

## Globality is not Worldliness

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This essay argues that worldliness and globality do not signify the same phenomenon. Whereas "worldliness" is an attempt to understand reality as simultaneously one and multilaterally produced, as objective and perspectival, globality is the *fait accompli* of processes of globalization that resolutely disavow their ideological intentionality. Focusing on the issue of Global Language and Global English, this essay seeks to implicate the regime of Global English in the genealogy of its dominance, and suggests that unless problems of "language" and "translatability" are raised as profound issues in a world that is structured in dominance, the concept of Global Literature will remain captive to the demands of the so-called dominant world languages. Global experiences are multiform, heterogeneous, heteroglossic, and polyvalent in ways that are just not accessible to the blueprint of global literature as envisioned by the transnational cosmopolitan imagination. Arguing vigorously against the Salman Rushdie claim that the best literature written in India since independence has been in English, this essay articulates the prescription that unless the dominant "non-vernacular" languages learn to translate themselves to themselves, Global Literature will remain mired in the provincialism of dominance.

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**R**eluctantly, very reluctantly, I begin with a reference to Salman Rushdie's infamous adjudication that the best literature produced in India during all its years of independence has been in English, and not in any of the Indian languages. Much as I wish not to dignify this evaluation, based as it is on metropolitan hubris and "sanctioned ignorance," with a response, I have to, since this judgment has been circulating very effectively among the cosmopolitan literati. The devastating comment that Rushdie makes in his introductory essay to the volume *MirrorWork* and elsewhere, is that much of Indian literature in Indian languages is "tractor art" that does not properly belong to the twentieth century. In effect, Rushdie

is making large representative claims about the world, and about where the world *is*. He is coordinating prescriptively the chronotopic whereabouts of the world, while banishing most Indian literature written in the fifteen and more Indian print languages from the proper and progressive temporality of the world. Obviously, these literatures are in the world, but alas in unredeemed and stranded provincial worlds of their own that fall almost a century short of the global norm.

I begin thus to make one important point: the world and the globe are not the same, just as globality is not worldliness, and globalization is not the same thing as "worlding." The world, worlding, and worldliness are part of a sensitive and hermeneutically generous vocabulary, anchored in a phenomenology that acknowledges that the very oneness of the world can only be understood on the basis of an irreducible perspectival heterogeneity. In the phenomenological tradition, and I refer here particularly to the work of Merleau-Ponty, the main focal points are: 1) the nature of "experience" and its mappability as discourse, 2) "intentionality" as that which binds the human to the world, 3) the coevalness of all human experience, 4) the thematization of "perspective" as simultaneously infinite and relational, 5) the attempt to think beyond subject-object and perception-cogito binarities, 6) the realization of phenomenological truth as the ongoing function of the phenomenological method, 7) the alignment of the world of nature as experienced through the primacy of perception with the all too human world of history and politics, and finally, 8) "worlding" as a perennial process of a lived and immanent contingency. Humanity is condemned to meaning, said Merleau-Ponty, and in saying so, he sought to celebrate the real as the intelligible, rather than use abstract rationality to perpetuate the distance between the "I am" and the "I think."<sup>1</sup>

In dire opposition to the world of phenomenology, globality is a condition effected by the global travel of capital, and globalization is the name for capital's relentless and inexorable dissemination. Along the flows of capital, certain patterns, certain configurations, certain genres, certain lifestyles and ways of being are instantly normativized as the appropriate and desirable ways of exhibiting and instantiating globality. The distinction I am making here is between "being in the world," a condition available to all locations in the world, and "globality," which is a particular way of achieving a *fait accompli* in the name of the entire world.<sup>2</sup> In other words, globality functions,

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1. For more on the theme of the "worlding of the world," see Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* and Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought* 17-87. See also chapter 3 of my book, *History, the Human, and The World Between* (forthcoming).

to use Foucault's phrase, as a reformed mode of representation that picks certain strands, certain modes of production, certain ways of being from the inclusiveness of the world and invests them with the aura as well as the charisma of "being global." This strategy achieves the effect of prescription and normativization without taking on the onus of "value," "ideology," or "accountability." To apply this process to the Rushdie evaluation: Rushdie assumes that in a world full of myriad, protean cultural and literary possibilities, certain trends are axiomatically avant-garde, progressive, and deservedly representative. These are the trends then that are valorized as the emerging platform of globality. The "tractor art" expressions, and those other modes that are antediluvian, even though they exist in their particular neighborhoods and make all sorts of truth and aesthetic claims, have not been "chosen" as the vehicles of a global content or sensibility.

