Aarthi Vadde vividly illustrates how modernist and contemporary writers reimagined the nation and internationalism in a period defined by globalization. She explores how Rabindranath Tagore, James Joyce, Claude McKay, George Lamming, Michael Ondaatje, and Zadie Smith use modern literary forms to develop ideas of international belonging sensitive to the afterlife of empire. In doing so, she shows how this wide-ranging group of authors challenge traditional expectations of aesthetic form, shaping how we modernly understand the cohesion and interrelation of political communities.

In *Chimeras of Form*, Aarthi Vadde vividly illustrates how modern and contemporary writers reimagined the nation and internationalism in a period defined by globalization. She explores how Rabindranath Tagore, James Joyce, Claude McKay, George Lamming, Michael Ondaatje, and Zadie Smith use modern literary forms to develop ideas of international belonging sensitive to the afterlife of empire. In doing so, she shows how this wide-ranging group of authors challenge traditional expectations of aesthetic form, shaping how we modernly understand the cohesion and interrelation of political communities. Drawing on her close readings of individual texts and literary, postcolonial, and cosmopolitical theory, Vadde examines how modernist formal experiments take part in debates about transnational interdependence and social obligation. She finds Joyce’s use of apophantic narrative as a way to ask questions about international camaraderie, and demonstrates how the “painless” works of Claude McKay speak to ideas of citizenship and shared affirmation, the analysis of the contemporary writers Zadie Smith and Shailja Patel shows how present-day issues relating to migration, displacement, and economic inequality link modernist and postcolonial traditions of literature. Vadde brings these traditions together to reveal the dual nature of internationalism as an aspiration, possibly a chimeric one, and an actual political discourse vital to understanding our present moment.

PRAISE FOR *CHIMERAS OF FORM*

“With extraordinary subtlety and fire, Aarthi Vadde charts modernist internationalism as a persistent and shifting冒険lust for experimental representation that was shaped by the range and scale of utopian, even confounding, depictions of the complexion of society. Her deft readings will transform the way we understand the complex cultural interactions and postcolonialism in question where those terms can no longer be taken as distinct categories inferred in period and geography.”
—BRENT HAYES EDWARDS, author of *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Case of Black Internationalism*

“Vadde has written a subtle, incisive, and richly thoughtful book. In smart and sophisticated readings, she rigorously thinks through contemporary and postcolonial fiction’s relation to the ingredients of politics and ideology, and she brilliantly illuminates such literary relations in an increasingly globalized world.”
—JAHAN RAMAZANI, author of *Byrd and the Odor: Style, Ajour, Sing*, and *The Dialogues of Greece*

“Vadde’s expansive, sophisticated, and finely施工单位 conceive conventional direction for

Vadde’s contribution is her remarkable insight into the ‘chimeric’ forms of global modernism. These forms don’t simply triumphal cosmopolitanism in the face of outmoded nationalisms. Rather they foreground the artificial and syntheticity of postmodern globalization after the ongoing displacements of the previous century.”
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“With extraordinary subtlety and fire, Aarthi Vadde charts modernist internationalism as a persistent and shifting impulse toward experimentation in fictions that stretch the range of the sayable in their forms don’t flaunt triumphal cosmopolitanism in the face of outmoded nationalisms. Rather they foreground the artificial and recycled style of posttraumatic globalization after the ongoing displacements of the previous century.”
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How did one map a country that blew into a new form every day? Such questions made his language too abstract, his imagery too fluid, his metre too inconstant. It led him to create chimeras of form, lionheaded goat-bodied serpentailed impossibilities whose shapes felt obliged to change the moment they were set, so that the demotic forced its way into lines of classical purity and images of love were constantly degraded by the intrusion of elements of farce.

—Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

If Hobbes is right, the idea of global justice without a world government is a chimera.

—Thomas Nagel, “The Problem of Global Justice”

Who gets to decide the range of the possible? How does one remain open to a transformable and politically progressive future while still challenging the ideology of unlimited progress identifiable with modernity itself? Such questions lie at the heart of this book’s literary and political investigations into the chimeras of modernist internationalism. I broach them not with a simple response but by yoking them to yet another, equally startling interrogative taken from Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*: “How did one map a country that blew into a new form every day?” Rushdie’s query derives possibility from impossibility. It acknowledges the limitations of aesthetic representation in the face of social upheaval, yet his prose also attempts to overcome those limitations by pushing received styles to their breaking point. The breaking point of language, the point at which the writer produces not form but “chimeras of form,” is also the point at which the range of the possible comes into view as a matter of enunciation. By risking illegibility and incomprehensibility in their fictional narratives, Rushdie and the other writers featured here stretch the
range of the sayable, and even the thinkable, within political, philosophical, and cultural understandings of global imagination.

The capacity of chimeras of form to at once delimit the range of the possible and exceed it is an epistemological one. It allows them to, in Judith Butler’s words, “pose the question of the limits of our most sure ways of knowing.” For Thomas Nagel, global justice is surely a chimera, a castle in the air, in the absence of a world state, but for the writers in this study, the unlikelihood of global justice ever being achieved is the occasion for a conversation about the perceived obstacles to international obligation, rather than mere acceptance of such obstacles. I use the phrase “chimeras of form” as conceptual shorthand for pushing the epistemological limits of imagining community and for testing the categories by which social life is rendered coherent and speakable. The chimera is primarily understood in its mythic dimensions, as a monstrous figure of the unclassifiable body (“lionheaded goatbodied serpentailed impossibilities”), but it also can be seen in its botanical and genetic dimensions, as a figure of taxonomic interference and rearrangement that brings newness out of the old, more familiar categories (lion, goat, serpent) that it grafts together.

Chimeras of Form undertakes its own projects of grafting: aesthetic and political categories come together in the titular formation “modernist internationalism”; literatures usually separated by period and geography are sutured together as part of a single body; and collectivities such as nation, federation, and globe are rarely considered apart from one another, though they remain distinct models of political and affective community. By allowing modernist internationalism to subsume a variety of writers working across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and within colonial and postcolonial contexts, I am not aiming to homogenize a century of literary history under the standard of modernism. Instead, I join the movement to deprovincialize a once exclusively European aesthetic category that has been redeployed in exciting ways beyond Europe and beyond modernism’s usual end date of 1940. My reformulation of modernist internationalism speaks foremost to the institution of modernist studies, but it also goes beyond it and into the intellectual history of globalization.

From Rabindranath Tagore to Zadie Smith, the writers featured here have developed and extended modernist theories and practices of literary form in order to contest isolationist understandings of national commu-
nity and to give shape and substance to matters that press for international and global frames of inquiry. Such matters include transnational migration, human rights interventionism, and the vast economic inequality that separates the Global North from the Global South. In pursuing an unapologetically aesthetic line of inquiry under the title *Chimeras of Form*, this study also shows that literature is an overlooked venue for responding to the presuppositions that would relegate internationalism and global justice to the realm of chimeras—that is, to the realm of illusory pursuits divorced from or insensitive to practical constraints.

Given that literary endeavor is often greeted as an impractical form of political interventionism, it seems an especially fitting starting point from which to explore how categories of poetic and political invention might inflect one another in ways that challenge the prevailing boundaries between “realistic change” and “chimeric fantasy.” I am not claiming that poetic inventiveness can directly change the circumstances of political reality, but I do believe that it can sharpen our sense of the thinkable and the sayable in the face of at least preliminarily impossible impasses. Paying close attention to the formal and theoretical complexities of a deprovincialized modernist internationalism, as this book does, invites readers to dwell in those impasses, though it makes no guarantee of getting through them. On the contrary, *Chimeras of Form* asks its readers to stick with chimeras as they lead us into a reengagement with and reconsideration of the facts, values, and frames associated with imagined community, good citizenship, international solidarity, and political agency.

I am interested in the chimera as a site where the line between possibility and impossibility is under dispute and capable of being redrawn. Its knotting together of hopeful illusion and hard reality is one of the reasons I have made it into an emblem of a modernist internationalism attentive to colonial and contemporary histories of inequality. It also gets at why I have retained the keyword *internationalism*, despite the flourishing of much current global theory under the banner of cosmopolitanism. Late twentieth-century turns toward cosmopolitanism have worked hard to rid internationalism of its chimeric taint. Bruce Robbins’s foundational work in this field, *Feeling Global*, declares that “internationalism is not a utopian idealism, an infinitely deferred ideal of ultimate justice for all,” while Kwame Anthony Appiah has approached cosmopolitanism not as the miracle cure to the world’s ills but as a challenge of habitation, a
balancing act between maintaining moral norms and respecting cultural difference that is just as pertinent to everyday life as it is to state policy decisions.\textsuperscript{2}

The cosmopolitan cultural turn has been deeply important for grounding internationalism in the impure spaces of real-world politics and in the habits and behaviors of ordinary people, but it buries an analytical opportunity by creating an opposition between the idealism of the concept and the reality of the lived situations in which it functions. Rather than retool unachievable internationalisms into achievable cosmopolitanisms, I return to moments in modernist fiction when the line between the unachievable and the achievable is being actively discovered. I approach the unachieved ideal as an opportunity to reflect on the value of the ideal in the first place and to see whether what was accomplished might have something new and interesting to offer in our quest to discover what qualifies as a possible and worthwhile pursuit. Rather than being embarrassed by internationalism’s chimeric associations, in \textit{Chimeras of Form} I reflect on standards of judgment as they inflect the art as well as the politics of global thought.

