
A Critique of World Literature

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Kant and the global novel

In “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan purpose” (1784), Kant drafts the historiographic parameters for a re-conceptualization of a human history narrated from the point of view of the actualization of freedom in a cosmopolitan political formation that he imagines, first as a world-republic [Weltrepublik], and later as a federation of nations [Völkerbund]. In this crucial essay, Kant articulates the passage from the conceptual universality of reason to its universal (that is, global) actualization in concrete cosmopolitan political and economic institutions, inaugurating what I have called elsewhere a ‘discourse of globalization’. The discursive construction of globalization is a highly ideological operation that consists on naturalizing the assumed universality of reason, when in fact, such universality is the result of a universalization of the cultural particularity of the bourgeoisie. More importantly, Kant’s discourse of globalization operates a translation of the abstract and philosophical concept of the universal, into its concrete, geopolitical actualization in a world structured as a totality of meaning governed by modern reason. Kant’s narrative of the global realization of bourgeois freedom (soon after perfected by Hegel through the concept of ‘world history’), on the one hand, opens up the interpretative horizon of globalization as the necessary spatial dimension of the project of modernity, and on the other, provides the
epistemological structure for the economic, political and military discourses of globalization that surround us today.

Besides the cosmopolitical narrative of Kant’s essay, I am interested in underscoring an idea that—to my knowledge—has been overlooked by the many literary critics interested in the relation between literature and globalization. Towards the end of “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan purpose” Kant suggests that the novel could play an important role in the production of the discourses of globalization, precisely by imagining the world as a totality mediated by bourgeois culture. Trying to authorize the pertinence of his theoretical proposal, Kant defends his idea: “It is admittedly a strange and at first sight absurd proposition to write a history according to an idea of how world events must develop if they are to conform to certain rational ends; it would seem that only a novel could result from such premises” (51-52).

What I find striking about Kant’s admission is his implicit disciplinary comparison between philosophic and novelistic discourses, and his attempt to determine which one is the most adequate to tell the story of a modern world that should march towards the global actualization of rational freedom. He seems to be saying: even though you might think that the novel is much better suited to accomplish this task, I would like to argue that this is a philosopher’s job. Even if Kant considers that it is the job of a philosopher to conceptualize the process of globalization, his formulation concedes that the challenge of imagining the world as a reconciled bourgeois totality of freedom could fall on the novel.3 The novel as the cultural formation that, during the 19th century, renders the historical process of globalization visible; the novel, or at least the imaginary potential of discourse contingently embodied in the novel form, where the process of
globalization is rendered available for reading audiences to work through the transformations they are experiencing at home.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, when bourgeois reason (through its economic, political and cultural institutions) was thought to be occupying every single region of the planet, the novel produced privileged and efficient narratives of the global formation of a bourgeois world. Because the novel was the hegemonic form that bourgeois imagination adopted in the nineteenth century, and because of the aesthetic and political force of the social totalities it was capable of constructing, most novels dealing with distant places produced powerful images of the globalization of bourgeois culture.4 This is the specificity of the relation between the novel and the historical process of globalization vis-à-vis modern philosophy: if philosophy conceptualized the transformation of the globe as the realization of a totality of bourgeois freedom (i.e., Kant, Hegel5 and Marx6), the novel provided this philosophical concept with a visual reality; a set of images and imaginaries that elevated the fiction of bourgeois ubiquity to a foundational myth of modernity.

My goal in this paper is to propose two different but complementary models to think about the relation between the novel and the discourses of globalization. The first one, the globalization of the novel, works not with particular textual formations, but with the historical expansion of the novel-form, hand-in-hand with the colonial enterprise of Western Europe. This concept will allow me to review the historical and theoretical parameters to study the world historical spread of the novel from Europe to the peripheries, and the constitution, at the end of the nineteenth- and throughout the twentieth century, of a global system of production, reception and translation of novels.
The second model, *the novelization of the global*, focuses on the production of images of a globalized world as they are constructed in concrete novels. I will read these figures, primarily, in novels by Jules Verne, and in a novel by Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg. As it can be expected, the kind of images they create of travelers spreading modern bourgeois culture throughout the world and beyond, reaching even outer space, are entirely different. While Verne was a professional novelist working in France, surrounded by imperialist discourses and by an immediate reading public imbedded in their State’s mission civilisatrice, Holmberg was an amateur writer (whose first occupation was in the natural sciences) living in Buenos Aires, still a large village (*a gran aldea*) at the threshold of becoming a city. Verne lived off and breath the experience of modernity, Holmberg’s Latin American context was constituted by a desire for modernity triggered by a lack of modernization. The point I will try to make is that the particular geopolitical determinations that marked each of these writers will produce dissimilar imaginaries of the global reach of their bourgeois characters and plots. In Verne’s novels, omnipotent bourgeois characters (based on the *topos* of the *bourgeois conquérant*) travel adventurously through every continent, around the entire world and beyond: the bottom of the sea, the center of the earth, the Moon, Mars or the Sun. Whereas in Holmberg’s *Viaje Maravilloso del señor Nic-Nac al planeta Marte* (1875), the social position of the Argentine (and Latin American) bourgeoisie within a global economy of the discourse of adventure allows only for a spiritual/immaterial/imaginary travel: the carnal body of Nic-Nac never leaves his home, and only his soul (!) travels to Mars. I will attempt to read these novels that take their materials from discourses of adventure, science fiction and spiritism, in terms of their relation to the hegemony of the protocols of realism, to try to
broaden the limits of the concept of representation in relation to the world historical globalization of the European bourgeoisie.

Finally, in a coda to the paper’s main argument, I would like to connect the interpretative model of the globalization of the novel and the novelization of the global that I’m putting forth here with the rentrée of the concept of world literature. Recently re-introduced in the academic debate by Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, among others, this restored notion of world literature can be understood as an attempt to conceptualize the global ubiquity of the novel since the end of the 19th century and the mid-20th century. In the final part of the article I will analyze what could be deemed as the cultural politics of world literature, and of the critical and pedagogical practices that are derived from this concept—and I will examine its underlying claim about the potential to address, in academic practices, cosmopolitan expectations related to the production of a discourse about the world based on the respect of cultural difference. In other words, my question in this closing section will be whether world literature, as a concept and as a practice, is capable of becoming an effective cosmopolitan discourse.

The Globalization of the Novel

Between the eighteenth- and nineteenth century, the novel traveled from Europe to Latin America, as well as to other peripheries of the world, through the colonial and postcolonial channels of symbolic and material exchange. On the one hand, novels were appealing to a Creole class torn by the contradiction between its cultural and economical attachment to Europe and its desire of political autonomy. Local elites found in those narratives of subjective freedom that triggered the possibility of imagining and modeling
identities independent from the colonial metropolis. Specific to the Latin American consumption of novels was the opportunity to grasp an experience of modernity that, for the most part, was not available to the reading Creole class in its everyday life, despite liberal aspirations that was beginning to articulate as a political and cultural project.

Because of the kind of experiences that the novel afforded to the readers of the colonial and semi-colonial peripheries, Latin American intellectuals immediately realized the important role that the consumption, production and translation of novels could play in the process of socio-cultural modernization. The Argentine Domingo F. Sarmiento was the most prominent writer and politician (albeit not the only one) to propose that novels were an essential instrument for the modernization of Latin America. In his essay Facundo. Civilización y Barbarie (1845) he had proposed that Latin America would leave its pre-modern backwardness if it imposed over its barbarian, natural being, civilized/modern (that is, European) cultural practices and institutions. Modernization was a process of conversion (forced or voluntary, but in any case, violent) enacted by the act of reproducing European modernity in Latin America. Immediately after the publication of Facundo, Sarmiento traveled to Europe, North Africa and the US. Walking through the streets of Paris, Sarmiento thinks:

Las ideas y modas de Francia, sus hombres y sus novelas, son hoy el modelo y la pauta de todas las otras naciones; y empiezo a creer que esto que nos seduce por todas partes, esto que creemos imitación, no es sino aquella aspiración de la índole humana a acercarse a un tipo de perfección, que está en ella misma y se desenvuelve más o menos según las circunstancias de cada pueblo (138-139).9

[The ideas and fashion of France, her men and novels, are today the model and pattern of all other nations; I am starting to believe that this which seduces us here and there, this which we think is imitation, is nothing but the inherently human aspiration to be close to perfection that develops itself according to the circumstances of each nation].
Sarmiento defends a mimetic path to modernization arguing that imitation is not the postcolonial condition of the periphery, but, in a Platonic turn, an inherently human feature. In any case, he does not hesitate to prescribe precisely what should Latin America imitate from modern European culture: discourses (ideas and trends) and cultural institutions, and he gives in this quotation one single example of these institutions: the novel. The centrality of the novel as a modernizing institution has been studied extensively by Alejandra Laera in *El tiempo vacío de la ficción. Las novelas argentinas de Eduardo Gutiérrez y Eugenio Cambaceres*, where she quotes a rare journalistic article that Sarmiento wrote in 1856, “Las novelas”, where he equates the degree of modernization of a given culture with the amount of novels it consumes: “Caramelos y novelas andan juntos en el mundo, y la civilización de los pueblos se mide por el azúcar que consumen y las novelas que leen. ¿Para qué sirve el azúcar? Díganlo los pampas que no lo usan” (“Candy and novels go hand-in-hand in the world, and the culture of a nation can be measured by the amount of sugar they consume and the novels they read. What is sugar good for? Ask the Pampa Indians who don’t use it”). Sweetness, that surplus addition to the natural taste of food, can be considered a sign of gastronomic refinement, of civilization, but its value as an inscription in networks of modern consumption becomes visible, relevant when juxtaposed and paired up with the sentimental and political education the novel provides. The point of Sarmiento’s humorous analogy between candy and literary artifacts points to the central role he assigned to the novel as a universal parameter to measure the degree of modernity of any given nation.
During the nineteenth century, through processes of formal and thematic imitation, importation, translation and adaptation, the institution of the novel grew roots in Latin America, and towards the 1880s novelistic production and consumption was definitely established (the process takes place, with minor temporal slippages in colonial Africa, Asia and Eastern and Southern Europe). Due to the global hegemony of modern-bourgeois European culture (produced and reproduced in its colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial links with its peripheries) the novel was the first universal aesthetic form of modernity. It is important to bear in mind that the global preeminence of the novel-form among all other discursive genres cannot be explained as the result of a supposedly universal need for narration—narration and the novel are incommensurable cultural practices. The universality of the novel-form was the historical outcome of the formation (through colonialism, trade and promises of emancipation) of a world where bourgeois culture was increasingly hegemonic, if not forcefully dominant. Wherever one looked for modern desires (desire for self-determination, for identity, for material development and progress), one found novels—in fact that could be a way of defining the being of the novel in the periphery: the novel as modern desire formally enclosed and regulated.

