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И КУЛТУРОЛОШКИ ИСТРАЖУВАЊА

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КНИЖЕВНОСТ



LITERATURE



**Igor Grbić**

## **OCCIDENTOCENTRIC FALLACY: DOWNSIZING THE WORLD, OR KEEPING THE OTHERNESS OF THE OTHER**

**Abstract:** A new critical fallacy is proposed, summing the regular tendency in literary criticism and, even more generally, in the humanities, to reduce studying a phenomenon as universal as literature in examining only its Western manifestations. The perspective is ulteriorly distorted by ignoring or disqualifying all non-Western traditions of literary criticism. Literature, along with its relevant scholarship, has thus, in the West has never been seen and considered in its totality. Instead, what is really only a fragment and one among the possibilities of realizing the literary has been accepted and perpetuated as literature itself. This lopsided view is in sharp contrast to what is practiced in natural sciences, with their unbiased methodology including all of the world as their proper field. Warning of the various negative consequences of such an approach (especially considering the deeply human relevance of literature), the article argues for a reading and critical correctness that will replace the accepted provincialism and falsification.

**Keywords:** *occidentocentrism, West, non-West, literature, literary criticism.*

### **Introduction**

Unlike classic occidentocentrism, its present form fosters a hypocritical perspective in which, theoretically, we are all equal. However, the relativizing drive of postmodernism has by and large remained focused on restructuring the views and viewpoints pertaining to the West, failing to embrace its full potential towards a genuine cross-cultural catholicity. The conspicuousness of this syndrome becomes especially painful in the humanities, which – by definition and their very name – imply an impartial and comprehensive approach to humanity as such, a project seriously undermined by their past performance. It can be observed, in fact, that the West has incorporated the non-Western Other mainly to the extent it is translatable into "objectified" data and does not defy Western categories. Consequently, the most deplorable situation is to be found in the area involving issues as elusive as expression, value, taste and the like: practically nothing has been done to adequately include the arts of the Other. Among these, I would like to focus here on literary criticism, arguing that, empirically, it is still turning non-Western literatures into an exotic appendix to Western literature, at the same time showing no concern for, or even awareness of, the fact that its contemplation of a phenomenon as primordial and all-human as literature is based only on one of its fragments – prejudiced, to boot.



### **State of affairs: turning facts into as many problems**

Whenever I reach for the *Great Short Stories of the World* (Clark and Lieber, 1964) on my shelf and browse through its contents, I cannot but notice that it offers more British stories than old Egyptian, Arabian, Persian, Indian, Chinese and Japanese taken together! This is a fact, and it is a fact every unfettered reader should notice and remain confused thereby. He or she will then resort to the preface for an answer, but this will only result in confusion turning into embarrassment – for there will be no answer – and anxiety – for the suspicion of what is implied by the absence of it.

The first problem in my example is that we cannot even expect an average Western reader to notice the problematic fact, however factual it may be. The second problem is that the fact, once noticed, is not even seen as a problem, being something that is taken for granted. And yet, intellectual breadth of vision, academic integrity and logical consistency – all of them values the West has been the loudest to proclaim – make an explanation of the fact a binding task for us. There are only two possibilities uncompromised by mere technical defectiveness: either the implied premise of the anthology was that its ratio authentically reflected the situation in world literature (in other words, that, in terms of good literature, Britain had really contributed more than all of those ancient cultures together), or there was a tacit selection based on guesses what might be more interesting and relevant for the target reader. We must not seriously allow for a third possibility, such as the two authors of the anthology not being too familiar with non-Western cultures. Books of that kind should not be edited by individuals or tandems, anyway, but by teams that combine different areas of expertise, just as we normally find in general surveys of various human fields, literature included. Neither, indeed, should we in our example allow for a "quantitative excuse" and suppose the imbalance was created by lack of ancient stories that have survived; not only is it not true that so much has been lost over time, but there is also in the anthology an obvious disparity between the stories coming from ancient Greece, Rome and the Bible, on the one hand, and, on the other, those coming from the aforementioned non-Western cultures. Whatever reason there might be behind such imbalance, it has to be put forward in the preface of such a work. Needless to say, the preface of the anthology in question mentions none. It does not end here, though. In the anthology, the only nation quantitatively superior to the British are the French, while ranking third are the Italians and the Americans (the USA, to be more specific), each of the two equalling the number of Far-East samples taken together. In other words, we are given to understand that in the then only a-century-and-a-half old American fiction there had been more anthologically good stories than in the at least five millennia of the whole of Asia (the western Bible excluded).