Such standards of judgment are at play in the Rushdie epigraph at the beginning of this chapter. The flummoxed artist of the quote is Baal, a poet in the ancient city of Jahilia, who regards his chimeras of form as “failed art” because they cannot bring aesthetic order to his country’s rapid changes.\textsuperscript{3} Baal associates literary form with standards of organization that promote harmony, consistency, and unity. His ideal of form prevents him from seeing a countermodel of wholeness in his actually existing sentences. Their mixture of high and low language (classical and demotic) and their conjuncture of paradoxical figures of feeling (images of love and elements of farce) do not negate the discontinuous and discordant movement of history but instead conjure its very real effects through the organized arrangement of literary representation. What Baal perceives as incoherent and therefore vain art, Rushdie promotes as an autoreferential description of his own style. He accordingly turns Baal’s failure into a test of his assumptions about art forms as well as communal forms. Baal’s intention is not simply to capture or portray his country but quite specifically to “map” it. Mapping a country glazes aesthetic order with cartographic abstraction and evokes a clearly bordered shape on a political map. Chimeras of form, by showing that aesthetic and historical processes overlap, distort this image. Baal’s failure to map his country in
art conveys the vital truth that the boundaries of collectivity are never as given as a cartographic outline would suggest.  

By using Baal’s failed art to challenge the containment function of aesthetic form, Rushdie draws out the ideological tension between literary form as a stabilizing force and literary form as a tool for capturing the perpetual motion of communities themselves. This perpetual motion, which Baal experiences as the uncontrollable intensity of change, dovetails with what Jed Esty has identified as “the central contradiction of modernity . . . the state of permanent transition.”  

Chimeras of Form takes up the oxymoron of “permanent transition” not only as the unconscious expression of uneven development within the world-system (Esty’s primary use) but also as part of the self-conscious anxiety of being modern, of making one’s way in the world without recourse to the myth of knowable community.

Raymond Williams famously coined the term “knowable communities” to designate those “traditional” novels that depict social relations in communicable ways, whether as the product of face-to-face encounters or as the outgrowth of transparent forms of connection among characters. By contrast, he associates the modernization of literature with the decline of the knowable:

Identity and community became more problematic, as a matter of perception and as a matter of valuation, as the scale and complexity of the characteristic social organization increased . . . the increasing division and complexity of labour; the altered and critical relations between and within social classes: in changes like these any assumption of a knowable community—a whole community, wholly knowable—became harder and harder to sustain.  

In this passage, Williams is careful to specify the conditions of modernization responsible for puncturing the myth of communities as knowable, but in his larger essay he is equally at pains to address the role of “the observer’s position” and “matters of consciousness” in a literary work’s production of the knowable. The knowable comes under pressure not just from the modernization of modes of production, exchange, and social organization but also from the organization of literary works that destabilize the conventions of selectivity and social recognition, which produce the security and the allure of the knowable. I refer to such works as
modernist, and I maintain that such a definition is of a piece with a less exclusive, more attitudinal turn toward theorizing modernism’s relationship to modernity.

Working against the strictures of the knowable, writers and texts representative of modernist internationalism beyond Europe manage to reveal the conflict between imagining community as a stable, idealized entity—such as, for example, the “future heaven” of the postcolonial nation—and capturing nations, colonies, and continents’ very real immersion in transitional and transnational regimes of power. Their own experiments in formal dissolution and regeneration suggest that properly contending with the permanent transitions of a globalized modernity demands resituating ideals of communal order and identity within the actual indefiniteness of a “country,” a geographic designation that simultaneously, and not incidentally for my purposes, connotes both the nation and a region of undetermined expanse.

**Chimeras of Form** treats the impossibly restless image of “a country that blows into a new form every day” as a poetic distillation of modernity itself, unfolding under what Pheng Cheah has called “the uneven and shifting force field of the cosmopolitical.” For Cheah, the force field is a metaphor for the “mutating” economic, political, and cultural matrices of imperialism and neocolonial globalization whose “material linkages” are the proper focus of cosmopolitical critique. Without disputing the vital importance of analyzing this force field, I find Cheah’s way of writing about the cosmopolitical to be more deterministic than historically contingent, despite his many references to the force field’s constantly changing patterns.

To elicit the dynamic reading practices for which his theory calls, my own method draws on Caroline Levine’s recent defense of formalism. Levine treats the relationship between aesthetic forms and social forms as one of unpredictability, in which no one element dominates the others. She tracks the volatility of these colliding formal types and illustrates how the force fields governing large social orders are actually form fields. The shift to thinking about not just art but also political communities and institutions as having formal attributes leads Levine toward a new configuration of the relationship between literature and society in which no forces—even those as powerful as capitalism and colonialism—are left unaltered by their manifestation through multiple orders of form. Levine’s formal logic produces a powerfully distributive explanatory model
of collective life—one that forgoes “an exclusive focus on ultimate causality” in favor of strategic thinking about “the artificiality and contingency of social arrangements.”

How to analyze the social arrangements of a variety of collectivities, empowered and disempowered, enduring and transient, territorialized and deterritorialized, remains a question without a ready answer. Although I do not correlate literary and institutional forms exactly as Levine does, I do follow her distributive approach, and I likewise attempt to break down large-scale processes (in my case, processes of globalization) without getting locked into narratives that evacuate individual agency or absolutely separate literary consciousness from political consciousness. The exemplary chimeras of literary form in this book are chosen expressly because they provoke counterintuitive understandings of wholeness, in which forms do not contain contradictions but construct and channel them. Such literary forms are particularly useful for drawing out the artificiality and contingency of communal forms, and for making them more susceptible to rethinking within an incompletely knowable global landscape.

Hence, Chimeras of Form substitutes a chimeric model of literary form for a containment model in its characterization of modernism, and further theorizes modernist internationalism as doing the kind of cosmopolitical critique that deploys rather than denies epistemological crisis. Such a critique begins not by negating but by engaging the more radical elements within the ideologically mixed-up history of the articulation of modernist internationalism. Instead of dividing radical from pragmatic energies, I consider how idealized dreams of internationalism are staged and situated, restrained or wholeheartedly pursued, such that modernism’s chimeras of form reveal the analytical power embedded in aspirations—even, and perhaps especially, when those aspirations face accusations of fantasy, triviality, or misguided illusion. Though the writers and works I feature stretch the usual parameters of canonical modernism, they are accurately called modernist because they do not look to literature to overcome the real illegibilities, distortions, and affective conflicts that pervade attempts to think through collectivity or to do cosmopolitical critique. Rather, they allow those irregularities room to flourish, and reveal surprising arenas in which anticolonial and global thought converge.

The case studies in this book, which exemplify chimeras of form, include autotranslations, alternating asymmetry, stories without plots, archival legends, and root canals. With the exception of autotranslations,
which are a known mode of writing, I have opted for enigmatic titles that, in the cases of alternating asymmetry (James Joyce), stories without plots (Claude McKay and George Lamming), and the root canal (Zadie Smith), bring famously gnomic formal innovations of the authors out for interpretation. These forms of writing reveal the many dimensions of a chimeric modernism because, taken together, they mediate disputes about the real and the unreal (as well as the realistic and the unrealistic); they undermine a strong division between trivial fancies and heroic vision; and they challenge aesthetic and communal categories of success denoted by organic wholeness and self-sufficiency. Chimeras of form are not examples of what Rushdie’s Baal called “failed art,” in the evaluative sense of a review or self-appraisal, but they are forms that demonstrate devalued or unappreciated forms of creativity (such as translation) and that foreground amputation and incompleteness (such as in stories without plots) as strategies for rethinking definitions of the work of art built on originality, wholeness, cohesion, and autonomy.

In reading chimeras of form as figures of modernist internationalism, I propose that rethinking such unifying principles of aesthetic form, as the writers in this study do, enables them to question how those same principles (originality, wholeness, cohesion, and autonomy) operate as measures of the identity and health of communities, particularly national ones. Anti-internationalist principles of nationhood stress the value of homogeneity, isolation, and even exceptionalism in the creation of the nation’s cultural fabric, which itself is often presented as the organic outgrowth of tradition. The works in this study reveal how concerns with the mechanics of form, medium, and compositional methods—the tools of art—led their authors not only to think about nations as contingent constructions but also to imagine what kinds of national constructions might be continuous with or even dependent upon the critical valuing of international and supranational solidarities. By distinguishing between state sovereignty and national autarky (Tagore), by preserving the distinctions of nationality through the arousal of shared regional and diasporic affiliations (McKay and Lamming), and by discerning the provisionality of communal scales in producing local and global narratives of inequality (Smith), the writers examined in Chimeras of Form contribute to the political imagination of internationalism. They rethink the exclusivity of national loyalty and explore the impact of global forces on
alternative and less codified forms of collective life. With them as my guides, I show how strategies of breaking down, reassembling, and generally testing the wholeness of the work of art become essential to the analysis of cosmopolitical conflicts.