What is truly insidious about the metropolitan legitimation of globality, including Global English, is that it achieves a normative and ideological effect without even having to spell out the criteria of normativization or trace the contours of its aesthetic ideology. In the most vicious and banal sense of the cliché, "anything is what anything does": globalization too is honored and paraded around as no more and no less than what it does. But what about the representativeness of what it does, or the relevance of its performativity outside its own immanent and self-declared jurisdiction? To put it differently, how does globalization achieve the status of a legitimate speech act without gaining representative sanction from its constituent elements? When does "the speaking" become a "speaking for?" Can the historical density of such an act be evaluated or called into question from a point of view "without?"<sup>3</sup> Obviously not, since globality and globalization function a) as a smooth and frictionless surface where oppositions, antagonisms, and critiques cannot take hold, b) as a descriptive totality that disallows the very chronotope of the "outside," and c) as a form of expression that is definitively post-representational. In an alarmingly ironic mode that would make Althusser do somersaults in his grave, the process of capital is indeed functioning as a "process without subject or goal(s)."<sup>4</sup> The only way those other realities, genres, and modes of expression that exist in other spaces and times can hegemonize themselves is by relating themselves mean-

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2. For more on globality, see Sassen; Miyoshi and Jameson; Leiwei Li; and Appadurai.

3. For more on a pessimistic view of whether there is a *hors-texte* or not to Capital, see Negri and Hardt's *Empire*. For a nuanced understanding of the "outside," see Gramsci on "strategy" and "maneuver," *Prison Notebooks* 88, 108-10, 229-35.

4. Althusser, "Process without Subject or Goal(s)" *Lenin and Philosophy*.

ingfully and submissively to the aesthetic of the "global." Or else, they are summarily dismissed as citizens of "pre-history." The very simple question that would not even occur to Rushdie is the following: What about Global Tamil, or Global Arabic, or Global Chinese? The very gate-keeping *imprimatur* of globality has already been usurped by Global English in its dominant manifestation as Global Language. In other words, to be linguistic is to be English: that preeminent language that so naturally and gracefully carries the burden of world-historical contemporaneity on behalf of all humanity.

In this formulation, is English a form or a content? Is it the style or the message? Is it the celebration of a certain aesthetic sensibility that has supposedly reached a threshold as yet unavailable to other sensibilities and aesthetic choices? I remember some of the debates in the nascent post-independent India about the relevance of English in the Indian landscape.<sup>5</sup> The South, and in particular Tamil Nadu, was pro-English for two reasons: 1) the Southern States were aware that none of their four rich languages - Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, and Kannada - had a chance of being anointed as the official national language, and 2) while Hindi was a "national-insider" and for that reason a fellow competitor, English was useful to the extent that it was "foreign," for its foreignness distanced it from considerations of comparative local and intra-national prestige. There was both a proactive acceptance of English (it had after all become our own, and moreover, it was absolutely necessary for international participation) and a strategic advocacy of English so as to beat back the northern Hindi hegemonists.

Then there were the debates about Indo-Anglian literature. Should/could literature about Indian realities be conceived and written in English? Would such a strategy constitute a fundamental betrayal of a variety of Indian experiences, each anchored in its own particular linguistic ethos? In the hyphenated formation, should India be given prominence, as adjective or as substantive, or should the priority mark the language that would be the vehicle of literary communication? Should Indian English sound like British, or American English? Or should it be contaminated by "vernacular" influences? There were severe and crippling anxieties about style and diction. How should Indian English achieve its own form of contemporaneity without sounding derivative; and if it was to be "contemporary," with reference to what norm of contemporaneity?<sup>6</sup> Many would feel that Indian writing in

5. See Rajan, *Lie* and Joshi, *Rethinking*.

6. For more on "derivative discourse," see Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* and Radhakrishnan, *Theory* (Chapter 4).

