

**Worldliness as Key to the Singularity of Literature:
Questioning the General-Particular Framework of Literary Categories**

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Abstract:

Beginning with the premise that the event of literature hosts the phenomenon of world-becoming, the paper seeks to understand the ontological nature of worldliness. Such an attempt is an unpacking of the subject-object binary and a fluidization of the reader's self in relation to the otherness that she/he confronts. Taking cue from Heidegger, Nietzsche and Deleuze, an understanding of worldliness translates to understanding repetition that serves as the key in coming to terms with the singularity of literature. Thereafter, the paper tries to examine literary categories and how they consequently impair the cognizance of this individuating potential of literary works, in turn falling prey to subterranean hegemonic forces. Finally, a critical evaluation of World Literature as an extreme and somewhat problematic form of general category is analysed and contrasted with the potential of Comparative Literature in responding to plurality and otherness that are ground conditions to let the world become.

Keywords: Worldliness, Singularity of Literature, Repetition, Literary Categories, World Literature

Literature as the Event of World-Becoming

That which distinguishes our engagement with literature or any work of art for that matter, from other things, is the fact that the former is characterized by a sense of happening. This however, does not tantamount to saying, that our coming into contact with other things in the world is bereft of any happening whatsoever. Yet, these latter happenings are neutralized by the very functionality by dint of which these things come together to constitute our everyday life. Using a hammer to put a nail on the wooden plank or pouring water from a jug to a glass are such commonplace instances, where the happening is hardly taken notice of. In fact, as Heidegger points out in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art", the equipmentality of a

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thing is predicated upon its ability to dissolve itself in the act in which it finds its use (“Poetry, Language, Thought” 45).

Nevertheless, a work of literature does persist as a thing. On one hand, this is substantiated by the material that constitutes it, and on the other, a certain resistance, a distinct impenetrability that is met with in reading. Unlike other ‘practical’ things however, the thing that literature is, is characterized not by usefulness whereby its materiality is subsumed to utility. Rather, it is the happening itself that is called to being in reading that serves as the *raison d’être* of literature. A work of literature is thus a thing, whose thingly feature “belongs admittedly in the work-being of the work, it must be conceived by way of the work’s workly nature. If this is so, then the road towards the determination of thingly reality of the work leads not from thing to work but from work to thing” (38).

What is meant here by the workly nature of the work? It must be that which makes the work a work. Since, the work is indistinguishable from the event that happens in our engagement with it, this nature is by no means a stable, general, metaphysically derivable element. On the contrary, such a nature is dynamic and inseparable from the event in which it occurs. There is no end to the possibilities that a literary work can bear. Reading a work can elicit pleasure, sorrow, curiosity so long the reader is capable of naming that what the work bears for him. But it is a futile exercise in Nominalism, for any literary work does not evoke a medley of distinctly identifiable emotions and responses, rather serves a new horizon where the things and people whom we had hitherto known appears in a new light. The event of literature invokes a totality, not one that can be envisaged as a distinct summation of things, but the absolute identification of the appearance with the act of making appear. If we are to find one word for what appears in a work of art, it must be something that always eludes our desire for encapsulating it within a framework, and at the same time, it must be that which can only appear in becoming. We call this elusive something the world, and the workly nature of the literary work subsists in worldliness.

And yet, do we not protract our understanding of the world to a general idea? We seem to be sure what the world is and what it means, and armed with this certitude, we approach a literary work as a particular manifestation of this general notion. We speak of World Literature in a sense that literature belongs to the world before it is read. The world is granted an unquestioned priority, and literature as its myriad messengers. Our faith in this

undisputed primacy of the world is supported by that epistemology that categorically describes the world to us through channels like media, trivia, clichés and the archives, information and circulation that are to be found in disciplines such as culture study, sociology, history and so on. Instead of according literature as the sole ground where its meaning seeks to be produced, we extrapolate a work to clusters of stable knowledge-systems, and understand its significance as being represented and derived from the offshoots of such epistemic nexus. Such a tendency is re-iterated in the acts of grouping literature according to periods, culture, categories of class and gender. The event of literature is relegated to a space outside of the work and preceding it. We associate this space with the demarcation of being a social or cultural space.

