agent of recognition and "the rest" as the object of recognition, in representation." As she points out, it is through these technologies that the literary market *and* academic discourse such as world literature "selectively and often arbitrarily confer world membership on literatures."[22] The result was books like John Macy's *The Story of World Literature* (1927), which covers "Asian Literature" in merely 13 pages out of 500, just after "The Beginnings of Literature," in a chapter entitled: "The Mysterious East-Chinese-Japanese-Indian-Arabic." Indian literature consists exclusively of ancient Sanskrit literature, and the only modern author mentioned is Tagore, who is presented as a lonely, little-known voice (remember he had won the Nobel Prize in 1913) damned with faint praise:

> In our own days an Indian poet has arisen whose voice is heard beyond the intellectual frontiers of his faith and language. This is the Bengali Rabindranath Tagore. Something of the bloom and cadence of his verse must inevitably be lost in translation. We are told that he has a delicate sensitive ear for the music of words.[23]

In the end, more productive than a critique of modern intellectuals and their "amnesia," or a historical narrative about the inevitable rise of the juggernaut English (or French) and the obliteration of everything else in their wake, is to be wary of single-strand and monolingual historical narratives (Arabic existed in a multilingual world, too), and conceive of space, whether local or further flung/wider, as the "multiplicity of stories so far," and attend to those stories and the different configurations they produce.[24]

Polysystems Redux: The Unfinished Business of World Literature

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In responding to Muhsin al-Musawi's two-part essay on the Arabic Republic of Letters, this essay proposes a rethinking of the world systems model in global literary studies in

22   Shu-Mei Shih, "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition," *World Literature: A Reader* eds. T. D'haen, C. Domínguex and M. Rosendahl Thomsen (London: Routledge, 2013), 260.
23   John Macy, *The Story of World Literature* (London, Bombay, Sidney: George Harap & Co, 1927), 43. Japanese literature is "best interpreted by Lafcadio Hearn."
24   "The multiplicity of stories so far" is Doreen Massey's definition in *For Space*, 6e (London: Sage), 9.

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terms of a polysystems framework. Rather than trying to fit literary worlds—ancient, premodern, modern—within a single Euro-chronological frame culminating in a world capitalist systems model—where the non-European worlds appear as invariably inferior—it is worthwhile to see them as several polysystems with variable valences within a heterotemporal planetary literary space. This approach offers a comparative reading of the emergence of three language worlds—Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic— and urges us to rethink the totality of the world literary space as a diachronic field that generates overlapping, multiscalar, comparative histories of literary polysystems.

Literature is what escapes the system; you cannot speed read it.

—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

The field of world literature, observes Emily Apter in her recent book *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, has become too "entrepreneurial" and "bulimic," spewing out plural worlds while remaining all too Eurocentric in its approach.[1] Gargantuan and expansionist in its vision, world literature according to Apter needs to be more than a project of "curatorial salvage," a field that "gathers up swaths of literary culture deemed vulnerable to extinction and performs preservational intervention."[2] Salutary as her warning is, it is perhaps a little too hasty in its judgment of the field's perceived pathologies. For world literature as conceived in our contemporary era has only just begun to pay heed to non-Eurocentric *ecumenes* and plural maps of transcontinental republics of letters— ancient, high medieval, and modern—that seriously challenge a single-world model of literary systems, whether Wallersteinian or Darwinian. Nor is such work invariably a "proliferation of geographically emptied names" unmindful of the problem of untranslatability, uncritical in its acceptance of easy communicability, and primarily invested in a vapid globality. On the contrary, as we shall go on to see in the examples that follow, translatability, historicity, textual singularity, and geopolitical specificity are critical to the way these projects are conceived.

Muhsin al-Musawi's two-part essay, "The Republic of Letters: Arab Modernity?," offers an exemplary model in this regard. Beginning with the proposition that the world republic of letters is not just a post-Renaissance phenomenon originating in Europe, al-Musawi traces the emergence of an Arabic literary world and an Islamic republic of letters in the high medieval period. Spread across southern Europe, the Mediterranean, North Africa, and West Asia with Cairo as the epicenter, this Arabic *ecumene* flourished between the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries and generated a stupendous body of lexicons, encyclopedia, compendiums, critical commentary, and poetic collections, all housed in well-funded libraries. al-Musawi's essay is actually a lament at the shortsightedness of the Arabic *nahdah* (the modern Arab literary movement that flourished from 1811 to 1950) that expressly used the European

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1   Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013), 3, 8.
2   Ibid., 326.

