# The Occidentocentric Fallacy

# The Occidentocentric Fallacy:

## *Turning Literature into a Province*

By

Igor Grbić

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

The Occidentocentric Fallacy: Turning Literature into a Province

By Igor Grbić

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library



ISBN (10): 1-5275-1306-8
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1306-8

# CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

# A BOOK I BROKE UP WITH

One of the most memorable books among which I grew up in my parents' home was the *Great Short Stories of the World*, a fat thousand-odd page book whose huge white letters sprawling over a garishly light green cover looked intimidating rather than appealing to a child only starting to feel his way through the mysterious world of the written word. This state of mutual aloofness changed some time after I started learning English. One fine unsuspecting day my mother suggested I should practise the language by reading from the book of stories we had. "You know, the one with huge white letters sprawling over a garishly light green cover." Of all the books in our home! Naturally enough, it would have been beneath my dignity to confess to a slight fear of the book in question–a mere book!−so there was no other way left for me but to pluck up all the courage I had and overcome the glaring unpleasantness of the cover and the yellowish, newspaper-like pages beneath it. As you can guess by the title of this Introduction, thus began a year-long love affair (the more real since in my native language−as opposed to my mother tongue, which happens to be Italian−*knjiga*, "book", is female gender). It took me on countless journeys, journeys that at every single moment were triple: through language, through literature, and through all kinds of the cultures of the world.

Until the monster constantly dogging every affair did bite. Until the breakup. But, since every monster is horrible only to the extent it finds in its victim a dark spot sealed to a different mode of being (its frustration only parodied by the monster's presence), this loss of innocence was at the same time an initiation into experience. Into maturity.

And this is where the present *knjiga* actually begins. It was also a fine unsuspecting day when, browsing through my still most dear green and white book, I found myself sucked up into a part of the book I had never paid particular attention to: its Contents. For the first time I was forced into noticing a curious fact. There were more British stories included−the chapter opening the modern Western section of the book−than Egyptian, Arabian, Persian, Indian and Japanese−together! Eighteen to sixteen, to be

precise. I had to recheck my mental map against a proper geographical map in my atlas, but, of course, there was no need to: Asia (minus the Palestine of the Bible and plus Egypt) indeed was a mass of land much, much larger than the British Isles. And a much larger mass of people, too. Besides, even a knowledge of history and general culture significantly inferior to mine would have known that most of the cultures squeezed into the lesser side of the above ratio had had traditions predating the British one at least by a couple of thousands of years, in some cases even continuing into our own present. And yet, there it was: eighteen to sixteen, for the much younger, and much smaller one. In my youthful naivety I moved on, only to find my equally youthful surprise deepening. What followed was the German chapter, with thirteen stories. French, with nineteen. Italian, with sixteen. I clearly, and painfully, felt a world crumbling inside me. It was the world from the title of my book. And the pain−well, the pain was the pain of a milk tooth only slightly prematurely taken out to make room for an adult, mature, permanent one.

Still, it took me God knows how many more years−too many, anyway−to realize that my book was no exception, but a normal expression of a rule: the rule of turning the world into one of its provinces. Of identifying the globe with one of its fragments. Of downsizing the world. A rule taken for granted. And ever since it hit me, it has been a major concern of mine, both as writer and scholar, to "catch up" with the rest of the wide, wide world, and simultaneously to point out the need for others to do it, the paths along which it can be done. This book is a possible way to sum up the effort.

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 the latter 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 human expression, values, taste and the like: practically nothing has been done to adequately include the arts of the Other. Of these, I will here focus on literary criticism, arguing that, both theoretically and 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. It is my intention to treat literature and its related problems as purely as possible. While I am well-aware that nothing, literature included, can be excluded from its wider contexts that ceaselessly shape, define and charge their texts, literary scholarship has much too often ended up replacing texts by contexts and forgetting about texts themselves, which should always remain the scholar's prime concern. Any interested reader can learn about contexts from the ever-increasing avalanche of books in post-colonial and cultural studies, stressing political, sociological, historical and economic matters. This is not one such book. It rather belongs to literary studies proper and aims, to the best of my abilities, at exorcising whatever compromises literature as a truly global phenomenon and suggesting positive means to reconstruct it and appreciate as such. It wants to make the still unaware reader aware of the regular tendency in literary criticism and, more generally, in the humanities, to reduce studying phenomena as universal as literature to examining only their Western manifestations. In literature, 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, 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 practised 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 present book argues for a reading and critical correctness that will replace the firmly embedded provincialism of the West, something I call the *occidentocentric fallacy*.