The anthology in question is not one of its kind, but rather representative of it, as well as of the whole Western paradigm of literature. A selection of other examples is taken from David Damrosch's book (2003, pp. 124-129), where it is

prefixed by the fact obvious to anybody willing to see that, up to very recently, world literature was in North America regularly defined as Western European only (p. 110), which, from the American standpoint, is the minimal definition of the West. John Macy's *The Story of the World's Literature*, from 1925, stretches for over five hundred pages, but the whole of non-Western literature (here identified with Eastern, indeed) implodes into a single fifteen-page chapter entitled – symptomatically, for a past age – "The Mysterious East". Macy, does, however, express regret for not having enough time to unravel the mystery, since there is undoubtedly much among the Chinese that we, too, could appreciate, and we are wrong to exclude it. *Masterpieces of World Literature in Digest Form*, the widely used reference work edited by Frank Magill, was an achievement done by a team of experts. It appeared in 1949 and contained summaries and short analyses of 510 major works. The second volume, from 1955, embraced another 500 titles, and 500 more were added in the third volume, from 1960, and in the fourth (and final), from 1969. Despite all the changes in the process, the *world* from the title of the anthology was again mainly understood as the shorter way to say the *Western world*. Among the 1010 works represented in the first two volumes, there are only three non-Western: the *Arabian Nights*, Lady Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji*, and *Śakuntala* by Kalidāsa (he himself presented with the typically occidentalized credentials as "the Shakespeare of India", and his play as beloved of Goethe). With the growing awareness that the term world literature needed indeed embrace the whole of the world, the third and fourth volumes introduced non-Western literatures through a more capacious door, but with a result still very far from what one should expect as a proper share: of the final total of 1008 authors, only 23 are non-Western. Put differently, 2.7%. Finally, there is the instance of *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, that Damrosch himself acknowledges as probably the most widely used anthology in world literature courses in the USA, ever since its first appearance in 1956. However, as late as its fifth edition, in 1985, the *world* from the title meant Western Europe and the USA. The first edition included 73 authors, almost all of which were from the "literary superpowers" (Greece, Italy, France, Germany, Britain and the USA). It was only with the sixth edition, in 1992 – less than a quarter of a century ago! – that a handful of non-Western masterpieces were introduced. Such is Norton's world masterpiece orientation – or rather occidentation, as Damrosch aptly rephrases it.

More disturbing than all of this is only the fact that, in the West, it disturbs hardly anyone. (One of the courses I am teaching at my university was called, at the time I took it over, World Literature from Antiquity to Classicism. The beginning of its name is flatly and disappointingly contradicted by its second half (in my language, Croatian, *antiquity* can refer to Greek and Roman antiquity only, while *classicism* may have a global scope, but requires some very specific qualification). Of course, I chose to ignore the second half of the name and introduced the new and neutral World Literature 1.) So, is our

discrimination, in literature as in so many other areas of human interest, to be understood etymologically, or technically? That is, are our choices, hierarchies and knowledge produced by an unbiased act of distinguishing between the bad and the good, or are they simply another sad manifestation of our chronic favouring one small party over the huge many? Are political correctness and its cultural derivative anything more than a flattering ideal to be paid lip service to, making us only sophisticate our basically unchanged beliefs and behaviour? Sticking to literature, there are other disturbing issues to be presently considered.