**Internationalism: Utopia and Reality**

The chimera: a mythological monster of disparate parts; a biological creature containing within it two or more genetically distinct types of cells; an implausible dream that nonetheless lives on. Chimeras of form: attempts to graft together theoretically separate spheres such as art and politics, nature and culture, but also attempts of a particularly wary kind in which the writer’s agency in the world is a matter of self-reflection and debate rather than a fait accompli. At its broadest level, *Chimeras of Form* takes to the borderlands of impossibility and possibility, fracture and assembly, artistic agency and self-doubt. It shows how modernist writers’ analytic work in these borderlands participates in philosophical and cultural debates about internationalism that have persisted since the early twentieth century. The chimera’s knotting together of threatening change and harmless fantasy makes it a powerful symbolic figure for internationalism, a discourse punctuated, on the one hand, by dramatic calls for transformation in the loyalties of ordinary people and the realpolitik of states, and, on the other hand, by recurring doubts about its efficacy in affecting either ordinary people or state policy.

Internationalism’s battle for legitimacy is observable across the ideological spectrum. Liberal philosopher Thomas Nagel has described cosmopolitan internationalism and its attendant “chimera” of global justice as a moral aspiration without political teeth, whereas Marxian cultural critic Fredric Jameson has famously remarked that, in the wake of socialist internationalism’s failure, “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than a world without capitalism.” Calls for internationalism on the extreme ends of liberal and socialist thought have tended toward normative universalisms that evacuate cultural specificity. Strong cosmopolitans, such as Martha Nussbaum, will demand that a citizen of the United States should care as much about a person in a country they have never visited as they would about their fellow Americans; whereas strong socialists, such
as the conveners of the 2013 World Social Forum, will declare that, in their efforts to end historically situated and diverse forms of discrimination and oppression, “there is no solution within the capitalist system!”

Such blanket statements certainly can be judged naive and unrealistic, in light of the differential ties that bind people and the differential effects of the varieties of systems that comprise global capitalism, but the demands for change that their chimeras impose can also serve what Sianne Ngai calls a “diagnostic function”; that is, they can help us make sense of “representational predicaments” that connect the psychic desire for a different kind of world to the material constraints of social and political life. Although Ngai’s claim pertains to ugly or weak feelings, unsuitable to taking political action, my claim for the diagnostic power of chimeras pertains to the way they (and the literary forms they animate) reveal the tacit terms of ideality and reality operating within our notions of what separates powerful illusions from vain ones.

Nationalism, as many have argued, is a powerful illusion, one with traction over the hearts and minds of people and connectedness to the institutions of state that give it a concrete political apparatus. Internationalism, if we adopt Nagel’s view, is a vain illusion, unless it eventually paves the way for “global sovereignty”—in others words, for the existence of some kind of world state whose political form will attain the concreteness that nation-states now enjoy. The aspiration toward a global sovereign, qualitatively different from empire, was debated by H. G. Wells and Rabindranath Tagore in 1930 as part of an event sponsored by the League of Nations’ International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. Wells was for and Tagore was against, and the reasons for their differences will be addressed in chapter 1. But Nagel envisions a state-centered theory of justice in action: justice depends upon the existence of a sovereign government, which can coordinate and control the collective self-interest of its people and set the parameters by which justice is judged. Outside of states, the rules of justice do not apply.

Nagel arrives at the conclusion that international relations are anarchic and global justice is chimeric via Thomas Hobbes, but a more immediately relevant intellectual ancestor is E. H. Carr. Carr’s book *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* (1939), which he originally wished to title *Utopia and Reality*, set the theoretical vocabulary for what would become the academic discipline of international relations. Carr is known in that discipline for shaping and propounding the “realist” view to which Nagel subscribes
and for discrediting the “utopian” strategies of Wilsonian internationalism to foster cooperation across nations. Although Carr was derisive of Wilsonian internationalism for taking up a set of positions that took morality rather than self-interest as the starting point for its policies, what he really condemned were its hypocrisies, the ways in which organizations like the League of Nations would sponsor cultural internationalism while perpetuating economic imperialism within and beyond Europe. The shortcomings of Wilsonian internationalism’s specific utopianism are well known, but Carr’s muted defense of utopianism’s place in international politics is not so well known, particularly because of his reputation in the discipline of International Relations as the resolute political realist.  

In *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, Carr regarded international politics as an “infant science,” and he saw it, like other infant sciences, as “markedly and frankly utopian . . . in the initial stage in which wishing prevails over thinking.” Wilsonian internationalism was based on wishing, and it was the job of international political scientists to correct the balance of aspiration with analysis. Indeed, achieving a balance of utopia and reality, as opposed to just siding with realism, was for Carr the hallmark of mature thought:

There is a stage where realism is the necessary corrective to the exuberance of utopianism, just as in other periods utopianism must be invoked to counteract the barrenness of realism. Immature thought is predominantly purposive and utopian. Thought which rejects purpose altogether is the thought of old age. Mature thought combines purpose with observation and analysis.

Carr’s definition of maturity in the science of international politics, much as in the story of Goldilocks, is about finding out what kind of thought is “just right.” An immoderate realism, beholden to “what was and what is” is “impotent to alter the course of events.” Moderated by utopianism, mature thought recognizes that “theory, as it develops out of practice and develops into practice, plays its own transforming role in the process.”

Despite my reservations about Carr’s rhetoric of youth and maturity, which imply developmental stages that the literature in this study challenges, his statement about theory and practice resonates strongly with my reading of the Rushdie epigraph. Rushdie combines Baal’s idealist desire
INTRODUCTION

for form with his written chimeras of form to revise literary form’s theo-
retical association with order and containment. Combining utopianism
with realism in the self-consciousness of chimeras (wishes that know
themselves in some way to be false) allows Rushdie to give form to the
dynamism of historical processes that Baal sets out to freeze.

The chimeras of form underpinning modernist internationalism are
thus not moves toward formlessness but literary attempts to redirect and
diffuse the existing frameworks through which international attachment
and global justice might be recognized. If a state-centric view of politics
views international relations as anarchic, a more cosmopolitical view
would strive to develop frameworks that target the relationships between
groups and theorize accountability across different kinds of collectivities.
The writers in this study, like Carr, attempt to bring shape and form to
the “formless” space of international politics; however, they are not inter-
ested in turning that project into a science or erasing the imbalances of
utopianism and realism that would have us wonder whether internation-
alism is visionary or just laughter in the dark. Their uncertainties about
their own artistic agency play into their efforts to push the limits of
aesthetic and social representation. By breaking down literary forms but
also rebuilding them, they explore how political communities of various
scales (nations, empires, and federations) create the lines between order
and disorder, alien and citizen, which states claim only to police. From
Tagore to Smith, these writers also try to reshape, if not the borders of
political communities, at least the borders of reader consciousness, so
that the idea of justice may more readily extend from the national to
the global.

In 1939, Carr wrote, “Frank acceptance of the subordination of economic
advantage to social ends, and the recognition that what is economi-
cally good is not always morally good, must be extended from the na-
tional to the international sphere.”\textsuperscript{15} In 2016, even though progress has
been made (“fair trade” is part of the vernacular now), we are not at the
level of frank acceptance for global social justice. The story that \textit{Chimeras of Form} tells thus has a purpose that goes beyond academic endeavor; my
own chimera, or “genial illusion,” to quote Joyce, is that a study that helps
internationalism to gain acceptance in the domains of sentiment and
culture will ease its acceptance into the domain of politics.

Although there is no guarantee that increasing the cultural acceptance
of internationalism will breed political change—or global economic redis-
tribution, which is even tougher—there is something to be said for taking stock of an ideal like global justice, the debate of which lends insight into the intellectual history of globalization. Samuel Moyn, who is, like Nagel, a firm skeptic of global justice’s ability to translate its formation as a “scholarly movement” into “real-world outcomes,” has nonetheless historicized the philosophical emergence of the ideal, to fascinating effect. 16 Moyn recovers the disavowed conjuncture between cosmopolitan theories of global justice, rooted in the foundational work of political philosopher Charles Beitz, and the alliance-based Third-Worldism of developing countries in the New International Economic Order (NIEO) of the 1970s. The NIEO brought the values of Third-Worldism to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1974, where its proponents pressed for the protection of postcolonial national economies (including the nationalization of resources), restitution for resources exploited under colonialism, and special measures to ensure the development of the world’s poorest countries. 17 In an essay entitled “Justice and International Relations” (1975), Beitz supported the NIEO platform as consistent with the goal of global justice, but he later backed away from that position in his 1979 book Political Theory and International Relations, which argued for a more liberal conception of global justice rooted in the rights of the individual over the self-determination of states.

