

## CHAPTER 3

# PLANETARITY

All through these pages I have suggested that literary studies must take the “figure” as its guide. The meaning of the figure is undecidable, and yet we must attempt to dis-figure it, read the logic of the metaphor. We know that the figure can and will be literalized in yet other ways. All around us is the clamor for the rational destruction of the figure, the demand for not clarity but immediate comprehensibility by the ideological average. This destroys the force of literature as a cultural good. Anyone who believes that a literary education should still be sponsored by universities must allow that one must learn to read. And to learn to read is to learn to dis-figure the undecidable figure into a responsible literality, again and again. It is my belief that initiation into cultural explanation is a species of such a training in reading. By abandoning our commitment to reading, we unmoor the connection between the humanities and cultural instruction.

In this chapter I will argue that, as presumed collectivities cross borders under the auspices of a Comparative Literature supplemented by Area Studies, they might attempt to figure themselves—imagine themselves—as planetary rather than continental, global, or worldly. The planet is easily claimed. Let me explain what effort is implicit in my invocation of that word.

I propose the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. In the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines, once the equator and the tropics and so on, now drawn by the requirements of Geographical Information Systems. To talk planet-talk by way of an unexamined environmentalism, referring to an undivided “natural” space rather than a differentiated political space, can work in the interest of this globalization in the mode of the abstract as such. (I have been insisting that to transmute the literatures of the global South to an undifferentiated space of English rather than a differentiated political space is a related move.) The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. It is not really amenable to a neat contrast with the globe. I cannot say “the planet, on the other hand.” When I invoke the planet, I think of the effort required to figure the (im)possibility of this underived intuition.<sup>1</sup>

To be human is to be intended toward the other. We provide for ourselves transcendental figurations of what we think is the origin of this animating gift: mother,

nation, god, nature. These are names of alterity, some more radical than others. Planet-thought opens up to embrace an inexhaustible taxonomy of such names, including but not identical with the whole range of human universals: aboriginal animism as well as the spectral white mythology of post-rational science. If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away. And thus to think of it is already to transgress, for, in spite of our forays into what we metaphorize, differently, as outer and inner space, what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us as it is not, indeed, specifically discontinuous. We must persistently educate ourselves into this peculiar mindset.

It is often pointed out that globalization, in the form of ancient world systems, has a long history. This historical reckoning remains crucial to our task. In the relatively autonomous economic sphere, however, information technology has also created a rupture—hence my invocation of the computerized globe.

I began this book with academic memos. It is by way of such unremarkable moves that cultural instruction hopes to shift the episteme. Indeed, those memos were attempting to deal with changes in the student body because disciplines that had started in the aftermath of war were now in a globalizing world. It is as an alternative to such timid and placatory gestures, as well to the arrogance of the cartographic reading of world lit. in translation as the task of Comparative Literature, that I propose the planet.

Is this to render our home uncanny? I am, of course, not thinking of the English word “uncanny,” but of the Stracheys’ translation of Freud’s word *unheimlich*, signifying the turning of what is homey into something *unheimlich*—uncanny in this German-substitute sense. To think the word this way is in itself a disciplinary exercise in Comparative Literature: “In what circumstances the familiar can become uncanny and frightening, I shall show in what follows.... What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*” (UC 220, 224).

Some years ago, writing on the work of the subaltern studies collective, I had commented, “the figure of woman is pervasively instrumental in the shifting of the function of discursive systems.”<sup>2</sup> We will see below that the figure of woman-as-mother-as-vagina is important in Freud’s explanation of the uncanny. In our attempt to track planetarity as making our home *unheimlich* or uncanny, we will construct an allegory of reading where the discursive system shifts from vagina to planet as the signifier of the uncanny, by way of nationalist colonialism and postcoloniality. This is in keeping with my method: gender as a general critical instrument rather than something to be factored in special cases.

In a peculiar passage in “The Uncanny,” Freud finds the normative confirming definition of the *Unheimlich* in what is uttered by some abnormal men:

If it does not rest upon mere coincidence, [this instance] furnishes a beautiful

confirmation of our theory of the uncanny. It often happens that neurotic men explain that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. (UC 245)

As is so often the case, Freud discloses himself managing a crisis even as he (rationally) diagnoses the crisis management as a neurosis and derives the reason of psychoanalysis from it.

This triple whammy is made visible in Luce Irigaray's feminist psychoanalytic reading of Plato.<sup>3</sup> Reading many details in the Greek text, she shows that the allegory of the cave, by constructing a disavowed womb (with an unacknowledged paraphrastic hymen) as a place where we are and that we can escape, fulfills the dream-wish of reason to wish away the inescapable control exercised by the uncanny. Her mesmerizing, repetitive, cyclical reading mimes the structure of transference and countertransference. The aim of psychoanalysis is to access the subject to strengthen the agent—to tap the psychic apparatus to restore social viability. In keeping with this, Irigaray analyzes Plato not to dismantle him but to restore social agency to the dreamer. Acknowledge the presence of the paraphrastic way out, acknowledge the vagina as the portal of birth written into your cave and then ... you will see that what you see as rupture is also a repetition, the saving myth of the death of the scapegoat—Socrates, the man who escapes and returns—rather than only the singular risk of the escape into reason.

I want to create a loose homology here between Irigaray's method in this early essay and the method of the new Area Studies as it works with Comparative Literature and Ethnic/Cultural Studies. In her careful work with language, helping read the dream of reason with sympathy in order to harness the dreamer to institutional agency, Irigaray becomes our mediator—the feminist reader rather than an analyst within the institutional situation. I have always been wary of choosing psychoanalysis “as such” (if there can be such a thing) as the model of reading.