No botanist or zoologist would ever claim legitimate knowledge of the vegetal and animal world, respectively, if acquainted only with the species living in their own neighbourhoods. The greater global insight into the two worlds, the greater one's competence in the two sciences. The same is far from rare in social sciences and the humanities, too. Western sociology, ethnology, linguistics, comparative philology, religion or mythology are only some instances. Imperfect as their universality is, these sciences have at least been turning the whole of the world into their proper work place, thus paving the way towards a more genuine intellectual commitment. Western comparative and world literature, on the other hand, even when they have exhausted all relevant points of contact between two or more Western literatures, still prefer finicky prying into second-rate information and third-hand gossiping to finding links with the whole new worlds of literature lying beyond their home fence. Neither does Western literary theory find it relevant to compare its findings with those of non-Western ones and possibly become even enriched in the process, although there have been great traditions of literary theory in Japan, China, India and the Islamic world. Whatever there presently is of a global comparative literature and literary criticism has by far and large been taking place outside the West, while the average level of Western academic ignorance, when it comes to the basics of global literature and poetics, remains shameful and would in normal circumstances be considered an intellectual scandal. Professor Patrick Colm Hogan, one of the few Western ground-breaking researchers in the field, bitterly reports that what he gets from his colleagues when he brings up the subject of non-Western literary theory before European colonialism is usually: "Oh, you mean Bhabha and Spivak!" (Hogan, 1996). Again, one is not disturbed by the fact. No Western literary theoretician could possibly take seriously their Chinese, Japanese or Indian colleagues if they didn't know of Horace, or even a minor name like Sidney; but they feel perfectly unembarrassed when not responding to the names of Liu Hsieh, Zeami Motokiyo and Ānandavardhana, though these are the *greatest* literary theoreticians within the three traditions, whose work, from more than one aspect, anticipated the West by centuries.

### **Eurogenetic fallacy and beyond**

Such double standards are part and parcel of what Hogan calls the *eurogenetic fallacy*, the belief that everything starts (and, for that matter, ends)

with Europe. If one has noted great similarities between Indian and ancient Greek logic, or mysticism, the conclusion is that, at some point of time, the first must have been influenced by the latter, certainly not the other way round. We can identify the eurogenetic fallacy even in cases in which a Western convention begins to be taken much too literally and earnestly and develops into firm prejudice, taken for granted. The examples include pinning the world's zero (or even *prime!*) meridian down to London Greenwich and, consequently, positioning Europe into the centre of the world; along with space, seeing time as the other basic dimension being born in that central part of the central Europe, from which the specific times of all the other parts of the world are calculated simply as a plus or minus deviation; using terms such as the Old and the New World, old being what Europe has always been familiar with, new what she had to discover in time; the very concept of *discovering* the New World, implying that something becomes known only when known to the Old World, as if the New World's natives had not known their own homelands all the time; the Americans themselves calling Japan and China Far East, even though, from their standpoint, those are rather Near West.

All of the above examples (and many more one could add) may be – and are, indeed – quite handy and ought not to trouble us too much, as long as we remember that they are conventional and utterly relative, not literal and absolute. We have been using them for so long, automatically, neutrally, through historical inertia, as technical terms. What should have been troubling us all along is rather the underlying occidental culturocentrism, logocentrism, Christianocentrism, the self-evident rationale of identifying the whole of the world with one's own particle of it. What should be troubling us is that the classic Bible-and-sword colonialism looks so candid and honest when compared to the sophisticated mechanisms of a neocolonialism that spreads its good spell with its tongue in cheek, using the pompous word *globalization* to baptize a one- -way process that does not inspire one point of the globe with another, but reduces all to one. What should be troubling us is the self-sufficiency which is the invigorating substitute for saying our self-complacency. It is something that allows us to violate, with a clear conscience, the very same sublime principles we have been proclaiming, something that urges us to systematically provincialize the world, tying all the various flames with which it has been licking the heavens down into a tiny streak of smoke from the fireplace on which we are warming up our self-righteous giggling. What should be troubling us is the fact all of this is not troubling us.