In tracing the course of Beitz’s “deradicalization” and his eventual distancing from NIEO positions, Moyn nonetheless finds in those positions an “alternative version of global justice” built around policy prescriptions for restructuring trade rather than expanding sovereign power over larger and larger state formations. 18 Whereas state-centered theories of justice, such as that of John Rawls or Nagel, abstractly disentangled states, both Third-Worldist and cosmopolitan theories acknowledged the history of economic and political interdependencies that make such disentangling impossible, even if cosmopolitan theories ultimately softened the revolutionary edge of Third-Worldism’s collectivist demands.

Like Moyn, I examine the often occluded interface between anticolonial and liberal theories of internationalism, though I am less interested in chronicling anticolonialism’s containment by liberalism than I am in examining how these dueling-yet-imbricated discourses might be mediated and illuminated by literary works irreducible to ideological agendas. If the scholarly concept of global justice is grounded in very real historical demands still waiting to be met, then the chimeras of literary form
brought forth by modernist internationalism take us into the mix of intimate experiences, disappointed expectations, and recalcitrant aspirations that lend immediacy and embodiment to historical reckonings.

**Deprovincializing Modernism**

The subtitle of my study, *Modernist Internationalism Beyond Europe*, demands some explanation, especially because the version of modernist internationalism I am offering is remarkably different from the European formulation that came to be institutionalized in the 1950s and 1960s. In his introduction to *Modernism: An Anthology*, Lawrence Rainey recalls several early approaches to accounting for modernism, which constitute possible origin stories for the movement’s incorporation into the academy. Most influential of these early forays was Harry Levin’s 1956 essay “What Was Modernism?,” which proceeded to define the category by populating it with specific writers. Building a canon, which this essay did, was thus key to establishing the definition of modernism, and Levin’s selections and pedagogy played a profound role in shaping modernism’s association with elitism and gatekeeping.

To reinforce this point, Rainey recalls a legendary Harvard course taught by Levin entitled simply “Joyce, Proust, and Mann,” in which students were required to read the complete *À la recherche*, *Ulysses*, and one or more novels by Thomas Mann, with either Proust or Mann being read in the original language. This syllabus contributed to the formidable image of modernism and to its further definition as a “pan-European and cosmopolitan phenomenon, one promulgated by an international community effectively removed from the contingencies of time and place.”

Other early accounts of modernism include that of Graham Hough, who inadvertently suggested Anglo-American modernism’s first period boundaries when he claimed that “the years between 1910 and the Second World War saw a revolution in the literature of the English language.” Though Hough oriented modernism around the relationship of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Rainey classifies his and Levin’s early definitions of modernism as “neoclassicist.” They conceived of modernism not just as rebelling against romantic and Victorian conceptions of art but also as searching for deep symbolic structures of order that might serve as a refuge from the chaos of contemporary history.
Anyone privy to debates in modernist studies since the early 2000s will know that this neoclassicist vision of modernist internationalism, centered on politically disinterested expatriates in Western European nations has come under profound pressure from all sides. A 2001 essay by Susan Stanford Friedman entitled “Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism” revisits the task of field definition begun by Levin, but in a less positivist, more excursive vein. Her essay’s conjunctural approach to the modern, modernism, and modernity as well as its tendency to produce, in the language of jazz, variations on their definitions, shows how much scholarly accounts of modernism have migrated away from the early nominal accounts of Levin and Hough, and even from the later gatekeeping practices of Hugh Kenner, who in 1984 also defined modernism as an international phenomena and, by that criteria, excluded Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and William Carlos Williams as “provincial” writers. Such selectivity prompts Friedman to assert, “If he [Kenner] had included these writers [Woolf, Faulkner, Williams] in his pool of modernists to begin with, his generalizations about modernism would have been different. So might his concept of the internationalism of modernism if his pool had included writers from Africa, South America, and Asia.” Jahan Ramazani has also called attention to the discrepancy between modernism’s “vaunted internationalism” and its critical history of circumscription, arguing for the traversal of disciplinary boundaries separating modernist and postcolonial studies. Friedman’s and Ramazani’s important reappraisals of modernist internationalism made the paradigm’s own provinciality hard to ignore, as did the flourishing of scholarly studies in the 2000s under the rubric of what Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz called the “new modernist studies.”

So why return to the fusty category of modernist internationalism when so much rich work has been done within a new set of vocabularies emphasizing the transnational networks, material contexts, and medial variety of modernism? Because I want to generate friction between the term’s initial institutionalizing function and the revisionary account on offer in the present work. Modernist internationalism is not a theoretically abstract principle but a historically articulated category open to infiltration and rearticulation precisely because we maintain a record of its past associations. Whereas modernist internationalism has, with the hindsight of postcolonial and transnational methods, become associated with Eurocentric aestheticism and an exclusive politics of literariness, my ac-
count begins by recontextualizing modernist internationalism within the historically specific milieu of the interwar years, when multiple internationalisms—political and aesthetic, European and non-European—commingled. By taking modernist internationalism beyond Europe, I aim to deprovincialize the category rather than supersede or supplant it. This means exposing the assumptions at work within the making of an exclusivist modernist canon and illustrating how the concept of modernist internationalism grows and changes when we consider literary texts from across multiple continents, and internationalisms from across a variety of ideologies.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that deprovincializing modernism is something particularly unprecedented. Far from it; the archive I assemble in this book may be entertained as modernist thanks in great part to the conceptual pressure and stretch that previous studies in the field have already placed on the category. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel’s prescient collection Geomodernisms rewrites the modernism of Anglo-American New Criticism by taking a “locational approach” to modernism’s diverse geographies and historical contexts. Their formulation of modernism as “geocultural” and plural laid early groundwork for rethinking modernism through a global lens.

Pamela Caughie’s collection Disciplining Modernism frontally addresses the difficulties of rendering modernist studies interdisciplinary, especially when definitions of modernism and modernity vary dramatically across the arts, philosophy, and the social sciences. By channeling our understanding of modernism through these disciplinary realms, Caughie’s collection yields an important insight for deprovincializing modernism: that clarifying confusion about definitional terms may ultimately matter less than explaining with precision the “divergent perspectives and motives” that create such confusion. I take to this to mean that, although standardizing terms such as “modernism” and “modernity” is important for critical dialogue, it cannot tell us as much about those terms as can understanding their splintering through actual use.

The differential ways in which modernism and modernity have been invoked by writers across nations and periods inflect my work in Chimeras of Form. My tendency toward multiplying strains of modernist internationalism rather than homogenizing them is also anticipated by Mark Wollaeger’s Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms, which offers a large-
scale vision of modernist study that replaces positivist, panoramic definitions of modernism with hermeneutical reflection on the methods by which scholars identify works as modernist across a variety of regions and languages. 27

Paul Saint-Amour has retrospectively labeled such collective efforts to rethink modernism as a form of descriptively weak theory in which the definition of modernism has become increasingly associative and probabilistic as opposed to nominal and binary (e.g., defining works as either modernist or not modernist). 28 The waning of a strong theory of modernism, with its exclusivist notions and gatekeeping functions, has led to the waxing of modernist studies as a field. Like descriptive weakening, deprovincializing modernism (as I use the phrase) is meant to draw out and name preexisting currents within modernist studies that may not have been parsed in such terms before. It is also intended, perhaps surprisingly, given the “beyond Europe” of my subtitle, to use the momentum gained from the project of provincializing Europe to rethink Europe’s symbolic function in scholarship on modernism and modernity.

Since the publication of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s seminal book Provincializing Europe, the titular idea has guided progressivist critics looking to understand experiences of modernity outside of European geographies and chronologies. 29 “Beyond Europe” has meant not only abandoning the restricted vision that metonymically took European thought for universal thought (Eurocentrism) but also questioning the use of European categories of cultural history to explain the cultural production of non-Europeans. The endeavors within modernist studies to address non-European literatures have certainly overcome the restricted vision of modernist internationalism’s earlier institutional history, but the question of whether they have overcome diffusionist or assimilationist paradigms of knowledge production remains a contentious one, often depending on whether scholars view the categories of modernism and modernity as “incontestably European in origin.” 30 Proponents of alternative modernities have, on the face of it, eschewed such a claim in order to point to the intellectual and creative autonomy of non-European cultures, whereas proponents of a singular modernity have embraced its Europeananness in order to emphasize the undeniable economic differentials that separate the metropoles and peripheries of former European empires. 31
Despite the opposition of these positions, the structures of the debate they have provoked have, sometimes purposefully and sometimes unwittingly, reinforced Europe’s position as agent of empire and a standard of modernity, with alternatives arrayed around it. Such a narrative leaves something to be desired for many different parties. For those who work on the internal power structures of Europe (for example, in colonial Ireland, Eastern Europe, or Scandinavia), it leaves a reductive view of the continent unexamined. For those who study non-European cultures’ contributions to modernism and modernity, it yields a relativism that leaves the power structures of economic and cultural development unaddressed.

