

## Telling the Story of Literature from Inside Out

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# Telling the Story of Literature from Inside Out

## Methods and Tools for Non-European Poetics

Rebecca Gould

Gould's discussion of *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature* (2014), a magisterial contribution to South Asian literature edited by Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb, situates this work within broader trends within the discipline of comparative literature and cross-cultural poetics. She considers how this volume advances the ability of the discipline overall to engage with multilingual texts, to develop a literary theory based on difference rather than sameness, and to think concretely about how vernacularizing processes contribute to the formation and circulation of literary cultures. While advocating for an intrinsic approach to aesthetic culture, she acknowledges the importance of all methods for engaging with world literature from non-European points of view.

Keywords: poetics, aesthetics, literary comparison, South Asia, Islamic world, premodernity, vernacularization

How do we compare the literatures of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, when the very tools through which these literatures are to be engaged have been devised for other purposes?

When the chronologies, the typologies, the categories, and the genres were formulated with a view to European literary histories? These questions hurl us toward another abyss: how in rejecting or seeking to transform these tools, as most of us will, do we avoid the trap of nativism or of narrow historicism? How do we move beyond refutation and deprecation and negotiate the complex dialectic of understanding literatures on their own terms while making the most of tools and methods already in general currency? Failing to engage with this dialectic is Eurocentric. Yet, if we refuse to deploy the tools available to us and to draw on the discourses in widest currency within our immediate academic spheres, the results we obtain will communicate nothing to the broader world.

Such is the dilemma faced by a work such as Yigal Bronner, David Dean Shulman, and Gary A. Tubb's *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature*. It offers a preliminary history of *kāvya*, the Sanskrit term for literary composition that encompasses poetry and prose, for a world wherein the conceptualization of this subject is as yet in its infancy. It does so through sections focused on specific authors (Kalidasa, Bana),

genres (the *mahakavya*), historical periods (“poets of the new millennium”), and specific geographies (“regional *kavyas*”). The *kavya* conceived of here is broadly South Asian rather than Sanskritic, and yet all of its iterations bear the traces of Sanskrit. The editors identify four major sources for writing *kavya*’s history: “what poets have to say about other poets”; “what poets have to say about their own poetry”; “popular accounts and assessments”; and “the explicit remarks of professional critics and theorists.”<sup>1</sup> These four sources constitute the archive, not only of literature, but also of literary criticism and literary theory. These texts are commentaries on other texts, as well as on themselves. They constitute the material of literary scholarship while also exemplifying it, enabling the reader to step back from the text and consider how it has been—and might and should be—read. The words of poets about the work of other poets, about their own work, popular accounts, and the accounts of critics are the core sources available to the would-be *kavya* chronicler.

For a specialist in the literatures of the Islamic world, particularly Persian and the multilingual Caucasus, this fourfold typology of sources gives rise to the question of how they can provide a model for writing literary history, and the history of literature’s reflection on itself (otherwise known as literary theory). How does this work for literatures that have yet to be fully integrated within the world literary canon? I share much common ground with the contributors to this volume: we all struggle against a general condition, wherein the texts and traditions we work on are positioned at the margins of literary studies as a discipline. As Dan Martin rightly complains, “Literature as such does not fill the cultural niche that the academy reserves for Tibet” (567). The terrain of Tibetan literature is instead given over to religious and area studies, with occasional admixtures of history. The same might be said of the literatures of the Caucasus, especially Georgian, but Persian too, to a lesser extent.<sup>2</sup> Although this state of affairs may not trouble scholars who do not prioritize the study of literature above everything else, it is immensely frustrating to those of us who were first

drawn to the literatures in question in part because of the unique forms of aesthetic experience they made available to us.

From the Norton Anthologies to the freshman introductory courses to the Cambridge Histories, existing institutions for the study of literature do not treat non-European literatures well.<sup>3</sup> Can the four core sources identified in this volume's introduction for writing *kavya*'s history help reverse our common disciplinary malaise? Can the material they offer as a framework be extrapolated onto a method for engaging world literature? When posed from the vantage point of both South Asian and Islamic literary cultures, the answer to this question is unambiguously yes. The best sources for literary history are literary texts themselves, along with the intertextual webs these texts weave across time and space. These works offer the kernels of a shared methodology, while attesting to the unrealized potential of world literature as a paradigm, notwithstanding its current precarious status, as well as its widely reported death.