Over against such a readerly choice—questioning “experience” as a text to be read in the interest of agency—is the peculiar American strength of Ethnic Studies, which will not let go of “the authority of experience” as the bedrock of its theorizing. The first wave of literary feminism in the United States, well before the institutional emergence of Ethnic Studies, worked from this strength. I am thinking, of course, of Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert's monumental work *The Madwoman in the Attic*, which belongs to the same era as Chinua Achebe's “Image of Africa” and “Plato's *Hystera*.”<sup>4</sup> Confrontational, experiential, and in effect monolingual, harnessing the ethereality of theory where available, today's Ethnic Studies carries this trait. It must now learn to play with Area Studies, emphasizing the textuality of the language of “ethnic origin,” producing that inter-dictive “and yet” when either patient polyglot transference (Irigaray) or impatient dismissal (Gilbert and Gubar) seems to appropriate center stage.

It is with such cautions in mind that I begin to track the figuration of the uncanny in the three texts we read in the last chapter: *Heart of Darkness*, *Season of Migration in the North*, *Pterodactyl*. I stay with the abnormal yet normative confirmation of the definitive: “the female genital organs ... this *unheimlich* place ... is the entrance to the former *Heim* of all human beings.”

I closed the last chapter by saying that feminist presuppositions could be generalized, with no more than the usual specificity problems. Now, with the help of Irigaray’s reading method on Plato, I am going to use a general feminist take on Freud to make my point about making home uncanny.

The reading goes like this: Freud’s rethinking of the mind-body problem was extraordinary, the production of the psychologically available mind as the work (and being) of a psychologically unavailable (metapsychological) apparatus—much as the sentient body is the production of a materially unavailable physiological working out of the body’s materiality. Indeed the two are linked in ways that can be deciphered. This is the good part. This brilliant morphology is shackled, however, to a family story specific to a time, place, class, gender—supported by the kind of cultural props such specificities would provide.<sup>5</sup> As Irigaray attempted to wrest the Platonic text from its narrative commitments, so do we attempt to separate the Freudian text from the narrative that it inhabits.

How does it figure here? I will give the most mechanical outline and ask the reader to understand that the way I got here was far from mechanical.

The *Heimlich/Unheimlich* relationship is indeed, formally, the defamiliarization of familiar space. But its substantive type does not have to be the entrance to the vagina. Colonialism, decolonization, and postcoloniality involved special kinds of traffic with people deemed “other”—the familiarity of a presumed common humanity defamiliarized, as it were. I am not suggesting that there is a necessary connection between these politicoeconomic phenomena and the specific image that figures the uncanny for Freud and his patients. I am recording a certain difference in the figuration that I noticed as I read these three novels.

*Heart of Darkness* is committed to the narrative of nation as expanding space: that story is told in the broad strokes of male bonding and a loner escaping that bond. The gender figuration follows Freud’s own culturally permitted narrative and the substantive type seems to remain intact. *Season* undoes the polarizing of colonizing and colonized space, and, curiously enough, it is the sense of male bonding that is undermined. In my reading, the narrative undoes stereotyped gender presuppositions to undo the polarization. And the fixed signification of the type of the uncanny comes to be destabilized. *Pterodactyl* courts planetarity, and the defamiliarization of home does not carry the class-gendered meaning at all. Who knows how much of this is my transactionality as reader? Does one ever know? I have tried to be as scrupulous as possible. I take psychoanalysis as a kind of lexicon, of course; I cannot psychoanalyze Conrad or his text.<sup>6</sup> I am taking Freud’s canny cultured European male notion of the type of the uncanny as an allegory of reading. I read the staging of *Heart of Darkness* as a classic representation of the (ab)normal definition of the

(Un)heimlich. I can therefore give a feminist spin to Achebe's comment on the anxiety produced by the familiar humanity of the African. The text must reverse the values of nature, turn "natural" semiotics around as the backdrop of this uncanny humanity: "There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine," Marlow remembers, "and this stillness of life did not resemble a peace" (HD 55, 56).<sup>7</sup> I can learn about the management of "the former home of all human beings" from the structural representation of that dark heart. Not only a heart but also the mouth of the vagina; as, in Plato's dream, not only a cave but also the mouth of the vagina.

Of course one would need a careful reading to secure this. I find that I have been more than usually schematic in this chapter, perhaps because I cannot offer a formulaic access to planetarity. No one can.

From pages 19 to 22 in my paperback edition, the book describes the steamer trip from Bordeaux to "the mouth of the big river." The trek to the Company's Station takes another eight pages. On page 31, Marlow leaves "with a caravan of sixty men, for a two-hundred-mile tramp" to the Central Station. The heart of the story is the eight-hundred-mile voyage to see Kurtz, "the chief of the Inner Station" (HD 40). A little later, there is a description of a glimpse of "the great river ... glittering ... through a sombre gap" that is as close to the scare of the Kantian dynamic sublime as you can get. There is talk of something being in there and something coming out of there: "What was in there? I could see a little ivory coming out of there, and I had heard Mr. Kurtz was in there." From this vagina dentata we go another step. The interim sixty pages develop the anxiety of this place of "prehistoric humanity," and on page 103 we see in the black woman an image of that uncanny that gives witness to the soul and gaze of that first dwelling place: "the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul."