This brings up a question about the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the global bourgeois world where novels circulated. Was there (indeed, is there) a difference between the European novel, the Latin American novel, the Asian novel, the African novel, etc.? Well, yes and no. Yes: one could point to diverse formal and thematic aspects of individual works (something I do in the next section, where I conceptualize and analyze the idea of the novelization of the global) whose difference was informed, among
other factors, by a geopolitically determined experience of the process of globalization of modern institutions, practices and values. However, if one looks at the globalization of the novel-form as a modern and modernizing institution, then it would be quite difficult to identify differences in terms of the institutional and political function of the novel in these different locations. In other words, the world system of novelistic production, consumption and translation reinforces the dream of a global totality of bourgeois freedom with Hegelian overtones; that is, a totality whose internal heterogeneity (i.e., the formal and thematic particularity of the Latin American or African or Asian novel vis-à-vis the European novel) is functional to the identity of the global novel. I insist: the globality of the novel-form is the result of a historical process of global hegemony—the product of an operation of universalization of its bourgeois and European particularity. In an interesting and seldom read note in the Prison Notebooks, “Hegemony of Western Culture over the whole World Culture”, Gramsci uses the category of hegemony he developed almost exclusively to analyze social formations within national scenarios, to consider processes of globalization, as the world history of the hegemonic West over its cultural others:

Even if one admits that other cultures have had an importance and a significance in the process of “hierarchical” unification of world civilization (and this should certainly be admitted without question), they have had a universal value only in so far as they have become constituent elements of European culture, which is the only historically and concretely universal culture—in so far, that is, as they have contributed to the process of European thought and been assimilated to it (416).

In this quotation, Gramsci is at his most Hegelian. He affirms that World Culture—the possibility of proposing the existence of a global cultural field—depends on the universal mediation of European culture; as global hegemon, European culture
recognizes and incorporates the subaltern aesthetic norms, forms, practices that are
central to the cultures of its others, to form a world cultural field structured around the
predominant *nuclei* that governed the appropriations that gave it form in the first place; a
global cultural field whose universality and relatively stable homogeneity is the result of
the hegemonic mediation of European or North-Atlantic bourgeois culture. In other
words, through the Gramscian category of hegemony, I am attempting a revision of the
most mechanic dimensions of the cultural discourses on core/periphery relations. My
point is that the periphery does not merely receive and absorb cultural mandates from the
core based on an international division of labor and trade balance that favors the
development of the First World, but on the contrary, I am arguing that core/periphery
relations are culturally mediated by a hegemonic production of consent in the margins of
globalization.¹³ This hegemonic cultural mediation can be read in the interstices between
the globalization of the novel and the novelization of the global—between capitalism’s
creation of “a world after its own image” (Marx and Engels 477) through the global
expansion of its aesthetic and cultural institutions, and the local literary reappropriations
and reinscriptions of that epochal process.

In this sense, and taking a cue from the way Gramsci understands hegemony, the
operation of universalization that constitutes the discursive basis for the globality of the
novel should not be understood as a form of cultural subordination of the periphery to the
core. Not in the least. In fact that is why I mentioned the notions of ‘importation’,
‘translation’ and ‘adaptation’, instead of thinking only in terms of ‘imitation’,
‘implantation’ or ‘imposition’. The ideas of coercion and consent imbedded in the
concept of hegemony presuppose an active agency in the enterprise of the
universalization of the novel on the part of peripheral cultures. That is, in the nineteenth-
and early twentieth century, the representation of the particularity of bourgeois European
culture and its institutions as universal was a shared enterprise by intellectuals and
practitioners at the center and at the margins of a global discursive field that sanctioned
the universality of the novel-form.

It would be easy to dismiss the universalization of the novel as cultural form and
modern institution simply as a function of colonialism, to see the historical process of
globalization only as an euphemism for the establishment of oppressive colonial relations.
I think this would be a mistake. Although both processes coincide to some extent, the
global expansion of the European bourgeoisie and its institutions supposes the universal
realization of the promise of a political and cultural modernity, and whether in the
nineteenth century or today, the peripheries of the world have an intense desire for socio-
political and cultural modernization (a desire represented in and by novels). The
globalization of bourgeois modernity and its institutions implied in the nineteenth century
both the threat of (neo)colonial oppression and the promise of emancipation. Looking at
this aporia through the glass of the deconstructive dictum that Derrida first formulated
about Socrates’ pharmakon, one could say (adapting it to the circumstances of my
argument) that globalization is both the condition of possibility and impossibility of
modernity (and of novelistic difference) in the margins of the universal.

The Novelization of the Global

The model of the globalization of the novel serves the purpose of explaining the
role the novel-form played in the global expansion of bourgeois culture and its
institutions during the nineteenth century. The crisscrossing trajectories of infinite exchanges, importations, translations and adaptations of novels (what I term *the global novel as cultural form*) render visible the spatial extension and intensity of the process of globalization. However this explicatory matrix does not provide any insights into the different textual devices, strategies, plots or characters of the great variety of concrete novels that gave specific content to *the global novel as cultural form*. It is necessary, then, to specify the model of the globalization of the novel, to formulate a hypothesis capable of accounting, not only for the historical spread of a global form, but also for the narratives of globalization as a discursive figure produced by a subset of texts usually concerned with lands and peoples far removed from Europe. Within these lines, if the globalization of the novel looks at the transformation of the world as a global totality of bourgeois culture, and makes sense of it as a system and as a world-historical process, the novelization of the global (the second and complementary way in which I am trying to conceptualize the idea of *the global novel*) traces the specific imaginaries of universalism that this kind of novelistic texts forge—putting into circulation a visual reality of the global reach of the bourgeoisie with forceful effects in terms of the production and reproduction of discourses of universal adventure, exploration and colonial profit.

Jules Verne’s novels in particular provide a most productive case study for *the novelization of the globe*. If spatial meaning is discursively produced (an idea Edward W. Said worked through with the notion of “imaginative geography”), or to say it bluntly, if fiction is the way we apprehend, categorize and represent the world, then Verne’s novels can be said to have produced some of the most radical imaginaries of the transformation of the planet into a totality of bourgeois culture and sociability, producing a textual
surplus that exceeded what is usually read as a mere fiction of colonialism. The bourgeois characters in his novels travel across the five continents, striating the surface of the earth, basing their remapping of the world in an epistemology of adventure and exoticism (only a few examples of this: *Cinq Semains en Ballon*, 1863; *Voyages et Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras*, 1864-65; *Le Tour du monde en 80 jours*, 1873).

Furthermore, Verne dares to send his bourgeois men beyond the surface of the earth into the unknown: to the moon (*De la Terre à la Lune*, 1865; *Autour la Lune*, 1870), to the sun (*Hector Sevandac*, 1874-1876), to the bottom of the sea (*Vingt Mille Lieues sous les mers*, 1869-1870), to the center of the Earth (*Voyage au centre de la Terre*, 1864). In the closing paragraphs of *De la Terre à la Lune*, the omniscient narrator, channeling the pride and fear J.T. Maston felt for his three friends in space: “ils s’étaient mis en dehors de l’humanité en franchissant les limites imposées par Dieu aux créatures terrestres” (243) [“they had put themselves beyond humanity, surpassing the limits imposed by the Creator on his earthly creatures”]. In Verne’s novels there are no limits for the realization of the bourgeois dream of universal freedom: the whole universe and its utmost recondite corners expect the arrival of Verne’s *bourgeois conquérants*. These are novels where contemporary readers saw the reflection of their own bourgeois *local* experience transformed into global adventures that underscored the intensity and excitement available to those individuals willing to embrace their bourgeois subjectivity and explore its universalizing potential. My point is that because of this, these narratives have to be read, not just as performances of the discourses of globalization, but also as a recreation and reinforcement of the conditions of possibility for the universal adventure of the European bourgeoisie.
The construction of images and imaginaries of globality, of the transformation of the earth by bourgeois desire, is a symbolic challenge that could not be completed in one novel; quite the opposite it has to be reconstructed with the technique of the panorama, putting together the pieces found in many (if not all) of Verne’s novelistic archive. I am going to review some of the narrative strategies that opened up the possibility, for novels and readers, to imagine the earth (in fact, the entire universe) as a bourgeois playing field, ready and available to produce science, make money and have a leisurely laugh.

1) All of Verne’s novels involve travels of some sort; in these journeys there is always at least one instance where the novel takes a step back to capture an image of space as a meaningful cultural totality. The perception of the human eye of the real is always fragmented; articulating those fragments to create a larger mental image of something we cannot apprehend except in successive fragments is a complex psychological and intellectual operation that Kant theorizes conclusively in the third critique, The Critique of Judgment. Only an imaginative discourse, literature, can produce an image of the earth as a round significant whole that is inaccessible to empirical perception. In Autour de la Lune (1870), Michel Ardan, the French astronaut of a crew of three (the other two are American), looks at the small window of the spaceship—the hollow missile that is taking them to them, and exclaims: “Hein! Mes chers camarades, sera-ce assez curieux d’avoir la Terre pour la Lune, de la voir se lever à l’horizon, d’y reconnaître la configuration de ses continents, de se dire: là est l’Amérique, là est l’Europe; puis de la suivre lorsqu’elle va se perdre dans les rayons du Soleil!” (94) [“Ah! my dear comrades, it will be rather curious to have the earth for our moon, to see it rise on the horizon, to recognize the shape of its continents, and to say to oneself, ‘There
is America, there is Europe; then to follow it when it is about to lose itself in the sun's rays!”]. This is the same bird’s-eye perspective that Dr. Fergusson has in Cinq semaines en ballon (1863): “Alors l’Afrique offrira aux races nouvelles les trésors accumulés depuis des siècles en son sein. Ces climats fatals aux étrangers s’épureront par les assolements et les drainages ; ces eaux éparses ser réuniront en un lit commun pour former une artère navigable. Et ce pays sur lequel nous planons, plus fertile, plus riche, plus vital que les autres, deviendra quelque grand royaume, où se produiront des découvertes plus étonnantes encontre que la vapeur et l’électricité” (88). Besides the clearly colonialist idea that Africa “will offer” its treasures to the new race of explorers, scientists and colonialists, the view from afar and from above produces a clear hierarchy between the subject and the spatial (humanized) object of observation, producing a symbolic relation where the latter subordinates itself to the will of the former. In their mappings (of planet Earth in the first example; of a whole continent in the second) Verne’s novels represent space as an available opportunity for bourgeois exploration, adventure and profit.16

2) Feasibility, measurement: given the positivistic inclinations of the French bourgeoisie during the second half of the nineteenth century, the effectiveness of an image of the world or a whole universe as a homogeneous space that can be crisscrossed back and forth depends on its measurability. For example, the eighty days that Phileas Fogg gives himself to enclose the earth (Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingt jours, 1872) signals the philosophical and scientific certainty about the fact that the Earth can be circled in a predetermined amount of time—that between the omnipotence of bourgeois European culture and the enterprise of apprehending the totality of the globe lies only a
willful individual. Analogously, *De la terre à la lune* (1865) is a journey expected to be completed in exactly ninety-seven hours and twenty minutes, as the subtitle of the book indicates (“*Trajet direct en 97 heures 20 minutes*”); in fact, the obsessive preparation and study of all the variables, scientific and economic, occupies almost the entirety of the novel that ends right after the rocket is launched. The possibility to measure with scientific precision the course of the adventure reinforces the initial omnipotent intuition that seizing the earth or the entire galaxy is a task at hand, entirely feasible.