My engagement with *Innovations and Turning Points* in these pages pursues several goals. First, I situate this volume within ongoing efforts to rewrite the history of world literature and to extend the tools available to us for embarking on this project. Next, I offer reflections on the methodologies appropriate to comparative poetics, or for doing what Sheldon Pollock (cited many times in this volume) has called studying "literary culture from inside out."<sup>4</sup> Throughout, I consider how *Innovations and Turning Points* fulfils or departs from the methodological aims that seem to me most relevant to a discipline that aspires to do justice to the diversity of literary forms. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on how the stories we tell about world literature from non-European points of view might collectively challenge the methodologies that have been bequeathed to us by prior generations of literary comparatists. I consider how, by enriching the study of their most proximate subjects, non-European viewpoints will also eventually transform the study of literature as such. Along the

way I engage in nonsystematic comparative reflections on how the patterns and themes revealed in the scholarship in *Innovations and Turning Points* intersect with the literary traditions of the Persianate world, broadly understood.

I want to begin briefly with where we find ourselves at present, in an age when scholarship on literature is both programmatically global in terms of its aspirations and yet persistently Eurocentric in terms of its methodological foundations. Emily Apter has polemicized against world literature in this sense, and many have joined her in her call.<sup>5</sup> Gayatri Spivak proclaimed the death of comparative literature a decade earlier, on similar grounds to those decried by Apter: the homogeneity of a discipline that remains awash in outmoded Eurocentric categories, without yet being able to draw on or refer to alternative epistemic norms.<sup>6</sup> These depredations are striking, not least because they largely ignore the groundbreaking work underway in self-described area studies departments, of which *Innovations and Turning Points* is but one of many examples. What lends an aura of plausibility to Apter's and Spivak's critiques is the fact that the discipline of comparative literature as yet remains aloof from the areal focus of volumes such as the one under review here. What does it mean to claim that comparative literature is dead, when those who are engaged in such condemnations also fail to engage systematically with texts outside European canons, most notably those from before modernity?

In my view, it is less the case that comparative literature is dead as that it currently lacks the material foundations necessary for its successful realization. As the editors of *Innovations and Turning Points* understand well, these foundations consist of critical editions, translations, anthologies, and commentaries, not only academic articles and conference papers. The "pilot studies" offered in this landmark volume do much to fortify world literature's material foundations from a South Asian point of view (26). Their

collective success is most visible in three domains, which I address in turn: the treatment of multilingual literary cultures, the theorization of literary difference, and vernacularization.

With regard to multilingualism, a number of contributions in this volume allow us to move away from a vision of literary history as a series of discrete monolingual literary traditions that only occasionally merge with each other. All studies of *kavya* by definition rely on Sanskrit aesthetic principles, just as, across the Islamic world, all discussions of poetry refer back to the Arabic conception of *shi'r* (poetry). Yet, increasingly in scholarship on South Asian literatures, the supremacy of Sanskrit is situated within a heteroglossic geography.<sup>7</sup> The contributions of Thomas Hunter, Martin, Shulman, and Allison Busch bear this out in different ways. **{AU: Please add authors' full names at first mention.}** Tibetan, Braj, Telugu, and Old Javanese all take their place in this volume “inside and outside the history of Indian *kavya*” (601). *Innovations and Turning Points* is a literary history oriented toward a single conceptual ideal, *kavya*, that reflects the multiplicity of ways in which this ideal has been engaged. The volume’s structure shows that no adequate account of a given literary tradition can examine the fate of one language in isolation from that of others. That isolationism has been the model for most literary scholarship to date in modern European academies is a result of the national basis of modern literary study and the consequential division of the discipline into specific language departments (most commonly French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Russian).

Like its predecessor, Pollock’s *Literary Cultures in History* (2003), *Innovations and Turning Points* turns away from the monolingual framework that has dominated much of literary studies to date.<sup>8</sup> Rather than offer us a history of literature in Sanskrit, this volume works toward a multilingual history of *kavya*. From a methodological point of view, this endeavor is more promising for the future world literature than are earlier contributions that tend to adhere to a monolingual European model.<sup>9</sup> Even from a European perspective, the