I have tried to show that the rhetoric of Salih's novel gives us a critique of colonialism and anticolonialism as traffic in the reproductive politics of sexual difference. His text also turns to the definitive uncanny in the end. The narrator enters the river, in a hardly avoidable symbology of the womb, "naked as my mother bore me." The interruption of Mustafa Sa'eed's story takes place, in narrative time, *after* this plunge, and *after* the story has already come to its appropriate conclusion at the end of the previous section. The plunge in the river is an uncanny space of time. The narrator now declares, "I did not let him complete the story" (SM 166). In this mode of performative contradiction, the narrator interrupts his death in these uncanny waters by the most banal longing for fire, a cigarette, a little cigar, quite clearly not just a cigarette at this point. In two echoing sentences, rocking between choice and decision, he "chooses life" (SM 168). The translation spoils the comical parallel of the two sentences. The very last sentence likens the narrator to a comic actor, shouting "Help! Help!" [*nejda*] in a classical Arabic translation of English or French, rather than the more colloquial "help me" [*sa'iduni*] that would have been more appropriate in the mouth of a drowning man. What does this ending mean? At least a rejection of the heavy postcolonial thematic, marked by sexual difference, that is the legacy of *Heart*

*of Darkness.*

In Mahasweta Devi's novella the womb is not a place of fear, although the metaphor is as obvious as in Conrad or Salih. "Now go down through a roofless tunnel, down, down, go down, turn, enter a dark cave again. The sound of water above them and its floor is slippery ..." (PT 175), and so on. But the question of sexual difference has been bracketed, as we have seen. And there is nothing initially familiar about the pterodactyl that the force of the narrative could render uncanny. The paintings on the cave wall could be either ancient or contemporary. Puran doesn't care.

The pterodactyl remains other; it cannot dwell, nor can it be buried. The impossible death of the ghost is no more than an occasion for "responsibility" between members of two groups that would otherwise be joined by the abstract collectivity of Indian citizenship: the Hindu and the aboriginal. The uncanny is planetary here, not in play as a stake in sexual difference.

The novella is embedded in a critique of the postcolonial state and a declaration of love for the historical other of the entire legal collectivity of the Indian nation. Indeed, the figure of the pterodactyl can claim the entire planet as its other. It is prior to our thinking of continents: "When the continents drifted again and took their current shape ... you were supposed to have become extinct" (PT 156). It is a figure of the mindset that can make the "new" Comparative Literature work. The appropriations of Jurassic Park into cyberpunk may have rendered that thought silly. One will have to look out for what Raymond Williams calls the preemergent around the corner, suppressed by a specifically metropolitan moment that emphasizes the uneven and asymmetrical global digital divide. The "preemergent" leads us toward a "structure of feeling." Raymond Williams thought and wrote in a way that could take on board the less foundational modes of thought implied by Marxism and made explicit by Freud and Foucault. But thinking of institutional attitudes to be fostered by pedagogy, we do not need to tap those modes, we need only remember them. The altered attitudes toward language learning, areas versus nation-states, figure versus rational expectations, that I have been discussing in these chapters can no doubt be plotted as a "structure of feeling," if that is the language we prefer. The scenario that I am constructing would suggest that the dominant figuring of "prehistory" as cyberpresent or science fiction adventure would interfere with the emergence of the figuration of an undecidable planetary alterity. We must therefore observe the figuration of that preemergent in this text, and experience the "structure of feeling" as a narrative of the impossible.

The *Heart of Darkness* theme belongs to European national colonialisms. In this overly schematic last chapter, a few other bases must be touched. We must remember the older U.S. marginalities: Hispanic, African; and the heritage of older empires: Russian, Ottoman, Habsburg. I will remain caught in the scandal of Comparative Literature, unable to access First Nation orality. I mention my shortcoming in hope. Postcolonialism remained caught in mere nationalism over

against colonialism. Today it is planetarity that we are called to imagine—to displace this historical alibi, again and again. I outline this utopian idea as a task for thinking ground because otherwise a “reformed” comparative literary vision may remain caught within varieties of cultural relativism, specular alterity, and cyber-benevolence. Transnational literacy may remain confined within a politics of recognizing multiculturalism or of international aid, in the interest of a “Development” of which the promise of cyber-literacy is increasingly a part. This is, indeed, a general representation of the politicized edge of any comparative discipline in the United States. I am in general solidarity with this. But as in the case of crossing borders, my solidarity is critical. I cannot ignore Donald Pease’s judgment that metropolitan multiculturalism—the latter phase of dominant postcolonialism—precomprehends U.S. manifest destiny as transformed asylum for the rest of the world. As Pease suggests, on the basis of much empirical detail: “In restricting the referentiality of the term ‘post-colonial’ to the political settlements that took place after the decolonization of former European colonies, postcolonial theory has constructed the most recent of the variations on the theme of U.S. exceptionalism.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this position, the United States as the final and hospitable home of cultural rights, seems to me to be closer to an enhanced metropolitan nationalism than to the necessary impossibility of a “grounding” in planetarity. This is the most immediate short circuit that a comparativist universalism, shuttling between Area Studies and Ethnic/Cultural Studies, might trip. This for me is therefore the most immediate agenda item for the study of race and ethnicity. Here anthropology is deflected through mere identity claims in a simulacrum of the project of other-ing the subject. For if anthropology classically studies the other as community, Ethnic/ Cultural Studies cathects the community as “others.” But given the ruling ideology of “the authority of experience,” we may be in danger of seeking the community as no more than a collection of ourselves.<sup>9</sup>

In 1990, a time that seems remote from the urges that make me undertake this work, I wrote about ethnicity as follows. I had a clear sense that I was writing not as a comparativist but in the paradisciplinary tendency inhabited by discourses of identity:

It is through the literature of ethnicity that we customarily approach the question of globality within literary-cultural studies defined along humanist disciplinary lines. The word *ethnos* in Greek meant “one’s *own* kind of people” and therefore we take it to mean, by extension, “nation.” Side by side with the Greek word *ethnos* in the Greek-English Lexicon is the word *ethnikos*—other people, often taken to mean “heathen, pagan.” ... I think the literature of ethnicity writes itself between *ethnos*—a writer writing for her *own* people (whatever that means) without deliberated self-identification as such—and *ethnikos*, the pejoratively defined other reversing the charge, (de)anthropologizing herself by separating herself into a staged identity. The literature of ethnicity in this second sense thus carries, paradoxically, the writer’s signature as divided against itself.<sup>10</sup>

In 1996, Derrida wrote as follows:

What is identity, this concept of which the transparent identity to itself is always dogmatically presupposed by so many debates on monoculturalism or multiculturalism, nationality, citizenship, and belonging, in general? And before the identity of the subject, what is *ipseity*? The latter is not reducible to an abstract capacity to say “I,” which it will always have preceded. Perhaps it signifies, in the first place, the power of an “I can,” which is more originary than the “I” in a chain where the “*pse*” of *ipse* no longer allows itself to be dissociated from power ... mastery and sovereignty.<sup>11</sup>

Two kinds of points are being made in the Derrida text: first, that the ethnos is already self-divided, and second, that ipseity or self-sameness has something in common with the planetarity despot—*pse* reversed—claiming power and property. Identity politics is neither smart nor good. Comparative Literature laced with Area Studies goes rather toward the other.

All my examples so far have been postcolonial, tied to New Immigrant groups in the United States: Maryse Condé, J. M. Coetzee, Tayeb Salih, Mahasweta Devi; with Conrad as control. Cultural Studies is heavily invested in New Immigrant groups. It seems to me that a planetary Comparative Literature must attempt to move away from this base. What I write in closing will give some indication of the way out, as far as a nonexpert can imagine it. These words are no more than scattered speculations, to mark the limits of my rather conventional U.S. Comparative Literature training: English, French, German, poetry and literary theory, romantic and modernist.

As I hope above, the new Comparative Literature will touch the older minorities: African, Asian, Hispanic. It will take in its sweep the new postcoloniality of the post-Soviet sector and the special place of Islam in today’s breaking world. Not everything for everyone, all at once. But a Comparative Literature format—historical and linguistic—possible, for any slice chosen from any of these places, the background filled in by new reference tools on Franco Moretti’s model.

I am writing these words in Hong Kong. I come here as often as I can, and go on to other Chinas, to get a sense of the immensely changeful and vast scenario of the evolving Asia–Pacific. The three papers I heard from Wu Hung this time would be a way into the Comparative Literature of the future, if seen through the eyes of a critic for whom gender is not just for special cases.<sup>12</sup> This is no more than an example, of course, and it touches only the People’s Republic of China. The Asia–Pacific spans Southeast Asia, Micronesia, Polynesia, New Zealand, perhaps Australia, Hawai’i, California—each with different histories of the movements of power. It is with this ensemble that the divided and diversified story of Asian America, old and new immigrants, must be imaginatively cobbled to make for a robust Comparative Literature. The time for producing historically thin “theory” describing the feeling of

migrants in pseudopschoanalytic vocabulary is over. It was exhausted in the first phase of the Comparative Literature dispute reflected in the Bernheimer collection.

The old postcolonial model—very much “India” plus the Sartrian “Fanon”—will not serve now as the master model for transnational to global cultural studies on the way to planetarity. We are dealing with heterogeneity on a different scale and related to imperialisms on another model:

Over the time that the world has known substantial states ... empires have been the dominant and largest state form.... Only now ... do we seem to be leaving the age of massive Eurasian empires that began in earnest across a band from the Mediterranean to East Asia almost four thousand years ago. To the extent that we regard such international compacts as the European Union, GATT, and NAFTA as embodying imperial designs, furthermore, even today’s requiem may prove premature.<sup>13</sup>

To this compact we must add the financialization of the globe.

Globalization plays with all the constituencies I have announced in this chapter, but in a different way with the postcoloniality announced by the breakup of the old Russian imperial formation, competing with the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, that managed to appropriate the dream of international socialism and was propelled by the historical moment into new imperial competitions. In this sector of Comparative Literature, my example for the moment is Mark von Hagen’s “From Russia to Soviet Union to Eurasia: A View from New York Ten Years After the End of the Soviet Union,” a piece rich in suggestions for new work.<sup>14</sup>

The study of this new postcoloniality will not necessarily find the best directions from the proliferating collections of post-Soviet feminist anthologies in translation—first because, like much earlier postcolonial studies, they still follow the lines of empire, and therefore Central Asia is liable to find a less than interesting place, with little careful historical textualizing or tracing. And second, it is well known that the Soviets made women the vehicle of modernization in the area.<sup>15</sup> Thus here too the division among women on either side of the tradition-modernity line is one agenda for the new Comparative Literature as it weighs in with metropolitan Ethnic Studies. That particular division is quite often marked by access to Russian. The in-depth study of language is crucial here.

As Hamid Dabashi writes: “from the scattered memories of a sacred imagination that once congealed in the Arabia of the sixth (Christian) century, competing ‘Islams’ were invented by contending political forces dominant from Transoxiana to Spain.”<sup>16</sup> The tribalities of Central Asia had paradoxically written a “freer,” more eclectic Islam than the more publicized conflicts in the residue of medieval Islamic cosmopolitanism or the recent puritanism and orthodoxy of the Wahabis, and, in a different formation, the Taliban. Close as I am to Bangladesh, I am very aware of the paradoxical freedoms

within peripheral Islams. In Central Asia we can tap the consequences of an earlier modernization of women and a current traditionalization of Islam. I have discussed the tracks of planetarity in this formation elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

The range and diversity of the Islamic diaspora is immense. It is altogether appropriate that Comparative Literature should undo the politically monolithized view of Islam that rules the globe today, without compromising the strong unifying ideology potentially alive in that particular cultural formation.