Enlightenment as its model for a new "awakening" and consciously distanced itself from the Mamluk and the early Ottoman periods. These latter far from being eras of decadence and imitation generated a cosmopolitan republic of letters across West Asia, North Africa, the Mediterranean, Syria, and South and East Asia. In positing Cairo as the epicenter of this republic, al-Musawi's analysis antedates and decenters the French historicization of the emergence of the Republic of Letters as a European Enlightenment phenomenon.[3] There is one other proposition of the resolutely inward-looking European historiography of modern world literary systems that Musawi's essay counters. This is the emergence of the "philologic-lexical revolution" in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, what Pascale Casanova identifies as the second important phase in the internationalization of literary worlds. In Casanova's reading this phase is a purely European phenomenon, and non-Western literary and philological worlds have to wait until the period of decolonization in the 1950s to become part of the international literary space. Musawi's essay draws our attention to the colonial-driven lexicographic enterprises that emerged in the field of Arabic philological and textual studies from the late eighteenth century, and that in turn brought literary texts in Arabic and Persian into European literary spaces, thus effectively internationalizing those spaces well before the decolonization period of the 1950s.

The richness of Musawi's historiographical analysis also lies in the way he traces the impact of high medieval Arabic lexicographic traditions on the far more codified and instrumentalized lexical enterprises during the colonial period, thus challenging interpretations of the medieval period in Arabic literary historiography as a dark and decadent phase. The resonance of Musawi's analysis with other recent revisionist accounts of the philologic-lexical revolution in Europe can scarcely be missed. Aamir Mufti's 2010 essay, "Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures," expressly draws our attention to the planetary remit of this revolution, which in bringing the vast reservoirs of classical languages of the East to invent the linguistic family tree "posited nothing less than the languages and cultures of the entire world as its object in the final instance."[4] The role of Sanskrit in particular in constellating the field of European comparative philology—the progenitors of contemporary linguistics and lexicography—has been extensively studied. We are also familiar with the gradual fall from grace of Sanskrit in late-nineteenth-century philology and linguistic theory when it began to be seen less as a magisterial influence and more as an antiquarian system and a "museum of ancient practices."[5] The larger discursive and material forces at play in denigrating ancient and medieval language worlds during this period of the aggressive consolidation of colonial rule are impossible to

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3   See his discussion of Peter Bayle's coinage, *Republique des Lettres*, at the end of the seventeenth century, and Dena Goodman's subsequent history of the phrase in her book, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1994). Muhsin al-Musawi's, "The Republic of Letters: Arab Modernity?" *Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 1.2 (2014): 267.
4   Aamir Mufti, "Orientalism and the Institution of World Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 36.3 (2010), 459.
5   See Revathy Krishnaswamy "Nineteenth Century Language Ideology: A Postcolonial Perspective," *Interventions* 7.1 (2005), 43–71. In my own essay, "The Language Question in India," I trace the shift from Sanskrit and Persian worlds to English at the cusp of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and discuss the gradual disenfranchisement and desublimation of Sanskrit as a the locus of philological knowledge. My essay was published in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson. Vol. 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 649–680.

recount in my brief response. Instead, I might just briefly mention Foucault's insight on epistemic ruptures during the period under discussion in *The Order of Things*, an insight that, I suggest, is symptomatic both of his own resolutely introverted vision of the emergence of modern epistemic worlds and of philologic/linguistic theory's modernizing compulsion to distance itself from its non-European influences.[6] Foucault identifies the discovery of language—not as world but as representation—in early-nineteenth-century Europe as the single most significant rupture heralding the onset of modern epistemology. In doing so, he argues, "*it would be false—and above all inadequate—to attribute this mutation to the discovery of hitherto unknown objects, such as the grammatical system of Sanskrit.…* What changed at the turn of the century, and underwent an irremediable modification, was knowledge itself as an interior and indivisible mode of being between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge.'[7] Although it may be true that the "peculiar existence and ancient solidity of language as a thing inscribed in the fabric of the world were dissolved in the functioning of representation: all language only had value as discourse,"[8] this did not necessarily mean that the European discovery of Sanskrit and other classical languages of the non-Western world was incidental to the emergence of this new episteme. On the contrary, as Musawi's essay and the extensive scholarship on Orientalist philology demonstrate, Europe's encounter with the literary and linguistic riches of the Near East, India, and the Far East was critical to the emergence of language as a discourse and medium of representation. Casanova's internalization of a resolutely introverted intellectual history of the philological revolution in nineteenth-century Europe is what readings such as Musawi's and Mufti's challenge.