Such an epistemological supremacy is argued, among many others, by Heidegger, who traces its tradition back to the era of Humanism in Europe. In his essay on the critique of Cartesian philosophy “The Age of World Picture”, he explicates humanism as that which “designates the philosophical interpretation of man which explains and evaluates whatever is, in its entirety, from the standpoint of man and in relation to man” (“The Question concerning Technology” 131). This stability of reference of all knowledge with respect to man could be obtained at the price of proscribing and circumscribing what is meant to be human. Once being-human could be framed in tenets, the certitude of representation could be achieved. The consequences of such a historical phenomenon were on one hand the rise of the encyclopedia as the repository of all there is to know about the world, and using Humanism as a ‘tool’ to civilize those who apparently fell outside its boundaries, namely the ‘natives’ in the colonies. The abuse, or misdirection, of Cartesian reason continued way long till knowledge became synonymous with factuality. We are the successors of this trend who prolong its movement every time we assume the world as a completed entity of inert facts and the work of art as merely a new combination of these facts.

Yet, that which is ontically closest is ontologically farthest, says Heidegger in a ponderous moment in *Being and Time* (69). If the world is that which becomes in the engagement with the literary work, it has no factual primacy. This equals in refuting the very notion of the world as a compound of facts. It is rather in this shift from the medley of facts towards understanding where one comes to be, that constitutes worldliness. “The where-in of an act of understanding which assigns or refers itself is that for which one lets entities be

encountered in the kind of Being that belongs to involvements; and this 'wherein' is the phenomenon of the world. And the structure of that-to-which [*worauf hin*] Dasein assigns itself is what makes up the worldhood of the world" (119). The world, thus, does not exist as a fact does, but can only become. Art, by defamiliarizing itself from everydayness, makes the appearance of the world possible.

The defamiliarization that is at work in literature is not a new combination of facts derived from a general stratum, but a new way of seeing things. If that is so, the notion of a stable human subject can no longer hold, for if we come to look at things in a new light, we are no longer the same as we were before. Here lies the full force of literature's productivity. Unlike the productivity of a machine that produces individual specimens according to varying needs from a general pattern, literature produces the possibility of becoming new. We can no longer subscribe to the general-particular logic, despite the fact that the work of art indeed is individual. But that is not all. The Essence of Art, as Deleuze rightly points out, lies not just in it being individual but in its individuating potential. Essence constitutes subjectivity ("Proust and Signs", 43). The event of literature is world-becoming because our horizons undergo change. What brings about this widening of horizon? Not just the work of art as something individual, but the event, the workly nature that we mentioned before, that is unconcealed by the "projective binding of oneself" ("Essence of Truth" 45). The world is the 'that' which this binding seeks. It is a correlate of this binding and bound to the act of projection which is creative by nature [*Entwurf*].

Reading, understood in this sense, is essentially a creative act. It not only creates that which appears to us in a work but is the ground of an event where a distinct relation evolves; a relation that we resolve as existing between the self and the world, but one that is always prior to any such polarization. Reading, in this sense, does not create new knowledge, but new ways of understanding, new ways of being in the world. This shifts literature from a purely epistemological ground to an ontological concern. The work as a thing is material, but our engagement with it transcends its materiality. This does not mean that meaning of a work is abstracted from its body, but that the body itself presents us an occasion of discovery, a discovery of the self and the world, if one wishes to maintain such a distinction. The subject matter of a work therefore no longer pertains to something that is hermetically sealed, 'contained' within the work that one may unearth with one's subjectivity. Rather, the subject

matter points to that which is arrived at inculcating the cost of the erasure of that self-sure entity which we had imagined ourselves to be until that moment. This is the transcendence that appears strange because it is at once empirical; occasioned by an aesthetic process that but serves as a point of departure. We call this phenomenon transcendence because the reader undergoes a change while reading that is not bound or determinable by what is read. And this is what makes us see the hermeneutic, and not hitherto considered hermetic nature of the act of reading. Interpretation is creation; it is the in-betweenness situated in relation to what is read and what is understood, in other words, what happens or comes-to-be, for understanding is the structure of Dasein, as Heidegger shows. “What appears paradoxical-namely, that the subject matter is simultaneously shaped by the register and yet taken for something independent of it- is due to the liminal space that is opened up by interpretation itself” (Iser 60). This in-betweenness of the act of reading as a movement towards a new way to be in the world, is liminal, because it serves as a passage from one state to another. If we are to look at the space of literature, we cannot seek it in so-called already-defined socio-cultural space, but in a realm where we and the world become.