The move toward deprovincializing epistemological categories avoids some of the impasses of the modernity debates by shifting their terrain away from origins to encounters. An emphasis on encounters shows that orienting conversations about modernity around singularity and plurality cedes too much to Europe from the outset. As Gary Wilder has argued:

Modern, concrete universalizing processes (like capitalism) were not confined to Europe. Nor were concepts of universality (or concepts that became universal) simply imposed by Europeans or imitated by non-Europeans. They were elaborated relationally and assumed a range of meanings that crystallized concretely through use.32

To alight on the origins of modernity, whether European, Asian, or multiple, is not the only way to study historical power relations or to overcome ongoing epistemological inequities. Rather, we should question the foundation of originality itself and, moreover, be wary of confirming provenance as a measure of thought’s identity or natural belonging to a certain territory. Wilder builds on Susan Buck-Morss’s notion of “the communism of the idea” when he argues that “supposedly European categories of political modernity . . . self-determination, emancipation, equality, justice, and freedom” are not the property of Europe but part of the shared legacy of modernity.33 Tracing the history of concepts like modernism and decolonizing them by exposing the power relationships embedded in their making is one way in which scholars of modernism and modernity can ensure they are deprovincializing their fields, as opposed to simply expanding them.34

*Chimeras of Form* returns to the first half of the twentieth century to recover a series of colonial encounters that brings peripheral European
introduction

(specifically Irish) and non-European (specifically South Asian and Caribbean) experiences of modernity to the core of modernist internationalism’s aesthetic and communal experimentation. By doing so, the book reveals modernist literature’s engagement with the international as an emergent scale of analysis in the interwar era. The idea of an interconnected and securitized world was already a salient concept in the early twentieth century. Technologies such as international standard time contributed to an increased awareness of the global simultaneity of collective existence, while the institution of passport requirements for travel across European empires and their colonies following World War I created discrepancies in raced and gendered groups’ experiences of transnational mobility that were hard to miss. Modernist internationalism beyond Europe addresses itself to such globalizing processes of modernity. It coheres around artistic efforts to rethink notions of autonomy and organicism in literary form and attends to how a subset of modernist formal experimentation contributed to intellectual projects of evaluating internationalisms of diverse political persuasions. All the writers in this study inject perspectivism, collage, and revision not only into their literary forms and compositional methods but also into their political theories of collective membership, affiliation, and action. Rethinking autonomy probably does not sound traditionally modernist; perspectivism and collage no doubt do. Although it is undeniable that many of this study’s featured works meet the threshold of “modernist” established by preceding typologies of modernist form and periodizing rubrics, it is not my aim, as should be apparent by now, to shore up a strict prototype of modernism against those who would use the term even more flexibly than I have here. I support undertakings that theorize modernism differently, provisionally rather than definitively, and with an eye for the discrepancies between the literary institutionalization of modernist internationalism and the lived encounters of a one and unequal global modernity.

Such latitude is reasonably met with certain questions and criticisms—some particular to this study and some more far-reaching: Aren’t there other writers and works—say, W. E. B. Du Bois’s The Souls of Black Folk and Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas—that have been historically marginalized from the modernist canon and are directly concerned with matters of international solidarity? Doesn’t using the largeness and vagueness of global modernity as an index for modernism flatten out the distinctiveness of the “high modernism” that occupies a solid and orienting
place within European and Anglo-American narratives of literary history.\textsuperscript{39}

My answer to both these questions is yes. I cannot claim that Chimeras of Form is an exhaustive study of the kind of modernist internationalism it outlines. Its case studies are exemplary and not all-inclusive of efforts to come to terms with the growing unknowability of communities. The geographic spread of the project purposefully troubles teleological paradigms of literary history, which tend to favor evolutionary stories of literary development and to prize the strict causalities that are more possible to assert when working within a bounded territory.\textsuperscript{40}

In offering a sampling of writers who have been traditionally divvied up into different primary groups (Indian literature, in the case of Tagore; international modernism or Irish literature for Joyce; the Harlem Renaissance for McKay; Caribbean literature for Lamming; Canadian for Michael Ondaatje; British for Smith), I am arguing for what sociologist Mark Granovetter calls “the cohesive power of weak ties.”\textsuperscript{41} Such ties lend insight into relationships across groups and illuminate elements of social structure that are obscured by attention to intragroup dynamics. My principle of selection is thus native to the critical challenge set by internationalism and cosmopolitics themselves. To understand the relationships between different identity groups, as well as the thicker and thinner bonds that comprise what Bruce Robbins calls “attachment at a distance,” we must be willing to pursue more diffuse configurations of literary culture, especially when diffuseness enables us to target the eccentricities of national literature traditions.\textsuperscript{42} Such eccentricities might include translated works, such as Tagore’s, whose English autotranslations of his Bengali writings internalized the demand of writing for multiple audiences; works composed outside the author’s country of birth and with no particular national audience yet in existence, as with McKay’s \textit{Banjo} or Lamming’s \textit{The Emigrants}; or works that thematize and theorize supranational state formations, such as Zadie Smith’s “The Embassy of Cambodia,” a short story that ties the fate of its characters more to the European Union than to England.

When I deploy modernist internationalism as a category to be interrogated as well as remade, I am allowing the chimeras of form that populate this study to affect the book’s own methodological self-understanding. Rather than divide modernism, postcolonialism, and globalism into
discrete and datable periods of literary history, *Chimeras of Form* treats them as analytical apertures onto the concurrent and unfinishable projects of modernity, decolonization, and internationalism. In the suffix shift from unfinished projects to unfinishable projects, I declare my difference from philosophers of modernity such as Jürgen Habermas, who retain faith in the Enlightenment precepts of progress. Whereas “unfinished” embeds a telos of liberation and accomplishment that defines Habermasian optimism, “unfinishable” acknowledges the intractability of economic inequality, neocolonialism, racism, and various other kinds of oppression, the structural parameters of which have shifted but not disappeared across a globalized modernity.

The sustaining mood of *Chimeras of Form* is thus, apropos of modern-day usages of the word chimera, pessoptimism. An ambivalent mixture of innocence and experience, hope and doubt, pessoptimism invites in some of the negativity that utopianism usually keeps at bay. The chimeras collected in this book capture the elements of dispute and disbelief at work in determining the conditions of possibility for social transformation. They yield a modernist internationalism in which the historical experiences of colonial dependency, racial exclusion, peripheralness, and various other forms of economic and cultural subordination are neither simply overcome nor left behind.

**Artificial Life: Chimeric Form and the Modernist Grotesque**

The taint of negativity that accompanies the chimera, its designation as everything from a monstrous body to a foolish dream, lends perverse insight into the received norms governing our definitions of proper bodies and wise ambitions. Although the task of tracing a full genealogy of such received norms of body and mind is beyond the scope of the present project, it is useful to consider how the chimera, long held as an exemplary figure of the irrational and the grotesque, has functioned within theories of imaginative writing and the imagination in general. By examining the role the chimera has historically played in determining imaginative and aesthetic value, we gain a better sense of the literary and communal assumptions that are disturbed by the formal experiments highlighted in this book.
In his classic work of criticism *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), M. H. Abrams argued that eighteenth-century empirical theories of the mind, as represented by David Hume and Alexander Gerard among others, often invoked “mythological grotesques” to exemplify the action of the imagination and its grounding in, even subordination to, sensation. Abrams cited Gerard’s *Essay on Genius* (1774), which used the chimera to illustrate the empiricist principle that the imagination’s claims to novelty are always a product of its reassembly of sensible perception: “When Homer formed the idea of the Chimera, he only joined into one animal, parts which belonged to different animals; the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a serpent.” The chimera is a product of mental processes that Abrams classifies under “the mechanical theory of literary invention,” which, contrary to what he calls genius, relies on the “less perfect energies of art” to assemble a new object out of existing materials, rather than on the more perfect energies of nature, which does not just assemble but converts extrinsic material into that which is intrinsically essential. Gerard compares genius to a plant converting “moisture from the earth” into “nourishment.” With that metaphor, he offers a protoromantic organic theory of literary invention that looks forward to the “full development of the organism as aesthetic model.”

