

## Introduction: Victorian studies, world literatures, and globalisation

This special issue, 'The State, or Statelessness, of Victorian Studies', shows the field's engagement with twenty-first century technologies and institutions (digital humanities and Higher Education); neo-Victorian literature, politics, and architecture; post-Darwinian biology and genomics; world literatures, transculturation and globalisation studies. Yet the two essays that provide close readings of the most globally loved Victorian novelist return to a classic tradition (i.e., before poststructural or postmodern theory) of critics – William Empson, Robert Garis, Jonas Barish – and traditional aesthetic questions about pastoral and authorial voice. The larger view and long durée that currently characterise some of the best in Victorian studies are accompanied by a self-critique following on several decades of postcolonial, race, gender, and sexuality studies. Llewellyn and Heilmann examine the scope and limits of neo-Victorianism. This introduction argues that there is a difference between nostalgic neo-Victorianism and the critical transvaluation of actants and ideas often associated with nineteenth-century Britain.

Academics will have noticed the increasing demand over the last decade on the part of students, professional organisations, funders, HE administrators, and publishers for work that we might call global, international, or worldly. As academic presses struggle financially to publish scholarly monographs, they are now packaging groundbreaking collections as reference works for students or companions for the general public, and two 2012 collections, *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* and *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, might cause us to reflect on the relation of local fields like Victorian Studies to these emergent, typically collaborative efforts.<sup>1</sup> While world literatures are ancient, the study of world literature is growing in contested terrains: world literature as the best (Goethe's *Weltliteratur*); as bearer of universal values (Tagore's *Vishwa sahitya*); as circulating in translation/remediation (the current, most popular view as promoted by David Damrosch and notably less or even non-evaluative),<sup>2</sup> in relation to power and domination (e.g., in relation to postcolonial studies);<sup>3</sup> in relation to commodification (Tariq Ali's 'market realism'<sup>4</sup>). And although Western critics rarely talk about it, for

much of the world, world literature still has to do with the literature of Internationalism, in the sense of the Marxist International. Central to current debates about the value of world literature is the relation of world, a place or *lifeworld* that we inhabit, to globalisation, a process or transformation that often acts upon us. The juxtaposition of lifeworld as space or place and globalisation as process acting upon it (often figured as a juggernaut) suggests the positive, cosmopolitan, diversity-friendly connotations of world literature, while also showing the pitfalls of its analysis, i.e., historical and present inequalities. These inequalities are evident all the way down, in capacity for production, access to distribution, availability for consumption, and degree of receptivity. In addition to these ethical questions of value in World Literatures, we also face the main question of taste: are we interested in world literature that is the best, or world literature that is best-selling? If world literature is the best, is popular literature that which merely participates in circuits of mass production and consumption? This raises the value of translation. For the purposes of the global circulation of literature, is translation best when it is most faithful to the source culture that produced it? Or when it is most useful to the target culture that adapts it?

Consider some statistics from world and popular literature. We don't know how many copies of Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy* (骆驼祥子; Pinyin *Luòtuó Xiángzi* – literally 'Camel Lucky Lad' – 1936), for many the greatest modern Chinese novel, has sold in Chinese, but it is estimated to have sold 70 million copies in Russian alone.<sup>5</sup> Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (*100 Years of Solitude*) has sold 30 million copies – 20 million in Spanish alone – and has been translated into thirty-seven languages. In terms of impact not on the public but on other writers, it is widely accepted as the most influential novel of the last fifty years, especially in global terms of South to South transmission, for example in magical realist fiction in Arabic-speaking countries and the PRC (People's Republic of China). Thanks to consumption practices made available by Kindle, E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Random House, 2012) sold 4 million copies in the UK and 15 million in North America in its first three weeks of publication and is therefore the 'Fastest selling novel of all time', second only to the collective sales of *Harry Potter*. Nonetheless, according to Wikipedia's List of Best-Selling Books, Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities* has sold 200 million copies and is therefore the 'best-selling novel of all time'.<sup>6</sup>

A more authoritative index than Wikipedia is Unesco's *Index Translationum – World Bibliography of Translation 1978–present*.<sup>7</sup> Here the world's most translated authors since 1978 are, first, Agatha Christie; second, Jules Verne; third, Shakespeare; fourth, Enid Blyton; fifth, Valdimir Lenin. The first Victorian author to appear on the list of