Worldliness as Repetition, Repetition as Singularity

In which direction should we then proceed in order to better understand the phenomenon of worldliness that is infinitely repeated in our engagement with literature? The clue to this, if not the secret that could once and for all be disclosed but at least the promise that could lead us to a less fabricated path, lies in the askance itself. We must seek to understand the nature of repetition, for it is the mode through which the world appears in literature. Most certainly, this repetition is not the conventionally understood re-appearance of the identical, for then all works of art would evoke worlds similar to one another and generality could be conserved. On the contrary, the very fact that we say the world is infinitely repeated in literature, and that the world is that which becomes or that to which our projection seeks to bind itself, precludes it from being an identity.

Deleuze asks a fundamental question that is relevant to our present discussion of world-becoming as repetition. “What is the being of that which becomes, of that which neither starts nor finishes becoming? Returning is the being of that which becomes”

(“Nietzsche and Philosophy”, 48). If the world returns eternally, it does mean that it is the recurrence of the identical over and over again. The notion of Eternal Return had indeed been so conceived as an inescapable loop of time by pre-Socratic philosophers who looked at it as the subjugation of becoming to pre-determination of fate (29). In his caustic attack at metaphysics, Nietzsche gives a radical turn to the understanding of Eternal Return as a principle of synthesis of forces. All becomings occur by the gathering of intensities passing through differences. What then directs these forces? Nietzsche calls it the will-to-power. The forces by themselves would be erratic and would come to mean nothing unique, unless it is channelized by a potential that provides with a peculiar gradient to move about. This potential, or will, is a complement of the forces themselves and not anthropomorphic. It is the internal, differential and genetic element of its production. “It does not let itself be delegated or alienated to another subject, even to force” (49).

But why does then Nietzsche call this a return or repetition? This is because the forces by themselves are indeed intensities and unperceivable. Only when they are driven by the will do they appear as creative. Every becoming is the return of forces to the realm of creation, and this return is eternal for becoming is without beginning or end. In his magnum opus *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze says,

repetition is being, but only the being of becoming. The eternal return does not bring back the same but returning constitutes the only same of that which becomes. Returning is the becoming identical of becoming itself. Returning is thus the only identity, but identity as a secondary power; the identity of difference, the identical which belongs to the different, or turn around the different. Such an identity, produced by difference, is determined as ‘repetition. (41)

The world as that which becomes in literature is a repetition of forces to the realm of creation. And in this regard, the worldliness of literature becomes a key to understanding its singularity. There is no one world out there somewhere that is permuted by art into individual combinations. Neither are there multiple worlds without any a center, as Deconstruction Theory suggests. For it remains undeniable, that every appearance in literature is that of the world. The definite pronoun before the word world here does not indicate a conceptual generality, but the other face of singularity, which is universality. “We

are confined to ways of describing whatever is described. Our universe, so to speak, consists of these ways rather than a world or of worlds” (Goodman 3). The universe, being only that which comes to be interpreted and described, is singular in this respect. And this singularity can neither be approached by objectivism, a faith that the world already exists prior to description, nor subjectivism that reifies the world to the self’s imagination. It must be addressed outside this much debated binary, for the contention between the Realists and Nominalists that Eagleton alludes to, works under a completely different paradigm where ontology is not granted a central status (1-18).

Universality differs from generality in the condition of absence of genus. If the world was a general concept, then it must have been part of a subset of another group of a higher order. However, as Markus Gabriel ironically points out, the world being a super-object, as in an object containing all objects, cannot exist. It would not be possible to perceive a super-object simply because the perception of it would also have to belong to it. This goes on to confirm that the world cannot be conceptualized in a subject-object binary, but can appear only as singularity where perceiver and perceived exist undifferentiated in perception and becoming. Hence, Markus’ statement, “although the world does not exist, there do exist infinitely many worlds” (65). The singularity of literature implies that the world is repeated infinitely without ever being present as something whole, definite and conclusive.