The chimera, as an example of what, in the wake of romanticism, would be described as “mere” mechanical invention, thus provides a degraded figure of invention, the impurity of which is specifically linked to its alignment with the less perfect processes of art rather than the more perfect processes of nature. In “Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing” (1742), Hume also adduces the chimera to explain inferior forms of imaginative invention, but unlike Gerard, he restricts himself to the more narrow field of writing and distinguishing that which is “fine writing” from that which is crude. Quite interestingly, the chimera is an example of the crudeness that arises not as the opposite of refinement but as an excess of it:

On the other hand, productions, which are merely surprising, without being natural, can never give any lasting entertainment to the mind. To draw chimeras is not, properly speaking, to copy or imitate. The justness of the representation is lost, and the mind is displeased to find a picture, which bears no resemblance to any original. Nor are such excessive refinements more agreeable in the
epistolary or philosophic style, than in the epic or tragic. Too much ornament is a fault in every kind of production. Uncommon expressions, strong flashes of wit, pointed similes, and epigrammatic turns, especially when they recur too frequently, are a disfigurement, rather than any embellishment of discourse.\(^46\)

Copying and imitating do not connote a dull mimeticism to Hume; they are methods by which the writer achieves a balance, a “just medium” between simplicity and refinement, so that the grace of the natural is perceived and preserved. The chimera’s excessive refinement (note how the word refinement lends to artistry the mechanical connotations of a refinery) renders it a “disfigurement” rather than an “embellishment” of discourse, although it may be more accurate to say the embellishment is what disfigures this organic wholeness of fine writing for Hume: “As the eye, in surveying a Gothic building, is distracted by the multiplicity of ornaments, and loses the whole by its minute attention to the parts; so the mind, in perusing a work overstocked with wit, is fatigued and disgusted with the constant endeavour to shine and surprize” (italics mine). The chimera is both an example of denaturalizing stylistic extravagance and a symbol of the dangers of the grotesque as it evolves from Homeric epic to Gothic architecture.

The chimera’s association with excessive refinement and disorientation of the eye makes it symbolic of a grotesque whose aesthetic effects overlap with the aesthetic effects that modernists in this study are interested in creating. They reconceptualize the empiricist rejection of extravagant stylistic experimentation as the necessary courting of literary difficulty and even illegibility. Such aesthetic values opposed the achievement of simplicity in an effort to push the boundaries of reader identification and to question the self-confirmations of universality and particularity as principles of reading and writing across cultures. In Nationalism, for example, Tagore situated himself between two rejected paths: “the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism,” on one side, and the “self-idolatry of nation-worship,” on the other.\(^47\) For him, autotranslation offered a third way between the polarities of cultural indistinction and cultural autarky—a linguistic vehicle through which to explore the dynamic interplay of illegibility and translatability as initially a condition and later a principle of international exchange.
McKay, in turn, embraced embellishment and disorientation of the eye as a way of stymieing surveillance, both biographically and literarily. Take this anecdote from his autobiography, *A Long Way from Home*:

For the first time in my life [in Morocco] I felt myself singularly free of color-consciousness. I experienced a feeling that must be akin to the physical well-being of a dumb animal among kindred animals, who lives instinctively and by sensations only, without thinking. But suddenly I found myself right up against European intervention and proscription.

A chaoush (native doorman and messenger) from the British Consulate had accosted me in a souk one day and asked whether I was American. I said I was born in the West Indies and lived in the United States and that I was an American, even though I was a British subject, but I preferred to think of myself as an internationalist. The chaoush said he didn’t understand what was an internationalist. I laughed and said that an internationalist was a bad nationalist. He replied gravely: “All the Moors call you an American, and if you are British, you should come and register at the Consulate.” I was amused at his gravity, reinforced by that African dignity which is so impressive in Morocco, especially as I had said I was an internationalist just by way of a joke and without thinking of its radical implications. But I wasn’t aware then how everybody (European and native) was looking for hidden meanings in the simplest phrases. The natives imagine (and rightly enough) that all Europeans are agents of their respective countries with designs upon their own, and the European colonists are suspicious and censorious of visitors who become too sympathetic and friendly with the natives.\(^48\)

I quote McKay at length because his recollection, as it unfolds, puts a privileged idea of disembodied, if not universal, experience within the context of imperial surveillance, where his jokes are inescapably politicized by the paranoid milieu of the French protectorate. He discovers that simplicity is not a feature of such climates where “everybody . . . (European and native) was looking for hidden meanings.” Misunderstanding, tonal dissonance (between McKay’s levity and the chaoush’s gravity), and mutual suspicion are the historical conditions of McKay’s internationalism,
but they are transformed into formal strategies (puns, syntactical ambiguities, plotlessness) in *Banjo* (1929), the novel that he was revising while in Morocco. In fiction, McKay explored playfulness and elusiveness as the survival tactics of migrants without papers or paths to citizenship. To claim the identity of an internationalist—because it was comical, but also because it was inscrutable—illustrates a chimerical kind of unknowability; it interferes with and repurposes categorical language to push against external attempts at classification.

McKay’s internationalism is of an entirely different order from the proposed plans and institutional forms of Wilsonian internationalism that E. H. Carr called utopian. Indeed, his experiences and his transformation of those experiences into art offer a certain kind of historical truth about the dark side of liberal internationalism, lost to the once “infant” and now grown science of international politics. In showing how McKay and other writers contribute to the analysis of international conditions, I am making a case for literature’s contribution to the intellectual history of globalization. Intellectual history, as I invoke it here, refers less to a sub-discipline of history, itself rife with self-definitional and methodological debates, than to a multidisciplinary humanistic project of understanding—in Stefan Collini’s words, “those ideas, thoughts, arguments, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and preoccupations that together made up the intellectual or reflective life of previous societies.” Such a project is necessarily interdisciplinary in scope, but, Collini continues, it benefits from a variety of what may be seen as discipline-specific skills: “the trained sensibilities of the literary critic, alert to all forms of affective and non-literal writing, or the analytical skills of the philosopher, probing the reasoning that ostensibly connects premises and conclusions.”

In attributing to literary works the capability of, if not exactly arguments, their own forms of analytical intervention into global thought, I am hybridizing the “trained sensibilities” of the literary critic with the “analytical skills” of the philosopher. I suspect few literary critics would object to this approach, but those outside the field of literary studies may find it more surprising. Reading literature not just for the lived experience of those who came before us or exist alongside us (albeit in very different ways) but also for the ways in which literary works stage the interaction of ideas with feelings, action, and embodiment in fact addresses one of the old but recurring criticisms of intellectual history: that it is too willing to grant autonomy to ideas (as opposed to human actors or systems) as the
Although self-identified intellectual historians have developed multiple ways of addressing the social context and material distribution of ideas, fiction is often overlooked as a space capable of grounding ideas. It is my contention that it epitomizes a milieu in which the history of thought and the history of writing become inseparable.

The works featured in *Chimeras of Form* lend specific insight into the affective and analytical predicaments of globalization by inviting readers to think about the scale of knowledge and how the boundaries we draw around communities play a role in determining what or who we perceive as unknowable or more difficult to know. A chimeric modernism, informed by the grotesque, grapples with the conjunctures of the known and the unknown, of bounded communities and unbounded forces. Ideologically speaking, it lacks “the encapsulating and enclosing sense” of what Raymond Williams would call, in the wake of *The Country and the City*, the “regional” novel. The regional novel refers to a variety of subgenres that produce knowable communities by imagining their settings as self-contained. Such genres of “provincial” fiction include

the *rentier* novel, the corporation novel, the university novel—in which absorption in the details of an essentially local life depends, ultimately, on not seeing its relations with a more general life: the work which is at the source of rentier income; the market and power relations which are the true source of the corporation’s internal operations and maneuvers; the wider process of learning and resources and access which constitute a particular kind of university.

Williams is performing a materialist critique of the regional novel’s holistic qualities, which has now grown quite familiar, but his interpretation also bears some forgotten insights. He argues that, in projecting the region as “organic” (that is, as an “internal whole”), the regional novel creates the region as an autonomous entity either divorced from external sources of income and labor, in the case of privileged regions, or subject to damaging external forces, in the case of disempowered or endangered regions. In either case, organicism becomes a synonym for the “autonomy” of the community’s formation, which is expressed in spatial terms. The community’s “internal processes” existed prior to and independent of whatever forces now threaten it from the spatial position of “wholly external.”
Williams’s understanding of so-called regional novels helps us to understand what happens when ideologies of organicism go beyond theories of literary inventiveness and start applying to the representation of a variety of actually existing collectivities. They cultivate a sense of wholeness by naturalizing a sense of boundedness. An organic definition of communal form proceeds by retrospectively erasing the history of intersection that enables its existence and reframing it as the history of distinct internal and external forces.

Such communal organicism, which Williams identifies with the corporation and the university, arguably took its most influential and far-reaching form in romantic theories of nationalism, which as Étienne Balibar argued, created “a people” from diverse populations by devising a model of unity, “an internal collective personality,” that was imagined as anticipating the constitution of the state. National unity was so powerful not because it utterly subordinated the internal differences of populations but because it allowed the state to minimize those differences while making the difference between “citizens” and “foreigners” of absolute symbolic value. For Balibar, the organicism of “the nation form,” historically speaking, facilitated isolationism and even racism shaped by the nation's ruling interests. His argument represents a foil to Pheng Cheah’s, which, prizing intention over effect, explains the philosophical motivations behind the organicist positions of German romantic thinkers such as Schlegel, Novalis, or Schleiermacher: to realize “the harmonious unity of individuals in a society that preserves their autonomy” from a “paternalistic state-machine.” Aligning the nation against the state, Cheah argues, the romantics metaphorized the nation as a living, breathing organism, while the state became a machine inimical to freedom.