3) Cultural colonization: after having produced the images that trigger an imaginary of global availability, these novels represent the actual process of taking possession of these ‘vacant’ spaces. Verne rarely invents characters that are straightforward representatives of state colonialism—although he does it in novels like *Hector Sevandac* (1877), and in the representation of some members of the Gun Club (the organization that organized the launching of tripulated missile to the Moon) in *Autour la Lune*, who propose the exploration of outer space “Pour prendre possession de la Lune ‘au nom des États-Unis pour ajouter un quarantième état à l’Union! Pour coloniser les régions lunaires, pour les cultiver, pour les peupler, pour y transporter toutes les prodiges de l’art, de la science et de l’industrie. Pour civiliser les Sélénites” (63). But that is not the only path available. The most interesting one is the one chosen by those characters that (in sync with the genealogy of the discourses of globalization) advance their colonial agenda, not in the name of the nation state, but rather in the name of modernity, of the universal and universalizing goal of bourgeois culture. That is why Verne’s novels are populated by bourgeois businessmen, politicians, professors, *pater familiae*, scientists and *bonvivants* not only from France, but from most Western European nations.
(including France) as well as the US, Russia and nearly any country that might have had at the time a growing middle class. The *bourgeoisification* of the world: that is the key to understand the transnational dimension of the philosophical and literary conceptualization of the process of globalization, even in the nineteenth century: the desire to produce a homogeneous totality of bourgeois culture that eventually could coincide with the surface of the earth (and, in Verne, with the entire universe). That is why, perhaps the most striking novel within this corpus is *De la Terre à la Lune*, whose closing sentence belongs to J.T. Maston, the secretary of the Gun Club, whom, speaking directly to the bourgeois readers of the novel, pays homage to his astronaut friends that are venturing into outer space in the name of bourgeois civilization: “A eux trois ils emportent dans l’espace toutes les ressources de l’art, de la science et de l’industrie. Avec cela on fait ce qu’on veut, et vous verrez qu’ils se tireront d’affaire!” (244) [“Those three men have carried into space all the resources of art, science, and industry. With that, one can do anything; and you will see that, some day, they will come out all right”].

Jules Verne’s novels have been usually read in the intersection of science fiction and the adventure novels. Without trying to dispute these generic inscriptions, I would like to propose that in order to underscore the political relation its narratives establish with the global expansion of bourgeois-modern institutions and practices one needs to question their relation to the hegemonic protocols of representation of the realist novel. In other words, what happens if we think of Verne’s novels as a form of oblique realism—the construction of bourgeois reality, not necessarily as it appears to be, but *as it could be* if it were to actualise all its potential? I am not interested in discussing whether Verne was a prophet for technologies that were only going to be invented in the next century, or
if he was imagining further uses for the technology already available at his time—Verne scholars have spent a good deal of their energies trying to establish this. My proposal is to read Verne’s novels in the margins of the realist novel’s representational protocols: narratives that give us an insight into the world historical, universalizing role of the modern bourgeois subject; an insight that the realist novel, with its frontal attack on the real of bourgeois social relations and its fiction of transparency, could not afford to produce as evocatively. Verne’s oblique realism, through a fantastic/scientific detour, taps into the real of the global imaginaries of European modernity: a representation of the discursive conditions of globalization. What Verne’s singular realism represents, then, is not (not only, not necessarily) the concrete social formation of the turn of the century’s middle classes, but the latent power of the ideology that sustains it. This is the radical and productive ideological potential that the novelization of the global opens up for the late nineteenth century novel: to imagine the world as the global space determined by bourgeois culture where the novel, or rather the global novel will inscribe itself.

**The Latin American Novelization of the Global**

The globalization of the novel and the novelization of the global are not two parallel or alternative critical roads. It is the critical reader who makes them intersect when reading comparatively novels produced or consumed in different points of the uneven global field of production, consumption and translation of novels, that enable the universal ubiquity of the novel-form. In other words, to understand the relations between different aesthetic articulations of the novelization of the global in distant points of such global novelistic field (in this case, the material conditions of production of Verne’s
novels on the one hand, and those of Eduardo Holmberg’s 1875 novel *Viaje maravilloso del Señor Nic-Nac al planeta Marte*, on the other), one needs to read diachronically the displacements of ‘outer-space novels’ (globalization of the novel), together with the actual images of the universe produced in each of these cultural locations (the novelization of the global).

Holmberg began publishing *Viaje maravilloso del Señor Nic-Nac al planeta Marte* on November 29, 1875 as a serial in the newspaper *El Nacional* in Buenos Aires, and tells the story of Nic-Nac, a common man, an aficionado to all kinds of scientific and pseudo-scientific disciplines and gadgets, who makes an appointment with a doctor in spiritism who had just arrived to Buenos Aires from Europe: “Aquel espiritista se llama Friederich Seele, o si queréis su nombre en castellano, Federico Alma” (39) [“The spiritist’s name was Friederich Seele, or if you want his name in Spanish, Frederick Soul”]. Nic-Nac develops a ‘spiritual’ crash on the doctor and he convinces him to practice the technique of transmigration or *transplanetation* (“transplanetación”) that consists on fasting for extensive periods of time until the soul leaves the body to travel across the universe. Nic-Nac sees the perfect opportunity to realize his dream: “¿y si ahora tuviera la idea de lanzar mi espíritu a visitar los planetas?” (43) [“what if I wanted to launch my spirit and visit other planets?”]. After eight days of strict fasting, Nic-Nac collapses and as his soul leaves his body, he sees from above a doctor trying to reanimate him. Soon after beginning his spiritual journey, Nic-Nac encounters Dr. Seele that is going to be his guide in the voyage to Mars, a planet that is object of an extensive account of its natural, socio-political and cultural features, all of which turn out to resemble (surprisingly or not) very
closely to those of Argentina. After his spiritual adventure, Nic-Nac (or rather, his soul) returns to his body in Buenos Aires.

The most interesting trait of Holmberg’s book is its structure. What we read is the book Nic-Nac wrote to tell his story and authorize his spiritual space travels. What is supposed to be Nic-Nac’s text is framed by two paratexts by the apocryphal editor of Nic-Nac’s manuscript. In the “Introduction”, he refers ironically to the relationship of the general reading public with paranormal phenomena and narrates the encounter of two young men who read newspapers’ headlines out loud the about Nic-Nac’s situation right after he had returned from his universal journey. The press informs that he is not well, and has been admitted into a hospital for mental patients. People in the street don’t seem to agree on the real or imaginary nature of Nic-Nac’s journey: “unos negando el hecho, otros compadeciendo a su autor, algunos aceptando todas y cada una de las circunstancias del viaje” (30) [“some denying the truth of the event, others feeling sorry for the author, and some accepting every single of the circumstances of the trip”]. Similarly, in the apocryphal ‘Note of the editor’ which closes the novel (“El editor toma un momento la palabra” [“The editor briefly takes the floor”]), the fictionalized publisher of the book blames the deficiencies of the text on the fact that the author is insane (“¿Pero quién es Nic-Nac? ¿Dónde está? ¡Ah! ¡En una casa de locos!”, 179 [“But who is Nic-Nac? Where is he? Oh! In a loony bin!”]), and proceeds to inform the reader of the psychiatric diagnosis of Dr. Uriarte who is treating Nic-Nac at the hospital: “manía planetaria” (180) [“planetary mania”].

There are many things to compare between Verne’s and Holmberg’s novelization of the global (or, of the universal—meaning the cosmic), among them, the huge disparity
in the quality of the novels (Nic Nac is quite a poorly written narrative in terms of its style and plot).21 Besides the uneven aesthetic worth of the novels except (that could be explained by resorting to the individual talent of each of the novelists; or to the varying degrees of autonomy of the French and Argentine literary fields, and the practical development of the formal protocols of novelistic writing), I would very much rather concentrate on critical questions brought forth by the immaterial nature of Nic-Nac’s universal spiritual/imaginary journey, and the ambiguity and shadow of doubt that the text itself casts over Nic-Nac’s first-person narrative.

If in Verne’s novels the universality of its traveling characters is determined by the fact that they take real trips with real consequences (within the plot)—that they transcend their locality and go outside of their home (France, the US, or the Earth at large) in order to materialize their universal aspirations making the universe theirs, how should one read the imaginary or spiritual nature of Nic-Nac’s journey to Mars in Holmberg’s novel? Or to say it differently, how should one understand Nic-Nac’s adventure in Mars when the universal predicate of his trip depends, not on leaving his country, but his own body?

Perhaps the most obvious possibility would be to interpret it in relation to Holmberg’s marked interest in spiristism and paranormal phenomena, and his attempt to reconcile these practices with the hegemonic positivist creed—attempt that was widespread in Latin America as well as in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century.22 While this is certainly an important point and should be considered when reading Holmberg’s novel, there is more to it; his intellectual curiosity about spirism does not exhaust the differences between Verne’s novels and his. It could account for the choice of a spiritual
travel and a self-conscious out of body experience instead of a dream or a drug-induced hallucination, but it does not shed light over the decision to narrate an imaginary/spiritual trip, instead of a real one, as in Verne’s case. Another approach to the imaginary nature of Nic-Nac’s universal travel would analyze this turn of the plot as a novelistic option determined by the conditions of enunciation of the periphery that, compared to those of Verne’s, were supposed to be inferior in terms of the availability of symbolic and material resources. According to this hypothesis, Holmberg’s choice would have been marked by the marginality of a culture defined by the lack of a first-hand experience of the universalizing/globalizing potential of the bourgeoisie—an experience that was available to writers immersed in a culture that was expanding its modern practices, values and institutions to the peripheries of the world. Again according to this line of thought, Holmberg would have represented a spiritual voyage, an out of body experience, because it was supposed to be all his marginal conditions of enunciation could afford. A spiritual trip, as opposed to Verne’s depiction of a substantial voyage intended to map the international interaction of astronauts in space and to omnipotently realize the colonial appropriation of the Moon by Western colonial powers. Along these lines, then, Nic Nac’s journey would have been triggered by a cosmopolitan desire to explore what lies beyond one’s own location, but it would have to be considered a less-consequestional kind of cosmopolitan drive: a spiritual, immaterial cosmopolitanism; pure cosmopolitan aspirations that could not be actualized, a cosmopolitanism self-conscious of its limitations and impossibilities.