All imperfections in the present book have to be attributed to none but myself. Among these there are some I am conscious of. For instance, my obvious bias to Indian examples when dealing with non-Western literatures. I am afraid this is an inevitable consequence of my thirty-year long obsession with Indian culture, including a B.A. in Indology, something that not even hoped-for decades of future non-Indian scholarship on my part will be able to balance. Besides, just as sometimes one cannot wait enough, at other times waiting–here in order to gather more material and present a more comprehensive case–looks rather like highly undue procrastination complying with the *status quo*. Anyway, the

point of this book is stating the problem as much as needed, not orating it as much as one would like to see it. There are then imperfections that still elude me, some of which might even have to wait for my permanent teeth to fall out for me to see through them, too. On the other hand, I take as a great vantage point of mine the fact that I observe, perceive, think and write from a minority position. Practically all that has been written on world literature, its imbalances and consequent falsification, has been pouring out from comfortable American, English or French positions, out of "big" nations, with "big" languages, each of which has a history of producing and perpetrating the very problematic state of affairs, rather than experiencing it. The fact that I was born and live in Croatia, a small country with a history–both political and cultural–troubled by a long series of outside invaders and inside identity issues, is something I find immensely helpful in understanding and sympathizing with a typical non-Western situation.

The first chapter diagnoses the state of affairs, offers a representative slice of the history of the occidentocentric bias, and questions the very concept of the West. The second considers the peculiar situation of the humanities among the sciences, and the especially peculiar situation of literary studies within the field of the humanities. The third tracks the birth of the idea of a world literature. In the fourth chapter I explore the need for literature as world literature, its benefits, such as insight into literary universals, and the accompanying dangers, such as harmful analogies. The fifth brings more examples of cultural appropriation, introduces the phenomenon I call the Tagore syndrome, and examines the role and influence of global prizes such as the Nobel. The whole of the sixth chapter is dedicated to the still understated, however crucial, process of translation, without which any idea of world literature remains a sheer dream. The seventh chapter tries to gather in one place at least the most valuable messages non-Western literatures can profitably teach their self-proclaimed Western tutor. The eighth, final, chapter focuses on "world literature" as only an approximative and fragmented selection of the actual literature of the world out there, and warns of the damage done by specialization and studying literature as non-literature.

# CHAPTER ONE

# NO EXCEPTIONS, RULE ONLY: TURNING FACTS INTO AS MANY PROBLEMS

*Great Short Stories of the World*, my youth's darling, was published by the London-based Hamlyn Publishing Group, in 1964. It was edited by Barrett H. Clark and Maxim Lieber. As it later turned out, it was to all appearances a mere reprint of the 1925 original, published by the American Albert & Charles Boni. To fill in the gaps, let me add that its Asian-African cluster trying to counterbalance British stories consists of two for ancient Egypt, four for ancient India, two for Persia and Arabia respectively, and three for China and Japan respectively. The dessert is left for the very end, of course, which makes it a particularly bitter bit: the USA is represented with just as many, that is, sixteen stories.

Now, all this is facts, facts readily verifiable to anyone who can still afford suspicion in these matters (you will find the Contents at www.unz.org/Pub/ClarkBarrett-1925n02:8), and, once we have all agreed upon them, facts every unfettered reader should notice and remain confused by. 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 adequate 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. I can see only two kinds of reasoning behind the editors' distribution: either the implied premise of the anthology−because that is what it is, literally a "collection of flowers", a selection of the best of the kind−was that its ratio authentically reflected the situation in world literature (in other words, that, in terms of good literature, Britain, or Germany, or France, or the

USA, had really contributed almost or even more than all of those ancient, long-lasting cultures taken together), or else there was a tacit selection based on guesses what might be more interesting and relevant for the target reader, coupled with the premise that prior to and apart from a full-fledged modern literature of the West no other literature of the world had (and, possibly, has) truly disengaged pure literature from its mythical, religious or whatever non-literary causes. We must not seriously allow for a third possibility, such as the two authors of the anthology not being too familiar with some or all 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. And indeed, Clark and Lieber only arranged the flowers brought to them by great many subeditors and contributors from both home and abroad. Neither should we allow for a "quantitative excuse" and suppose the imbalance was created by lack of ancient stories that had survived; not only is it not true that so much had been lost over time (particularly in those cultures that continue into the present, which is actually *all* except Egypt), but there is also in the anthology an obvious disparity between the stories coming from the also "damaged" ancient Greece, Rome and the Bible, on the one hand, and, on the other, those coming from the aforementioned non-Western cultures: the three Western or at least westernized cultures outweigh the entire Asian-African cluster by one.

What does the Preface really has to say about that? Here is how it begins:

> This collection marks the first attempt to bring together in a single volume a characteristic group of the outstanding examples of the Short Story as it has been practiced from the earliest days of civilization down to the present generation, by writers of almost every nation or race that has made any considerable contribution to the art of telling stories. It is a panorama extending over the entire globe [...]