Comparative Literature can also find its own unacknowledged prehistory in this sector, and thus do a long-range historical revision of the record of its apparently European provenance. Muslim Europe and Arabic–Persian cosmopolitanism have both been abundantly studied in Middle Eastern studies and comparative history.<sup>18</sup> Because of the special nature of Comparative Literature, we, on the other hand, have spent considerable energy on Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach in Turkey, as if they were explorers for the cause of literary criticism.<sup>19</sup>

To a certain extent, Islamic feminism has also been relegated to its own ghetto. The introduction to Deniz Kandiyoti's "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies" summarizes a great deal of information about this phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> I have attempted to work against such ghettoization in my work on Assia Djebar.<sup>21</sup>

Can the foothold for planetarity be located in the texts of these spread-out sectors of the world's literatures and cultures? Perhaps. The new comparativist is not obliged to look for them, of course. One cannot adjudicate the task of an entire discipline, in spite of the efforts of the world literaturists, the Encyclopedists. I think this drastic epistemic change must be imagined by Comparative Literature. But I cannot will everyone to think so.

I would like to close this section of the chapter with no more than a gesture toward the two older minorities, the African American and the Hispanic. I am very far indeed from expertise in these areas. I have no doubt that intimations of planetarity in my sense have been documented in the vast critical literature in these areas. I give witness by quoting two passages from my own work, one on a passage from Toni Morrison, another on a passage from Diamela Eltit.<sup>22</sup> No plot summaries. As in the case of those teasers of the next mystery included at the end of thrillers, I hope the reader will move to the text if the bits tantalize. *Beloved* is a much-read text in the U.S. mainstream, Eltit not so.

First, then, a moment in *Beloved*:

The lesson of the impossibility of translation in the general sense, as Toni Morrison shows it, readily points at absolute contingency. Not the sequentiality of time, not even the cycle of seasons, but only weather, as in these words, summing up the conclusion of the terrible story of maternal sacrifice, an opening into a specifically African-American history. If Mahasweta undoes the division between Aboriginal and Indo-European India by the experience of an impossible planetarity; Morrison undoes the difference between Africa and

African-America by the experience of a planetarity equally inaccessible to human time: “By and by, all traces gone. And what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water and what it is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted-for; but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather” (B275).

That too is time. Geological time, however slow, is also time. One must not *make* history in a deliberate way. One must respect the earth’s tone. One might be obliged to claim history from the violent perpetrator of it, in order to turn violation into the enablement of the individual, but that is another story. After the effacement of the trace, no project for restoring the origin. That is “just weather,” here today as yesterday.

With this invocation of contingency, where nature may be the great body without organs of woman, we can begin to see that the project of translating culture within the politics of identity is not a quick fix.

And now “I give you the briefest glimpse of Diamela Eltit’s *The Fourth World*, written during the so-called economic miracle following General Pinochet’s repressive regime in Chile.”<sup>23</sup>

Eltit achieves a sustained superrealism that signals another lexicon—an allegory to be explored—by its very seamlessness. The language mimes the tone of the child-analyst who knows that metaphor and reality—inner and outer—have not separated themselves in the child’s consciousness. “Whole persons” have not congealed here. We are in a world of negotiable sexual identities, twin brother vanishing into twin sister. I repeat, nothing, except an uneasy sense of everything, tells us that there is an entire body of political meaning here—in order to discover which we must move into the social text. Far from being self-referential, the text signals beyond itself. Yet there will be no referential connection, I can promise. As soon as you decide this is a veiled description of a devastated country, you will be obliged to remind yourself what Melanie Klein teaches us: that this is the normal landscape of the infantile psyche that enters “social normality” precariously, in depression and mourning, which may or may not be informed with postcolonial content. Eltit does not permit negotiation between autobiography and the political: two discontinuous structures of violence.

The narrative, such as it is, begins with the primal scene of violence: “On that April 7, enshrouded in my mother’s fever, I not only was conceived, but also must have shared her dream because I suffered the horrible feminine attack of dread” (FW3). After one hundred and eleven pages of violent shuttling and reality testing inching towards some unnameable conclusion, the last page asks for a reading in Kleinian language, as the birth of a political super-ego. When the beginning of the final section says “Outside . . .,” we are

convinced that it is a description of a city on a certain map. There can be little doubt that “[t]he money from the sky return[ing] to the sky ... hungry for urban emptiness but also sowing emptiness upon the fields ... [upon which] contempt for the sudaca race [the immiserated female race, especially from the South —*sud*] is clearly printed” (FW112–113) speaks of the empty promise of “economic growth” as the immiseration not only of some place like Chile but of the entire South, of “Development”-as-exploitation. This is not postcolonialism as some latter-day psychomachia of territorial imperialism. It is the recognition of a globality that cannot be captured by our computers. Autobiography is easy here—the collectors of testimonies are waiting with their tape recorders—but irrelevant. “Far away,” the book concludes, “in a house abandoned to brotherhood, between April 7 and 8, diamela eltit, assisted by her twin brother, gives birth to a baby girl. The sudaca baby will go up for sale”—code name “democratization.”

Today I would suggest that, by attempting to write the self at its othermost and blurring the outlines between that graphic and globalization, Eltit’s text stages the lineaments of the planetary.

[In response to objections from my first best reader, I had jettisoned what I include in this extended parenthesis. Perhaps it would have been wiser to excise. Let me at least give my reasons for pasting the cut text back in.