The fallacy Hogan calls eurogenetic is a prerequisite for the one I here propose under the name *occidentocentric*. It more precisely involves making Europe not only the birthplace, but also sustaining it as *the* paragon, of any true achievement, and a paragon that has rather to do with the West than with Europe only, ever since the self-centered West outgrew its European cradle. The term *fallacy* in both cases inserts the phenomena among the ones already registered by Western literary criticism (intentional, affective, etc.), and it does

so very happily, indeed, since we are faced here with an essentially critical problem. If the subject of literary scholarship is to be literature, it has to be studied as such, as unqualified as possible, wherever and whenever it has appeared, in the very same way an American botanist would not ignore a kind of fern growing – or extinct! – in New Zealand, just for the fact it does not grow in America. Neither can we imagine a *World Fauna* compressing the world's savanas, rainforests, deserts and jungles, with all their lions, tigers, elephants, giraffes, kangaroos, lemurs and gerbils (to take only some still existing species) – into a few chapters or pages. This, however, is exactly what normally happens in the humanities. Whole cultures – worlds within the world – with their centuries- or even millennia-old histories, arts and philosophies collapse into a space far below their volume's worth, into exotic appendages to a thorough examination of their Western counterparts. But then, flora and fauna have to do with plants and animals, while culture is all about man. And the Western man can afford genuine curiosity, open-mindedness and objectivity when it comes to confronting the kinds of beings that do not *threaten* his image of his own self-importance. It is interesting, actually intriguing, to learn what sorts of creatures grow, swim, fly, crawl or run elsewhere. The Western man sees it as a further expansion of his knowledge – knowledge equalling factography – and his knowledge is something he is particularly proud of. Meeting other men, however, is not meeting other objects, but subjects of knowledge. Subject to subject.

If literary scholarship of the West – to stick to my own area, though, *mutatis mutandis*, all the observations here can be applied to other humanities, as well – does not feel like opening up to the catholicity of its natural sciences, it should then be at least bound by intellectual integrity to either make a clean breast of its tongue-in-cheek occidentocentric fallacy, or openly declare that non-Western literary and critical traditions are not worth one's time. Of course, the second answer should be admissible only after one has invested considerable time into becoming familiar with them, which, to a large extent, implies overcoming a possibly occidentocentric literary taste and becoming sensitive to, possibly, other ways of defining and appreciating the literary.

However, not even the existing handful of global literary theoreticians in the West seem to have sufficiently realized that literary studies encompassing the whole of the world are not important only or foremost for mimicking the natural sciences and finding out about the Other, but, prior to that, for finally establishing literary scholarship in the first place. If literature is a global phenomenon – as it obviously is, for both the occidentocentrist and his antagonist – how can it be legitimate to study and judge the literary as such, basing oneself only on one of its specific samples? How can I remain unmoved to peep into others' literatures and literary theories, deprived of the presentiment that I might thus discover that what I believed to be the pyramid is actually only one of its solitary steps? Is my fear of the novel, harbouring the uncanny possibility I might feel forced to drastically re-examine my beliefs, really



stronger than my humanistic – and human – dedication to the real truth? How can I, having once overheard there used to be some non-Westerners that also meditated on the art of literature, not only remain indifferent, but even proceed to publishing a survey of literary theory in the West, entitled simply *Literary Theory*? What would be a gross abuse of methodology in the case of a zoologist or a sociologist – an academic scandal, as I have already suggested – is an established practice in literary theory. With barely anyone to see it. To see that a single literary experience is identified with literature as such, to see that in our literary theory we have completely discarded the vaguest possibility – which is in fact a high probability – that we have seen only one side of the problem, while there might have been others who have seen what we have missed. Or at least seen it in a light different enough to add a new streak to our accepted image.

If one is dealing with a part believing it is the whole, it is ignorance. But if one is doing it knowing it to be only a part – then it is sheer arrogance to pretend one is still dealing with the whole. Any single thing, literature included, can be validly discussed only if we know *all* of it. Otherwise we are discussing fragments – and fragments only – no matter how many of them there might be. And no insight into the whole of any single thing can be regarded complete if we know nothing of the ways it has manifested itself *elsewhere*. Finally, even if we possessed total knowledge of all temporal and spatial manifestations of the literary, such knowledge would still include only all the *realized* potentials of the literary. It is then a symptom of further arrogance to conclude therefrom that these include all of its *latent* potentials, too. No one can predict what our future has in store for our posterity, literature not excluded (at the furthest point of our speculations we can imagine an encounter with some extraterrestrial verbal culture, which would certainly also have significant impact on our idea of the literary). Finally, we are fully entitled to presume that not even the future will exhaust all possibilities of artistic expression.