The first attempt it may very well be and, after my initial exasperation that normally follows a breakup, I gradually did develop a genuine admiration for its pioneering vision, in an age when a handful of countries, mostly Western, openly ruled most of the world. It is a point the importance of which I cannot stress enough. But should I leave it at that, it would mean simply substituting one naivety for another. Almost a hundred years after the attempt, with the basic rules of the game still unchanged, one should be able to see through and beyond the brilliance of it all and detect the less charming spots lurking in the dark. Neither does one really

need any deconstructive or generally poststructuralist framework and jargon to do it: a pair of unscreened eyes and an authentically ecumenical mind will do the job (of course, I take *ecumenical* in its original Greek sense of referring to the inhabited world at large, not just to its Christianized part, as in the historically tainted usage).

Now that my intimate involvement with the *Great Short Stories* has moved from the stories to its Preface I particularly stumble on "any considerable contribution to the art of telling stories". If these words are to be taken at their face value, one may ask the following question: have the whole of Africa (except for its ancient Egyptian part, obviously), Australia, Oceania, Southeast and Central Asia, Native Americans, and so on, been left out of the collection because they did *not* considerably contribute to the art of telling stories? To say that their stories are rather cosmogony and theogony, and thus belong rather to their respective mythologies, is simply not true. Not only does a neat division between mythology and literature more often than not imply another instance of imposing modern Western concepts on non-modern non-Western realities, but the latter themselves frequently make a fine distinction between *great* stories, telling of things mythological, and *small* stories, told and transmitted rather for the cherished aesthetic effects they produce (though, of course, neither genre can do without making art of its words). In some cases the unrepresented literatures did have considerable influence, over a significant part of our globe, their misfortune being simply that the part falls out of the Western immediate horizon. Is this, then, what is meant by "considerable contribution to the art of telling stories"? Is it any contribution to the *Western* art of telling *Western* stories? Is this why the Indian book of fables *Pañcatantra* is included? Because *Directorium Humanae Vitae*, its fifteenth-century Latin version derived from a mixed Persian, Arabic and Hebrew mediation, served as the source of most European translations, its original author becoming Bidpai or Pilpay and influencing, in the West, the highly influential fables of La Fontaine and the fairy-tales of the Grimm brothers? Which did not happen with any of the stories contained in any of the numerous Indian epics, which usually can be told, read or shown−as, in fact, is the case in their homeland and the surrounding areas−as independent stories. Regardless of the fact that the influence of the most popular of these epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, just cannot be overrated across the enormous expanse stretching north and east of India, reaching even Japan, to the extent that, in parts of Malaya, most of Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos, the common word for dancing itself derives from Rāma, the protagonist of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and is variously pronounced as *rom, lam* or *ram* (see more in Bowers 1960, 15). Is this area

considered to be marginal only? Only provincial? But why then include, always within the Indian chapter, Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara*, the "Ocean of the Rivers of Stories"? I know of no influence of his work on Western literature. Actually, there is Salman Rushdie's novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, a book I immensely enjoyed reading and translating, but that is a lonely instance, modern, and, after all, penned by an Indian. Was it included because of its influence back home? Is this how I should explain the curious insertion−regardless of my private rejoicing over it−even of one Croatian author, A. G. Matoš, who, true enough, had a great impact in his own country, who introduced many modern Western influences into Croatian literature in general, but whose international, or even global, influence was null? If so, then why not include at least one Indian story-teller *after* the "ancient" times signalled in the title of the chapter, some of whom did considerably contribute to the art of telling stories in their own country and, sometimes, even beyond? And what about the boundless sea of stories contained in Indian folklore, that marvellous, oral entity that keeps shaping and reshaping itself and the people listening to its humming, their best writers included?

We should by now be sufficiently informed to seriously question the subtitle of Clark-Lieber's book: *A Collection of Complete Short Stories Chosen from the Literatures of All Periods and Countries*. I guess *complete* means here *unabridged*. *All Countries*, however, is blatantly untrue, an impossible mission, after all, and therefore a syntagm better to be avoided. But *All Periods* have by now also shown their true face. Even if we refrain from insisting upon following "Ancient Egypt" all the way to a modern kind of Egyptian storytelling, and accept ancient Egypt as having little to do, in fact, with modern Egypt, it remains a mystery why India is also represented only as "Ancient India", despite its at least three and a half thousand years of continuity. Persia and Arabia have also been represented by their early works only, but, interestingly enough, their headings omit the *Ancient* epithet. As we come to China and Japan, the editors decide to turn the tables on the reader. Of the three Chinese contributions, the last one is by Pu Songling (transliterated in the book as the then usual P'u Sung-Ling), who lived between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Finally, Japan becomes more modern than ancient, and very much so. Of the three stories, two−a majority!−are by modern authors: Mori Ōgai (transliterated as Ogwai) and Shimazaki Tōson (transliterated as Toson), both between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A "rationale" for the book's choices and imbalances is also implied by its Preface, stating that the editors were moved by

> the belief that what has delighted the Chinese from time immemorial, the ancient Egyptians, the Jewish shepherds and warriors of Biblical times, the Greeks of Homer's days and the Romans of Caesar's, will appeal with equal force to the inhabitants of the civilized world of the Twentieth Century.