However, I believe that the assumptions behind this interpretation of the gap between Verne and Holmberg are mistaken and therefore its conclusions would not be
historically accurate. On the one hand, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Latin American elites were engaged in worldwide travels and explorations—and even if they were not inscribed in a world historical transcultural imperialistic process, they did not lack the experience of hegemony, since they were engaged in an internal colonization that would lead soon to the reaffirmation of liberal nation states. On the other, Holmberg could have written without any difficulty the actual trip to Mars of an Argentine astronaut, the way Verne sent out to the moon two Americans and a Frenchman. Why not? In fact Verne’s *De la Terre à la Lune* was published ten years before *Viaje maravilloso del Señor Nic-Nac al planeta Marte*, and it seems improbable that Holmberg (usually signaled as the first Latin American to write science fiction texts\(^{23}\)) would not have read Verne before writing *Nic-Nac*.\(^{24}\)

So then again, the question is why Holmberg wrote a novel about a galactic voyage resorting to transmigration and *transplanetation* instead of modern technology and science. Should one think that Holmberg’s decision regarding the plot of his novel was structurally determined by the material conditions of Latin America in the context of worldwide processes of globalization? Or was it the result of personal preference? In other words, the decision of writing an imaginary/spiritual trip, and not the representation of a real trip to Mars would have had to do with the peripheral situation of Argentina and Latin America in the world historical process of colonialism, or with Holmberg’s personal interest and belief in paranormal phenomena? Answering this question affirmatively would imply a very mechanic and transparent conception of the relation between art and cultural practices and structural economic determinations, and would ignore the fact that the lack of a direct experience of technological modernity could never
inhibit the literary imagination, and on the contrary, it could even encourage the production of scientific scenes perhaps less accurate than those produced at the time in France or England but equally compelling in terms of the narrative efficacy. But there is no need to go the orthodox way because the novel itself, in its paratexts, establishes that Nic-Nac’s travels are, at best, the pathological adventure:

No, Nic-Nac no es un loco furioso, es un loco tranquilo. Y es tan cierto lo que afirmamos, que basta abrir el libro de entradas de aquel establecimiento para leer una partida en la que consta que el señor Nic-Nac padece de una ‘manía planetaria’. El director del establecimiento, hombre instruido y observador incansable, ha manifestado que Nic-Nac es un ente original, afable, un tanto instruido, al que se le pueden creer muchas de las cosas que dice, exceptuando, empero, los medios de los que se ha valido para transmigrar de la Tierra a Marte y de éste a aquélla’ (179-180) [No, Nic-Nac is not a raving lunatic, he is crazy but calm. We are certain about this, and the records of the establishment confirm it in an entry stating that Mr. Nic-Nac suffers of ‘planetary mania’. The director of the establishment, a learned man and indefatigable observer has declared that Nic-Nac is an original, affable, slightly educated being; one can believe almost anything he says except his references to the means he may have used to transmigrate from the Earth to Mars and back].

By diagnosing the main character as suffering from a “planetary mania”, the editor returns the experience of Nic-Nac to the scientific realm of psychiatric taxonomies, within the limits of which, *transplanetation* is a mental illness and not the possibility of a journey through the universe. The editor sets the record straight: anyone aspiring to reach the stars should develop the necessary technology, just as the members of the Gun Club in Verne’s *From the Earth to the Moon* did, and paranormal sciences do not lead to the realization of universality but to psychiatric confinement. At the end of the editor’s note, the rational and instrumental relation with the world that had been broken down by Nic-Nac’s first person (delusional) narrative has been restored, and literary renderings of the universe as a totality of meaning is again mediated by realist representations *á la Verne*. 
If Verne’s novels are capable of producing effective images of the world as a totality of freedom mediated by modern social relations, it is precisely because they are confident about the place they have as novels (indeed as French novels) in the historical process of global expansion of bourgeois institutions, values and practices. What determines, in turn, Nic-Nac’s “radical situational difference in the cultural production of meaning” (Jameson, “A Brief Response” 26)? Viaje maravilloso del Señor Nic-Nac al planeta Marte does not even attempt to imagine a world unified under the hegemony of modern social relations. Instead, it puts forth an alternative universalist imaginary, only to negate it later, as if marginal conditions of production of universality allowed for the demarcation of the limits of its impossibility.

At a historical juncture immediately prior to the inauguration of a new universalist horizon for Latin American culture marked by the discourse of modernismo, when Latin American writers are not yet concerned with the representation of their desire for universality, but with the exploration of the frontiers of their national or regional particularities (think of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano’s El Zarco, Lucio V. Mansilla’s Una excursión a los indios ranqueles, José Hernández’s Martin Fierro, Francisco Moreno’s Viaje a la Patagonia Austral, most of Ricardo Palma’s Tradiciones peruanas, González Prada’s first essays, Machado de Assis’s Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas, and even Martí’s Escenas Norteamericanas), Holmberg’s Nic-Nac posed questions about the novelization of the global and the universal that few others seemed to be considering at the time in the peripheries of the world: can my characters travel the way Verne’s characters travel? Can they produce with and through their displacements images of a reconciled modern world, smooth and available? Can they be identified as cosmopolitan,
metropolitan or colonial subjects, striving to inscribe themselves in the universal order of modernity? Verne’s self-assured novels do not need to give affirmative answers to these questions because the questions themselves are presupposed in the texts’s confident belief in their universal discursive nature. The “radical situational difference” (Jameson “A Brief Response” 26) of Holmberg’s Nic-Nac and, in fact, of any Latin American narrative being interrogated by questions better suited for a Dr. Fergusson, a Phileas Fogg or a Michel Ardan, lies not in a hopeful affirmation to them, but in the recognition of a limit. It is this epistemological obstacle that, perhaps, might be taken to inform the conditions of enunciation of a marginal space, where the world historical affirmation of a teleological discourse of globalization is decoded as the “planetary mania” of a schizophrenic, and the “spiritist fantasy” of a boorish and precarious proto-novel, that nevertheless anticipates the cosmopolitan aspirations of the discourse of modernismo.

As a discursive potentiality opened up by the globalization of the novel, these and other novels produced in metropolitan or marginal locations make available images of the world as a newly conceived cosmopolitan horizon for the novel’s hegemonic or counter-hegemonic intervention.

Coda: A Critique of World Literature

The twofold argument of this paper stems, symmetrically, from a double anxiety. On the one hand, a question about how to conceptualize the role of literature—and of the novel in particular—in the production and reproduction of the discourses of globalization, and at the same time, the ways in which those discourses determine the imagination and its forms in the novel. On the other, a certain uneasiness about the re-emergence in the
context of US academic discourse of the concept of world literature as an attempt to address what I have called in this paper the global ubiquity of literary texts, the universality of the novel as a modern institution and, thus, the formation of a global field of production, consumption, translation and displacements of novels. In this final part of the paper, I would like to interrogate, not the notion of world literature itself (which, since its re-elaboration and actualization in Franco Moretti’s “Conjectures on World Literaure” in 2000, and in the translation of Pascale Casanova’s The World Republic of Letters in 2004, has been widely discussed) but rather, the critical practices and political implications, as well as the picture of the global literary field, presupposed in the concept of world literature. In other words, I am not particularly interested in defining whether world literature is a tool meant to classify world literary texts and exclude others, whether it is a discipline and a way of reading (and thus, the new paradigm for comparative literature), or the name of the historical formation of a space of symbolic exchange and circulation that exceeds particular national cultures; world literature entails, to a certain extent, all of these critical and pedagogical operations. Progressing in a different direction, with the articulation of the globalization of the novel and the novelization of the global, I am trying to focus on the cultural but also theoretical effects that the revival of the concept of world literature may have in the ways we conceptualize, imagine and teach the global dimensions at stake in the novel. My concern has to do with the potential of world literature (world literature as the specific name of a field of study, a discipline, a pedagogical practice and a canon) to illuminate or obscure the global layout of the hegemonic formation of the literary institution—an uneven process that determines both the world literary status of certain texts as well as the discourse of world literature
itself. The question I would like to examine in this last part of the paper is whether world literature serves the cosmopolitan purpose that is supposed to be constitutive of its critical and pedagogical practices.

Behind the reentré of the concept of world literature lies a commendable political goal: to imprint a universalist inclination to a US educational system and cultural ambience increasingly chauvinistic, that is seen (appropriately so) as a symbolic battlefield for the future of global citizenship. This aim of the new world literature, with which is difficult to disagree, is very much in line with the radical and controversial proposal of a cosmopolitan education for American students that Martha Nussbaum put forth over a decade ago in a now famous piece, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism”, that generated a heated debate, the echoes of which are sill being heard today:

As students here grow up, is it sufficient for them to learn that they are above all citizens of the United States, but that they ought to respect the basic human rights of citizens of India, Bolivia, Nigeria, and Norway? Or should they, as I think –in addition to giving special attention to the history and current situation of their own nation– learn a good deal more than is frequently the case about the rest of the world in which they live, about India and Bolivia and Nigeria and Norway and their histories, problems, and comparative successes? Should they learn only that citizens of India have equal basic human rights, or should they also learn about the problems of hunger and pollution in India, and the implications of these problems for larger problems of global hunger and global ecology? Most important, should they be taught that they are above all citizens of the United States, or should they instead be taught that they are above all citizens of a world of human beings, and that, while they themselves happen to be situated in the United States, they have to share this world of human beings with the citizens of other countries? I shall shortly suggest four arguments for the second conception of education, which I shall call cosmopolitan education (6).

When understood as part of the larger project of a cosmopolitan education, the political worth of the concept of world literature becomes undeniable, especially when, as in the case of Nussbaum’s proposal, the notion of cosmopolitanism is articulated as a
desire for universal justice. The question is whether world literature is capable of accomplishing this cosmopolitan goal. Or, better yet, which conception of world literature, if any, could produce critical and pedagogical practices capable of accomplishing this? To say it bluntly: my problem with some discourses of world literature is that, when trying to account for the scope of the concept and its corpus, they produce a flat and rather static picture of what world literature is: a canon that tends to repeat itself in anthologies and series of global great works, or in syllabi across the country that collect always more or less the same predictable and typified kind of worldly texts. Even when paying lip-service to combined and uneven development and to the asymmetry of global power relations, the world literary maps often produced tend to reinforce romantic essentialisms (a remnant of Goethe’s coinage of the concept of weltliteratur), according to which the third world specializes in the production of hyper-aestheticized national allegories that express their cultural particularities—for example, their frustrated dreams of modernity—, while the metropolitan centers contribute truly aesthetic innovations.

Some of the field’s most prominent comparatists have been working for a decade now on re-defining world literature in relation to the heritage of postcolonial studies—a discursive articulation that effectively moved the theory of world literature away from the two threats that nevertheless still loom over the discipline, as if its romantic origins would not let go, holding world literature back, reminding it of its Goethean birthmark: on the one hand, the postulation of world literature as an even playing field for the literatures of the world, where a certain idealistic sense of parity between them becomes possible—in other words, world literature as an equalizing discourse that rights the
wrongs of cultural imperialism and/or economic globalization; on the other, the
expressive logic according to which some works convey a historical or aesthetic
experience of their cultures of origin and therefore, become part of the corpus of a world
literature made of the sum of a plurality of global particularities.