Unesco's top fifty most translated authors is Arthur Conan Doyle at fourteenth and Dickens at twenty-fifth, followed by Robert Louis Stevenson at twenty-sixth, Oscar Wilde at twenty-eighth, and Rudyard Kipling at forty-fifth. Conan Doyle is the sixth most translated author in China, with Dickens at ninth, and Dickens is the fourth most translated author in Egypt. Divisions between popular and high culture become complicated quickly in the global context, in which Dickens, García Márquez and Lao She seem to fulfil the criteria for both popular and world literature, best-selling and the best.

The division between popular and canonical literature is also breaking down in the academy due to new methods of analysis, especially those associated with digital humanities (DH). A few years ago, Franco Moretti argued that we should not theorise about a genre like the novel on the basis of a handful of canonical texts that were obviously exceptions to normal literary production.<sup>8</sup> If we want to know about the genre of the novel, we should look at the thousands and hundred thousands of novels published. In May 2012, two of Moretti's colleagues at Stanford, Ryan Heuser and Long Le-Khac, duly circulated on the Internet 'A Quantitative Literary History of 2,958 Nineteenth-Century British Novels: The Semantic Cohort Method', in which they in effect tested Raymond Williams's thesis in *The Country and the City* (1973) through data analysis, noting 'A pervasive expansion of social space in the nineteenth-century British novel in reaction to parallel changes in the actual social spaces of Britain; a concomitant concretization of novelistic language that constructs, reflects, and critically responds to this change in social experience; a spatialization of setting; a move from direct to indirect characterization; and a fundamental shift in narration from telling to showing.'<sup>9</sup> Heuser and Long Le-Khac associate these formal properties with social formations, the whole study amounting to the beginning of a more empirical history of the novel. With such data, how will theories of the novel based on readings of the classics compare? Or will readings, like Rae Greiner's and David Kurnick's in this special issue, become predominantly *aesthetic*, leaving larger claims about history and genre to teams of DH specialists aided by literary historians? Lyn Pykett's essay on the development of Victorian Studies in the changing institutional environment of British Higher Education and Dino Felluga's on DH in the US context address some of these issues.

I now turn to processes of globalisation. In the Introduction to the Global Circulation Project's Forum on *Global Modernisms*,<sup>10</sup> we had to confront more questions about literary space: Within what frames can we best study culture? Is the frame closest to 'home', like national

literatures or the Victorian period, the best? What is lost when the local is viewed mainly through the global? Yet what is lost in a too-tight focus on the local?

In the case of the Victorian British Empire, studies of British imperialism are now contested by larger inter-imperialities, dialectical co-formations, with horizontal contexts between empires and vertical struggles of class, caste, race, ethnicity, gender, etc., within each of them. Laura Doyle writes, after Yeats, of twenty centuries of interconnected empires from the Islamic Abbasid and Ottoman, to the Persian, Byzantine, and Indian, to the Russian, Swedish, Polish, Spanish and Portuguese, to the Han, the Tang, and the Sung, all in *processes* of modernisation, capitalisation, and domination, trading goods, people, institutions, cultures, sign systems, with credit, interlocking trade systems, and print money.<sup>11</sup> If we take empire as the unit of analysis, there are many empires with their own particular and interlocking niches. Transregional modern social trends include global population growth, global intensification of land use, the marginalisation of nomadic and agricultural peoples, and the 'civilising' of the masses in mass education rather than the grooming of elites. Well before Marx, geopolitical formations in the long *durée* stimulated global capitalism through what has been called by Immanuel Wallerstein an ethnicisation of the world's workforce.<sup>12</sup> After Marx, rising expectations of independence and autonomy throughout the world were simultaneous with their thwarting by economic, religious, or gender constraints, contributing to waves of resentment. The clashes and formal aporias of modern literatures often move between the poles of progress/optimism/hope and nostalgia/resentment/melancholy. Victorianists will recognise all this from the Victorian period, but the processes of modernisation, liberalisation, exploitation, and domination were operating elsewhere too.