All you’re saying is that these two pluralize, my friend had said. I cannot see how that can be read as planetarity.

What I am attempting is to force a reading. I would like to see if the text could possibly sustain the turning of identitarian monuments into documents for reconstellation. Twenty-five years ago I attempted such a forced reading of *To the Lighthouse*, timidly attesting that it might not be “correct.”<sup>24</sup> I still recall a mainstream feminist critic mockingly commenting that it was certainly an incorrect reading. I realize now that I have not lost my obstinacy. I read in Miller’s *Others*: “This other calling on us to respond, this future that comes into being by way of the response, can only get here, arrive on this shore, speaking in tongues, in a multitude of overlapping and contradictory voices.”<sup>25</sup> In Mark von Hagen’s groundbreaking “From Russia to Soviet Union to Eurasia,” I read that a “consequence of this feature [the retelling of the history of the Russian empire and Soviet Union from multiple vantage points] of pluralization has been a decentering of Russian history”; that in the fourth issue of *Kritika*, a journal associated with this new pluralization, “the editors defend their tolerance of cultural studies approaches to ‘representations of alterity.’” I keep feeling that there are connections to be made that I cannot make, that pluralization may allow the imagining of a necessary yet impossible planetarity in ways that neither my reader nor I know yet. In this last chapter of scattered speculations, I include this imperfect parenthesis in the hope that the connection will be made by a future reader. As follows:

Identity politics is neither smart nor good. Comparative Literature laced with Area Studies goes rather toward the other. With this confidence, I approach two widely known, heroic figures from the older minorities, writers of a previous dispensation: José Martí (1853–1895) and W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963). The task is to find moments in these earlier texts that can be reinscribed for what I am calling planetarity.

José Martí, the Cuban activist intellectual who lived in New York from 1881 to 1895 and died in action in the Cuban revolution against Spanish colonialism, could still seem to generalize a binary opposition: “Spanish America, *his* America ... [as] ‘Our America’ and ... Anglo-Saxon America, ‘the Other America.’”<sup>26</sup> If we look more closely at his writings, however, we see this fervent nationalist going beyond mere nationalism to a more general and heterogeneous version of “Latin America,” a phrase coming into circulation even as he was writing.<sup>27</sup> I believe it is possible to read the concept-metaphors of Martí’s ruralist left-humanism for undoing named binaries, nationalism giving way not only to a heterogeneous continentalism but also to an internationalism that can, today, shelter planetarity. I will read only one passage here, but examples can be multiplied. To read one passage is not to underdemonstrate the argument.

Forcing Martí onto the tracks of planetarity is particularly fraught with the temptation to “ruralism.” I have written about the spectralization of the rural (altogether distinct from ruralism)—conversion of “the rural” into a database for pharmaceutical dumping, chemical fertilizers, patenting of indigenous knowledge, big dam building and the like—as the forgotten front of globalization for which the urban is an instrument.<sup>28</sup> In my open-plan fieldwork, I consider the Indian rural poor as the largest sector of the electorate. The urban subproletariat should certainly not be ignored. In order, however, to access cultural systems—long dysfunctional because of delegitimation—for the source of an ethical instruction that may supplement socialism, the isolation of the rural may be helpful. To romanticize this group as the primitive will defeat the purpose and annul effort. And indeed, I always insist that we should make a further effort, at the same time, to insert them into the social productivity of capital through education, a risky undertaking. But otherwise, the current material wretchedness of their normality is not perceived as due to the remote deprivations of capitalist exploitation without capital’s social productivity.<sup>29</sup>

It is from this position, far from a primitivist romanticization of the rural, that I ask, Is it possible to make Martí’s ruralism into a *mochlos* for planetarity?<sup>30</sup> Since the Earth is a bigger concept-metaphor than bounded nations, located cities, can we read it against Martí’s grain and turn the text around for planetarity? Perhaps not. As I have already indicated, I write for a future reader. In the meantime, let me not be taken to be a ruralist, quite in the grain of Martí’s text.

My plane is flying now over the land between Baghdad, Beirut, Haifa, and Tripoli, into Turkey and Romania. I am making a clandestine entry into “Europe.” Yet the land looks the same—hilly sand. I know the cartographic markers because of the TV in the arm of my seat. Planetarity cannot deny globalization. But, in search of a springboard

for planetarity, I am looking not at Martí's invocation of the rural but at the figure of land that seems to undergird it. The view of the Earth from the window brings this home to me.

It is of course an established, even banal connection that exists between the rural and the Earth, Nature capital N. But even at its most banal it provides a countercontext to the idea of city/nation. This is particularly noticeable when Martí speaks of education. Martí is no primitivist. His civic planning, however untested, inspired Fidel Castro as well as the Florida Cubans. His ideas of the education of the rural population are closer to Booker T. Washington than to Du Bois and more like the Chautauqua in form. But the logic of the metaphors rather than, necessarily, the substantive argument allows a way out of nationalism, and not in the direction of the North American diaspora. Nowhere is this clearer than in his account of the memorial service on the death of Karl Marx, where the idea of a labor international is embellished in the following way: "By operating the forces of Nature, they become as beautiful as Nature" (MR 43; translation modified).