limits of approaching the study of literature through the paradigm of national traditions have been widely critiqued; hence, the South Asian multilingual model has broad relevance. Increasingly, South Asianist scholarship is the focal point for the argument that monolingual literary histories are constraints imposed by a nation-state model that makes territory coterminous with linguistic and ethnic identity.<sup>10</sup> Recognizing that South Asian literatures offer the resources for moving beyond the monolingual paradigm, Francesca Orsini has pioneered the study of South Asian literatures on a multilingual basis.<sup>11</sup> Orsini's paradigm of the "multilingual local" shares much in common with the guiding assumptions of this volume.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps as a result of the preeminent status of Arabic within the Islamic world (enshrined as it is in the concept of Quranic inimitability, *i'jaz*), scholars of Middle Eastern literatures have not done as much as South Asianists have (generally and in this volume) to forge new methods for engaging with the multilingual dimensions of their respective traditions, particularly before modernity. And yet, the heteroglossic landscape is similarly complex. It would be impossible, for example, to name a major classical Persian contribution to literature or to literary theory that is unaffected by prior Arabic contributions. Whether its primary linguistic medium is Persian, Ottoman, Chaghatay, or another language of the Islamic world, Islamic poetics (*ilm al-balagha*, literally the science of rhetoric) is as profoundly Arabic in its foundations as South Asian poetics is Sanskritic. Yet scholarship on *balagha*, such as it is, has tended to focus on single linguistic traditions, notwithstanding the significant continuity, and in many cases the full isomorphism between (for example) Persian and Arabic in the realm of rhetoric.<sup>13</sup> Although the meanings of key rhetorical terms, such as metaphor (*isti'ara*), simile (*tashbih*), and metonymy (*kinaya*), shift as they move across languages, the lexical pool for rhetorical terminology flows from a single, clearly identifiable source: classical Arabic, the language of the Quran. The supremacy of Arabic is inviolable

and constant; it is a condition of possibility for the emergence of every other literature across the Islamic world. Just as *alankara-sastra* conditions the Sanskritic orientation of texts in Brajbhasa, Telugu, Tibetan, and Old Javanese, so does *balagha* condition the relation of Persian and Turkic poetry to Arabic.

The variability of literary meaning across languages was accompanied by a relative constancy of literary figuration across all Arabic-script Islamicate literary traditions. So long as the script was Perso-Arabic, the lexicon drawn upon for poetic figuration belonged to a common rhetorical tradition. And even when the script in use was not Arabic, as with Judeo-Persian, which was written in Hebrew script, the fundamentals of Persian rhetoric shaped its poetics as much as with any text composed in the Perso-Arabic script.<sup>14</sup> As with the Indic vernaculars that emerged during the first half of the second millennium, even when new terms were grafted onto an older tradition, the old foundational Sanskritic terms never completely disappeared.

By contrast, with language pairs such as Sanskrit-Tibetan in South Asia and Persian-Georgian in West Asia, literary theory was more often forged through calques—rough equivalents—than through direct transliterations. At the beginning of the ninth century, Martin posits, “a Tibetan equivalent had been coined for the Sanskrit word *kavya*” (585). Note that, in contrast to, say, Braj, it was decided to introduce an entirely new term into Tibetan in order to represent the new concept of *kavya*. Like Tibetan in relation to Sanskrit, Georgian incorporated a large volume of Persian narrative and tradition, while domesticating the Persian rhetorical lexicon beyond recognition. Unlike early modern vernaculars such as Braj and Ottoman, Tibetan and Georgian are ancient languages with literatures that long predated global languages like Sanskrit and Persian. Instead of accepting loanwords (*tatsamas*) from these global languages, they were more likely to draw on their indigenous resources to describe the new concepts they deployed. These differing approaches call for a



more temporally attuned and systematic account of the variable relation between local and global language along temporal axes than is yet on offer at the global scale.

Monolingual paradigms misrepresent the plurilingual dimensions of literary culture in most if not all parts of the premodern world. And yet, recent decades have witnessed groundbreaking initiatives to move beyond this misrepresentation, such as Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle's landmark volumes that gather together the *qaṣidas* (odes) of an astounding range of Islamic literary cultures, from Swahili and Hausa to Urdu and Sindhi.<sup>15</sup> Similar projects have been undertaken to map the plurilingual circulation of other genres, such as the *ghazal* (lyric poem).<sup>16</sup> Within this same pluralizing tradition, the multilingual structure of *Innovations and Turning Points* is instructive to all literary scholars, including those who specialize in European literatures.