What are the implications of thinking about world literary systems and the future of world literature as a discipline in light of the aforementioned discussion? What openings does Musawi's rich tapestry of Arabic language and literary worlds offer us? Here I reflect on two possibilities that I think are critical to generating a rich, polysemic and heterotemporal vision of world literature in the years to come. One is the opening up of comparative literary studies beyond the French-English-German-Spanish quartet to the philologically rich world of area studies especially from the Middle East, Africa, South and South East Asia, not to mention the Russo-Slavic region.[9] This conjunction of comparative literature with area studies has only just begun generating a wealth of scholarly exchanges in various world literary forums, and is, I suggest, a powerful reconstellation of the postcolonial turn in literary studies that began in the early eighties. The second is a serious rethinking about the world literary system itself in terms of a polyworlds model. In regard to this latter, it is worth briefly revisiting system theories from the 1970s, and, especially, the work of Claudio Guillen and Itamar Even-Johar, to see what they have to offer.[10] Both were influenced

6 See Stefan Helgesson's essay in this forum for the use of terms *introversion* and *extroversion* in literary theory.
7 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Vintage, 1973), 252, emphasis added.
8 Ibid., 43.
9 Here I echo and reiterate Gayatri Spivak's injunction that comparative literature should open up conversations with scholars in area studies if it is to survive in the twenty-first century. Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2003.
10 Claudio Guillen, *Literature as System: Towards a Theory of Literary History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971). Itamar Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theory," *Poetics Today*, Vol. 1.1/2: Special Issue: Literature, Interpretation, Communication (Autumn 1979): 287–310.

by the work of the Russian formalists and the Czech structuralists, and, especially, the Bratislava School. In his monumental work *Literature as System*, Guillen recommended a "systematic knowledge and the critical and historical study of literature in general throughout the length and breadth of a world literary space."[11] No doubt, Guillen's definition of *system* as more than a combination or a sum of its components foregrounds the idea of dependency of parts on the whole and their interrelationship marked by strata and hierarchy. But his overwhelming investment in a careful and close reading of texts, and the emplacement of texts in their historical contexts, offer an opening to consider literary systems—past and present—as also diachronic, dynamic, polymorphic, and multiscalar. Itamar Even-Johar's theory of polysystems offers an even stronger opening for a pluralized conception of world literary systems. Two main propositions underpin his theory. One, the simultaneous existence of a closed net-of-relations and concurrently overlapping open net-of-relations within a purportedly a single system. Two, the rejection of synchronic uniformity over multiformal intersections across time and space.[12] The first proposition enables us, for instance, to read the philologic and linguistic revolution of the nineteenth century as both a closed net of relations involving only internal exchanges among European languages and an overlapping open net of relations with Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Chinese in full play. The second proposition allows us to formulate discrete theoretical approaches that are sensitive to the structural, cultural, and material particularities of different epochal moments in the *longue duree* of world literature.[13] The problem of both temporality and historicity here can be addressed by attending closely to what the texts and their reception histories themselves reveal about the value of the literary in different eras, not to mention the very idea of the literary itself. The potentially incommensurable significations of the literary in each discrete era need to be critically reckoned with. Together, these two propositions provide an opening for conceiving the totality of the world literary space as a diachronic enterprise that can generate comparative historical studies of literary polysystems. In other words, rather than trying to fit literary worlds through history within a single Euro-chronological frame culminating in a world capitalist systems model—where the non-European worlds appear as invariably inferior—it is worthwhile to conceive of them as several polysystems with variable valences within a heterotemporal planetary literary space. The three case studies I go on to discuss briefly illustrate the value of this polysystems approach to world literature. They focus on literary worlds in Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian, respectively, and range across ancient, high medieval, and modern eras.

11   Cited in Dario Villaneuva, "Claudio Guillen: (World) Literature as System," *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, eds. Theo D'Haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2011), 111.
12   For an expanded explication of these see Itamar Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theory"; see specially page 291 for the idea of open and closed net-of-relations.
13   This resonates somewhat with Franco Moretti's take on the conundrum of temporality in conceiving of world literature as a system. As he puts it: "the past and the present of literature (a "long" present, beginning in the eighteenth century) should be seen, not as 'superior' or 'inferior' to each other, but as two epochs that are structurally so different that they require two independent theoretical approaches." Franco Morett, "World Systems Theory, Evolutionary Analysis, *Weltliteratur*," *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World*, eds. David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins, and Nirvana Tanoukhi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 75–76.