Science – any truly spiritual science – has, in its scope, to be based theoretically, speculatively, not empirically. Any insight into the existing samples has constantly to be supplemented by – and, indeed, predicated on – an internal insight into the very essence of the thing under examination, insight into the prototype. The deeper this internal insight, the clearer the understanding dawning upon us of only a *part* of the prototype having been realized, the greater even the likelihood of intuiting, in the prototype, some possibility of manifestation that has simply not yet been attested by a sample. But the first thing we should do is certainly exhaust what is at our hand already. How can we ever hope of understanding the very idea of the literary if on the way we are helped only by variations of a single sample recovered in our precincts? How can we not feel the urge to ask others what is the side of the concept they have seen from their neighbourhoods?

### **From German Romanticism towards a future criticism**

The present situation in literary studies, with its cultivated autism, is not only scandalous, but also catastrophic, if we take into consideration that as early as two hundred years ago the greatest literary critical minds of Germany lay foundation for an impressive temple whose building was soon to be aborted. Not only Goethe, but both Herder and the Schlegel brothers imagined the history of literature as a supranational whole, in which national literatures participate only as components of literature taken in general. In his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1809/1811) August Wilhelm Schlegel observes:

We see numbers of men, and even whole nations, so fettered by the conventions of education and habits of life that, even in the appreciation of the fine arts, they cannot shake them off. Nothing to them appears natural, appropriate, or beautiful, which is alien to their own language, manners, and social relations. With this exclusive mode of seeing and feeling, it is no doubt possible to attain, by means of cultivation, to great nicety of discrimination within the narrow circle to which it limits and circumscribes them. But no man can be a true critic or connoisseur without universality of mind, without that flexibility which enables him, by renouncing all personal predilections and blind habits, to adapt himself to the peculiarities of other ages and nations – to feel them, as it were, from their proper central point, and, what ennobles human nature, to recognise and duly appreciate whatever is beautiful and grand under the external accessories which were necessary to its embodying, even though occasionally they may seem to disguise and distort it. [...] Poetry [...] is a universal gift of Heaven, being shared to a certain extent even by those whom we call barbarians and savages. Internal excellence is alone decisive, and where this exists, we must not allow ourselves to be repelled by the external appearance. Everything must be traced up to the root of human nature : if it has sprung from thence, it has an undoubted worth of its own: but if, without possessing a living germ, it is merely externally attached thereto, it will never thrive nor acquire a proper growth. (Schlegel, 1914, pp. 18-19).

How unfortunate that these words still sound so modern!

It is with Goethe that world literature – *Weltliteratur* – gets its name and best-known articulation. His famous statement has it that "[n]ational literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World literature is at hand, and every one must strive to hasten its approach" (Goethe, 1875, p. 213). The next year he adds that "there can be no question of the nations thinking alike, the aim is simply that they shall grow aware of one another, understand each other, and, even where they may not be able to love, may at least tolerate one another" (as cited in Strich, 1949, p. 350). In the process, Goethe (1986, p. 228) even sees room for one national literature intervening into another and, through its own

separateness and difference, correcting it: "The phenomenon which I call world literature will come about mainly when the disputes within one nation are settled by the opinions and judgments of others."