In the critical discourses of Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch,
Haun Saussy, Emily Apter, Shu-mei Shih and Wai Chee Dimock, among others, world
literature has already overcome the menaces of expressiveness and ideological blindness
to the political determinations that shape the discipline, thus earning the post- prefix that
indicates its inscription in a post-identity politics discursive field. Their world literatures
are, indeed, post-world literary understandings of the concept and have, for the most part,
begun to take care of the first of the two dangers I have just fleshed out. In all of these
authors, the articulation of world literature with postcolonial concerns, as well as with
poststructuralist discourses on identity (national or otherwise) and world-system theory,
results in an account of the global based on the consideration of the constitutive
unevenness of social relations across the world or within a given cultural configuration.

But this refashioning of the concept of world literature at the theoretical level, cannot
modify (at least not soon enough) most of the pedagogical practices inscribed in the field
of world literature that, as all of these theorists acknowledge, seem to be lagging behind
in a romantic mood. A quick review of world literature syllabi and of most anthologies,
shows that the logic of representation and expressiveness is still at work, especially when
one looks at the aesthetic features of the texts that have made it into the classroom and
the canon, and at the relation that these traits establish with the imagined characteristics
of the country or region these works are supposed to stand-in for. David Damrosch has
defined this constitutive logic most eloquently:

“In world literature, as in some literary Miss Universe competition, an entire
nation may be represented by a single author: Indonesia, the world’s fifth-largest
country and home of ancient and ongoing cultural traditions, is usually seen, if at
all, in the person of Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Jorge Luis Borges and Julio
Cortázar divide the honors for Mr. Argentina” (Damrosch “World Literature in a
Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age” 44).31

A fitting example of these facts of the discipline is the MLA’s series of books
“Teaching World Literature”. When I received the catalog of this collection in the mail, I
was curious to see which Latin American authors and novels had been included. The
catalog had been published in the winter of 2007 to celebrate the proximity of a
milestone: the series had 95 titles and was planning to reach one hundred volumes during
the following year. I read the brochure from cover to cover, and I was not surprised to
find that a) in terms of its discursive heterogeneity, the list did not quite follow the
patterns of the post-multicultural global canon that is familiar in university classrooms
across the United States (at least in comp lit classrooms): an overwhelming majority of
19th and 20th century modernist works in English, a handful of the 18th century British
novels that mark (according to Anglo-critics), the rise of the genre, a few classics (the
Bible, Homer, Euripides, Virgil), medieval and early modern canonical texts (Chaucer,
Dante, Elizabethan theatre and poetry, Molière), and Frederick Douglass’s slave narrative
as the only case of an inclusion that once might have been thought to stretch the limits of
the literary institution. Perhaps most surprising was the fact that, for a series that bears
the name “Approaches to Teaching World Literature”, there is only one text in a non-
Western language (Japanese). Out of ninety-five titles, sixty-five are in different
intonations of English, fourteen are in French, three in Italian (Bocaccio, Dante and—surprisingly, not Petrarca, Manzoni, Leopardi, Di Lampedusa or Svevo, but Collodi’s Pinocchio), three in German (Goethe, Kafka, and Mann), three in Spanish (Early Modern Spanish drama, Cervantes and García Márquez), three in classical Greek and Latin (Homer, Euripides and Virgil), and a single representative of Russian (Tolstoy), Norwegian (Ibsen), Japanese (Murasaki Shikibu) and classical Hebrew (the Bible).

In his book What is World Literature?, David Damrosch puts forth a convincing argument about how much things have changed in terms of the scope of world literature in the US during the last hundred years. If at the beginning of the twentieth century world literature anthologies and course syllabi, “defined ‘the world’ unhesitatingly as the Western World” (124), Damrosch points to how, during the 1990s, several anthologies (among them, The Harper Collins World Reader, and The Norton Anthology of World Literature) radically changed their approach to world literature, turning it into a truly global field that encompasses the whole world and all historical stages, from pre-1492 indigenous narratives from the Americas, to postcolonial and postmodern literatures from every periphery of the Western world.32 I shared Damrosch’s optimistic outlook about a world literature that seemed to have overcome its previous conservative and narrow conception of what the world was. But then I ran into the “Approaches to Teaching World Literature” series which, given the institutional weight of the MLA, cannot be taken merely as the residual presence of an archaic conception of the field and its narrow scope, but on the contrary appears to render visible the institutional health (outside of a few exceptions) of the pedagogical practice of world literature in most US universities—as opposed to the way the most progressive intellectuals theorize it.
Besides the production and reproduction of the global hegemony of English, I find a more relevant issue at stake in the MLA’s series, but also in some of the new multicultural world literature anthologies: the logic of expressiveness at work in the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion that shape up the textual corpus of the drastically antagonistic ways of understanding the scope of world literature. In the MLA’s list, the rationale for the inclusion of the English and French works responds quite straightforwardly to a dynamics of canon reproduction, the constitutive grounds for institutionalization. The same logic seems to apply to the Bible, the Greco-Roman classics, Cervantes and Lope de Vega, Goethe, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Kafka and Thomas Mann. If one considers the texts that are left out of this group – the medieval *The Tale of Genji*, supposedly authored by Shikibu, García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad* and Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* –, they are hardly shocking or subversive inclusions, however they speak loudly to the MLA list’s conception of what the margins of the West can contribute to the discursive field of world literature. Even if the MLA is going to publish in this series only one text from East Asia, one from Africa and one from Latin America, the question is why these three? What lies behind the choice of *The Tale of Genji*’s (11th century) medieval misadventures of Japanese courtesans, *Things Fall Apart*’s (1958) history of colonial unrest in Africa, *Cien años de soledad*’s (1967) magical realist genealogical allegory of Latin American twentieth century history? I believe the answer is to be found in the commonly held belief that these texts can be taken to express the Japanese, African and Latin American historical experiences. This critical cliché is based on the reduction of the vastness and complexity of each of these cultures to a singular essentialized meaning: a traditional Japan that lives on in the West’s imaginary, a tribal Africa that falls victim to the violent social restructuring of colonialism,
a Latin America forever doomed to political unrest and the pre-modern identity of private and public domains. In the case of Cien años de soledad, whose transformation in a global best-seller was paved over by the prejudiced expectation of reading publics in Europe and the US to see magical realism as an aesthetic form that embodies the supposedly pre-modern, marvelous and exotic social nature of Latin America. In other words, García Márquez’s novel came to represent and express what a large portion of the world literary public sphere assumed was the essence of Latin American culture and social history; Latin America, and not necessarily Colombia, or tropical South America, or Santa Marta, because Cien años de soledad has been read worldwide (including in Latin America) as a narrative metaphor of the whole region’s historical experience and socio-political destiny. Thus, the essentialist logic of expression can be read a) as a romantic ideology which assumes that a cultural particularity is contained most perfectly in the indivisible unity of the nation; and b) as a discourse of globalization based on the postulation of an acritical coexistence of fixed regional identities and national institutions. Thus, it is hardly surprising to find in the MLA’s “Approaches to Teaching World Literature” French, German, Italian, Russian and US classics, alongside two representatives of Latin American and African modern classics, such as Cien años de soledad and Things Fall Apart.

It goes without saying that none of the proponents of a post-world literary world literature would subscribe in their theoretical construction of the field to such a logic for the construction of syllabi, anthologies and research agendas. So what would be the alternative to determine the specific textual content for a critical and pedagogical world literary practice? In his “Conjectures on World Literature”, Franco Moretti provides what I find to be the most convincing, if unpractical, answer to this question. For him, world
literature has to live up to the universal promise implied in its sheer name, and thus he operates a passage from world literature to the literatures of the world, all of the literatures ever written anywhere in the world. This new literally universal field transforms world literature in a necessarily collective enterprise with a very clear division of labor: on the ground floor, the specialists producing knowledge on particular literatures through close readings of texts and cultural contexts; on the upper level, the meta-discursive realm of über-comparatists such as Moretti, tracing, through what he calls “distant reading”, universal trends and patterns that would render visible the world system of literature as a global cultural totality. By proposing to read everything, no cherry-picking whatsoever, Moretti avoids the danger of a world literature made of texts that are chosen and isolated based on their supposed capacity to express and represent their respective national or regional cultures of origin. Standing for Latin America, we would no longer have magical realism and testimonio only, but the entirety of the immensely heterogeneous aesthetic universe of the region.

Nevertheless, even when the constitutive threats of actually existing world literary practices might have been taken care of, what I consider to be the most important question at the center of these world literary anxieties remains unanswered: is world literature, as a cosmopolitan project that aims at articulating cultural difference towards emancipatory goals at all possible? Can a discourse on and pedagogy of world literature produce the planet that Gayatri Spivak has proposed, as a form of imagining a world that “overwrites the globe” as “the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere… In the gridwork of electronic capital… drawn by the requirements of Geographical Information Systems” (72)? This ethically normative dimension has marked the cultural
and political urgency of world literature’s historical task, since Goethe until its most recent revamping: world literature as an aesthetic construction underscored by the cosmopolitan demand to overwrite unjust social relations at a global scale—be them colonial, warmongering, or generally oppressive; and at the same time, the cosmopolitan desire to overcome the restrictions and limitations of our own particular culture, and of our claustrophobic experience of it; and, at the same time, a cosmopolitan conviction about the necessary universal nature of the promise of a cultural emancipation of the planet; a cultural formation capable of leading the way towards global peace, world literature as the project of a global culture (as the dialectical negation of the one-sidedness of local particular cultures) where all the emancipatory potential of ‘culture’ can finally be released. David Damrosch notes that nowhere have these grand expectations been more eloquently stated than in René Wellek classical article “The Crisis of Comparative Literature” (1959), where he proposed a discipline structured around world literary goals: “Comparative literature has the immense merit of combating the false isolation of national literary histories” (282-283). In the last paragraph of the article, Wellek expands this idea and goes on to establish the crucial role critical discourse in the production of cosmopolitan values and, thus, in the actualization of the abstract construction of the universal subject imagined by the Enlightenment; comparative literature and world literature as the critical discourse that would render visible the cosmopolitan ethical and cultural world to come:

Once we grasp the nature of art and poetry, its victory over human mortality and destiny, its creation of a new world order of the imagination, national vanities will disappear. Man, universal man, man everywhere and at all time, in all his variety, emerges and literary scholarship ceases to be an antiquarian pastime, a calculus of national credits and debts and even a mapping of networks of relationships. Literary scholarship becomes an act of the
imagination, like art itself, and thus a preserver and creator of the highest values of mankind (Wellek 295).