These cases bring to the fore works of scholars who have hitherto been little engaged with by the mainstream comparative and world literary establishment, but who nevertheless have much to offer in helping us reconceptualize the making of diachronic and multiscalar systems across the vast span of world literary history.

Sheldon Pollock's *The Language of Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (2006) is my first case study of a cosmopolitical and comparative model of literary world-making in the manuscript era that cannot be accounted for in terms proposed by the modern world systems model. A magisterial project that retrieves for literary historians a forgotten narrative of a world literary formation in the ancient and medieval periods, Pollock's book is the first large-scale cultural history of Sanskrit literary and language worlds. The study of Sanskrit has, of course, has had a distinguished lineage in classical philology and in the subsequent emergence of the field of Indology in nineteenth-century Europe. In some senses this dauntingly scholarly specialization has precluded scholars from venturing into a scaled up, transregional approach that would also make a Sanskrit *ecumene* visible as an influential cultural and political zone.[14] As Pollock notes: "Sanskrit studies, heir to a brilliant and imperious intellectual tradition that had set its own agenda in the important issues of the human sciences, has had grounds to rest content with addressing the questions predefined by this tradition—and the historical expansion of the realm of Sanskrit culture was not one of them."[15] He coins the phrase "Sanskrit cosmopolis" and traces the transformation at the beginning of the common era (AD) of this language from a sacred tongue to a secular, worldly, and culturally influential medium for widespread literary and political expression. This transformation marked the start of an amazing career that saw Sanskrit literary culture spread from Afghanistan to Java across a whole millennium, roughly from 300 AD to 1300 AD. In tracing its travels across this vast geography, Pollock's millennial-long history captures in staggeringly erudite detail the impact of Sanskrit on courtly cultures, on local vernacular cultures and polities, on poetics and secular literary forms, and on diverse textual traditions. His comparative frame also extends to Latinate Europe and Confucius China, two better-known "cosmopolises" in world history that emerged in parallel with the Sanskrit *ecumene*.

Why then did no one pay attention to Sanskrit as a significant world literary formation? The reason is that the spread of Sanskrit did not happen on the back of an imperium. Ancient Sanskritized India was never an empire in the way Latinate Rome or Confucius China was. Its cosmopolitical reach has remained untheorized and unhistoricized so far because it has never been seen as a world-making formation by the standards of current paradigms in literary and historical studies. In Pollock's words, "it was a universalism that never objectified, let alone enforce, its universalism," in the way the Latinate Roman and Chinese empires did. [16] He also attributes the lack of attention to the exoticization of Sanskrit as the expression of Eastern spirituality and the inability of

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14 Not that such studies have not been attempted. See J. Gonda, *Sanskrit in Indonesia* (Nagpur: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1952) and H.G. Wales, *The Making of Greater India* (London: Bernard Quartich, 1961). None, however, approaches the ambitious scale of Pollock's enterprise.
15 Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 11.
16 Ibid., 12.

colonial-era philologists and language historians to see it as a "worldly" tongue that could have such a powerful influence on cultural and political life-worlds of vast swathes of Asia over a millennium. Pollock's vast historical sweep goes on to study parallels between Rome and India also in terms of the rise of the vernacular languages in the second millennium that challenged the hegemony of both Latin and Sanskrit. This rich comparative analysis is accompanied by some of the deepest insights on the ideas of "cosmopolitanism" and "vernacularization." He urges us to see these various worlds—the Hellenic, Latinate, Chinese, Sanskrit—as different cosmopolises rather than in terms of a "European comprehensive universalism and a narrow Asian particularism."[17] Pollock also "worlds" these concepts for our times and demonstrates that their historical frames of reference need to be pushed deeper into antiquity. The concluding words of his book are worth rehearsing for purposes of a more culturally sensitive, historically nuanced, and ethically sound conception of the world literary systems:

> To know that some people in the past could be universal or particular in their practices of culture and power without making their particularity ineluctable or their universalism compulsory is to know that better cosmopolitan and vernacular practices are at least conceivable… and even reconcilable.[18]

Self-consciously positioned as a contribution to global and comparative literary studies and not just addressed to South Asia specialists and Sanskritists, Pollock's book urges us to seriously rethink the remit of comparative and world literary practices in western academia.