Second, to return to the question posed at the beginning, of reconstructing the history of non-European literatures when the very tools through which this history is to be written have been devised for other purposes, scholars of non-European literature face in acute form an epistemological dilemma shared by everyone. How can we be sympathetic interpreters of the past while writing from a vantage point that is alien to it? This is the problem, stated in general terms. In the context of South Asian and other non-European literatures, the general problem of temporal distance is compounded by cultural, linguistic, and regional differences, internally within South Asia as well as in relation to Europe. How can difference be narrated from a point of view that is necessarily outside its frame of reference? Here too, the means devised by scholars of South Asian literatures for dealing with this problem in the acute form in which it is posed by *kavya* are relevant to all scholars of literature, no matter how familiar or proximate are the traditions in which they work.

In their introduction and in the prefatory notes for each of the seven sections, Bronner et al. offer a series of methodological observations that structure the volume as a whole and

that broadly speak for much groundbreaking work underway within South Asian studies. “How,” they ask, “does one recognize change—especially in the context of tremendous continuities in language, figuration, and many structural and formal features? What kind of language is available to describe moments of innovation? One place to begin is with the internal perspectives that the Sanskrit tradition itself offers on its history” (6). Questions like these clarify why much recent scholarship on South Asian literary history is qualitatively distinct from the more conventional work that dominates much of what is called world literature, specifically scholarship focused on Europe (which is to say, the object of Apter’s and Spivak’s critiques). The point of view that makes the South Asianist approach unique can be characterized by its focus on, and interest in, newness, as well as the desire to use newness as a methodological framework for the scholarly project itself. All scholarship is in one way or another driven by the discovery of what is new, but the material resources within South Asian studies make the discovery of newness rather distinct. The methodological orientation to identifying emergent forms of knowledge and new ways of thinking, being, and experiencing literary form set this volume apart from its predecessors, offering a discursive elaboration on the more explicitly multilingual *Literary Cultures in History*.<sup>17</sup> Beyond the introduction, Tubb’s interest in “patterns of innovation” (72–75), Herman Tieken’s interest in “beginnings” (86–108), Peter Khoroché’s engagement in Bharavi’s originality (111–12), Busch’s focus on literary newness (“Literary Newness in Dialogue with Tradition”) (648–50), {AU: Minor revision okay?} and Hunter’s discussion, titled “Innovation and Change in the East Javanese *Kakawin*” (739–86), all concern themselves with different kinds of newness. Countless other explicit invocations of newness as an organizing trope could also be cited from this volume.

When a scholarly tradition orients itself conceptually to the discovery of the new, the question becomes: what criteria do scholars use to adjudicate this newness? New for whom?

The operating assumption of the editors and contributors seems to be: new for the poets and texts in question, and new for the tradition itself. The newness they seek is new not on our terms, but on the terms of the texts and traditions themselves. It follows, however, as a matter of methodological necessity, that if an aspect of a text is new within the horizon of its own tradition, it can be made new for us as well. This transformative process, of making the old new for us in the present, is the task of the scholar of the scholar-critic. Understood in this way, originality in scholarship is attained when the newness of the tradition being studied converges with the scholar's ability to reveal this newness within contemporary horizons. When this conjuncture is reached, the goal of literary theory and criticism has, however briefly, been attained. It may then fade away or be lost in the details, but for the one who had witnessed this flash of newness—and here I write as a non–South Asianist who has been heavily impacted by the innovations of colleagues in South Asian Studies—such apotheoses leave a mark that will never be erased. This volume attains to this degree of originality at several junctures, most strikingly for me in the contributions that focus on Braj (Busch), Tibetan (Martin), and Rajesekara's *Young Ramayana* (Lawrence McCrea).

Having gone this far in recognizing the originality of this monumental contribution to the study of South Asian literatures, I would like to pause, for there is an aspect of the framing of this project with which I find myself in disagreement, because it seems to me to conflict with the goal I endorsed above, of writing literary culture from inside out.<sup>18</sup> Bronner et al. state in their introduction that theirs “is not a history of Sanskrit *kavya*,” and add, “we may be generations away from such a work.”{AU: Quotation from p. 6?} This admission begs the question: is it precisely a *history* of *kavya* that ought to be our ultimate goal, as scholars of literature? I would submit—and I am aware that here I part ways with many of my colleagues—that the answer is no. Of course, anyone is entitled to write a history of anything he or she wishes. The issue lies with what then happens to the study of literature