If today, in the context of raging inequalities fueled in part by a process of economic globalization, the cosmopolitan echoes of Wellek’s discourse still seem relevant and even urgent to us, it is, however, difficult to sustain his humanistic optimism about the potential of world literature. The problem I find with this genealogy of world literature (again: from Goethe to Wellek, up to many of the proponents of a renewed world literature today) is that it tends to see the literary world—the world of world literature, as a field where different cultural singularities that define each other through violent ethical and economic antagonisms find a common discourse and enter into a dialogue that serves as a model for a global political agency. World literature as mediation and a form of cultural translation capable of producing a reconciled world that is unthinkable outside of this confidence in symbolic power culture.40

But in this world literature “informed by a sense of the implicit parity between literatures” (Trumpener 198), represented as a Habermasian public sphere for global dialogue, what seems to be lost is the account of the opaqueness of cultural otherness, and the intermittent failures of communication and global translation at stake in the hegemonic social relations that make up the world of aesthetic and cultural exchanges of world literature; that is, the hegemonic formation of world literature’s disciplinary discourse and object, and the necessary delimitation of what falls in and out of world literature—what gets to be translated (and why, and through what specific institutional articulations), and what, therefore, reaches audiences beyond the culture of origin of a given text, particularly metropolitan academic centers.41 Going back to García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude, a critical reading of the novel with a cosmopolitan
purpose should not transform it into an allegorical sign of Latin America’s cultural particularity, and determine its world literary worth precisely in terms of its ability to represent the region, among other representative texts; and even worse, because of the exotic flavor it would provide to the world literary cannon with its characters ascending to heaven amidst bedsheets. These usually complementary ways of arguing the paradoxical universality of One Hundred Years of Solitude depend on the affirmation according to which magical realism expresses something about the pre-rational constitution of Latin American societies that escapes the protocols of modern realist representation, and therefore reifies a reductive and condescending perception of the complex aesthetic and political relations between Latin American aesthetics and the region’s social structure. Sylvia Molloy lucidly explains this metropolitan fascination: “Magic realism is refulgent, amusing, and kitschy (Carmen Miranda’s headdress; José Arcadio Buendía’s tattooed penis)—but it doesn’t happen, couldn’t happen, here” (129).

A cosmopolitan approach attentive to the hegemonic forces at stake in cultural formations would underscore that the global status of García Márquez’s novel has nothing to do with a supposedly privileged relation with its culture of origin, but with the material production of its globality. For example, it would ask questions about the globalization of magical realism through Africa, South East Asia, Eastern Europe and the Chicano South West of the US: When was García Márquez (and perhaps, also, Alejo Carpentier) translated in each of these locations—and how were his novels and short-stories received? What were the existing local aesthetic traditions—as well as socio-cultural relations, that may have contributed to transform magical realist narratives into a
form of postcolonial interpellation? How, in what specific forms and instances, was magical realism appropriated and re-written? Were the traces of these global appropriations of magical realism obscured, or were they acknowledged in order to produce cosmopolitan forms of affiliation? And in turn, how did García Márquez and other Latin American proponents and practitioners of a magical realist aesthetic respond to the global echoes (cosmopolitan and postcolonial, but also metropolitan) of their discourse?

The twofold idea of the globalization of the novel and the novelization of the global that I am putting forth, is an attempt to re-inscribe the debate on world literature in relation to these cosmopolitan goals, while accounting for the historical universalization of novelistic writing, reading and translation, and for the production of singular images and imaginaries of universality that reduplicate in specific texts the global discursive horizon of modern literary practices. Or to put it in slightly different terms: an attempt to apprehend the hegemonic making of the universality of world literature, while resisting the temptation to fall back on particularistic reaffirmations of national or regional cultural identities, and in fact preserving said universality as the necessary horizon of cosmopolitan practices with an emancipatory purpose.

In spite of their methodological differences, the most intelligent interventions in the debate coincide in thinking of world literature, not as a defined corpus, but as a way of reading, of making relations and imagining unexpected and non-national contexts that may illuminate new meanings in certain literary works. While writing this article and thinking about cosmopolitan discourses, I came to understand the meaning of world literature in terms of the classical Marxist characterization of class as a social relation:
world literature as a cosmopolitan relation. The model of the globalization of the novel and the novelization of the global, with its emphasis on historical processes at a global scale and the production of global imaginaries, allows us to see world literature as a social relation, a cosmopolitan social relation—world literature as a critical discourse, but also as a concrete universal field of cultural exchanges, both constituted by structural, asymmetrical forces disputing the meaning of the global. In other words, the globalization of the novel and the novelization of the global foregrounds the constitutive tension at the center of the discourse of world literature: on the one hand, the cosmopolitan drive to represent a diverse globe as a reconciled multicultural totality; and on the other, the also very cosmopolitan mandate to map the asymmetric interaction of hegemonic and subaltern cultural and economic forces that determine the unequal making of the globe. Our challenge is to acknowledge and re-articulate in our pedagogical practices and in the design of our research projects, these complex cosmopolitan interpellations that point to opposing ways of symbolizing global difference, assuming that it is impossible to embrace the normative side of a cosmopolitan discourses such as world literature before accounting for the global hegemonic relations that shape them. The desires for commodities and discourses “of distant lands and climes” (Marx and Engels 477), that constitute to this day our cosmopolitan subjectivities, are at once, the symbolic ground where we hope to inscribe an intellectual emancipatory practice, as well as a domestication of the world that reproduces the hegemonic relations that world literature may or may not address.

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Works Cited


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1 Preliminary versions of this article were presented at the Stanford University’s Center for the Study of the Novel, and at Harvard University’s Humanities Center. My thanks to Margaret Cohen, Franco Moretti, Homi Bhabha, Steven Biel, Ken Puckett, Alex Woloch, Jerôme David, Chris Warnes, Alejandra Uslenghi, Gonzalo Aguilar, Alejandra Laera, María Teresa Gramuglio, Emily Apter, Tim Reiss and Victor Vich for their input and comments. A longer version of the paper is part of the manuscript of my upcoming book, Universal Desires. Latin America in the Discourses of Cosmopolitanism, Globalization and World Literature.

2 The world-republic is the cosmopolitan political institution Kant prescribes in “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”, however, eleven years later when he publishes “Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Sketch” (1795), he opts for a federation of nations in an attempt to balance out the sovereignty of each singular nation and the ultimate and transcendental location of power in the federation as the universal and cosmopolitan determination of the global system of international treaties and agreements.

3 It has been pointed out to me that I am reading Kant literally here, that Kant was not referring to the novel as a novelistic genre, but to the imaginative constructedness of a discourse clearly opposed to philosophy conceived as a scientific disciplinary discourse. Even if this was right, Kant chose to refer to ‘the novel’ as that which lies on the other end of philosophy, and in any case, invokes the workings of imagination embodied in the novelistic form as the space where the type of universal history he imagines might take place.

4 This is a dimension of the novel mostly overlooked in classical materialist genre theories, which have studied the novel as the aesthetic product of the rise of the bourgeoisie and the consolidation of the national
state. This critical perspective is historically determined by a concern about the specificity of national cultures and hegemonic struggles within the context of the nation state (i.e., Ian Watt, Raymond Williams). The explicative power of these theories of the novel blurred the global dimension of the novel, as well as the possibility of thinking a history of the novel that could account for the ways in which the process of globalization has been reshaping the world for the past 200 years.

According to Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, the nation state fulfills its world historical actuality in its colonial expansion, that is, possessing territories whose substantial end—because they are conceptualized as mere things, without a will and therefore without right—is to be possessed by the actualizing world historical nation:

The nation [Volk] to which such a moment is allotted as a natural principle is given the task of implementing this principle in the course of the self-development of the world spirit’s self-consciousness. This nation is the dominant one in world history for this epoch… In contrast with this absolute right which it possesses as bearer of the present stage of the world spirit’s development, the spirits of other nations are without rights, and they, like those whose epoch has passed, no longer count in world history… [They] will perhaps lose [their] independence, or [they] may survive or eke out its existence as a particular state or group of states and struggle on in a contingent manner with all kinds of internal experiments and external conflicts”. (Elements of the Philosophy of Right 374 §347).

…

The same determination entitles civilized nations to regard and treat as barbarians other nations which are less advanced than they are in the substantial moments of the state, in the consciousness that the rights of these other nations are not equal to theirs and their independence is merely formal” (Elements of the Philosophy of Right 376, §351).

Colonialism is the right and responsibility of world historical nations; it is the fulfillment of the task of “implementing” freedom in the world that was given to them. This absolute right of appropriating a “barbarian” territory, however, should be seen, according to Hegel, as nothing but the spread of freedom into less fortunate places.

6 In 1847, Marx and Engels wrote in “The Manifesto of the Communist Party” that the defining trait of modernity was precisely the process of globalization of the bourgeoisie’s mode of production, as well as its values, social practices and aesthetic culture. That is, in 1847, before a process of capitalist globalization could be seen embodied in concrete institutions other than the unregulated practice of commerce (whose global nature could only be deduced theoretically, by adding the specific exchanges between particular metropolis and colonies), Marx and Engels had provided the description of a process of globalization that defined and structured the modern world. Their insight merits the inclusion of the entire quotation where they pick up Goethe’s observation of world literature as a cultural symptom of the structural transformation of the world that the bourgeoisie was undertaking:

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the earth. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. … All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation… It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the
bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image” (476-477).

7 In 1884, Lucio Vicente López, a great historian rather than a fictional writer, published *La gran aldea*, a *costumbrista* novel about Buenos Aires in the 1860s and 1870s, the period immediately after the civil war and before the modernizing explosion of the mid-1880s and 1890s. That is the Buenos Aires where Holmberg’s novels are set.

8 I am referring here to the novel as the aesthetic form historically determined by the rise of the bourgeoisie and its need to represent its own worldview and its place in modern societies. Recently, this idea about the “rise of the novel” has been criticized in order to point to a longer history of the novel that may be traced back to medieval chivalric and courteous narratives. Nevertheless, I still believe that the hypothesis of the novel as cultural artifact determined by bourgeois worldviews, put forth paradigmatically by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957) is still today the most convincing description of the historical genesis of the novel form (*stricto sensu*) in Europe or in its peripheries. Watt’s arguments, however, consider the novel as an institution at work only in a national stage. The point of this essay is precisely to think about the role the novel plays in a larger, indeed global scale.

9 The narrative of Sarmiento’s stay in Paris is very interesting, because there are many instances when he destabilizes the notion of France as the privileged location of the universal. He –perhaps one of the most arrogant figures in Latin America’s nineteenth century– even depicts most of France’s political leaders as excessively provincial. However, he always returns his representation of France to the podium of the model to imitate. Sarmiento plays, arrogantly, with the idea of his own superiority to one or another French intellectual or official, but in the end, France remains the center and origin of the modern world which he aspires to.

10 The point Sarmiento makes is even more interesting when one takes into consideration the fact that he never wrote a novel himself. According to Ricardo Piglia however, he used the compositional strategies of the novel to write *Facundo*: “We do not read *Facundo* as a novel (which is not) but rather as a political use of the genre. (*Facundo* is a proto-novel, a novel machine, a museum of the future of the novel)” (135). For an in-depth analysis of the use of fictional strategies in the writing of his essay, see Diana Sorensen’s *Facundo and the construction of Argentine culture*, especially chapter two, “The Risks of Fiction. *Facundo* and the Parameters of Historical Writing” (41-66).