These words are pronounced from an obvious Western perspective. Included are the "exotic" examples, not "our own", to embellish the standard, Western set of story-tellers. Now, nothing wrong about that. Published in the USA, the anthology was, after all, meant for Western, not Chinese readers. But to identify this community with "the civilized world of the Twentieth Century" is very wrong. The fact that the book would hardly reach a Chinese, Japanese or Indian reader−a prospect that would have allowed the editors a belief that what has delighted the Westerners would appeal with equal force to the inhabitants of China, Japan or India−did not unmake the three cultures as parts of the civilized world of the Twentieth Century. And I do not wish to say the editors' occidentocentrism was intentional or even malevolent. It has simply been the Western mind-set. Part of the West's mental inertia. Wording such as quoted above immediately, automatically belies the editors' "wish that these stories shall be read and enjoyed by the general[!] public. They were written not for critics and historians, editors of anthologies and specialists, but for all[!!] mankind."

Clark and Lieber's *Great Short Stories of the World* are indeed great. These are great stories. Less great is the anthology presenting them. Nevertheless, it too is great, and this is the principal attribute I would attach to it. It was especially great when it first appeared in 1925, and it remains great when we situate it back into its context. In fact, I seem never to tire of admiring the fact that, almost a hundred years ago, it encompassed such still largely marginalized−European!−countries as Hungary, Belgium, Romania, Holland, Poland and Bulgaria. There are Yiddish and Czech stories in it. There are South American stories, so much prior to the magical realism boom. I am increasingly touched by the inclusion even of Matoš, a writer writing in my own "small", little-known language, along with one Serbian and one Slovenian writer, the three of them creating a chapter of their own (Yugoslavia, curiously spelled as Jugoslavia). Such catholicity of perspective was (or even has been) rarely to be matched in the anthologizing decades to come.

Which, of course, should not stop us from criticizing its defects or even blind us to their existence. On the contrary, a criticism of the kind becomes imperative once we realize these defects are inherent in the genre from its very beginning, with anthologies being only one of the symptoms

of the disease I here call occidentocentrism. Ten, or fifteen, or even almost twenty short stories from single nations not even that many centuries old are as many affronts to whole continents pulverized into boxes of humiliatingly modest proportions, or even wiped out. One could go on listing the shortcomings that ominously turn the world into its Western particle. For instance, if it was deemed methodologically correct to derive one story from *Beowulf* and one from *The Lay of the Nibelungs*, although these are epics, not fiction, and thus add one more story to the already existing seventeen British stories and the already existing twelve German, it should have become the more urgent to derive from the Indian epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the more so since, as already mentioned, the latter influenced an enormous part of Asia, while the two European epics remained sadly insular phenomena. So much for influences. And how could it possibly be methodologically correct−not to mention cultural correctness−to represent Persian, Arabian and Indian literatures only as ancient−as if after Ferdowsi, the *Thousand and One Nights* and the *Hitopadeśa* nobody in the three cultures had ever written anything worth anthologizing−but then to include Greece, the West's pet-culture, separately under the chapters "Ancient Greece" and "Modern Greece"? But the uncontested winner of this macabre game is surely the USA, ending and crowning the anthology. I have already mentioned its sample of sixteen stories. What this actually means, however, what we are eventually given to understand, is that in the then only a-century-and-a-half old American narrative there had been more anthologically good stories than in the at least five millennia of the whole of Asia (the West-adopted Bible excluded). And so on, and so forth.

