and aestheticizes a fundamentally Arabic mode of crisis in world literature, alerting us to the disciplined imagination of crisis originating in Western modernity and the pervasive imposition of violence (frequently in the form of silencing and censure) in the marginalized Arabic literature.

In his paper, Luis Fernando Restrepo concentrates on texts by contemporary authors from the Hispanic world who describe conflicts in several

parts of the globe: Congo (Mario Vargas Llosa), Haiti (Sergio Ramirez), Kashmir (Juan José Millás), Yemen (Laura Restrepo), Malasia (John Carlin), Zimbabwe (Leila Guerrero), Guatemala (Laura Esquivel), and Colombia (Manuel Vincent). As witnesses to political crimes, the so-called humanitarian non-governmental organization (NGO), *Médecins sans frontières (MSF)*, published in *El País* (2012) their reports from different countries pointing out the global scale of today's political crises. The main idea of the series *Testigos del horror (Witness of Horror, 2012)* was to present the scale of these crimes to the public and to underline their importance as a symptom of the global crisis of our times. On the one hand, a selection of photographs by Juan Carlos Tomasi allows one to see these texts as an example of documentary literature making visible "the wounds of the soul" on a global scale; on the other hand, these narratives seem to compete with pictures of suffering. Starting with several publications on the aesthetics of suffering by Susan Sontag, Laqueur, Joseph Slaughter, Lynn Hunt, Judith Butler, Susie Linfield, Richard Rorty, and Didier Fassin, Restrepo highlights the asymmetrical relations between the producers, consumers, and subjects of global narratives of suffering by critiquing the "celebrity humanitarianism" as a symptom of social crisis in this time of global media. The article also criticizes global politics that brings suffering to the forefront, and where the language of rights, protest, and revolution drawn from the civil rights and decolonization era of the 1960s has been replaced by the language of compassion. Furthermore, the author analyzes *Testigos del horror* in the context of the tradition of chronicle in the Hispanic world (e.g., José Martí, Gabriel García Márquez, Octavio Paz, and Carlos Monsiváis). According to Restrepo, there is a triangular mediation of suffering between spectators, the humanitarian agent, and the victim. The author of the article also asks whether today's writers are able to intervene in today's world crises. The central question of literature today seems to be: How do writers tell stories of abuse, drowning, and traumas?

Debjani Sarkar's "Hues of Red: The Facades of Leftist Insurgency and Crisis in India in Select Fiction" takes up a comparative reading of Naxalite and Maoist fiction, two categories of Indian literature which respectively point to Naxalism and Maoism, the ideological brand names of India's leftist insurgency, a crisis perhaps not of global scale, but certainly with a transnational dimension. In Sarkar's opinion, when Charu Mazumdar preached "the line of annihilation" in India, the Naxalite movement slipped into a fanatic kind of ideological terrorism, which however was based upon a misreading of Maoism that emphasizes armed revolution. The fluidity of the two terms, Naxalism and Maoism, becomes a stepping stone to Sarkar's analysis of insurgency literature, which proliferates in India's crisis discourse

and corresponds to the deeply unsettling social inequality in the decolonized India since the 1950s. By reading Neel Mukherjee's 2014 Man Booker shortlisted novel *The Lives of Others* along with Nilima Sinha's *Red Blooms in the Forest* published in 2013, Sarkar's article examines how the problematic violent activism of the Naxalite movement in the 1960s and 1970s receives fictional representation in twenty-first-century Indian literature. With hindsight of the mixed legacy of the Marx–Lenin–Mao Communism in India today, Sarkar's select fictions can detach themselves from the largely standardized and politically biased media reportage controlled by the state, probing into the complicated economic and political realities of the rural India in the throes of globalization, without suggesting an unadulterated version of historical truth. For India, the reason why insurgency literature burgeons today is that the rural milieu that used to breed terrorist impulse and revolutionary idealism is barely changed, Naxalite–Maoist insurgency after the 2000s still growing in and inflicting India. The metamorphosis and intermarriage of the Naxalite–Maoist discourse, as Sarkar's article reveals, further imply the unfinished agenda of world literature in the age of globalization, which incorporates an inner logic to create its crises and dissidents, like Maoism and its variants in India, from the inside. In this sense, the inquiry done by Sarkar is not merely to lay bare a secret history of violence in Indian literature, but also to sound the siren in the present world, a place where global terrorism is gaining momentum as the unscrupulous expansion of capitalist globalization exacerbates the gap between the haves and have-nots and escalates the crisis in the Global South.

Notes

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