It is when he is writing of the education of the peasant that the metaphor of nature releases its potential for displacement. In this account as well, he speaks of education. However bourgeois, sometimes even feudal, Martí's language might be, he intuits the same problem that Perry Anderson describes a hundred years later: the tension between structure and subject in Marx's thought. "Being in a hurry, and somewhat away from real life, he did not see that children who have not had a natural and laborious gestation are not born viable, whether in the womb of the people, in history, or from the womb of woman in the home" (MR 44; translation modified).<sup>31</sup> Again, the link is banal: nature, woman, and history by way of fertility. But the logic of the metaphor connects internationalism and nature, by placing history itself in the forces of nature and thus away from the specificity of nations. The common Spanish word for "people"—*el pueblo*—one of whose strong current meanings is "village," as one among a range of possible groupings of people, from a small local group to a tribe to a nation—manages the contrast between city/nation and nature.

Parallel structural contrasts—between nature and trade, universality and the nation—are present and managed in Martí's best-known piece on education, "Wandering Teachers" (MR 46–50). Here is the passage I will read: "The farmer's children cannot leave the paternal farm and day after day, go mile after mile, to learn Latin declensions and short division. And yet"—there is the contrast—

The farmers comprise the best, most healthful, and succulent national mass, because they receive from up close and in full measure the emanations and the loving contact of the earth from whose loving give-and-take they live. Cities are the minds of nations; but their hearts, where the blood rushes back and from where it is redistributed, are in the countryside. Men are still eating machines. We must make every man a torch. (MR 48; translation modified)

The country here is not simply the prenatal as opposed to the national. It is also the *hylè* or mass of the national, to which the blood rushes first and that becomes continuous with the exchange with the Earth. The Earth is a paranational image that can substitute for international and can perhaps provide, today, a displaced site for the imagination of planetarity. The choice of the blood rushing *back* as the first move, the description of the rural as a specifically *national* mass, and the inclusion of the trade-related word “redistribution” (*se repartir*) in its activity seeks to undo the contradiction between the national and the rural.<sup>32</sup> If you read these essays in the context of Martí’s own development, the vision of the countryside as the place of national production and redistribution rather than consumption—leading to exchange—is clear. Martí’s was a necessarily proleptic choice for a specifically *postcolonial* internationality. We will see this to be true of Du Bois’s choice as well. In our conjuncture, I am asking if there is anything in these stirrings of a postcolonialism before the letter that can displace itself into planetarity. Can the figure of the rural in Martí gives us leverage for such a reading?

Martí was acutely aware of the internal line of *cultural* difference within “the same culture.” He was against the establishment of a Creole oligarchy in postcolonial Cuba. This combines with left-ruralism in his work to reverse and displace the direction of progressive change, however imperfectly. This tendency can be developed to make his work consonant with the planetary imagination of the new Comparative Literature. We are outlining a politics of reading. Marx’s preference for the city over the country could not think the spectralization of the rural yet.<sup>33</sup>

The question of the possible displacement into planetarity may be a necessary supplement to the reconfiguration of “Our America” for cultural studies, which suggests that “Martí’s U.S. writing belongs to that tradition of exilic representation which counterpoises the lived experience of being ‘left alone’ in the Anglo United States with the reconstructed collective memories of homelands which lie elsewhere.”<sup>34</sup> Martí is not quite so distant from Cuba when he writes from New York; he is constantly planning for his country’s future. “Reconstructed collective memories” gives a sense of nostalgia that, for me, is absent from Martí’s feisty text, except for some stylized poetry where the genre asks for that sentiment.<sup>35</sup> I think part of this sentimentalization is precisely because the text is being reconfigured for the “twentieth-century migration [that] has seen the reassertion of Our America’s *cultural* claims to” the Other America. The essays in the collection from which I quote, especially those by Rosaura Sanchez and Donald Pease, redress the balance, pointing at the historical difference rather than effacing it by appropriation. I seek not only to correct but also to displace.

José Martí was killed fighting the Spanish at the age of forty-two. Du Bois was ninety-five when he died. We can see the possibility of being pulled into the track of planetarity more clearly in the latter. W. E. B. Du Bois undid African American continent-think, reversing and displacing the violence and violation of slavery and imperialism. In our historical moment, we must try persistently to reverse and displace globalization into planetarity—an impossible figure and therefore calling on

*teleopoiesis* rather than *istoria*.

*The Souls of Black Folk* is the prototype of the best (nationalist) vision of metropolitan Cultural Studies.<sup>36</sup> Du Bois acknowledges the responsibility of the African American because “the shadow,” as yet unpluralized, “of a mighty Negro past”—this metaphor of the shadow is important for him—must be claimed as part of an American past as well. The price is high. We can read a reversal of Aristotle’s definition of friendship—one soul in two bodies—as we can read an echo of Faust’s lament in Du Bois’s description of the African American at the end of the last century as “two souls ... in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (SB 52).<sup>37</sup> Writing from the Indian subcontinent, Ashis Nandy had spoken of Britain as the intimate enemy.<sup>38</sup> For the African American, the intimate enemy resides inside. This difference animates what I discuss next, a prescient essay called “The Negro Mind Reaches Out,” written twenty-five years later, where Du Bois gives us the first taste of colonial discourse studies and even a preview of what was to follow from it—postcolonial criticism. Du Bois the pan-Africanist knew the continent of Africa to be heterogeneous.

Du Bois’s movement from exceptionalism to egalitarianism—pushing for “the talented tenth” in the early phase to communism in the later—is well known. If, however, we look at the two texts without explicit reference to his intellectual life, what seems most striking is that, writing as a member of the metropolitan minority, Du Bois is exceptionalist and individualist; whereas, writing as a member of a global colonial world looking forward to postcoloniality, Du Bois is altogether aware that the production of the exceptionalist and individualist colonial subject creates a class division among the colonized, and that the colonizer often and paradoxically preferred the “primitive” rather than the “mimic man” he himself produced. Du Bois was writing on the internal class line of which I spoke above. Today, when these class divisions have altered the demographics of the former colonies and their diasporas, the metropolitan comparativist must imagine planetarity, displace the “primitivism” of the colonizer into the subaltern of the postcolonial, existing now in a cultural formation historically compromised by centuries of delegitimization; through the transforming work of imagining the impossible other as that figured other imagines us.