*qua* literature when scholarship on it is treated like a historical enterprise. What is lost to literature—or to *kavya* or *shi'r*, as the case may be—when reconstructive history becomes the goal? Might an exclusively historicizing approach to a literary tradition that rarely if ever regarded itself historically cause scholars to miss dimensions of these literatures that can only be perceived through engagement with their literary form?<sup>19</sup> Is literary history the only way of making premodern non-European literatures come alive in the present and of advancing our knowledge of these traditions? Are literary scholars simply historians who happen to use literary texts as their primary source? Does literature exist simply to “provide glimpses into the socio-cultural and historical contexts of literary activity” (197)? I would to the contrary suggest that the excessive focus on historicizing methods that had traditionally marked South Asian and other area studies goes a great distance to explain why the study of South Asian literary theory has lagged far behind. The focus on history had impeded our ability to promote, and to theorize, the experience of literature in all of its ahistorical and emotive force.

Let me pause then over a minor moment in this magisterial work that led me to register these hesitations. My remarks should be taken as signs of a broader disagreement with a certain approach to non-European knowledge that dominates area studies, rather than simply a critique of volume under discussion. In the introduction to the third section, on the development of the *mahakavya* (courtly epic), the editors posit that “all the essays in this section posit as a working hypothesis a far-reaching isomorphism among these poetic devices and what McCrea calls the ‘overall narrative and thematic content’ of the poem” (110). This comment seems to gesture toward the aesthetic category of wholeness, which is a major concern of European aesthetics, from Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel to Benedetto Croce and Roman Ingarden. It also more broadly links up with genre theory, an abiding concern of modern European comparative literature that is noticeably absent from premodern non-

European approaches to literary form. Many scholars of Middle Eastern and Islamic literatures have discussed how the European emphasis on the wholeness of the work of art has no counterpart in classical Arabic literary theory, notwithstanding seemingly cognate concepts like *nazm*, pioneered by al-Jurjani.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the editors recognize this dissonance when they write that “neither the *alankara* writers nor modern Sanskrit scholars have ever formulated such a hypothesis or addressed issues such as the pacing of plot, the role of large-scale repetitions, [and] the interplay between figurative and metrical structures” (110). In short, *alankarasastra*, much like *balagha*, lacks a theory of the work of art as an integral whole, and it can only take us so far in our efforts to reconcile the theoretical richness of premodern non-European literatures with the questions driving contemporary literary theory. This argument resonates with the evidence afforded by Persian, Arabic, Ottoman, Chaghatay, and Urdu poetics and is arguably a direct consequence of the rhetorical emphasis of much literary theory before modernity.

So far, so good. I do not object to the general premises of this argument, and I fully endorse the legitimacy and importance of engaging with premodern South Asian literatures through the lens of the categories that drive literary analysis today. Anachronistic formalism is foundational to the vocation of the literary scholar, who seeks to make texts from times past relevant in the present. What I do wonder about, however, is how the historicizing approach adopted in this volume may have limited the attention that might otherwise be given to how *kavya* operates on its own terms. If the *kavya* tradition does not explicitly reflect on their “overall narrative and thematic content,” then it follows that we must seek to excavate the ways in which they *do* conceive themselves, before reconceiving them in ways that will make them relevant to our own worlds. In fact, this level of analysis, which might be called indigenous or intrinsic for lack of better terms, is on display in abundance in this volume. I have no doubt that the contributors and editors, all of whom are eminent specialists

in their respective fields, are fully attuned to how the texts they analyze work at the indigenous and intrinsic levels.

My point is rather different, and it is aimed specifically at the nonspecialist, who will not be able to draw on his or her existing knowledge of *rasa* theory or the many types of bitextual poetry when engaging with this work. There are instances here, and indeed in most scholarship on non-European literatures, when the opportunity for maximizing the benefits of literary difference remains underrealized, because of an overhasty reliance on European aesthetic norms and the expectation that nonspecialists will be able to fill in the details from indigenous poetics by themselves. In fact, it is more likely that the gaps of knowledge caused by lack of access to relevant indigenous concepts will be filled by already familiar, if less relevant, concepts, such as genre and organic unity.<sup>21</sup> In such encounters, there will also be a tendency to fill in any gaps in comprehension by relying on historical explanations rather than text-immanent analysis.