If Pollock's work is a magisterial and *macrocosmic* account of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, my second case study, Ronit Ricci's *Islam Translated* (2011), is a *microcosmic* account of yet another premodern cosmopolis: Arabic. Microcosmic, because Ricci examines the history of Islamic world formations in South and Southeast Asia through a single textual tradition of translation and transmission. She considers the connection that linked Muslims across divides of distance and culture through the *Book of One Thousand Questions*, a well-known Arabic text depicting a dialogue between the prophet Muhammad and a Jewish leader. The narrative culminates in the conversion of the Jewish personage to Islam. Ricci traces the dissemination and transformations of the *Book* from its tenth-century Arabic original to its translations into Javanese, Malay, and Tamil between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, but it is not a history she weaves into any master narrative of the rise of Europe during the same period. Instead, her study refracts off Muhsin al-Musawi's account of rise of Islamic republic of letters in premodern West Asia, and brings into focus an Arabic cosmopolis at the conjunction of three other language worlds in Asia —Malay, Tamil, and Javanese—that are not part of Musawi's narrative. Here we see the force of the polyworlds model in play within one literary-lexical system. Both Musawi and Ricci trace the contours of an Arabic world system from the high medieval era to the modern. But Musawi posits his analysis as a counter-narrative to the history of European modernization and its impact on Arabic literary modernity.

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17 Ibid., 572.
18 Ibid., 580.

His geographical locus is West Asia and the Mediterranean. Ricci, on the other hand, gives us a history of the inter-Asian travels of Arabic as a shaper of cultural and religious worldviews, one that generated a "translocal Islamic sphere" across much of what is present day India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia.[19] Today, this region contains the largest concentration of Muslims in the world. In tracing the diverse meanings and circumstances of translation that have shaped the history of this one Arabic text, Ricci scales up her study to draw conclusions about the role of translation, linguistic change, and literary transmission in the spread of religious ideas and the transformations of vast continental proportions they can effect. Arabic, in both Ricci's and Musawi's accounts, functions as a world-making system that generates literary, lexical, oral, and written textual traditions vital to the formation of Muslim life-worlds around the globe. And yet each offers a unique world of Arabic letters that functions within an open net of relations with other language worlds.

I turn now to my third case study to illuminate yet another way of conceiving literary worlds as polysystems. This is the story of the emergence of Persian as a transregional literary sphere between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries. In a region contiguous with both Musawi's Arabic republic of letters in West Asia and Ricci's Arabic cosmpolis in South and Southeast Asia, a Persian world of letters flourished for much of the second millennium in a slice of the Muslim world that bridged Iran and northern India. Persian's rich relationship with Arabic and Sanskrit over a period of seven hundred years is one of the most enthralling episodes in world literary history, but, alas, little known beyond the small but distinguished cohort of specialists in the field. One such specialist is Muzaffar Alam, a professor of Persian, Arabic, and Urdu at the University of Chicago and successor to Sheldon Pollock's George V. Bobrinskoy chair in the department of South Asian languages and civilizations. In an essay published in a collaborative volume entitled *Literary Cultures in History* under the general editorship of Pollock, Muzaffar Alam traces the emergence of a Persian republic of letters from central Asia to northern India.[20] This republic cut a swathe through a non-Arabic Islamic world that spread across Ghazna, Ghur, Bukhara, Tirmiz, Nishapur, Isfahan, Shiraz, Sabzavar, Herat, Multan, Lahore, and Delhi.[21] Straddling a vast historical period from the early medieval to the modern eras, and politically tied to the rise of the post-Mongol Perso-Islamic world, Persian flourished under the Ghaznavids who ruled across prepartition northern India from 977 to 1186. Much like Cairo in Musawi's account, Lahore became the epicenter of this Persian literary republic. Later with the Turkish conquest of northern India in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Delhi, too, became an important node.