“Repetition as a conduct and as a point of view concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities” (“Difference” 1). Deleuze elucidates this with the example of festivals. Every celebration of a festival is the only occasion where it happens, and yet the festival as itself cannot ever occur. Likewise, literature occasions the appearance of the world, without ever giving us the world in itself. The notion of the possibility of the world existing as itself is an exigency born out of perception, and has no essential primordality. The transcendental idealism of Kant divides the universe into the noumenal and phenomenal realms because all aesthetic phenomena are contingent and evoke in the subject the feeling of confronting something partial. And yet this feeling of incompleteness is an ineradicable element in the totality of world-becoming. The world has therefore no noumenal existence, but only phenomenal vestiges of it could be arrived at. Whatever is noumenal about the world is contained in its phenomenality. Due to this paradox, the sense of the becoming of the world

is co-existent with the world holding itself back, for the world, unlike an equipment, does not allow itself to be entirely subsumed to use or function.

Thus, for example, a book chosen from a rack labelled African Literature in a bookstore has the possibility of making appear to us the African way of life only to the extent in which the world appears in our engagement with it. This picture or ethos is inextricably bound with the work and our binding with it. And precisely thus do we have the impression that that which is repeated also hides in the repetition as much as it is revealed in it. Unlike encyclopedic knowledge, literature gives us only that which we wrench out of it and ourselves. It tells us what it tells, and holds back that which it does not tell in the telling. To quote Deleuze in this juncture, “repetition is truly that which disguises itself in constituting itself, that which constitutes itself only by disguising itself- There is therefore nothing repeated which may be isolated or abstracted from the repetition in which it was formed, but in which it is also hidden” (17). On one hand, this makes us desist from framing literatures from Africa, our example in hand, into the epistemic molds provided by knowledge-systems. At the same time, it leaves a certain space open to interpretations, in fact beyond interpretations. Literature then shall no longer be looked upon as a representative of a continent, meaning all that the continent is associated with in common opinion and by knowledge archived about it. Rather, literature from Africa, or from wherever and whenever, would be an invitation to take part in an event, a becoming where the world has the possibility of becoming itself. This becoming-itself, that is, the world becoming world, is not representation of something already there. Instead of holding up a demonstration of the African way of life, the event would contribute to a fresh understanding of what it means to be ‘there’; if at all we are to collate this ‘there’ with Africa, it would be an Africa that does not yet exist but brought for the first time to existence by the work. “Because repetition differs in kind from representation, the repeated cannot be represented: rather, it must always be signified, masked by what signifies it, itself masking what it signifies” (18). Thus, repetition is possible only through difference, and not identity. The world that appears in a literary work from Africa is not a representation of African life as already known to us as readers, but a unique internal difference that sets it apart. The infinite repetition of the world in literature can now finally be understood as not being the re-occurrence of some identity, but generation of difference without concept (13).

Ontological Problems concerning Categorization

There seems to exist a great discrepancy of a fundamental nature between the fashioning of literature and its reception, appreciation, and circulation in academia. Our life in these technologically-driven times is by and large distributed in myriad pockets of existence, deliberately cut off from one another. In an epoch where functionality of things exclusively determines our interaction with them, knowledge too has not been able to escape from such a tide of unabashed pragmatism. Our way of seeing things, literature included, has as a result, been somewhat impaired by our proclivity for categorizations. Neatly divided categories serve as stable knowledge-systems whereby understanding is domesticated to behave merely as an exchange and manipulation of information. Even when the content of a literary work is apparently and overtly subversive in relation to a protest or counter-response against an already naturalized socio-cultural category like say class or race, it is soon blended in into a discursive pattern, entailing, if even not intentionally, the neutralization of that very same content.

A work of art, on the other hand, and literature especially due to its verbal roots in the very language that is spoken and lived, is by nature something that contests the very idea and validity of an essential core. Instead of subscribing to categories that are available as calcified and circumscribed zones of human experiences, a literary work is without reservation in embracing anything and everything that it deems fit for its self-expression.

The plurality in literature can only be understood in relation to the plurality in human life. Other than space-time-milieu, several perspectives, conditions, ideals, languages, faith and cultures get implicated at the construction of such plurality, and no matter in which language in whichever corner of the world, it acquires form through the interaction between uniqueness and universalization. (Chanda 46)

While a category encountered in the curriculum of a course in Literature, say for example British Romantic poetry, has as its point of departure as well as regulating principle an idea that has been accepted as something general and demarcated in space-time, literature becomes art only when it does not abide by the deterministic limits of such zones stipulated by conventional discourse. As mentioned already, worldliness as the projection of the reader

or even the writer is an act that is not teleological, for it is this projection itself that co-forms the world in its becoming. This projection is not a random manipulation of things, but a certain bringing together of elements that have been divorced from one another by the very course of human civilization in its zeal for compartmentalization. It is in this sense that Deleuze understands literature as a complication where the past appears not as that which had been once present, but in the very pastness of past, in the very possibility of it having been a fused state yet to be abstracted in analytical compartments (“Proust and Signs”, 30).