From a specialist perspective, there are good reasons for omitting discussion of the many kinds of bitextuality (*slesa*), or the differences between *yamaka* (rhyme) and *upama* (simile), or to offer typologies of *vakrokti* (oblique utterance) a general analysis. Yet, the aesthetic worlds intrinsic to these rhetorical tropes should be made available to the nonspecialist. Because they are text-immanent, they can expand our understanding of literature and enable the discipline to move beyond the normative application of European principles, including those that view the work of art as an aesthetic whole. The modern historical method is by contrast relatively limited in the points of entry it offers into unfamiliar aesthetic worlds. At least, creating such points of access is not this method's goal. So long as we remained confined to historicizing *kavya*, theoretical engagement with *kavya* will lag behind. It will be disproportionately shaped by the *application*, rather than the *transformation*, of existing European literary theory.

I know I do not speak for everyone—and possibly I speak for very few—when I suggest that the task of the literary scholar is not reducible to historicizing literature. Insofar as the goal is to “historicize a literary tradition” there will be a tension between the work of historical reconstruction and the work of aesthetic appreciation (26). That the latter is crucial to the editors and contributors is apparent from many contributions to this volume (in particular Tubb, McCrea, Bronner, Granoff, Malamoud, Shulman, and Rao{**AU: Please add first names.**}) as well as from the editors’ prior publications.<sup>22</sup> My hesitation, however, pertains less to what the volume actually achieves than with how it theorizes its own existence as a contribution to the study of literature. There is a great deal more than literary history in this volume, and that is to its credit. Yet, theoretically and methodologically, its conceptualization of its task is dominated by an historical framework that stands in tension with the intrinsic aesthetics of the *kavyas* it excavates.

One reason why it is worth focusing on *kavya* from an aesthetic rather than historicist perspective is that only the former can transform our understanding of literature as such, and teach us to pose questions that have not already been posed by European literary theory. To understand a poetic text on its own terms means engaging with it through a reading experience that collapses conventional frameworks of space and time. The aesthetic intensity of the reading encounter is in this sense ahistorical. As the contributors and editors know well, this is how poetry is best read, in the prophetic temporality of a Valmiki or a Mutanabbi. When the transtemporal dimension of the reading experience is suppressed through historical analysis, then the discursive uniqueness of poetry is lost. In fact, this volume abounds in transtemporal reading encounters that prioritize aesthetic experience. My point is simply that, methodologically, these encounters could have been more centrally foregrounded, and they could have been allowed to take precedence over the task of historical reconstruction. That would have been one effective means for ensuring that indigenous literary theory is not

overtaken by European concerns with organic unity, and that the relationship of *alankarasastra* to its European counterpart is that of transformation rather than subordination. An overly strict insistence on historical reconstruction as the endpoint of literary scholarship arguably conflicts with the intrinsic aesthetic experience that is *kavya*'s fundamental concern, as well as its most lasting and original contribution to world literature.<sup>23</sup>

To state this point more concretely, while engagement with *alankarasastra* enriches this volume and clarifies many dimensions of the reading experience in *Innovations and Turning Points*, there is also room for a more radical conceptual shift. The front-loading of indigenous literary theory sets this volume apart from prior histories of Indian literature. Future efforts in this direction may wish to even more programmatically foreground the basics of *kavya*'s conceptual universe—*rasa* (aesthetic flavor), *yamaka*, *riti* (style), *upama*, *vakrokti*, and many other tropes and devices that cannot be described here. Such a methodological focus would enable scholars of non-European literatures to go even further in dispensing with the conventions of European scholarship, including the historical method, as conventionally understood, or to problematize further the tools that have been bequeathed to scholars of non-European literatures, although they were devised for other goals.

I have so far discussed how *Innovations and Turning Points* offers new ways of theorizing literary difference for a multilingual literary universe. I want to conclude with a few remarks about a specific kind of comparison, which can be treated as a variation on the first two points. If it is the case that, as I have argued, all literary history, especially that written from non-European perspectives, ought to be written from a multilingual point of view, and that, if its originality and innovativeness is to be made relevant to the nonspecialist, it ought first to be theorized using concepts that derive from the literatures being discussed, then it follows that literary history stands in need of a methodology that will enable it to



achieve its comparative goals. The intrinsic aesthetic and the multilingual point of view can only be brought to life through a sophisticated and rigorous theory of comparison. With this in mind, I will conclude with some specific observations about the parallels suggested by the histories of vernacularization and of *kavya* in languages other than Sanskrit, traced in this volume, to a scholar of Persian and Persianate literatures in their diverse transregional manifestations.