Persian reached its apogee of literary refinement in the work of the thirteenth-century poet Amir Khusrau, a progeny of the Perso-Turkic world of migrants who moved to northern India in the wake of the Mongol invasion of Iran. Khusrau

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19 Ronic Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 4.
20 Muzaffar Alam, 'The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan,' *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 131–98.
21 Ibid., 134.

found inspiration in the sublime spiritual poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi, a post-Mongol Turko-Iranian poet whose shrine now rests in Konya in contemporary Turkey. Rumi is acknowledged as the progenitor of Sufism, a syncretic religious movement that was deeply spiritual and humanistic in its hospitality to people from all creeds. Persian became the language of the Sufi saints, and because much of their writings took the form of exquisite poetry, the aesthetics of Sufism permeated Persian literature during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Muzaffar Alam notes that the Sufis were active in translating into Persian Arabic renderings of Indian Sanskrit texts such as the *Hathayoga*, a treatise on corporal and spiritual discipline.[22] Significantly, the arrival of Persian in India also coincided with the first Persian translation from Arabic of the famous Sanskrit collection of animal fables called *Panchatantra*. Persian in turn consolidated itself as an influential transregional language of high culture by undertaking ambitious translational projects of Arabic works.

This interlaced translational history among Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit in the high medieval era witnessed a push from the courtly sphere in northern India around the fifteenth century to standardize Persian through lexicographic projects. Alam notes that although "only four dictionaries were compiled in Iran during the thousand years from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries, India... offered no fewer than sixty-six dictionaries during this period."[23] Perso-Arabic poetic forms that emerged during the same period, such as the *ghazal*, are still alive in contemporary India and have become part of the repertoire of popular Bombay cinema. Under the reign of the Mughal emperor, Jalaluddin Akbar, Persian became the supreme medium of courtly culture, poetic practice, and administration. Akbar ruled northern India and much of what is contemporary Afghanistan and Pakistan between 1556 and 1605, and his royal patronage of Persian was unparalleled in the history of the language. The first Persian translations of the Indian Sanskrit epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* took place during his time. By the time the British trading companies began arriving on the shores of western India in the early seventeenth century, Persian had consolidated itself as the official language of the governing class. The British traders and, subsequently, the administrators found it indispensable for commerce and governance. Despite the colonial incursion, Persian continued to be the language of the cultural and political elite for almost two centuries. India's unique contribution to the world of Persian literatures and letters, however, began to fray once the administrators of the British East India Company began to notice it as a threat to the cultural influence of English. English and the vernacular languages began to be seen as the right medium for India's transition to modernity under colonial rule. The author of the infamous 1835 *Minutes of Education*, Thomas Babington Macaulay, expressly noted that although Hindi, Urdu, and the other vernaculars were appropriate vehicles for modernizing the Indian education system, "to teach [the Indians] Persian, would be to set up a rival, and as I apprehend, a very unworthy rival, to the English language."[24] Macaulay's condescension is mirrored in the words of Edward Fitzgerald, the

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22 Ibid., 148–49.
23 Ibid., 149.
24 Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Educational Minute," *The Proceedings and Transactions of the Bethune Society*, (Calcutta: Bethune Society, 1870), 225.

translator of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*: "It is an amusement to take what liberties I like with these Persians who (as far as I think) are not poets enough to frighten one from such excursions and who really want a little Art to shape them." Muzaffar Alam's study of the Persian republic of letters in the second millennium encompasses a vibrant translocal world of literary exchange that was eventually undone with the shift of political power from the Mughals to the British after the war of 1857.

The three case studies just delineated, in tandem with Musawi's essay on the Arabic republic of letters, are, to my mind, superb illustrations of the refractory, translational, and the relational energies that ought to inhere in a truly global comparative literature practice. I also see manifested in them the spirit of a hospitable comparativism bequeathed us by the best in the legacy of postcolonialism: not of a doctrinal or routinized postcolonialism forever writing back to some representational bogeyman, but one that opens up literary worlds and works to the phenomenology of travel across both European and non-European *ecumenes*, something that embraces both the experience of an oscillating space-time continuum in which works exist both at a distance and in the "here-and-now" of literary production and reception, depending on where one is located, and also the ways in which works accrue layers of meaning as they travel through multiple sites of translation and interpretation across time. This phenomenon of textual networks and travel has been theorized by David Damrosch as the very essence of world literature—the elliptical circulation and reception of texts as he calls it, not a canon of classics, nor simply what the market calls world literature, that is, books from the non-Western parts of the world that make it to the top of the charts and are generally translation-friendly and prize-happy. To conceive, thus, of world literary systems as several interlaced open and closed nets of relations across space and time is to admit to world literature's infinite potential as a collaborative field, a business that scholars ought not to wash their hands of for fear of the unknown and the incomprehensible.

The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters as World Model

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> *My argument in the two-part essay focuses on the dilemma of naḥḍah as an unfin-*
> *ished mission; a transition as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn calls it. I join many scholars who are*
> *trying to see through its problematic nature, but I see it also in relation to the*

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