If the appearance of the world in our engagement of literature necessitates an openness on our part to allow that aforementioned ‘projective binding of oneself’ to take place, categorizations of literature in the academic quarters do run the risk of interfering, even impeding, with this phenomenon. It goes without saying that a structure is necessary in a disciplinary set-up and it can most certainly be never done away with. However, being conscious and alert about its possible adverse consequences would in my opinion be of paramount importance if we are to save literature from the clutches of the ongoing trend of pragmatism. For example, we approach the poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor from the vantage point of the Negritude movement. At first, we equip ourselves with the knowledge of what this movement had all been about, and then in reading the poetry, try to compare, if not fit, our experience with the expectation born out of this knowledge. Senghor’s poems come to be judged in light of the movement, as if it bore an obligation to behave as a faithful representative of its ethos. Many critiques have thus rightly criticized this poet for being gnostic, regressive, nativist and not being enough aware of the economic aspects of the colonial enterprise. Perhaps such a critique is not mistaken, but it is certainly a failure or a misunderstanding on the part of the critic if his judgement of Senghor’s poetry is based exclusively on that which is outside of it. What it entails is a disregard for what another human being is. It eventually culminates in a certain demand that we expect the other to conform with. We encounter a somewhat similar problem trying to grapple the genius of Flaubert in light of the category of European Realism. Having such a general, homogenized, monolithic datum as our reference, our reading is crisscrossed by our efforts of looking for convergences and divergences of the work in relation to a paradigm. We are anesthetized to the extent, that we tend to forget that a literary work is supposed to be not merely as an individual specimen of a family, but an individuating force. Instead of taking shelter under

the canopy of a general, inorganic idea, the work in its potential for individuation creates its own paradigm. Categorizations, in their basic distributions, evince a certain disregard neighbor blindness for this nascent, productive aspect of literature.

The singularity of worldliness precludes the possibility of it belonging to a general structure. If the world is that which becomes, the sense of it is accompanied simultaneously by the field in which this sense is presently. Unlike an advertisement that can achieve the same purpose through different fields of expressions such a newspaper, television, radio or the internet, the world as it appears to us in the engagement with a book, film or a sculpture cannot be divorced from the field in which it is occasioned. For literature as for other art forms, the field of sense cannot have any autonomous existence independent of the sense it carries. We can now understand the futility of a general literary category wishing to serve as field of sense for a work categorized within its corpus as an individual manifestation of it. World-becoming in literature is participation in the very process of sense without the aid of any reference 'external' to it. "The meaning of art is that it makes us confront sense" (Gabriel 185).

What consequences would such an awareness have for us as reader? Instead of remaining the same individuals, 'subjectively' dissecting a plethora of expressions coming to us from other human beings, an attitude of openness would involve a very sacrifice of such a conservative and conserved self. Projective binding of oneself in the event of world-becoming would allow us finally to stop persisting in the frantic effort of trying to arrange everything according to how we had always seen things. Borrowing the words of Alain de Botton, a genuine homage to an artist (and therefore art) "would be to look at our world through his eyes, not look at his world through our eyes" (213). Given that all categories are products of a conventionalized outlook, their boundaries may restrict from acquiring a new vision in reading, from entering into a new relation with the other where it is no longer held as something isolated or isolable from the self, from entering into the sharedness of an inter-subjective space by the dissolution of general prejudices and proclivities. The world appears only when one is open to change, open to becoming new, without which the world remains concealed in the everydayness and averageness of mundanity. This does not imply art cannot happen amidst that which is mundane, but since art is always an emergence, one that materializes that which is absent, it must, in order to become, wrench for itself a new

perspective. Art gives us the world only on the condition of us giving ourselves up to its tension. In the words of Proust, “through art alone are we able to emerge from ourselves, to know what another person sees of a universe which is not the same as our own...Thanks to art, instead of seeing one world only, our own, we see that world multiply itself and we have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists” (254).