We have here already considered how vast the *world* in *world literature* really is. Things are not much better with its close cousin (when the two are at all distinguished): comparative literature. It is almost always sequential, to use Hogan's term (Hogan, 1996), that is, it studies historical relations between the traditions being compared (which are usually very close, geographically and culturally). The other possibility – the path far less travelled – is what Hogan calls parallel comparative literature. Here similarities and differences between the traditions are studied insofar as they are not historically related. We learn to identify characteristics that – immediately recognizable, or just changing masks – appear across literary traditions of the world, thus leading us to what seems to constitute literature itself, before and beyond any particularization into time and space. Hogan (always in the same text, but also elsewhere) introduces in this regard the term *prototypical literary works*, that is, such that share all our standard criteria for verbal art and tend to vary a limited number of basic subjects and ways to treat them. One looks for the *universals* (Hogan specifies *narrative universals*), the constituent elements that participate in making a work of literature world round (see Hogan, 2003, especially Chapter 1). There are universal features that can be observed at the level of literary criticism, too. Hogan (1996) lists some of them: most traditions isolate similar literary flaws (excessive ornamentation, the illogic, vulgarity); most at some point develop a conflict between classicism and modernity; most involve debates over whether literature should be defined formally (e.g. verse patterns) or affectively, with the proponents of affect commonly winning out, etc. In the present age, suspect of any shared and lasting values, any kind of universalism is *a priori* doomed to be rejected as just another form of essentialism, a new tool of levelling out differences (that in the anti-essentialist perspective equal freedom), in order to reduce them to a limited and controllable set of generalities (that, within the same discourse, equal oppression). However, for those who do believe in the existence of fundamental patterns blossoming into varied surfaces, concentrating on identities – without ignoring the differences, but also without confounding them with a deep structure – is the only way of grasping the true being of a phenomenon. In our case, literature.

There is more. Literature being a way of expressing the being of man, studying it from a universalist perspective becomes a conspicuously humanistic, and human, activity. Rabindranath Tagore – to take an instance from the non-Western world – ends his lecture "World Literature" by noting that "[i]f we realise that universal humanity expresses itself in literature, we shall be able to discern what is worth in the latter" (Tagore, 2001, p. 148). We have – continues Tagore, as if echoing the German Romantics – to view literature as a temple being built by the master mason, which is the universal man. Individual writers are then his labourers. To elaborate on Tagore's conceit, literary critics could

then be seen as both the sweepers and the officiating priests, cleaning and assisting the access, for themselves and the visitors (readers), to the hidden divinity indwelling all great literature.

### **Some suggested remedies and final remarks**

Occidentocentrism used to be a far lesser sin in a time when it was not considered to be a sin and when, after all, our knowledge regarding non-occidental worlds was so much inferior than today. Today, however, the way it is being practised is much more complicated. On the one hand, everything starts from the same old – now simply implied – premise that the West *is* the best. On the other hand, there is the premise of cultural correctness, the official declaration that the first premise is wrong. Caught between these two premises, an unprejudiced and non-complacent observer is bound to sense a great uneasiness brought about by an outer reality belying the demagoguery from the rooftops.

What in a lay reader may remain quite optional, what in a specialized scholar studying only a particular literature may become at least desirable, should finally become literally binding for everybody calling themselves just literary scholars: students of literature *as such*. There are no shortcuts, and the only way is reading, reading, and reading – all along awaiting a *global taste* to break through the crust of our aesthetic habit. The task is not easy, but it is indispensable. Studying literature in itself is, essentially, so much more demanding than studying any particular literature, and it requires not so much one in love with one's idea of literature, and of its theory, but somebody willing to sacrifice these, on their pilgrimage to the literature behind all literatures. It requires casting one's own skin, again and again, along with the clothes given to it by its culture, again and again. It is a growing out of an inherited taste and growing into a taste capable of enjoying an ever greater range of verbal possibilities. It is a long, never-ending process, actually, a persistent, hard, disciplined aesthetic education, for a purpose not everyone will even agree it exists. But there are no detours.

So, it is difficult, of course, to expect a reader or a literary scholar (and the literary scholar is, ideally, the most qualified reader) to soar above the values conditioning them. But then, this difficulty is by itself something that ought to be made conscious, enabling us to call a spade a spade. Returning to the anthology we started with, it should be considered no sin, either moral or intellectual, had its two editors openly admitted, in the preface, that they – or their intended readers – were not able to enjoy the classical non-Western literatures, at least when compared to English or some other, similar literature, and that their choices had consequently been conditioned by that incapacity. They could have stopped at that, not even bothering to explain whether that implied they simply were not blessed with a taste global enough, or that they frankly believed Western literature had the upper hand, in the end. It would certainly have been much more correct, in whatever sense, than a tacit

perpetuation of our duplicity: an intimate conviction that the Occident is not only the cartographic centre of the world, and, on the obverse, a commitment to our own cultural correctness making us echoing, to others and ourselves, that the reverse is not true.