"That *Great Short Stories of the World* is not as nearly perfect a collection as the editors and publisher would have liked to make it is a foregone conclusion." As much as I agree, I am aware that the editors and publisher had in mind other reasons for the imperfection of their book. These are rather technical caveats: some stories were left out simply because they were too long; others because, though in themselves deserving to be included in an anthology, were already present in every other collection or easily available elsewhere. And as problematic as all this is, things get worse when I am reminded the book I have at home is the 1964 edition, not the original of 1925. Still, during those forty intervening years nothing had changed in the anthology. It was a mere reprint. As if there had not been another world war in the meantime. And a much more *world* one. One that, among other things, triggered off an intense process of decolonization, going rampant in the early sixties, too, a process that made the West keenly aware of various non-Western entities

as existing otherwise than mere extensions or pendants of the West. After all, our knowledge of oral cultures had also improved in the meantime, which is also knowledge of others' tales, reminding us that only at a second stage was literature put in writing, that originally it was orature (a fitting term coined by the Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o), and that presenting only written traces of the art of the word is another way to misrepresent it. But the 1964 edition registers nothing of all that. It had learnt nothing. Unlike some other anthologies we will observe, it had not evolved. Frozen in its bud, it just continued to cherish its imperfections, looming ever uglier as the times went on changing. The only novelty is its Introduction, by Gerda Charles, whose mixed, Anglo-Jewish descent was unfortunately of no help in detecting the real problem:

> It would of course be absurd to pretend that there are not−and bound to be for each reader−omissions or inclusions which madden, particularly as we come nearer our own time: no Lawrence, no Isaac Babel, no Conan Doyle ... and how gladly we would exchange, say, Arthur Morrison for Joyce. But these are the kind of complaints no anthologist in the world can escape. (Charles 1964, x)

And that is all. The problem concerns Western, more or less exclusively British internal imbalances. It remains a self-centred, autistic problem. There is no world outside its fragment inhabited by us, Westerners.

For a contrast and more comprehensive estimate I am going to include some more examples, offered by David Damrosch (2003, 124-129), examples that, due to their status and influence, can be taken as paradigms of the Western project named world literature.

The year 1925 seems to have been really groundbreaking in anthologizing literatures of a presumed world. It thus also saw John Macy's *The Story of the World's Literature*. Its more than five hundred pages spare only fifteen for the chapter "The Mysterious East", all there is about non-Western literatures in general. Macy is, however, aware that his book is "guilty of an absurd disproportion", that it devotes "only one short chapter to the literatures of four or five nations which are older than ours and perhaps wiser", and that, in his defence, "[t]he disproportion is to some extent excused by sheer ignorance, and to some extent justified by the magnitude of the literatures which are blood of our blood and bone of our bone." Given the volume and quality of the then existing translations, this sounds reasonable enough. It continues less acceptably: "The West has been thinking so fast that we have not time for the timeless East" (Ibid., 24-25). He does express regret for himself not having more time to disentangle the "mystery" (a typically orientalist term) and "that it is an absurd violation

of the spirit of the ages to glance for only three minutes at a literature like that of China which has been a highly civilized institution for at least thirty centuries" (Ibid., 37). Knowing that "[t]here is no doubt much in the Chinese mind which is sympathetic with us, [...] probably we are making a profound mistake not to get better acquainted with it." He even goes as far as to charmingly anticipate a "citizen of Pekin" coming eyes to eyes with Western representations of his culture and "smil[ing] tolerantly at our ignorance" (Ibid., 38). Nevertheless, I am afraid no amount of charm or the poor level of contemporary scholarship can excuse such mortifying inclusion of the Other. The less so if the author is aware of the imbalance.

Frank Magill's *Masterpieces of World Literature in Digest Form* is an even better case in point for being a later and widely used reference work. It first appeared in 1949, offering summaries and short analyses of 510 major works. Six years later 500 more works appeared in a second series. In 1960 the third series presented 500 more, with another 500 in the fourth, and final, series, published in 1969. Although authored by a team of experts, from the very beginning the "world" from the title meant practically the West. The first two series included among their 1010 titles only three non-Western: the Arabian *Thousand and One Nights*, the Japanese *Tale of Genji*, and the Indian Ś*akuntalā* (the last one along with the remark that it was beloved of Goethe (Magill 1955, 2:931), the obligatory guarantee of quality we will have opportunity to further consider later in this book). Pressured by the idea that the concept of world literature should be extended, series 3 and 4 of the sixties add more non-Western masterpieces. The improved and final situation remains bleak: of 1008 authors there are 23 not belonging to the Western fragment of the world. A 2.7%.

Finally, *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Last, but certainly not least, taking into consideration that it has probably been the most widely used anthology in world literature courses in the USA ever since its first appearance in 1956. The first edition sampled from its proposed field of study 73 authors, almost all of them from Greece, Italy, France, Germany, Britain and the USA. As late as its fifth edition, in 1985−just thirty odd years ago−the *world* from the title meant actually Europe and the USA. Only the sixth edition, from 1992, introduced a handful of others. As Damrosch's nice pun would have it, such is "Norton's masterpiece orientation−or occidentation" (Ibid., 129).[1]