In ripe colonialism, Du Bois writes of

the new democratic problems of colonization ... fostered by a certain type of white colonial official who was interested in the black man and wanted him to develop. But this official was interested in the primitive black and not in the educated black. He feared and despised the educated West African and did not believe him capable of leading his primitive brother. He sowed seeds of dissension between these two. (NM 399)

Postcolonially, the relationship between “the educated West African”—the Black European—and the “primitive” has continued in a class apartheid. The call for

planetarity in the reading subject may be a training for at least recognizing that scandal in the history of the present.

Du Bois is aware of the results, first, of the difference among the imperial policies of the various European powers; and, second, of the difference in the imperial policy of the same power toward its various constituencies. Thus for Du Bois the production of the colonial subject is diversified, yet another lesson that some postcolonial work forgets explicitly, though its mark is historically evident upon its body, as academic interest broadens out into Development and human rights.

Let us consider these two points separately. As we do so, we must of course note that Du Bois presupposes the difference in the production of the New World African—historically a double ancestry claimed by struggle, and, in 1924, the date of “The Negro Mind Reaches Out,” an economic and educational status more rooted, by that fact, as “American” than the Black European gentleman of whom he speaks.

Observing the difference in policy among the various European powers, or, as he puts it more picturesquely, the “shadows” of Portugal, Belgium, France, and England, Du Bois notices that “for nearly two centuries France has known educated and well-bred persons of Negro descent.... It was not that the French loved or hated Negroes as such; they simply grew to regard them as men with the possibilities and shortcomings of men, added to an unusual natural personal appearance” (NM 392). Alas, the situation is sadly changed today. And indeed, Du Bois did not see the shadow of France as an unquestioned good. Only in Boineuf of Martinique does he discover an exception: “One black deputy alone, Boineuf of Martinique, has the vision. His voice rings in Parliament. He made the American soldiers keep their hands off the Senegalese. He made the governor of Congo apologize and explain; he made Poincaré issue that extraordinary warning against American prejudice. Is Boineuf an exception or a prophecy?” (NM 397). Frantz Fanon is born in Martinique the next year.

We cannot know if Du Bois was aware that anticolonialism would not lead to productive continentalism. If so, he never put it down in published writing. We can turn to Wole Soyinka, “Arms and the Arts,” to find a clue, English to English, class-fixed.<sup>39</sup> The project for the new Comparative Literature would have been to make it possible to trace this multiform trajectory (or its restricted permeability) in the African languages, thickening each nation-state invoked by Soyinka through persistently depoliticized Area Studies resources. Insofar as such pluralization decenters the idea of “Africa,” it is possible to think our way into considerations of subalternity, eminently present in African studies from Amadiume to Mudimbe (I am no expert), and perhaps take a step, learning to learn from below, toward imagining planetarity.<sup>40</sup>

Just as socialism at its best would persistently and repeatedly wrench capital away from capitalism, so must the new Comparative Literature persistently and repeatedly undermine and undo the definitive tendency of the dominant to appropriate the emergent. It must not let itself be constituted by the demands of liberal multiculturalism alone. Training in such persistent and repetitive gestures comes,

necessarily, in the classroom. Insofar as the tertiary student is in the service of the dominant (although often unwilling or unable to acknowledge it), such training might seem to undermine their self-assurance. This is not an easy “positional skepticism of postmodernist literary and cultural studies,” but something to be worked through in the interest of yoking the humanities, however distantly, with however few guarantees, to a just world.<sup>41</sup> I appreciate gestures to shore up the humanities institutionally. I can, however, concur less with John Guillory’s recent suggestion that “the appropriate alternative to this strategy is to define and develop a knowledge of culture fully integrated into the spectrum of human sciences” than I can with Moretti’s scopic generic morphology (see [chapter 2, note 1](#)), which promises excellent reference tools, at least. Legitimizing the humanities by making them scientific was already tried by the extremes of symbolic logic and structuralism, which were and are, in their own sphere, useful developments. Our own North American player Northrop Frye put in a strong bid for literary studies on the model of the “natural sciences,” although he did grant that “the presence of incommunicable experience in the center of criticism will always keep criticism an art.” This incommunicable experience had nothing to do with Frye’s remarkably impersonal view of the ethical, as witness his “Second Essay: Ethical Criticism.”<sup>42</sup> To confuse the ethical as the experience of the impossible with positional skepticism and prescribe scientific procedure, as does Guillory, speaks perhaps to the occupational hazard of wanting a science of criticism. If we want to compete with the hard “science”(s) and the social sciences at their hardest as “human science,” we have already lost, as one loses institutional competition. In the arena of the humanities as the uncoercive rearrangement of desire, he who wins loses. If this sounds vague, what we learn (to imagine what we know) rather than know in the humanities remains vague, unverifiable, iterable. You don’t put it aside in order to be literary critical.

The planetarity of which I have been speaking in these pages is perhaps best imagined from the precapitalist cultures of the planet. In this era of global capital triumphant, to keep responsibility alive in the reading and teaching of the textual is at first sight impractical. It is, however, the right of the textual to be so responsible, responsive, answerable. The “planet” is, here, as perhaps always, a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right. Its alterity, determining experience, is mysterious and discontinuous—an experience of the impossible. It is such collectivities that must be opened up with the question “How many are we?” when cultural origin is detranscendentalized into fiction—the toughest task in the diaspora.