Taking certain categories too close to heart can lead to self-defeating consequences. It is in vogue to approach literary works under clusters of say post-colonial or Dalit studies. Undoubtedly, such a category is constructed with the purpose of allowing certain voices to assert themselves, those which had been suppressed hitherto by exploitative and dominating forces. But does not such a general rubric constrain their expressions? Do we not inspect these works under the straightjacketed perspective of a single parameter where other dimensions, even when acknowledged, are seen as manifestations of a general condition? If we are to allot space for the world to become in each of these works, how can we still persist in approaching them from a definite vantage? If colonization and racial discrimination had made the lives of their subjects narrow by canceling out possibilities of self-becoming, do not these discursive practices of ours enact the same attitude, albeit reversed, that these voices are to be perceived as representatives of some faction? Undermining the singularity of a literary work entails in these situations a continuity of the same hegemony that they attempt to subvert by expressing themselves beyond the narrow confines of a single rhetoric, bringing forth life in its most diverse coloration? Interpreting a work according to a set paradigm of oppositional discourse inculcates the following problem summed up tersely by Iser:

a great many of them use the very procedures developed by the hegemonic discourse; indeed, they have to do so in order to achieve the persuasiveness necessary to advance the group interest. Borrowing from the discourses they seek to subvert can turn out to be a structural handicap: in trying to gain validity for their objectives, they develop a frame of reference that, in the final analysis, is not far from being logocentric itself, because a certain rationality is required if an agenda is to be accepted. Logocentrism, however, is the hallmark of the hegemonic discourse, which, though dismantled by deconstruction and thus giving the green light to the rise of oppositional

discourses, makes these latter discourses indirectly dependent on what they intend to discard. (4)

It should come to us as no wonder that great literary works resist such categorizations from within, for their subversion is not aimed against this or that particular repressive apparatus but the very inhumanity that consists in restricting fellow human beings from attaining their potential and living freely. 'Post-colonial novels' like Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* or Ahmadou Kourouma's *The Suns of Independence* critique the reduction of human life according to the precolonial-postcolonial binary by giving us a glimpse of human problems and joys that are impossible to be empathized with through any such general formula. Similarly, it is well nigh impossible to participate in the happenings of Manoranjan Byapari's first novel *Batase Barudher Gandho* if one is adamant to interpret it from the perspective of a Dalit background, for the question of class, if there at all, appears not overtly but in a complication with aspects outside of its parametrical confines. To say Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is 'more African' than Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* would be a practice in fundamentalism, as if the African novel is a race towards perfecting the representation of something concrete and given. Both the works event the world in a certain way, and each has its own historical significance. Once we accept this, Achebe's critique of Conrad appears no longer chauvinist in nature, but historical.

Not only does a concern towards literature's singularity prevent us from being beguiled into such above-mentioned identity politics, it can also avoid the risk of universalizing certain general features beyond their chronotopical field. How often do we not categorize some of Rabindranath's poetry as being Romantic, or the prose of Kamalkumar Majumdar as Modernist? In simplifying distinct historically situated trends as general adjectives, do we not in turn accept the European paradigm as absolute, transcendental even in respect to where and when it had taken place in Europe? The result is that instead of allowing the world of Rabindranath and Kamalkumar to open up in its own right, we distill their offerings into readymade containers. Such acts of universalization are acts of de-historicization, involving erasure of that which is locally unique in an expression. In these extrapolations, the universe is in most cases a Western paradigm masquerading as something neutral. And such formalization results in an unbridled channelizing of means to suit the purpose at hand without heed to any ends in mind, where Reason behaves merely as an

instrument for computing information according to an existing logic (Horkheimer 14-16). Universalization that bypasses singularity is therefore an act of eclipsing, and not disclosure.