As if all of this were not enough, there is a further obstacle, "at home", in the Occident itself. Downsizing world literature to Western literature is only seemingly a simple job, because it is far from clear what the *West* really means. It might be clear enough from an Asian perspective, but even

that has its catches. Is not Australia also West? Although its position situates it rather within a supposed East. But then its people are white−at least the ruling ones, the ones that even fifty years ago were for all intents and purposes considered as the only Australian humans−and, most importantly, its culture and life standard are typical of the typical West. Very well then, apart from the geographical aberration of Australia (and New Zealand, obviously), the rest of the West seems to be neatly ordered: from a fictitious border along the Urals, the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus Mountains, westward to North America (equally obviously, without its southern, Latin component). Doubts then arise regarding Russia. Can the West proper really consider that enormous country one of its own? Has not Russia, the land of the Tartars, been subverting rather than supporting true Western values, either in its Orthodox Christian, or its atheist, Communist variant? Conspicuous, indeed, in American anthologies of the past, was a neglect even of Russian literature. Next to fall off are all those East European, mostly Slavic nations, seen as some kind of Russian satellites (not just in a political sense). They speak obscure languages, sometimes are themselves Orthodox, infected with an age-long Turkish presence, which left some of them even Muslim. Living in Croatia, I daily witness the discrepancy, manifesting as a kind of national schizophrenia: on the one hand an anxious, heartbreaking proving ourselves as an integral part of the Western traditions, for centuries, invented or real; on the other, the irresistible appeal of the officially repudiated Balkans and a repeated recognizing ourselves in many, too many of their practices.

The concept of world literature has not come out of such increasingly reductive definitions of the West unimpaired. As prefixed earlier in his book by Damrosch himself (Ibid., 110), we thus finally come to a fact obvious to anybody close enough and willing to see it: up to very recently, world literature was in North America regularly defined not just as exclusively Western, but as Western European only (plus the reduced North America itself, of course), which is the minimal definition of the West. Problems do start "at home". Things have been changing since the early nineties, but slowly, basically within small, initiated circles, and even there much too often only half-heartedly. 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 chronically 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 considered.

# CHAPTER TWO

# THE SPECIAL CASE OF LITERARY STUDIES WITHIN THE SPECIAL CASE OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

> Today almost all aestheticians and artists, poets, musicians and architects have universal knowledge concerning their own area. Briefly speaking, the 19th century was the end of the absolutism of the people who knew only their partial tradition of humanity and who did not know much about other cultures. (Marchianò 1994, 61)

Had these words been pronounced by someone else, I would simply find them preposterous. However, since they come from such a knowledgeable and sensitive scholar as Grazia Marchianò, I find them simply puzzling. Sadly, even years after their appearance they remain wishful thinking and I suspect it was sheer benevolence and optimism amidst things finally making at least some progress to push her high hopes to the level of a face-value statement.

No climatologist would figure as any kind of expert if observant only of the climate enveloping his own home. No geologist could afford equating the composition of his planet's crust with what it happens to be under his own feet. No mineralogist would ever dream of stopping in his drive for knowledge at the few stones he treads. Neither would any botanist or zoologist ever claim legitimate knowledge of the vegetal and animal world respectively, if acquainted only with the species living in their own neighbourhoods. Darwin did not come to his general theory of evolution by digging in his own garden, but by *starting* from it. The greater a scientist's global insight into the part of the world he studies, the greater his competence in his own science. These things go without saying and textbooks, general surveys, atlases and other written material produced by such disciplines bear ample testimony to their spontaneous cosmopolitanism. Here we can also include anthropology, as long as it is concerned with man as body. As long as man remains an animal.

Things start losing balance the moment we approach the social sciences and humanities. Sociology, ethnology, linguistics, comparative philology, study of religion or mythology are only starters. 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 back home, to finding links with the whole new worlds of literature lying beyond their fence. Neither does Western theory of literature 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 Arab 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. In fact, while Western literary scholars do tend to know some most elementary data regarding non-Western literatures (basically mere names and titles disconnected from any living context), they only very exceptionally have any idea there ever has been any literary scholarship outside the West and its influence. Patrick C. Hogan, one of the few Western groundbreaking 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). In other words, you mean the two best-known Indian representatives of postmodern, post-colonial, West-originated theory, articulating their ideas along recognizably Western lines of discourse. I have myself tried Hogan's experiment, with tragically identical results. Again, one is not disturbed by the fact. No Western literary theorist could possibly take seriously their Chinese, Indian, Arab or Japanese colleagues if they did not know of, say, Sidney or Boileau (who, for all their historical interest, have become only minor, dated curiosities even within Western literary criticism); but they feel perfectly unembarrassed when not responding to the names of Liu Xie (Hsieh), Ānandavardhana, Ǧurǧānī (Jurjani) and Zeami Motokiyo, though these are not just any, but *the greatest* literary theorists within the four traditions, whose work, from more than one aspect, anticipated the West by centuries. Such a situation also gets its official blessing through works that tend to