The parallels pointed out by Alexander Key in this *Kitabkhana* between the major genres of the Islamic world and of South Asia (these traditions' shared interest in prefaces and anthologies, for example) applies to Persian traditions as well. Similarly, there is much to be said about parallels between the rhetorical nuances of Sanskrit and the cognate values of Arabic and Persian poetics, not least the emphasis on innovation and newness. In addition to the parallels Key notes, one might refer to the modernist (*muhdathun*) poets among the first generation of 'Abbasid poets, of the eighth and ninth centuries CE.<sup>24</sup> What I would like to focus on instead in concluding is the dialectic between Persian and non-Persian languages, as it compares to the transmission of Sanskrit *kavya* to other languages. The vernacularizing process is traced in detail by Busch, and in different, less direct ways, by Hunter, Martin, and Shulman.

Just as the transition from Arabic to Persian as the dominant language for literary production in the eastern Islamic world was accompanied by a paradigm shift, so too did the more gradual processes through which Persian literature merged with non-Persian vernaculars transform the dynamics of literary culture. As with the complex trajectory of *kavya* across South Asia and beyond, the fate, first of Persian, and subsequently of Persianate idioms, is difficult to systematize. Three types of Persianization can be identified and compared to parallel trajectories with *kavya* in South Asia discussed in *Innovations and Turning Points*: Judeo-Persian, Persian-Ottoman/Chaghatay, and Persian-Georgian.{AU:

**Revision correct?}** The first case is essentially Persian written in a different script, Hebrew. The second case involves Persian's influence on a language with which it shared a script. In the third case, Persian idioms inflected an unrelated language that had long been written in a different script, and which predated New Persian itself. The flexibility of South Asian scripts, which permitted any language to be recorded in any script, means that Judeo-Persian (or Judeo-Arabic) has no direct parallel in South Asia. South Asian scripts were not tied to specific languages, ethnicities, or religions in the way that the Islamic identity of the Arabic script caused Muslim cultures to adopt this script universally, even when a different script was already in use. In the case of Persian-Turkic interactions, vernacularization transpired among languages that already shared a script, since the cultures they represented do not predate the adoption of Islam. This relationship is paralleled in South Asia by the turn to Braj from within a Sanskritic medium (as Busch discusses). Finally, the example of local vernaculars domesticating global literatures so thoroughly that the visible signs of influence were erased is paralleled in this volume by the discussions of *kavya* in Tibetan and Old Javanese (Martin and Hunter, respectively).

With these rough parallels established, perhaps it would be wise not to probe further, as further inquiry would surely lead to digressions. The broader point worth making is simply that Sanskrit, in the mode of *kavya*, Persian in the mode of *sukhan*, and Arabic in the mode of *shi'r* each lay a foundation for a global literature that circulated in local spheres and that cultivated its own intrinsic aesthetics. In each case, there was tension between the perceived supremacy of the foundational language and local deviations. Equally, the tension was productive for literary history and integral to its broader trajectory. Each of these circulations, whether across the Islamic world or across Asia, calls for a way of narrating that multilingual circulation that is not held captive by nationalist ideologies, monolingual premises, or historicizing agendas. Each story of circulation and exchange, of negotiation and

revision, deserves to be told in terms immanent to its own theories of what makes literature work and what constitutes an aesthetic experience. Finally, each story of circulation is itself an instance of comparison, whereby one literature impinges on another, one text generates another, and one imagination stimulates new ideas in another poet or reader.

Intertextuality, broadly conceived, is the story of literature. It is the basis of all literary history and the source of all literary meaning. The task awaiting the would-be critic of non-European literatures is to determine whether, when these literatures are compared, we are comparing the literatures themselves, their histories, their receptions, or a compound mixture of these foregoing elements. Each approach will call for a different disciplinary orientation and a different methodology. Some will choose to focus exclusively on comparing one literary text to another, on the basis of their shared aesthetic principles, without feeling the need to engage with the attendant historical contexts. Others will decide that there can be no meaningful discussion of a text without referencing its context, and will therefore compare both text and context at the same time. As we sort through these various possibilities and determine which works best in light of our chosen method, we must resist the temptation to propagate a binary vision that would make one mode of comparison superior to another. *Innovations and Turning Points* abounds in each form of comparison described above. In its multiplicity and diversity, it serves as a model for any future endeavor to tell the history of world literature from the inside out.