English would never get it right since the real and organic development of the English language was happening in the real English-speaking countries. When Raja Rao, one of the pioneering stalwarts of Indian writing in English, resorted to expressions like "nose-digging Nanjamma" in his novel *Kan-tapura*, there was embarrassment all around, as though Raja Rao had been guilty of some vile solecism. This wasn't English; not that the Janes and the Virginias and the Elizabeths of the western world did not "nose-dig," but it was the expression itself that caused embarrassment. It sounded like a literal translation from Kannada, and was symptomatic, in English, of an anomalous alliance of form and content. When Nissim Ezekiel published his famous and hilarious poems of Indian English (and we must remember that Ezekiel was publishing these poems fairly late in his career, well after he had secured his reputation on the basis of proper poems in English), the response was ambivalent. Sure, the readers enjoyed the poems and laughed at the indigenous idiosyncratization of English, but many weren't sure if this could be considered anything other than self-mockery. "Indian English" was neither the form of a specific content, nor the content of an identifiable form: it sounded rather like a hapless and humorous dramatization of a fundamental linguistic dissidence.

The problem facing many bilingual writers was one of choice: which language should they write in, and what would such a choice entail, beyond the intentions of the individual author? Would the author be making the choice from a position of Archimedean objectivity, or would the choice that was being made really constitute the identity as well as the integrity of the author? As the famous disagreement between Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o demonstrates, the choice of an audience is in fact constitutive of the message of the author, and also the identity of the author.<sup>7</sup> The debate is not about the possibilities of a de- and re-signification of French or English, but rather about *the choice between* re-signifying in English and writing in an African or Indian language. Given the unequal calculus of privilege that structures the relationship between the so-called "world languages" and the so-called "vernaculars of the world," how and fired by what motivation does the writer choose? Who is the writer and who are her people? And the choice isn't as easy or clear-cut as it would seem. The writer, after all, is both a historically conditioned individual, *and* a writer whose linguistic/aesthetic choice has to enjoy its relative autonomy. In other words, there is a degree of specificity to the writerly choice that cannot be blindly sub-

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7. I refer here to the early debate between Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o regarding the role of English in African literature. See wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing*.

sumed under the logic of political belonging. Here lies the contradiction. To write for one's immediate community, however laudable a choice ideologically and politically speaking, could well result in an acceptance of a narrow world. The politically correct choice comes with a price. On the other hand, the choice to write in English, although compromised in some ways, leads the writer into an international and eventually global space. The politically tainted choice leads to a reward. But the problem here is that adjudications of political rectitude or the lack thereof vastly oversimplify the politics of the writer's intentionality. For it is indeed conceivable that the decision on the part of the writer to create in English could well have its own substantive and autonomous aesthetic or literary justification that is not reducible to a transparent political diagnosis. While it is indeed true that the locality of Tamil writers remains merely local, whereas the locality of the English writer achieves the double distinction of being local and global or international at the same time, the twin issues of intentionality and culpability remain ambiguous. The choice to write in English does not have to be a meretricious choice: so what, if by writing with integrity in English, a particular writer reaches an international audience while an equally gifted fellow "vernacular" writer is denied that access? Clearly, what is *not* called for is a knee-jerk political verdict that extols all indigenous choices and condemns all English choices *tout court*. The problem is a little more complex, both historically and theoretically. The predicament for the postcolonial writer is of the second order, i.e., her problem is "how to choose 'how to choose.'"

It is one thing to say that Tamil literature, Arabic literature, and English literature, are all doing different things. But the discussion changes entirely when the focus shifts to comparisons between the state of indigenous literatures and Global English. For lack of any rigorous common ground, the positional superiority of Global English begins to play the role of arbiter of value.<sup>8</sup> To put it quite simply, it would not occur to a Tamil writer or intellectual to make the judgment that the literature produced in English or French over the last fifty years is just not up to par. Even if someone were to say so, such a statement would never get any serious global attention. It would perhaps be laughed at as the ravings of an insufficiently literate local writer, or pathologized as the *ressentiment* experienced inevitably by a provincial "frog in the well." I am not for a moment questioning the possibility that Tamil has much to learn from English - indeed, all languages need to be interrogated by and learn from one another. I am arguing that in

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8. For more on comparison and comparative studies, see Taylor; Spivak; and Radhakrishnan, *Theory* (Chapter 2).

instances of comparative value, the so-called global languages have always already proved their superior worth by virtue of their structural positioning within the geopolitics of literary and cultural production.<sup>9</sup>

Let us take a quick look at the way Rushdie begins his introduction.