11 Regarding the Latin American case, Laera explains that in the decade from 1880 to 1890, one hundred novels were published in Buenos Aires alone, when in the previous decade the number of novels issued would not exceed two dozens (19).

12 Franco Moretti goes as far as deducing “a law of literary evolution” (58) out of this process of global expansion of the novel form. Such a law would state (Moretti stresses his use of the potential) that “in cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means: almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe), the modern novel first arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials” (58).

13 This cultural mediation complements Franco Moretti’s “law of literary evolution” (see note 9), contextualizing his idea that the peripheral novel results from a compromise between Western form and local materials, in a cultural-political (rather than aesthetic) discursive frame.

14 Because of the symbolic power that literary discourse held in Western Europe during the nineteenth century, the social force of Verne’s narrative to promote and reinforce the discourse of globalization can be imagined to be huge. The importance of the role of literature and, more generally, of the world of the ‘arts and entertainment’ of the Second Empire cannot be exaggerated: there was a very specific need in France to produce and consume images of the colonial world beyond the borders of the familiar, not only because of the expansive dynamics of bourgeois-modern society, but most importantly because of a certain boredom with the economic stability and solidification of (recently instituted) traditions in the middle class. In fact, bien peu de Français, à la fin du second Empire, ont franchi le mer, vu de leurs propres yeux, connu de leur propre expérience les terres sur lesquelles flotte le drapeau de leur pays. Les récits d’un ancien soldat ayant fait campagne en Afrique, quelques images stéréotypées (des palmiers, des bêtes féroces, des hommes d’étrange apparence), tels sont les éléments essentiels qui composent, pour la plupart, au fond des villages et au fond des bourgs de province, la vision du
Verne’s operations seem to be caught at the intersection of two historical needs: to provide an imaginary of adventure, of French intellectual and racial superiority, of the concrete material articulation of the colonial enterprise as a *mission civilisatrice*; and the idea of a systematic scientific re-organization (remapping) of the world, that is known as the age of imperialism. “Le fait es décisif pour l’histoire française de l’idée coloniale, encore que sa portée n’ait été que trop rarement soulignée: de cette rencontre dans une vision et dans une foi communes des préoccupations des géographes et des aspirations des économistes soucieux d’une meilleure organisation du travail humain, va naître une doctrine militante de la colonisation—doctrine qui commence à se définir avec force dans les dernières années du second Empire” (Girardet 18-19). The point I am trying to make, however, is that, in his novels, Verne did not only provide the imaginary of the process of transformation that I have been calling *bourgeoisification* of the globe and globalization, but furthermore, one that represented the limitless nature of the bourgeois enterprise.

“Lorsque l’État prend le relais en matière de promotion de l’idée coloniale en France au lendemain de la Grand Guerre –à travers l’Agence des colonies et les expositions officielles-, il prend le relais du monde des savants, des différents secteurs économiques et du monde du spectacle, qui s’épanouit depuis le milieu du XIXe siècle… De même, la littérature a, bien avant la propagande d’État, joué un rôle central, sans grande discordance, dans ce processus de promotion de l’entreprise coloniale” (Blanchard and Lemaire “Avant-propos”, 13). And because in Verne’s texts there is no imaginable limit to the world historical expansion of the ‘spirit of freedom’, these novels are at once a performance of the discourses of globalization and a reinforcement of their conditions of possibility. It is precisely this articulation of entertainment and education as a powerful compound for the social reinforcement of a local and global enterprise what Daniel Compère brilliantly underscores when analyzing Hetzel’s project of the publication of Verne’s *Voyages Extraordinaires* as a serial collection:

> Deux voix essentielles se font entendre dans les romans verniens: une voix narrative décrit les événements et prend en charge la ‘récréation’, et une voix savante apporte toutes les explications nécessaires. Celle-ci passe par ces personnages spécialistes de divers domaines, ou par une voix anonyme qui diffuse les connaissances. Cette caractéristique pourrait rapprocher les ‘Voyages Extraordinaires’ de la vulgarisation scientifique. Toutefois, on remarquera que Verne est un vulgarisateur de seconde main, puisant son savoir ches ses contemporaines qui sont de véritables vulgarisateurs comme Louis Figuier, Camille Flammarion ou Arthur Mangin (Compère, 36-37).

Furthermore, they are a glimpse into the future of an omnipotent class that was creating the world as its own image; they allowed their contemporary readers a quick look into their own future (as participants in such conquering class) that reinvigorated and gave new impulse to colonial adventurers or scientific explorers to go out and map the globe, in short, the formal or informal colonial enterprise.

14 In the same family of representational operations of appropriation as mapping, another important strategy is that of the *familiarization* of the strange, uncanny or sublime, using the rhetorical strategy of the analogy: The Orinoco is like the Loire (*Le Superbe Orénoque*). The moon looks to Ardan, Barbicane and Nicholl like the mountains of Greece, Switzerland or Norway (*Autour de la Lune*). On his way to the center of the earth, Lidenbrok discovers another “Mediterranean Sea” (*Voyage au centre de la Terre*).

15 See Charles Morazé’s *Les bourgeois conquérants*.

16 In the same family of representational operations of appropriation as mapping, another important strategy is that of the *familiarization* of the strange, uncanny or sublime, using the rhetorical strategy of the analogy: The Orinoco is like the Loire (*Le Superbe Orénoque*). The moon looks to Ardan, Barbicane and Nicholl like the mountains of Greece, Switzerland or Norway (*Autour de la Lune*). On his way to the center of the earth, Lidenbrok discovers another “Mediterranean Sea” (*Voyage au centre de la Terre*).

17 In fact this is the point Roland Barthes makes in his reading of *Vingt milles lieues sous le mer* in *Mythologies*: “Verne appartient à la lignée progressiste de la bourgeoisie: son oeuvre affiche que rien ne peut échapper à l’homme, que le monde, même le plus lointain, est comme un objet dans sa main” (Barthes 80).

18 Antonio Gramsci, writing from his prison cell, addresses the realist nature of Verne’s narratives, explaining that their verisimilar construction of reality is assured by the hegemony of bourgeois ideology:
In Verne’s books nothing is ever completely impossible. The ‘possibilities’ that Verne’s heroes have are greater and above all not ‘outside’ the line of development of the scientific conquests already made. What is imagined is not entirely ‘arbitrary’ and is therefore able to excite the reader’s fantasy, which has already been won over by the ideology of the inevitability of scientific progress in the domain of the control of natural forces” (Gramsci 367).

Holmberg was a physician but never practiced. He was a vocational naturalist and wrote important works on flora, fauna, geography and paleontology, besides his literary writings and travel literature.

Nic-Nac describes Martian geography (mountains, forests, seas and even cities), and visits a Martian country, Aureliana, and describes its social structure, its mystical thinkers, positivist scientists, parliamentary debates, popular demonstrations, etc. The complete title with which the serialized novel was published at the end of 1875 in book format was “El viaje maravilloso del Señor Nic Nac/ En el que se refieren las prodigiosas/ avenutas de este señor y se dan a conocer las instituciones,/ costumbres/ y preocupaciones de un mundo desconocido”; but even if this long title underlies the unknown nature of the planet that Nic-Nac visits, what he finds in Mars is a mirror image of the changing face of Argentine society at the end of the nineteenth century, especially after the beginning of the organization of the modern state in 1862, 15 years prior to the publication of the Nic-Nac. As Sandra Gasparini and Claudia Román explain in their edition of Holmberg’s El tipo más original y otras páginas, “la década del 70 está atravesada, en la Argentina, por una gran cantidad de gestos fundacionales. Se crean academias, establecimientos educativos, museos, observatorios: se echan los cimientos de una modernidad, en cuyo marco se construirá la Nación” (191).

Victor Vich pointed out to me that a possible reason for the disparity between European and Latin American novels during the nineteenth century is that in Latin American poets and essayists produced the most relevant texts whereas the novel had a marginal place in the cultural and literary fields. In an article where he discusses the possible place of Latin American literature in the new world literature proposed by Franco Moretti in “Conjectures on World Literature”, Efraín Kristal explains that: “In Spanish America poetry was the dominant literary genre, and the essay or sociological treatise was of far greater significance than the novel until at least the 1920s, if not later. It is emblematic that Sarmiento’s Facundo (1845)—a sociological treatise about a caudillo—had a greater bearing on the history of the novel of the Latin American dictator than any straightforward work of narrative fiction written in the 19th century; or that Octavio Paz’s Labyrinth of Solitude was more influential than any Mexican novel until the publication of Juan Rulfo’s Pedro Páramo in 1955. And it is not a coincidence that José Carlos Mariátegui—the first Latin American Marxist philosopher and literary critic—does not cite a single novel of significance in his essay on Peruvian literature, published in 1927. The early Spanish American novel is certainly of historical interest, as symptomatic of cultural and political processes worthy of scholarly attention. But it would be misleading to pretend that it was the most widespread literary genre, or that it had many practitioners or readers. One would be hard-pressed to point to a single literary work, other than María (1867) by the Colombian Jorge Isaacs, as an example of a 19th-century Spanish American novel that was widely read within and beyond the national borders in which it was produced.” (62-63).

In a very interesting piece on genealogies of science fiction in Argentina, Angela Dellepiane accounts for the circulation of discourses of spiritism in th 1870s and 1880s in Argentina. She documents the presence of books by Allan Kardec (pseudonym of Hyppolite Léon Denizard Rivail), a disciple of the german scientist and pedagogue Pestalozzi who late in life developed a technique to contact spirits and became famous as a medium; and Camille Flammarion, author of very popular works on spiritism and astronomy, as well as hack science fiction novels. See also, Antonio Pagés Larraya’s 1957 edition of Holmberg’s fantastic short stories. Adriana Rodríguez Pérscico, one of the most lucid and comprehensive reader of Holmberg’s, points to the constitutive tension at the core of Holmberg’s discourse. She argues that in his novels and short stories, the positivistic preeminence of scientific imaginaries in the Latin American turn of the century is met with an ambivalent gaze, that can be said to criticize the social place of science: “Holmberg continúa y altera el modelo narrativo científico… [y] los postulados científicos coexisten con fenómenos sobrenaturales. De las certezas darwinistas resbalamos hacia los misterios del más allá” (389). Rodríguez Pérscico follows Ludmer in seeing Holmberg himself as a hybrid subject, the scientific-legal intellectual that inscribes his practice in the State, and the creative writer: “Tal vez, este carácter descentrado—la pertenencia múltiple y la pluralidad de intereses—le haya proporcionado a Holmberg una mirada estereoscópica que le permitió hacer la defensa y la crítica de la ciencia y la política. Esa posición
subjetiva peculiar es condición, ante todo, para los cambios de perspectiva en torno a la problemática de la ciencia, sus ventajas, límites, errores y aciertos, en los distintos relatos. Al mismo tiempo, ella hace posible el cruce y la valoración, la nivelación de saberes opuestos, como la ciencia y el espiritismo, que se trenczan en Viaje maravilloso del Señor Nic-Nac.” (383).