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**{AU: Should this author's name be given as "Narayana Rao, Velcheru"? I've seen it both ways in other essays.}** Rao, Velcheru Narayana, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. "A Pragmatic Response." *History and Theory* 46, no. 3 (2007): 409–27.

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1. Bronner et al., *Innovations and Turning Points*, 6. Hereafter cited in the text.

2. Most major research universities have a Persianist (usually in an area studies department), but how many models of world literature make the Persian (or Turkic, or Arabic, or Hebrew) contribution central to the theorization of literature on a global scale?

3. See Gould, “The Geography of Comparative Literature.”

4. Pollock, “Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out.”

5. Apter, *Against World Literature*.

6. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*.

7. As further evidence of the multilingual turn within South Asian studies, consider the multilingual range of the field-changing Murty Classical Library of India (Harvard University Press), which began publishing its first volumes in 2015.

8. Here it is worth referring to the review symposium that was organized around Pollock’s *Literary Cultures in History* that appeared in the *Indian Economic Social History Review* in 2005. See Subrahmanyam, “A Review Symposium.”

9. See, for example, the *History of Indian Literature*, for which Gonda served as general editor. While literatures other than Sanskrit are given extensive treatment in this series, they are treated *separately* from the general history of Sanskrit, and crossovers among these literatures are structurally obscured.
10. For such critiques they pertain to Hindu-Urdu in relation to Persian, see Busch, “Hidden in Plain View,” and Phukan, “Through Throats Where Many Rivers Meet,” 36.
11. Orsini, “How to Do Multilingual Literary History?”
12. See Orsini, “The Multilingual Local in World Literature.”
13. These convergences are discussed along with their divergences in Gould, “The Persian Translation of Arabic Aesthetics.”
14. Moreen, “The ‘Iranization’ of Biblical Heroes.”
15. Sperl and Shackle, *Qaṣīda Poetry*.
16. Bauer and Neuwirth, *Ghazal as World Literature I*, and Neuwirth et al., *Ghazal as World Literature II*.
17. At the risk of generalization, I would further argue that this methodological focus sets South Asian studies apart from other fields. I would be remiss not to refer to the key contributions of Sheldon Pollock in this regard, given that his work is an obvious *locus classicus* for any reflection on newness in a South Asian context. Most relevant to the present are “The Death of Sanskrit” and “New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India.” Subsequent commentators, such as Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason*, 3–5, and Kaviraj, “The Sudden Death of Sanskrit Knowledge,” have added many nuances to Pollock’s approach.
18. In some respects, I am rehearsing a debate that has many times been waged within South Asian studies between emic and etic approaches to knowledge, as well as the implications of



these differing views for the writing of history. See, for example, Sheldon Pollock's review of Rao et al.'s *Textures of Time*, "Pretextures of Time," and the authors' response in the same issue of *History and Theory* (Rao et al., "A Pragmatic Response").

19. I should note that Busch directly contests this point about the ahistorical nature of the material under discussion, noting that "Brajbhasha *kavya* was history—'history in the vernacular'—produced in accordance with an epistemology that, while hardly historical in the Rankean sense, constituted a significant narrativization of the past for its local readership" ("The Classical Past in the Mughal Present," 687). In this case, it might be noted that, if we are not to lose sight of the literariness of the literary text, it is important to think more deeply about what "history in the non-Rankean sense" might look like.

20. In Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, respectively, see Van Gelder, who proposes in *Beyond the Line* a concept of the molecularity of the classical Arabic *qasida* (15); Abu Deeb, "Studies in Arabic Literary Criticism"; Clinton, "Esthetics by Implication"; and Pritchett, "Orient Pearls Unstrung." For *nazm*, the closest cognate concept to the European conception of an organic whole, see Gould, "Inimitability versus Translatability."

21. For an example of the methodological approach critiqued, here, which is even more vulnerable to critique than the volume under discussion here, see Balbir, *Genres littéraires en Inde* (reviewed by Pollock for the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*).

22. The following works demonstrate the editors' deep investment in aesthetic experience as a crucial dimension of their engagement with literature: Shulman, *More Than Real*; Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*; and Tubb, *On Poets and Pots*.

23. For a recent approach to *kavya* that focuses wholly on aesthetic experience, see Pollock, *A Rasa Reader*.

24. For a recent study, see Fakhreddine, *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition*.

**{AU: Please add a short (under 100 words) bio note.}**