I once gave a reading to a gathering of university students in Delhi and when I'd finished a young woman put up her hand. "Mr. Rushdie, I read through your novel, *Midnight's Children*," she said. "It is a very long book, but never mind, I read it through. And the question I want to ask you is this: fundamentally, what's your point?"

Before I could attempt an answer, she spoke again. "Oh, I know what you're going to say. You're going to say that the whole effort - from cover to cover - that is the point of the exercise. Isn't that what you were going to say?"

"Something like that, perhaps..." I got out.

She snorted. "It won't do."

"Please," I begged, "do I have to have just one point?"

"Fundamentally," she said, with impressive firmness, "yes".  
(*MirrorWork* vii)

I would actually say, in opposition to Rushdie's assumption that his work is not paraphrasable in a uni-thematic way, that despite all the magnificent and multifaceted and de-centered virtuosity of the novel and its indefatigable indeterminacy, *Midnight's Children* is indeed fundamentally about one theme: the deserved failure of nationalism. I say this as an ardent fan of that novel. But notice the self-staging that takes place in Rushdie's anecdote. He, the powerful author, is the one on the defensive, whereas the callow young student, who hasn't yet been properly initiated into the professional practice of reading, aggressively interrupts the great author, and finally ticks him off. It is obvious that Rushdie's ironic tactic is that of a Mark Anthony who keeps reiterating that "Brutus was an honorable man." Rushdie's cosmopolitan-global irony triumphs over the questioner's literal-minded earnestness. The moral of the story here is that it is a good and a progressive thing for a text to have many points. The attempt to monovocalize it is instantly identified as a retrogressive practice of reading. After all, the young woman did give the book a full reading, despite its sprawling

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9. See Shankar 64-95.

prolixity, and even anticipated the response that the very act of writing may well constitute its own grammatological rationale; and yet, Rushdie's brief narrative makes her aggression sound callow and pre-theoretical. Having enacted this *mise-en-scène* with such non-didactic ease (Rushdie is just showing, and not telling or proving), Rushdie can proceed with his metropolitan universalism or globality. And this he does with ruthless felicity. Here is Rushdie again:

Put India in the Atlantic Ocean and it would reach from Europe to America; put India and China together and you've got almost half the population of the world. It's high time Indian literature got itself noticed, and it's started happening. New writers seem to emerge every few weeks. Their work is as multiform as the place, and readers who care about the vitality of literature will find at least some of these voices saying something they want to hear. However, my Delhi interrogator may be pleased to hear that this large and various survey turns out to be making, fundamentally, just one - perhaps rather surprising - point.

This is it: the prose writing - both fiction and non-fiction - created in this period by Indian writers *working in English*, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 'official languages' of India, the so-called 'vernacular languages,' during the same time; and, indeed, this is new, and still burgeoning. 'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books. (*MirrorWork* viii)

I do not have the space here to refute Rushdie's claim substantively; I will merely mention the names of a few Tamil novelists and short story writers of this period whose linguistic grace and felicity, critical and imaginative intelligence, and generic restlessness easily equal and exceed anything that Rushdie has written or anthologized: Jayakanthan, Pudumaiipithan, Kupara, Janakiraman, Ka Na Subramanyam, Ashokamithran, Ambai, Neela Padmanabhan, Jayamohan, Sa Kandaswamy, Lasa Ramamirtham, Mowni, Na Picchamurthy, Sunder Ramaswamy, and others. I leave it to the readers and the critics of the literatures of the other official languages of India to produce their own lists. My point here is to render Rushdie's evaluation accountable to its own criteria. Acting in his capacity as the advocate and spokesperson of India's visibility to the global gaze, Rushdie is agonizing over the fact that despite being such a large and populous nation, India has not been visible to the international or global gaze. It will not