For example, there are many studies of the circulation of commodities in Victorian literature and the social effects of commodity markets. Research that is more dialectical incorporates our knowledge of commodity circulation in Britain with the circulation of British commodities, say, in China, especially during that period from the 1840s and the Opium Wars. Even in a decade of war, the 1840s introduced to very widespread Chinese markets European glass, mirrors and the daguerreotype; by the 1860s, magic lanterns with slide shows ('foreign mirrors' 拉洋片儿/西洋景) and the camera. As in the West, the camera in China consolidated images of collective and individual identity. Victorianists working on inter- or trans-culturation might point to the wealth and status displayed in all-important photographs of large families. After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, ending a regime

of privilege and hierarchy, and the confluence of Western and indigenous notions of the self, the use of mirrors and camera noticeably contribute to modern portraiture as exploration of self, in the same way that mirrors contributed to European studies of subjectivity.

In 1860, the first bicycles were introduced; 1875, running water with 'dragon mouth taps'; 1877, the first telephone conversation; 1878, the first electric light, so that by the 1880s Shanghai had become the 'City that never sleeps'. By the 1880s, European became the prestige cuisine, with imported polished rice, wheat, and sugar cheaper than that produced locally, causing calamity to the peasantry. In 1897, film was introduced. Frank Dikötter, who has collected these data, argues that foreign 'copy culture' was embraced whenever useful or profitable; newness was more valued than souvenirs, making the China of this period in many ways a more progressive culture than the European.<sup>13</sup>

Simultaneous with such transcultural adaptations of material objects, the diplomat Chen Jitong wrote in Darwinian terms to novelist Zeng Pu in 1898 about world literature: 'We live in a time where we must rigorously pursue scientific studies in order to compete for survival. Where literature is concerned, we also cannot afford to be arrogant in holding ourselves to be uniquely superior . . . We must advocate for translation on a grand scale. Not only should we bring others' masterworks into our language, but our own works of merit must also be translated en masse into theirs . . . We must not only demolish the existing prejudices but also transform our methods in pursuit of a common goal.'<sup>14</sup>

Chen was thinking of translation as an act of making that might affirm different communities from the ones we are currently used to in Victorian studies. We are accustomed to the village, the factory or workshop, the socio-economic classes, trade unions, Ideological State Apparatuses of law, church, schools, science, medicine, and business (Dickens's 'Bar, Barnacles, and Bank'), the empire and colonies, but other communities also arose in the Victorian imagination that circulated very widely outside Britain. I have been tracing socialist individualists and national Internationalists from Wilde to Gide to the 1930s debates in Vietnam on Art for Art's Sake, and I shall conclude with these.

Oscar Wilde and particularly his 'Soul of Man under Socialism' (1891) were influential on the young André Gide. Wilde had argued in characteristically brilliant fashion that in order for individualism to flourish, society would first have to institute a level playing field through socialist redistribution. Only from an initial basis of equality would people then be able to develop in accordance with their different and unique talents and capacities. In his 'Défense de la culture' speech at

the 1935 International Writers' Conference in Paris, the anti-fascist Gide used Wilde's ideas to promote international universality through national particularity. Gide argued: 'There are, for peoples as for individuals, certain indices of particular refractions, and this is precisely the great interest of our cosmopolitan meeting . . . the culture that we aspire to defend is the sum of the particular cultures of each nation. This culture is our common good. It is common to all of us. It is international.'<sup>15</sup> Like Wilde, Gide was working his way into being that Victorian-inspired combination of communist individualist and national Internationalist. He said: 'For my part, I claim to be strongly internationalist while remaining intensely French. In like manner, I am a fervent individualist, though I am in full agreement with the communist outlook, and am actually helped in my individualism by communism.'<sup>16</sup> On the topic of World Literatures, he spoke out: 'What could be more *particularly* Spanish than Cervantes, what more English than Shakespeare, more Russian than Gogol, more French than Rabelais or Voltaire – at the same time what could be more general and more profoundly human.'<sup>17</sup>