23 See Adolfo Prieto’s article on the history of science fiction in Argentina.

24 Angela Dellepiane (220) makes the connection by tracing the publication of Verne’s novels in Buenos Aires between 1872 and 1875 in El Nacional, the same newspaper that published in Nic Nac in 1875.

25 The concept of world literature has had many lives since Goethe coined in twenty different references in conversations, correspondence and personal journals beginning in the second half of the 1820s that Fritz Strich pieced together under the rubric of Weltliteratur. For excellent accounts of the different implications of the concept in Goethe and beyond, see David Damrosch’s What is World Literature?, Cooppan’s “Ghosts in the disciplinary machine”, Prendergast’s edited volume Debating World Literature, and for a Latin American perspective, Ignacio Sánchez Prado’s collection América Latina en la “Literatura Mundial”.

26 Even though the widespread polemic about the refashioning of world literature in the US was re-ignited by the publication of Moretti’s essay in 2000, it could be said that Fredric Jameson’s “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (published in 1986) anticipated many of the lines along which the debate would be organized almost two decades later. In this piece, Jameson writes that “Today the reinvention of cultural studies in the United States demands the reinvention in a new situation, of what Goethe long ago theorized as ‘world literature’. In our more immediate context, then, any conception of world literature necessarily demands some specific engagement with the question of third-world literature” (68).

27 For a full account of the debate and different interventions that took place around Martha Nussbaum’s piece, especially in relation of her binary presentation of the goals of cosmopolitanism and patriotism, see Martha Nussbaum, For Love of Country?

28 There are exceptions, of course, perhaps more than I am aware of. In two fairly recent and very interesting texts, Vilashini Cooppan and Katie Trumpener give detailed accounts of the creation of world literature and culture courses at Yale. However, I believe the case that I’m going to analyze, the series “Approaches to Teaching World Literature”, because of the sponsorship of the MLA, exceeds in its institutional weight any particular attempt at creating world literature syllabi that challenge reified notions of the world and the hegemonic forces that shape it.

29 Pascale Casanova’s The World Republic of Letters is one of the most effective proposals against the implication of world literature as an even playing field, where literature (as well as other symbolic commodities) circulate on equal footing because of a cultural value that is autonomous from the economic unevenness that structures the social world. In spite of its evident Franco-centrism (clearly an imperialist residue that tends to resurface when the French intellectual field thinks about its structural function of France in a network of global relations), her use of Bourdieu’s theory of social spaces organized in (only) relatively autonomous fields structured by specific institutions and practices is very productive to render evident the uneven formation of a global literary and cultural fields constituted by asymmetric symbolic power relations. At the same time, I think that her understanding of Bourdieu’s notion of field is too rigid, and so, in her division of a world of one single embodied core (Paris) and several peripheries, where the structural function of the periphery is to produce innovation and the role of the first and secondary cores is to recognize, consecrate and reproduce such innovations, is another way of essentializing the periphery, not to say that is not always at all true; in fact, the idea that the third world produces aesthetic innovation and revolutionary ideas seems to be a usual fantasy (in the Lacanian sense) of metropolitan cultures.

30 To my eyes, one of the first and most interesting intersections of the discourses of world literature and postcolonialism, was Homi Bhabha’s formulación: “world literature could be an emergent, prefigurative category that is concerned with a form of cultural dissensus and alterity, where non-consensual terms of affiliation may be established on grounds of historical trauma. The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of ‘otherness’. Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrains of world literature” (The Location of Culture 12).

31 Damrosch analyzes the progressive changes in some of the anthologies of world literary texts during the second half of the Twentieth century: “The tellingly titled Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces was content in its first edition of 1956 to survey the world through a total of only seventy-three authors, not one
of whom was a woman, and all of whom were writers in “the Western Tradition” stretching from ancient Athens and Jerusalem to Modern Europe and North America… To a very real extent, the expansion of our understanding of world literature has improved this situation during the past dozen years. The major anthologies (such as those now published by Longman, Bedford, and Norton itself) today present as many as five hundred authors in their pages, often with dozens of countries included. It is even possible to consider that the old Eurocentric canon has fallen away altogether… This dismantling, however, is only half of the story, and not only because it hasn’t yet occurred in practice to the extent that it has been achieved in postcolonial theory…” (Damroch “World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age” 43-44). The point I am trying to make is that, even when anthologies, expanded their coverage, a great majority of the texts included (especially when they come from the peripheries of the Euro-American world) are included because the anthology presupposes an expressive relation between text and the cultural particularity of its assumed origin.

32 When, thinking about the turn of the century, Damrosch examines in detail “A pair of ambitious multivolume anthologies that were prepared in the first decade of the century: The Best of World’s Classics, in ten volumes, published in 1909 by Funk and Wagnalls under the editorship of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge; and the still more ambitious fifty-volume series The Harvard Classics, published just a year later by P.F. Collier and Son, under the general editorship of Harvard’s president, Charles W. Eliot” (What is World Literature? 120). And when writing about the recent multicultural turn of world literature anthologis, David Damrosch is, in fact, one of the protagonists of this change in the conception of world literature. He is the editor of the three-volume The Longman Anthology of World Literature. The Ancient World, the Medieval Era, and the Early Modern Period, which, indeed, fulfills the post-colonial promise of the new world literature.

33 For a commentary on World Literature Anthologies and the recent inclusion of García Márquez and Chinua Achebe in some of them, as a result of the globalization of the canon of world literature, see James English: "Prizes and the Politics of World Culture" in The Economy of Prestige. Prizes, Awards and the Circulation of Cultural Value (306-307).

34 In his book, What is World Literature, David Damrosch explains that “I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their own language… In its most expansive sense, world literature could include any work that has ever reached beyond its home base” (4). The reason why I juxtaposed David Damrosch’s notion of what would constitute a global or world literary novel, it is because I think that the political economy of the transnational publishing world (what sells, what does not) determine in almost absolute terms the choices in terms of what gets translated, and what is read in world literature courses. In other words, European and North American publishing presses translate, more often than not, works that tend to respond to the expectations of northern reader publics about what, for instance, Latin American or African literature is and should be. For an interesting articulation of the literature and politics and the coming into being of the global novel in the 1960s, with García Márquez’s Cien años de soledad as preeminent case, see Michael Denning’s “The Novelist’s International”.

35 For a history of the complex process of globalization of magical realism and magical realist forms throughout the twentieth century, from Germany to Latin America and South East Asia and Africa, see my “Magical realism and postcolonial writing”.

36 I take the idea of a displacement from the literatures of the world to world literature from Djelal Kadir’s essay “Comparative Literature in the Age of Terrorism”, but he writes about it to indict all the proponents of world literature, Moretti included.

37 Damrosch does not see in this infinite and absolute expansion of the horizons of world literature a liberation of world literature’s worst stigma, but on the contrary, a dissolution of the discipline’s specificity and value: “If the scope of world literature now extends from Akkadian epics to Aztec incantations, the question of what is world literature could almost be put in opposite terms: What isn’t world literature? A category from which nothing can be excluded is essentially useless” (What is World Literature? 110).

38 The two volumes of the original The Novel, Moretti’s gigantically ambitious attempt to rethink the history of and the theoretical perspectives on the novel—a project he undertook after having proposed his “Conjectures on World Literature”—can be read as the practical application of Moretti’s ideas in the by now famous article. Here, Moretti proposes the novel, precisely, as a paradigmatically universal form, a site where a community of critics can produce a concrete and well-grounded discourse on world literature.
In the third and final chapter of her book *Death of a discipline*, Gayatri Spivak proposes the notion of *planetarity* as a possible specific content to the new comparative literature she is calling for; a comparative literature based on a form of reading that recognizes in the opacity and the undecidability of the figure, the contingency of each particular dis-figuration, never giving in to the hegemonic demand of transparency and full comprehensibility. Planetarity is the figure that needs to be dis-figured, that is ethically and politically deciphered. The planet, then, is the site where, perhaps, we’ll be able to inscribe a form of community ethically different to that figured in the globe of globalization. “When I invoke the planet I think of the effort required to figure the (im)possibility of this underived intuition” (72). This is the first challenge that the category of planetarity presents us with: that the planet does not exist yet, today, in the context of the hegemony of the discourses of globalization. World literature, then, could be thought of as the comparative critical study of the symbolic that would deliver the planet to us.

One of the most effective critiques of this totalizing paradigm is the idea of a globalization of difference put forth by Emily Apter in her article “Global *Translatio*: The ‘Invention’ of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933” where she traces the construction of discourses of comparative and world literature by Leo Spitzer during his exile in Turkey—a discourse based on “untranslatable affective gaps” (108): “Spitzer’s explicit desire to disturb monolingual complacency” (105) produces a “a paradigm of *translatio*… that emphasizes the critical role of multilingualism within transnational humanism… a policy of *non-translation* adopted without apology” (104).

An example of a most productive material interpellation of the global dimension of literary formations is Diana Sorensen’s *A Turbulent Decade Remembered. Scenes from the Latin American Sixties*. Sorensen’s remarkable study of the institutions that made up the materiality of the 1960s *boom* of Latin American literature (see especially Chapter 4: “Toward a Transnational Republic of Letters: A Geography of Discursive Networks”) should be taken as a possible future road to take for a world literature mindful of the importance of material exchanges and hegemonic relations.

A brilliant anonymous reviewer of this essay commented on this proposal to read the universality of García Márquez’s novel in cosmopolitan terms rather than in relation to its capacity to express Latin American culture in a global market of cultural commodified particularities, that “Cien años, and magical realism more generally, can make us critical of such universalizing moves (the United Fruit Company is nothing if not cosmopolitan) but only if we read it figurally as a planetary novel”. This approach to the novel at the level of its plot and rhetorical construction adds a dimension I had not included in my argument and, I believe, complements my attempt to reject a globality based on the politics of cultural expression.

Sylvia Molloy’s piece “Latin America in the U.S. Imaginary: Postcolonialism, Translation, and the Magical Realist Imperative” is a crucial and definitive reference when thinking about reified US-Latin American cultural relations.

Homi Bhabha has famously characterized magical realism as a decolonizing aesthetic practice: “the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world” (“Introduction: narrating the nation” 7).

Another way of understanding the dual concept of the globalization of the novel and the novelization of the global as an attempt to grasp the articulation of the process of globalization and literary discourse is in terms of a diachronic analysis in the case of the *globalization of the novel*, and of a synchronic perspective in the case of the *novelization of the global*.

In a recent intervention in the debate about the re-emergence of the concept of world literature, Roberto Schwarz wrote, along these same lines, that if the intention of unearthing the idea of world literature “is to question the universality of the universal and the localism of the local, then it could be a good starting point for further discussion” (98). To question essentialist discourses of universality and particularity; and to underscore that both the universal and the local are historical constructions.