occur to Rushdie to ask the simple question: Whose fault is that? Rushdie, the valiant champion of hybridity, mongrelized realities, and the heterogeneous "word" functions here quite happily as a monolingual zealot secure in his conviction that the language in which the world supposedly speaks, and the language that is worth speaking in are the same: i.e., English. Effortlessly, he turns tables on his young and immature questioner. He retaliates with icy fury when he tells his young questioner that her monomaniacal insistence on one "fundamental point" is getting its just reward; the one point that she needs to understand is that as a genre, Indian writing in English of the kind that Rushdie admires triumphs absolutely over the other kind of writing that is so prevalent in the vernacular languages - writing that is focused on just one thing, i.e., paraphrasable content, or message. In other words, her inappropriate question is now being answered by being put in its place. The one point that Indian writing in English makes is not with reference to itself, for by Rushdie's token, this body of writing is internally heterogeneous, and each work speaks of infinite textuality and indeterminate *semiosis* and signification. That one point is made in the form of a judgment directed at all the regional literatures of India. Self-reflexivity is preempted in favor of an outwardly oriented finger pointing. Avant-garde writing in English can have the best of both worlds: on the one hand enjoy its own quality without having to make representative claims about it, *and* make judgmental and representative claims about those "other" literatures.

The one fundamental point that Rushdie is making here is that India's worth and self-esteem lies in its visibility and "being for the Other" in the English-speaking world. I would just add that this Other is indeed the big O that would admit of "no other." In the field of literature, global English is the one and only currency; and thank God, Rushdie is saying, India has begun delivering in that currency. To be fair to Rushdie, he does acknowledge the fact "that there has long been a genuine problem of translation in India - not only to English but between the vernacular languages - and it is possible that good writers have been excluded by reason of their translator's inadequacies rather than their own" (*MirrorWork* viii-ix). But here is the question. How is it possible for Rushdie, or anyone else for that matter, to acknowledge this huge problem and yet treat it as something epiphenomenal and go ahead with the judgment anyway? I agree entirely with Rushdie that in the last 50 years Indian writing in English has made a number of unique and vibrant contributions to world literature. But why should the happy celebration of the quality of this literature take a comparative form at the expense of other literatures that are not yet available to English comprehension? I suggest that the answer lies in the fact that there is a pervasive global

perception that even if good-quality translations were available, nothing would really change. The works in non-English have already been prejudged by the avant-garde omniscience of the metropolitan subject as "backward" by virtue of content and location. In the longer essay that appeared in the *New Yorker* and in *The Progressive*, Rushdie had used form and figuration as the basis of separation between literatures that had come into their own by virtue of their rhetoricity and figural autonomy, and those that were still seeped in the poverty of mere realistic content. It is interesting to note that what Rushdie downgrades as mere realistic content is the very stuff that Fredric Jameson, in his controversial essay on Third-World literature, allegorizes as the political capital that is intrinsic to Third-World literature; something that Jameson thinks is lacking within the postmodern play of first world literary and cultural production. Of the two positions, Jameson's is by far the less invidious since it at least attempts, albeit on the basis of an egregious misrecognition, to inaugurate an auto-critique of first-world literature on the basis of an exposure to an "other" culture. Rushdie on the other hand ends up anthropologizing the developmental distance between the first and the third worlds.

What to me is curious in Rushdie's celebration of Global English by way of Indian English is the strong retention of the vocabulary of nationalism: a concept that we thought had been summarily superannuated by the discourses of globality and globalization. Rushdie's adjudication is double-pronged: first, there is the comparative evaluation that places Indian writing in English far above and ahead of anything written in the "vernacular languages." Secondly, Indian writing in English is also valorized, and this is a political and ideological valorization and not just an aesthetic nod of approval, *as Indian* - as "as much Indian," if not more Indian, than the vernacular manifestations. There is a strong didactic passion at work in Rushdie's discourse that badly wants to claim India in the name of Global English, and demands that real India surrender to the representative embrace of Global English. Rushdie's aesthetic and formal appreciation of Global English finds ideological instantiation in his avant-garde spokespersonship on behalf of "Indian" literature. As Rushdie constructs this didacticism, or this pedagogy of will, he misrecognizes the nature of the complaints within India against the claims of Indian English as Global English. For one thing, it is just not true that the Indian populace has not accepted English and English language as one of its own literatures. Sure, there have been and will be contestations over the legitimacy of Indian English representations of India, but these contestations are not malicious attempts to discredit the truth claims of Indian English. They are relational contestations that focus

on the different visualizations and representations of India in all the different languages of India. Unlike Rushdie, who would like to clear a clean, literary, and non-polemical space for the performance of Indian English, bi- and multilingual critics in India would prefer to read the different claims made by different *bhasha* literatures and Indian English claims with reference to each other.<sup>10</sup> It is here that Rushdie makes his deadly ideological move even as he masquerades it as a purely disinterested and literary argument. When faced with political or ideological critiques of the performance of Indian English, this is what Rushdie has to say:

It is interesting that so few of these criticisms are literary in the pure sense of the word. For the most part they do not deal with language, voice, psychological or social insight, imagination or talent. Rather, they are about class, power, and belief. There is a whiff of political correctness about them: the ironical proposition that India's best writing since independence may have been done in the language of the departed imperialists is simply too much for some folk to bear. (*MirrorWork* xii)

In contrast to such callow animosity "back home," there is the welcoming of Indian writing in English in the West. As Rushdie voices it:

The perspective from the West is rather different. Here, what seems to be the case is that Western publishers and critics have been growing gradually more and more excited by the voices emerging in India; in England at least, British writers are often chastised by reviewers for their lack of Indian-style ambition and verve. (xii)

Rushdie's introductory essay ends on a crescendo:

The map of the world, in the standard Mercator projection, is not kind to India, making it look substantially smaller than, say, Greenland. On the map of world literature, too, India has been undersized for too long. This anthology celebrates the writers who are ensuring that, fifty years after India's independence, that age of obscurity is coming to an end. (xx)

Rushdie's rationale of "standard-bearing" on behalf of India is an ideological sleight-of-hand. There is the initial assumption that India has in fact been wallowing in obscurity till the advent of knight-in-arms called "Indian writing in English" who succeeds in initiating Indian literature into the global literary

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10. Much work has been done in India regarding what are called "bhasha" or indigenous language literatures.

map. And what kind of writing achieves such a miraculous breakthrough? It is in his answer to this question that Rushdie makes manifest his cultural and literary ideology: It is a certain kind of self-aware and autonomous literature that deals with the complexities and the nuances of form, voice, and figuration that, in validating itself, will also speak for India, and usher India into global prominence. Such literature is not hamstrung by issues of belief, concerns about power and exploitation, about class and other such indices of the political. Critics who demand that literature either deal with or be symptomatic of the political are immediately typecast as propagandists or ministers of culture at the service of political correctness. Literatures that are motivated by belief, power, class, etc., are "in the world," but are not worthy of global attention and recognition. Such literatures may also be Indian in a descriptive sense of the term; but they are Indian in a pathological and a backward sort of way. It would seem then that there are two ways of being national/Indian; and only one of them is the right way. Thus, in Rushdie's argument, globalization is being valorized as a particular kind of postnationalist cultural capital, and coordinated as a specific kind of postnational *habitus*, to borrow from Pierre Bourdieu. It is this way of hoarding the privileges of dominant/western/eurocentric nationalism that is renamed effectively as global and cosmopolitan, whereas the "other" nationalism remains vernacular, identitarian, and theme-infested.

The worldliness of those texts and literatures that ticks to a different temporality, or responds to a different set of imperatives than the ones hallowed by Rushdie's manifesto of aesthetic formalism and self-reflexivity, does not find a place in the global map. My point here is simply this: the transition from worldliness to globality or global status is the result of a subtle stage management whereby the content of certain privileged metropolitan forms is anointed as the avant-garde and the cutting edge while the form of certain other contents that belong to the hinterland are immediately stigmatized as backward and therefore not deserving of global temporality. In fact, these other literatures are not even perceived as formal figurations. They are just what they are: raw unmediated "content" seeking deliverance through mere paraphrase and thematic *denouement*. Rushdie does not say so, but what it amounts to is that these content-driven literatures are born losers in the game of the global avant-garde. Globalization cannot be achieved and celebrated except on the basis of a competitive framework that has already decided who the winners and who the laggards-behind are. Globalization acknowledges the historical reality that the one world is indeed made up of multiple, heterogeneous, and mutually contradictory worlds; and yet, it goes on to prescribe where the one world should really be at: the

chronotope where the world is most itself and at its developmental best is the chronotope of the cosmopolitan metropolis. Fictional forms that capture cosmopolitan hybridity are deemed to be qualitatively superior, both ontologically and epistemologically.<sup>11</sup> Such a vision of the global perpetrates the tautologous truth that to be global one must already be global.