become authoritative or even standard in their field. Going back to Norton, the first edition of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, published in 2001, found room, in over 2500 pages, for almost 140 theorists. But less than 15 of these were non-Western, none lived prior to the twentieth century, and−to further reduce the embarrassingly reduced minority−none articulated his ideas outside the ken of post-colonial and race issues. As R. Krishnaswamy bitterly comments, "the West produces theory autogenetically; the rest do so only in response to the West" (Krishnaswamy 2014, 140-141). The second edition, from 2010, introduced four more non-Western theorists: C. D. Narasimhaiah (India), Li Zehou (China), Kojin Karatani (Japan), and Paul Gilroy ("Black Atlantic"). "While this is indeed a welcome move," concludes Krishnaswamy, "these additions still fall into the predictable (and contemporary) categories of transnational black/race studies, nationalistic revivals of indigenous classical traditions, and East-West studies" (Ibid., 152).

Such double standards are part and parcel of what Hogan calls the *eurogenetic fallacy* (Hogan 1996), 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 (and this despite the fact that the myth puts it quite clearly: the beautiful Eastern Europe was ravished by an insatiable Western Zeus). 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*, from Latin *primus*, first!) meridian down to London Greenwich and, consequently, positioning Europe−that is, only a privileged part of it−into the centre of the world (American maps, of course, with the USA in the centre, adapt only to appropriate); 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 plus or minus deviations; 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 one could add many more) 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.[2] 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.[3] 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 rising 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-centred West outgrew its European cradle. The term *fallacy* in both cases inserts the phenomenon 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, for that matter, even extinct!−in New Zealand, just for the fact it does not grow in America. Otherwise our adjectives are simply misplaced: we do not have Western histories of literature, but only histories of Western literature; we do not have Western theories of literature, but only theories of Western literature (which is so much worse than histories of Western literature since these are "merely" quantitative falsifications−presenting a part as the whole−while theories of what is actually Western literature only are qualitatively false identifying as they do one of the possible manifestations of the literary phenomenon with literature in general). Only occasionally,

and always purely accidentally, do they stumble on generally valid truths. Neither can we imagine a *World Fauna* compressing the world's savannas, 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. In his own field, history, and a hundred years ago, Oswald Spengler warned of the problem that even today remains mostly ignored, either by inertia or deliberately:

> The ground of West Europe is treated as a steady pole, a unique patch chosen on the surface of the sphere for no better reason, it seems, than because we live on it−and great histories of millennial duration and mighty far-away Cultures are made to revolve around this pole in all modesty. It is a quaintly conceived system of sun and planets. We select a single bit of ground as the natural centre of the historical system, and make it the central sun. From it all the events of history receive their real light, from it their importance is judged in *perspective*. But it is in our own West-European conceit alone that this phantom "world-history", which a breath of scepticism would dissipate, is acted out.
>
> We have to thank that conceit for the immense optical illusion (become natural from long habit) whereby distant histories of thousands of years, such as those of China and Egypt, are made to shrink to the dimensions of mere episodes while in the neighbourhood of our own position the decades since Luther, and particularly since Napoleon, loom large as Brocken-spectres. (Spengler 1926, 1:17)

We are still very familiar with such, Western, surveys of "world" history. And it is obvious that it takes only most simple modifications to make the above words apply to a Western study of world literature. Or the following words, on the same page:

> It is self-evident that for the Cultures of the West the existence of Athens, Florence or Paris is more important than that of Lo-Yang or Pataliputra. But is it permissible to found a scheme of world-history on estimates of such a sort? If so, then the Chinese historian is quite entitled to frame a world-history in which the Crusades, the Renaissance, Caesar and Frederick the Great are passed over in silence as insignificant.

This, then, is the crucial distinction: what is more important *for us* is one thing, but what is important for articulating *a scheme of world*

*literature* (to promptly translate into our own terms)−is a thing altogether disconnected from and uncaring for our own petty importances. You cannot understand literature as a global given−which might be close to *literature in itself*−on estimates based on samples whose only virtue is that they are ours. What, from what Spengler calls the morphological point of view, has that virtue to do with a scientific criterion?