Just as I believe in the necessity to make literary scholarship globe-large, I believe in a global taste. I do believe it is possible, with enough talent and work, to reach the point where familiar emotions, thoughts, concepts and expressions will not equal good, with the unfamiliar equalling bad. If, when reading Lady Murasaki's *Genji Monogatari*, I find it unappealing and unrewarding, I am, as a private reader, entitled to reject it. But as a literary critic – that is, as a professional, conscientious reader – I am obliged to honour the likelihood that the Japanese tradition, that makes of it its greatest classic of all times, knows better than my alien perceptiveness – and to not give up! I am expected to acquire as much as I can of native literary, native critical and native extraliterary material that will help me attune myself to the aesthetic world of Murasaki's novel (the best editions of foreign literature are those that contain just this kind of "infrastructure": prefaces, introductions, notes). On whatever step of the pyramid I may find myself, I believe first of all in its pinnacle. There, I will be able to encompass all the steps, but also, and more clearly than ever, that all of them not only end with it, but that the pinnacle is where they spring from in the first place.

At the present point, Western literary criticism, and its literary experience in the widest sense, remain sadly provincial. While an Indian connoisseur can adroitly jump from Virgil to Kalidāsa and proceed with Milton, his Western colleague will have to skip the middle term, because all he knows about it is only the name (if that much), although hiding behind it is the greatest name of classical Indian literature (in the opinion of both West and East). It is embarrassing. It is unprofessional. Scandalous. I once heard a colleague – unembarrassed, of course – say that the only thing he knew of Japanese literature was *Memoirs of a Geisha* (for those who might still not know, the work was published in 1997 and was written by Arthur Golden, American). Ironically, one of the greatest ambitions of the humanities was to arm themselves with the same "objective" and "exact" criteria of the natural sciences (understood as the true paragon of science); it turned out that was just a dream, while the one thing with which the humanities could and should have grown to the standards of the natural sciences – universality – has been left unused (though surely not conceived as such, this is one of the parameters that, sadly enough, underlie the English distinction between science and scholarship). One should never be discouraged by one's failures in developing foreign tastes; for the time being it will more than suffice understanding the need to relativize one's own. If I cannot appreciate the Other, let me at least understand that my own values and experiences based on them are just one in the sum-total of possibilities. Western aggression, that has exported the West to all the world, coupled with its hostility when it comes to importing anything that might re-



define its own identity, has world-wide produced clones of Western literature and one of the big questions is: do we still have non-Western literatures in the first place? (I refer here to Grbić, 2014, where, within the phenomenon I termed the Tagore syndrome, concrete cases are discussed).

In a postoccidentocentric world, the effort of all humanities has to spread along two main lines: horizontally, towards an ever-wider field of sampling, and vertically, towards an ever-deeper understanding of the essentials hidden in all those samples (as well as in the yet unmanifested). There is no doubt many a would-be candidate is deterred from the task by the present Moloch of specialization that sacrifices a revelation of the enlightening whole to additionally veiling it by microscopic drilling of the parts, with a purposefulness that much too often remains dubious. However, in studying something as enormous as world literature and literary theories, errors in details have to be condoned when they are compensated by general insights that do seem to lead us toward a larger truth. Histories and general surveys of world literature in which non-Western literatures are not only minimized as a matter of course, but also represented only in their oldest periods (because later they are subsumed under Western literature, anyway?) – should be abandoned as factual forgeries. Even specialists in a particular national literature should consider the option of widening their understanding of *literature* by reading something outside their immediate scope, instead of exhausting their specialized field to a limit where it becomes hair-splitting and gossip.

Today it should finally appear as utterly ironic that the Occident, which has lined up the rest of the world according to its own perspective, is even deprived of an autonomous name: it is Occident only to its Orient, it is Western only from the perspective of the Eastern; from the perspective of an Other. And this irony ought to finally make it aware that it itself is not as much occidental, after all, as accidental. Somewhere amidst a world looking for an essence.

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