By way of conclusion, I would like to offer two corrective counter-global insights: the first, by way of an episode. Years ago, while I was in India translating his Tamil fiction into English, Jayakanthan, one of the hall-of-famers of contemporary Tamil literature, asked me with some severity: "You, my friend, ask me if I have read John-Paul Sartre. I ask you, has Sartre read Jayakanthan?"<sup>12</sup> Leaving aside the question of personal ego and the politics of the *prima donna*, Jayakanthan's indignant counter-question makes an important point. (Here I must remind my readers that far from being a provincial hero, Jayakanthan is a highly visible public intellectual who made the controversial statement just a year ago that he has nothing to learn from Tamil writers). The point simply is this: lack of reciprocity and the sheer absence of critical negotiation. The objective is not to substitute Global Tamil or Global Arabic or Global Chinese in place of Global English, but rather, to interrogate rigorously from a variety of perspectives the will to meaning and to power that informs the imperative to globalize. Global visions that are sanitized in the name of a self-sanctioning avant-garde, and global imaginings that deny the coevalness of the many realities that constitute the world within an unequal but relational network serve merely to perpetuate a world that is structured in dominance. It would behoove a Rushdie to verify if his own texts "translate well" to themselves before he takes on the magisterial task of determining whether non-metropolitan realities and experiences translate well into the syntax of the putatively global.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the metropolitan work *par excellence* has to worry about the possibility that its intelligibility to itself is neither axiomatic nor an intra-linguistic *fait accompli* that obviates the need for "self translation." Only then will it have earned the right to referee the value of "other" languages and their self-expressions.

My second thought will be a quotation from Jacques Derrida: "We only

11. For more on hybridity, see Young; Bhabha; Canclini; Mignolo; and R. Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Mediations*, and "Diaspora" (forthcoming in *Anglophone Literature*, 2006).

12. Jayakanthan recently won the prestigious Gnanapit award in India. My translation of one of his novels, *Some People in Some Situations*, is forthcoming from Orient Longman, 2006.

13. "It translated well" is the resounding last line of Maxine Hong Kingston's work, *The Woman Warrior*.

ever speak one language. We never speak just one language."<sup>14</sup> What is most valuable about this statement is the tension that it enacts between an unavoidable monolingualism and an equally ineluctable insufficiency of the "one language," or of "language as one." Derrida's formulation locates the predicament of the self and that of the other on the same terrain. In a characteristic double-session, Derrida thematizes the inevitability of monolingualism, but only to point out that such a thematization is entirely dependent on the inadequacy of the one language. Rather than flamboyantly celebrate heteroglossia or the polyglot condition in purely affirmative terms, Derrida chooses to position the polyglot possibility deconstructively within the jurisdiction of the "one language." As Ellison would have it, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"<sup>15</sup> Derrida too is suggesting that in speaking, say English or French, we are also speaking what is not English or French in ways that are not and cannot be available to us in our monolingually constituted consciousness. In other words, there is no need to look outward to discover heterology: heterology has already been acknowledged as the necessary condition for our own preferred and inevitable, and perhaps inviolable, monolingualism. To put it in terms of my discussion of Rushdie's claims, Global English can speak its tongue only to the extent that it allows itself to be framed by everything that it cannot speak. It is precisely by producing its own meaning as its particular form of finitude that Global English can validate its truth claims as one set of claims along those being made by other languages from their specific perspectival coordinates. What Derrida's formulation does is to critically thematize and avow the problem of monolingualism's "self-sanctioned ignorance" and thereby transform the relationship of the monolingual to itself. It is very much in keeping with Derrida's deconstructive rigor that he prescribes a move that makes any language vulnerable and accountable to "the other within," rather than a polyglot strategy ultimately informed by the ventriloquial will of the one language.

What Derrida is guarding against in effect is the potential violence of representation, intended with the best of intentions. If Global Language is what the human subject, from its multifarious locations and positions, is looking for, such a language cannot bypass the productive problem of the Tower of Babel. If indeed there are many languages; if, furthermore, it is "natural" for each language to consider its particularity a manifestation of

14. Derrida, *Monolingualism* 7.

15. The magnificent last sentence in Ellison's *Invisible Man* is: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (581).

the global; and if, finally, the relationship among the many languages of the world is structured in dominance, then, the project of establishing a monolingual relationship to global reality can only be symptomatic of such dominance. It becomes then the particular ethico-political and aesthetic onus of dominant languages such as English not to engage in transparent dreams that imagine the "language of being" as nothing other than the "being of the dominant language."

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