I came to the Art for Art's Sake debates in Vietnam via a chapter of *Global Modernisms* by the critic of Vietnamese literature Ben Tran. Ben Tran's essay is on the debates of 1935–9 in colonial Annam (French *Indochine*; today Vietnam), so the relevant empire in which the Victorian Wilde's ideas were translated was the French and the relevant movement was the communist International. Gide was attractive to the Vietnamese for what they called his 'romanticism' (for them, the value he placed on individual subjective expression) and his 'realism' (for them, his representation of the real struggles of the masses). In the Art for Art's Sake debates, the critic and activist Hoài Thanh cited Gide in developing a cosmopolitan outlook: 'Gide expresses his complete commitment to individualism. Individualism does not contradict communism, but rather individualism needs communism in order to reach complete fruition. The more an individual develops his character the more the collective benefits, Gide claims. The same is true for each national culture: the more each enunciates its distinctiveness, the more [hu]mankind benefits.'<sup>18</sup> While rebutted by 'realist' Marxists, Gide's model of international universality through national particularity broke with the Confucian instrumental use of literature in favour of creative and personal expression. Hoài Thanh thought that this would lead to ethically autonomous individuals who would benefit the collective. The free development and articulation of the individual could only be realised by the free development and articulation of all. This intercultural transvaluation of values often associated with Victorian Britain – individualism, independence, collectivism, nationalism,

internationalism, cosmopolitanism, and so forth – will be central to the development of Victorian Studies in the future. As in the post-Darwinian biology and genomics so brilliantly discussed by Jay Clayton in this special issue, the vitality of Victorian Studies is seen in the field's extension beyond its nominal time, 1837–1901, and place.

## Notes

- 1 Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir (eds), *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (London: Routledge, 2012); Mark Wollaeger with Matt Eatough (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Laura Doyle and Regenia Gagnier, 'The Global Circulation Project's Forum on Global Modernisms', *Literature Compass*, 9 (2012), 589–630; <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/lico.2012.9.issue-9/issuetoc>.
- 2 David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
- 3 A position often expressed by postcolonial critics is that world literature as a field tends to universalise and depoliticise literatures: its homogenising processes are rooted in the encyclopaedic ambitions and evolutionary models of nineteenth-century thought; it distorts the uniqueness of the objects compared, reducing them to variants on a common standard; it relies on a devaluing of certain cultures in relation to others. For clear statements of the issues, see Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman, Introduction, *New Literary History*, special issue *Comparison* (Baltimore: Summer 2009), 40:3, v–ix; and Robert Young, 'World Literature and Postcolonialism', in D'haen et al., *World Literature*, ch. 22, 213–22.
- 4 Tariq Ali, 'Literature and Market Realism', *New Left Review*, 199 (1993), 140–45.
- 5 Interview with Lao She's son Shu Yi, 'Lao She's the Dead' (22 March 2011), [www.ruiwen.com/news/55072.htm](http://www.ruiwen.com/news/55072.htm); accessed 21 May 2012.
- 6 For a detailed study of Dickens's circulation outside Europe and North America, see R. Gagnier, 'The Global Circulation of Charles Dickens's Novels', *The Global Circulation Project of Literature Compass* 10:1 (2013), 82–95 doi:10.1111/lic3.12021.
- 7 UNESCO, *Index Translationum: World Bibliography of Translation*, [http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=7810&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=7810&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).
- 8 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005).
- 9 Ryan Heuser and Long Le-Khac, 'A Quantitative Literary History of 2,958 Nineteenth-Century British Novels: The Semantic Cohort Method', <http://litlab.stanford.edu/LiteraryLabPamphlet4.pdf>.
- 10 Doyle and Gagnier, 'Forum on *Global Modernisms*'.
- 11 Laura Doyle, 'Inter-Imperiality: Dialectics in Postcolonial World History' (forthcoming in *Interventions*).



- 12 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic, 1974); *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750* (New York: Academic, 1980); *Historical Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1984), see esp. pp. 78–85.
- 13 Frank Dikötter, *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
- 14 Jing Tsu, 'World Literature and National Literature(s)', in D'haen et al., *World Literature*, ch. 17, 163–4.
- 15 Ben Tran, 'Queer Internationalism and Modern Vietnamese Aesthetics', in Wollaeger and Eatough, *Global Modernisms*, ch. 15, 367–87 (p. 370).
- 16 *Ibid.*, 370.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 370–71.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 374.