> Is it not ridiculous to oppose a "modern" history of a few centuries, and that history to all intents localized in West Europe, to an "ancient" history which covers as many millennia−incidentally dumping into that "ancient history" the whole mass of the pre-Hellenic cultures, unprobed and unordered, as mere appendix-matter? This is no exaggeration. Do we not, for the sake of keeping the hoary scheme, dispose of Egypt and Babylon−each as an individual and self-contained history quite equal in the balance to our so-called "world history" from Charlemagne to the [First] World-War and well beyond it−as a *prelude* to classical history? Do we not relegate the vast complexes of Indian and Chinese culture to foot-notes, with a gesture of embarrassment? As for the great American cultures, do we not, on the ground that they do not "fit in" (with what?), entirely ignore them? (Ibid., 17-18)

It is frightening that Spengler's examples hardly need any adjustments to fit a discussion of a proper world literature! The hundred years that have meanwhile elapsed, with postmodernism as their latest and seemingly earnest outcome (unlike the transparent insincerity of the contemporary globalization and its correctnesses), have done embarrassingly little in replacing what Spengler calls the Ptolemaic system (either of history or literature, let me add again) with the Copernican, that "admits no sort of privileged position to the Classical or the Western Culture as against the Cultures of India, Babylon, China, Egypt, the Arabs, Mexico (Ibid., 18)", *unless* it might be somehow shown that a privileged position should be granted, to one or another, on purely literary grounds.

So much for history−and its science−as a representative example of the way the humanities treat their subjects. Very much unlike the situation in the natural sciences. But then, flora and fauna have to do with plants and animals, while culture is all about man. And the Westerner 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 Westerner sees it as a further expansion of his knowledge–knowledge equalling factography–and his knowledge is something he is particularly proud of. Meeting other people, however, is not meeting other objects, but subjects of knowledge.

Subject to subject. Agent to agent. And the more the area of study directly involves creations of the human mind and imagination, the more self-righteous the study becomes, the more aggressively possessive, shellbound, conceited and self-consumed. The more provincial.

The earliest expression I have found of the awareness that even within the humanities things are particularly bad when it comes to studying literature is Richard Moulton's (who belongs among the fathers of comparative literature), from 1919 (that is, contemporary with Spengler's pronouncements). Though his book, too, largely belies its title−*World Literature and Its Place in General Culture*−already in its Preface he makes clean breast of taking world literature "not in the sense of the sum total of particular literatures, but as a unity, the literary field seen in perspective from the point of view of the English-speaking peoples" (Moulton 1919, v). He then expands his vision, in the sixth chapter, entitled "Collateral Studies in World Literature", to include Arabic, Indian and Persian literatures (though not Chinese and Japanese, since, quite consistently, "it cannot be said that any part of these has been adopted into the *world literature of the west* [my italics]" Ibid., 333), and does aim at a comprehensive theoretic consideration of world literature−which he actually takes also to mean literature *per se*, as inducted from a close study of its vastly distributed samples−at least within the terms of the book, reduced, but openly declared and pragmatically based. Moulton clearly sees that we do not split into national compartments when we speak of philosophy, history, art or language, but are rather aware of their existence as wholes, regardless of their possible variations. So, for instance, "we recognize that there is the thing philosophy, with an independent interest and history of its own, the whole being something quite different from the sum of the parts. In other words, we recognize the unity of philosophy" (Ibid., 2). Seeing an area as not merely a sum of its parts, but also−and foremost−as an overarching entity only manifesting through its various components, is already by itself a great achievement and I will come back to it shortly, specifically in relation to world literature. However, warns Moulton, once we come to literature, things are studied in water-tight compartments. "We look in vain for an independent study of literature itself, and of literature as a whole" (Ibid.). Neither does comparative literature, or philosophy of literature, save the day. We do not, for instance, have a comparative mathematics. "Such names might indeed be used to denote specific pieces of work; they could never indicate a whole study", while a "Philosophy of Literature can be nothing more than a single element in the whole study of literature" (Ibid., 2-3). What ultimately matters is rather getting a glimpse of the *unity of literature*,

achieved only by "a detailed and loving acquaintance with a large number of actual literary works" (Ibid., 3).[4]

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 a legitimate 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 valid 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 have 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 purely 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, as if nothing had happened, to publishing another survey of literary theory in the West, entitled simply *Theory of Literature*? 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 the theory of literature. With barely anyone to see it. To see that a single literary experience is identified with literature as such, to see that in our theory of literature 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 *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 the 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 hold that not even the future will exhaust all possibilities of artistic expression.

To supplement Moulton's "detailed and loving acquaintance with a large number of actual literary works", it must be pointed out that 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 accompanied 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 any existing 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? As a rule, explicitly (within post-colonial and related postmodern studies) or implicitly (within world literature studies proper), discussing world literature boils down to eliminating a form of humanistic imperialism and establishing cultural symmetry. But what is really at stake here, from a genuinely scholarly point of view, is not another variant of political correctness or empowering non-Western cultures, but the very scholarly integrity, *actually* studying what one proposes to study when labelling one's endeavour with what soon enough blows out into a mere misnomer. Put most simply, even at the beginning of the third millennium

of history as defined by its own reckoning, Western literary criticism still does not study literature.

In spite of the fact that the ideal was proposed at least two hundred years ago, in the West.