The tension between the Balibar argument, which accentuates the xenophobic tendencies within national organicism, and the Cheah argument, which accentuates the liberationist values intrinsic to it, captures some of the tensions that exist between cosmopolitan and postcolonial approaches to the nation under globalization. Cosmopolitan accounts prioritize the movements of people and see strong nationalist sympathies, particularly in Europe and North America, as obstacles to instituting more egalitarian and just forms of belonging; postcolonial accounts prioritize the continuing domination of weaker nations by neoliberal policies and see national uprising (where the nation is proximate to the popular)
as the best avenue of resistance to them. Given the power differentials between the Global North and Global South, it makes sense that the critique of nationalism would register differently across these geographies. Yet, it does not seem right to leave the divide as one of irreconcilable differences, in which cosmopolitanism is allied with neoliberal apologia and postcolonialism with a reductionist suspicion of the supranational. Cheah himself proposes that organicism and liberation are dubiously linked in the aftermath of decolonization’s failure to produce genuine emancipation and economic freedom: “the most apposite metaphor for freedom today is not the organism but the haunted nation.”

Drawing on Derrida, Cheah argues that haunting or spectrality is “the inscription of *techne* within the living body: it opens up every proper organic body to the supplementation of artifice.” This supplementation insinuates the presence of death and thus the possibility of a kind of mechanical failure into the organism; however, it also is what conditions the realization of the national ideal in the concrete form of the nation-state. The national spirit, in other words, must struggle to transform the “inorganic prosthesis” of the state into an organic form of popular sovereignty, yet the state’s susceptibility to the deadening forces of global capital renders the national spirit inevitably spectral—a ghostly reminder of the possibility of popular resistance to global capital, but also of the historical failure of that resistance. Although he never uses the term, Cheah’s language renders the actually existing nation-state a chimera in the biotechnological sense: a body that is both born and made, organic and artificial. Spectrality is the result of postcolonial nationalism’s failed idealism, and Cheah is quite explicit about associating the “nation-people” with life, and “global capital” with death.

While I do not share this logic because it ontologizes the division between the national and the global, heroizing the former by irreducibly connecting it to the people and vilifying the latter by irreducibly connecting it to capital, Cheah is right to seek a rapprochement between organism and machine in his metaphorics of the nation-state. However, rather than seeing their imperfect fusion as the corruption of the national ideal by state appropriation, I would use the fusion as a reminder that all real collectivities are prosthetic bodies in which natural and artificial elements are not so easily separated out and judged life-giving or deadening. Indeed, as Cheah himself knows when he aligns spectrality with *techne*, artifice
(and not organicism) is what enables his retheorization of the nation as always already haunted by its contamination.

One final purpose the chimera serves in Chimeras of Form is to provide a new metaphor for actually existing societies—societies shaped by division, hierarchies of power, and the compulsion to construct and reconstruct their identities in ritualized ways. In using the chimera, an example of what the empiricists dubbed mechanical invention and a figure for what Cheah dubs “the contamination of political organicism,” to highlight the constructedness of collective bonds, I am not suggesting that societies are best understood as lifeless machines instead of living organisms, but rather that they should be viewed, analogically speaking, as hybrid forms of artificial life.56

The biotechnological connotation of chimera, familiar now if not in the eighteenth century, helps move beyond the opposition between the organic society that incarnates life and the mechanical society that deadens it, and points to the artifices by which collective feeling comes to seem more spontaneous (i.e., organic) at some scales, such as the national, and more forced (i.e., mechanistic) at other scales, such as the global. Devising new metaphors for collectivity is important because such language organizes our understanding of how, to paraphrase Bruno Latour, the social is assembled and might be reasssembled, at least epistemologically, through projects of redescription.57 The chimeras of form that populate this book participate in the project of redescribing the cosmopolitical landscape. They learn from, but also challenge, the powerful legacy of organicism over literary and communal theories of form, and, most importantly, present modernist grotesques of artful and artificial life as alternatives to it.

**The Chimeras (Chapter Organization)**

Each chapter in Chimeras of Form is organized around a different genre of writing or formal conceit that establishes the relationship between modernist literary practices and internationalist imagination. These “chimeras” take illegibility, distortion, disproportion, and even unboundedness as techniques for analyzing imperial power, transnational mobility, and supranational collective affiliations. They can be understood as grotesque (disfigured or embellished) literary forms in the sense that they fail to meet
aesthetic standards of value based on organicism, and, consistent with the vernacular understanding of a chimeric pursuit, they reflect desires and yield insights that sometimes fail to meet political standards of vision based on rational and heroic action.

As Geoffrey Galt Harpham has argued, the grotesque designates a “species of confusion” that reminds us that disorganization can be as constitutive and purposive a feature of art as organization. Indeed, in Harpham’s definition, the grotesque comes to stand in for the self-reflexivity of an art “that recognizes its own incongruities and paradoxes.” By reflecting on and harnessing the contradictions of their art, the writers examined here not only register their experiences of a globalizing modernity but also reinterpret those experiences as the basis for specific conceptual interventions into debates on national and transnational belonging.

In designing my exposition around a more continuous twentieth and twenty-first century than the usual narratives of rupture around 1945 (the end of World War II and the beginning of decolonization) or 1989 (the end of the Cold War) would imply, I am also arguing for the persistence of premises, articulated under the early twentieth-century umbrella of internationalism, within premises articulated under the late twentieth-century banner of global consciousness. Rather than assert that globally oriented analytical terms such as transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, planetary, and world-system supersede older terms such as empire, anticolonialism, and internationalism, I contend that they sublate them—that is, absorb their lessons in the process of claiming to move past them. As I cut across the divides of the twentieth century, my goal is to make clearer the terms of that sublation, which affects multiple disciplines beyond literary studies. This is not to say that nothing changes in the aftermath of great historical events but that reenergizing the relationship between early and late twentieth-century thought furnishes contemporary “globalization talk” with a richer understanding of its own world-making vocabularies.

I begin my account of modernist internationalism with Tagore, whose autotranslations stand as examples of degraded art for two reasons: first, because translations have traditionally failed to meet the criteria of aesthetic originality and autonomy required of art; and second, because the critical consensus around Tagore’s English works is that they fail to transmit the beauty and flair of their Bengali originals. Rather than discount Tagore’s translations, my first chapter centralizes them. It shows how he turned unglamorous, second-order acts of literary production, such as
compilation, translation, and editing, into modernist strategies for preserving linguistic difference and defending partial unintelligibility as a necessary feature of transnational communication across imperial lines of power.

Through my close readings of Nationalism and The Home and the World, I demonstrate how Tagore treated his Bengali originals not as hermetically sealed, finished works but rather as repositories of material. The circulation and translation of these works into English allowed him to mediate between utopian internationalisms that dreamed of perfect communication between nations and autarkic nationalisms that argued for the cultural self-sufficiency of the nation as a marker of its readiness for sovereignty. Against both these more absolutist positions of globalism and nationalism, Tagore’s autotranslations offer a model of national autonomy that precludes cultural organicism and a model of internationalism that makes imperfect communication a topic of conversation rather than an obstacle to overcome.

Up next is James Joyce’s famed modernist internationalism, which though long understood in terms of his radical break from collective ties and his move to mainland Europe, is reappraised in chapter 2. Since the 1990s, postcolonial and cosmopolitan approaches to Joyce have challenged his reputation as an apolitical aesthete by examining the relationship between his formal innovations and the colonial conditions of Ireland. Chapter 2 builds on such approaches, but it also reconfigures the opposition between modernism’s aesthetic individualism and postcolonialism’s political collectivism by analyzing what I call, borrowing from Walter Benjamin, Joyce’s mediated solidarity with the Irish people. Mediated solidarity entails a serious critique but not an outright rejection of solidarity, whether national or international, particularly when expressions of solidarity rely on rather than contest practices of self-deception.

Joyce treated the self-deceptions embedded within individual ambitions and collective nationalist fantasies as chimeras with the potential to deflate the grandiose comparative claims of Irish cultural revivalism. In a rejoinder to revivalism’s politically powerful but specious comparisons, Joyce developed his own critical comparativism, which I trace under the title of “alternating asymmetry.” This chimera of form addresses the material inequalities that persisted beneath well-intentioned but overstated claims to both Irish and European solidarity. Connecting various formal figures of uneven comparison, from Dubliners (1914) to the “Cyclops”
episode of *Ulysses* (1922), this chapter shows how Joyce plunged into rather than glided over the necessary costs of political unification in his efforts to dispel the self-deceptions internal to the operations of both colonial underdevelopment and anticolonial nationalism.

The third chapter brings together Caribbean-born migrant writers Claude McKay and George Lamming and forms a bridge across the divides of period and national literature that usually assign McKay to the Harlem Renaissance and Lamming either to the category of postwar black British literature or to Caribbean literature. In allowing these two writers to converge, I argue that a paranational version of modernist internationalism emerges in their mutual formal and theoretical engagement with plotlessness. The lack of a plot—understood in the polysemic sense of a planned-out heteronormative life, a collective political program, and a patch of land to call home—becomes the common ground from which McKay’s *Banjo: A Story Without a Plot* and Lamming’s *The Emigrants* explore the fugitive life and fantasies of colonial black subjects within securitized Europe. In deforming plot and finding an alternative idiom, rhythm, and structure for the mobility of stigmatized populations, McKay and Lamming become unlikely guides to contemporary theorists of cosmopolitics and international law (namely, Étienne Balibar, Seyla Benhabib, and Nicolae Gheorghe) who have argued for the accommodation of transience within territorialized models of belonging and citizenship.

The chimera of form featured in my fourth chapter is the archival legend, which is how I classify Billy the Kid from Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and Sailor from his *Anil’s Ghost*. Combining theories of the archive as a space of material collection and artifactual remains, and theories of the legend as a genre of storytelling that cultivates the unreal and the unknowable, I argue that Ondaatje uses archival legends to broach the tensions between isolationism and internationalism, cultural particularity and universal norms of justice. Although some critics have argued that Ondaatje’s collage aesthetics are irresponsible and compound injustice because they obscure the cause and effect of historicist narratives (a criticism that will recall, for many, Georg Lukács’s famous disregard for modernism), this chapter shows that Ondaatje subjects the norms of both international justice and historicist causality to criticism for being inadequately sensitive to cultural memory. Rejecting both the disemboding abstractions of human rights dicta and the embodying practices of historical identification, he uses archival legends as figures of
semi-embodiment brought into being by formal strategies of artifact collection, fragment accretion, and loose assembly. These legends situate universal norms and historical facts within the foggier but no less real realms of national myth and transnational memory. Ondaatje suggests that internationalism must attend to these domains of sentimental remembrance or risk becoming tone deaf to the cosmological gaps that persist in how members of “strong” versus “weak” nations view the effect of colonialism on the global present.

The fifth chapter follows Zadie Smith’s “root canals,” a metaphor and a narrative form she developed in her first novel *White Teeth*, to describe the transnational historical networks obscured by nation-centered accounts of the past. Like Ondaatje, Smith develops forms of unboundedness like the root canal in order to entwine different groups’ collective memories; unlike him, she uses that strategy to address head-on the topic of causality within a global framework. Smith asks what economic, political, and personal conditions bring migrants to Europe and the United Kingdom and, in turn, how residents in these regions might be implicated in stories of migration, distant violence, and global economic inequality that they see as irrelevant to the scope of their everyday lives.

Focusing specifically on Smith’s northwest London fictions, I show how her strategies of formal division (sectioning, chapter construction, and unsynthesized narrative remainders) address the problem of drawing boundaries around accounts of both personal attention and structural inequality. Although drawing boundaries enables political positioning, it also risks blindness to the scales of such positioning—as, for example, when Smith considers what it means to defend a local neighborhood from gentrification while also remaining hospitable to migrants who are drawn to Europe’s prosperous cities for work. Smith uses the dyads of form and matter, parts and wholes, in her fiction to bring ongoing (and sometimes competing) stories of uneven global development to bear on tarnished dreams of upward mobility. One of the most acute observers of fiction’s ambiguously political work in the world, she asks how literature today might contribute to leftist projects of demanding transnational accountability and fighting the privatization of public resources.

Finally, an epilogue brings *Chimeras of Form* up to the very moment of its publication, amid what is being called the global migrant crisis. The years 2014 to 2016 have seen the highest levels of mass displacement in recorded history—higher than in the aftermath of World War II. The
difference today is that most refugees come from beyond Europe and are subject to vulnerability and vilification, largely due to their racialized and religious otherness. The epilogue turns to Kenyan writer Shailja Patel’s *Migritude* (2010) to show how this experimental work of art transforms the figure of the migrant from an object of knowledge into a subject of it.

*Migritude* is a one-woman theatrical show that Patel “re-mediated” into a book, combining the script of the show with a poetic account of the production of both the show and the book. The book version is the epilogue’s focus and the final chimera of form with which to reflect on the major principles of modernist internationalism as I outline them. This re-mediated work does more than simply give voice to an oppressed and precarious collective; from within its conjuncture of performance and print, it contemplates the medium dependency of voice, the indirect political agency of art, and the always incomplete nature of cosmopolitical knowledge. The eponymous migritude emerges as a powerfully contemporary “public feeling” for modernist internationalism—one that is conducive to analyzing and surviving the violence of forced displacement. 62

As these chapter descriptions show, chimeras of form both diffuse and reassemble totalities (suturing fragments, deforming plots, rendering off-balance the part–whole relationships of a work of art) to give expression to internationalisms that have incorporated rather than rejected strategies of illegibility, fantasy, myth, and epistemological self-reflexivity. The combination of the chimera’s dueling definitions as monstrous body, hybrid life form, and discredited ambition creates the perfect storm from which to deprovincialize modernist internationalism not only as an institutional knowledge formation but also as an aspirational and analytical pursuit.

Such deprovincializing begins with the writers themselves—those who have innovated by falling through the cracks of organized politics and ratified forms of resistance. To emblematize their efforts, I offer as the unofficial mascot for this study the genetically engineered FutureMouse from Smith’s *White Teeth*. FutureMouse is a product of Marcus Chalfen’s scientific research, a biological chimera made in the lab by grafting together tissues of different genetic constitution. Like their mythological predecessors, biotech chimeras blur the line between organic and mechanistic creation, a unified whole and sutured-together parts. However, in their physical existence, they also speak to history’s stretching of the field of possibility such that, over time, “chimera” as a signifier of impossibility
might become a signifier of possibility, in all its exciting and dangerous potential.

Smith initially renders FutureMouse as the grotesque creation of Chalfen's techno-utopian imagination (“On his chin the tumors hung like big droplets of dirty rain”), but the last lines of the novel depict the chimera escaping its cage (“the getaway of a small brown rebel mouse”). A darkly comic image of freedom, FutureMouse is more fugitive than hero, but it is Smith’s sense of vulnerability, irony, and absurdity that allows her to comment on the occlusion of visions that are too certain, too driven, and too faithful to their own precepts (what the novel dubs “Chalfenism”). FutureMouse, embattled chimera, is a kind of spirit animal for modernity’s absconders, for those who have faced the butt end of civilizing progress narratives and have devised ways of moving forward that entail going backwards and sideways as well.

A wariness of purity and perfectibility consequently unites all the writers in *Chimeras of Form*, even as they pursue hopes of a more egalitarian world order. Their wariness marks an important distinction between majorly utopian strains of modernism, such as those Boris Groys attributes to the Russian avant-garde, and the minorly utopian, “chimeric” strains of modernism featured in this book. Groys has argued for the conceptual complementariness of avant-garde aesthetics and Stalinist politics on the basis of a utopian constructivism. According to his account, both the artistic movement and the political program sought to “overcome the resistance” of their materials, be it a specific artistic medium or the “economic, social, and everyday life of the nation,” and to remake them into their “desired form.” Treating the will to power as an inescapable facet of artistic identity, Groys suggests that “the Stalin Era satisfied the fundamental avant-garde demand that art cease representing life and begin transforming it by means of a total aesthetic-political project” in which the success of the state was measured by the aesthetic imperative to create “impenetrable, autonomous artistic worlds.”

Groys’s emphasis on autonomy and hermeticism is an example of how the Russian avant-garde ideology of autonomy came to inflect the Stalinist political imagination, in which the state is conceptualized as a bounded and policed work of art. Although Stalinism no doubt represents the extremities of such a constructivist approach, the writers discussed here come perilously close to the aestheticist impulse to fashion societies according to the rules of art as they think through the relationships
between literary forms and communal forms. Indeed, the dangers of aesthetic projection haunt Tagore’s protagonist Nikhil in *The Home and the World*, when he aligns despotism with the molding of social relations into “a hard, clear-cut, perfect form.”

The chimeras of form discussed here—autotranslations, alternating asymmetry, stories without plots, archival legends, and root canals—guard against that despotism by contesting theories of the ideal work of art, the work that achieves transcendence, autonomy, succession, and coherence. They develop instead their own theories of the material work of art that, by embracing immanence, subordination, medium dependency, and mechanical acts of construction, continually engage with rather than transcend the resistance of their materials. *Chimeras of Form* makes a virtue of literary forms that, like mythological and biological chimeras, test received understandings of coherence rather than affirming them. It allows the *working* of art, as in the labor of creating art, to come into view so that the task of reconstellating collective solidarities internationally might, through the very qualities we call “chimeric,” enter into our poetic and political imaginations as something real, long-standing, and urgent.