The Case of World Literature

Perhaps the most extreme instance of categorization in literary studies have been that of World Literature. Here, a twofold generalization is at work. Firstly, World Literature as a category assumes upon itself an understanding of what the world actually is, before and independent of engagement with literatures. The world here is the factual world, the planet and its inhabitants taken de facto. Even if the collection of works arranged under World Literature remains undecided, the general idea supporting the category would continue to exist. Thus, as a category, World Literature is set in opposition to the understanding of the world as something that becomes. Secondly, it is also taken for granted that literature is a uniform phenomenon everywhere and at every time. That is to say, literariness, or that which makes a work a literary work is universalized. Needless to say, such a universalization too has a Western fulcrum, since the category itself had emerged in a culture where literature is taken for something that is written. Such an idea, though not explicitly stated, comes to bear a certain attitude of disregard or condescension towards all artistic productions verbal in nature but not necessarily in print. “But if literature comes to be understood differently everywhere in the world, the compound ‘World Literature’ amounts to no meaning at all” (Chanda 46). This is precisely the problem that was hinted with converting historical constructs to general adjectives, here in this case, enlarged to the widest possible limit.

Every category has a more or less distinct ground cut out for it. For example, Romanticism is associated with post Industrial Revolution, Modernism with post 1910 period, however puerile that might sound. The relevance of a category is, in this fashion, predicated by an area circumscribed by time and space, till it gets universalized by abstraction from its historical context. In this regard, what must be then the ground for World Literature? If World Literature is understood as literatures from the world, then it becomes a super-object like Markus Gabriel mentions in relation to the world being a set containing all sets. Surely, such a super set cannot be a set itself, for then it would contradict the condition of it containing all sets. The category of World Literature is, in this sense, self-contradictory

for it has no valency to exist due to lack of a ground that it could exclude to circumscribe its own identity.

And yet, World Literature as a category exists. It has its collection of texts 'from all over the globe'. Certainly then, there exists a principle of selection and exclusion. World Literature does not then mean simply all literatures of the world. A literary work has to 'qualify' to be a part of it. Although emerged at the times of Goethe's *Weltliteratur* and Rabindranath's *Biswa-Sahitya* whose attempts were directed at a widening of horizon and break from parochialism, World Literature has, in the course of time, resulted at the canonization of certain selected works at the cost of peripheralizing all that was considered not significant enough.

The internal structure of the category is national or continental in character; a poem from Ghana, a play from China, a short story from South America and so on. No doubt such an endeavor is commendable. But is there not a problem lurking somewhere? History has witnessed the cruelly ironic phenomena of nation-building in the erstwhile colonies. Nation, as a category, is fraught with many contradictions that continue to haunt us till today. In a country like ours, the idea of a political nation still struggles to find one common factor on the basis of which it could unify all its citizens. And it is especially in situations such as this, that we can identify trends towards majoritarianism, attempts towards homogenization at the cost of excluding a minority. If such a problematic category such a nation is made to serve as the basis for World Literature curricula, would we not perpetuate the marginalization perpetrated by the state? It is but obvious that the voices that have already been silenced would hardly find place in such international constellations. And to make it worse, the literary work chosen from a nation would eventually come to be regarded as the representative of its culture. This has two possible consequences. Firstly, a handful of works surely cannot claim to represent the plurality of a complicated landscape. If that is so, the work begins to behave as an icon for a culture that perhaps in reality does not thrive as one culture at all but rather an interaction between different cultures and traditions. And secondly and more importantly, the very notion of a work being representational of a culture is undercut by the belief that the nation is an objective entity that can be described, whereas in reality, it is but a geopolitical construct grappling to domesticate plurality within a manageable, controllable scope.

It should appear clear by now that any categorization runs in contradiction with the singularity of literature. Categories, no matter what intention they represent, implicates a reduction of perspective and imagination, whereas to accord singularity its place, one must give oneself over to the irrational chaos of human expression that is pregnant with unforeseen possibilities. On the other hand, frameworks are necessary for study of literatures as well. If only these frameworks could be approached from the experience of texts towards overlaps, could there still be a possibility of according literature its productive potential; a literary history that proceeds not from categories, but from below (Dev 320-22).

If Comparative Literature is to act as an accomplice, a fellow traveler in such expeditions, what should it be? As long as it remains something that could be answerable by a ‘what?’, Comparative Literature would not be able to resist the many pitfalls of categorizations discussed so far. It is only from a shift from ‘what?’ to ‘how?’ can Becoming finally be given the centrality it requires to come about. This means, a shift from being a discipline to being a method. While the natural sciences can afford to apply a general method to various objects of enquiry, Gadamer argues that in the study of *Geisteswissenschaften*, “the theme and object of research are actually constituted by the motivation of the enquiry” (285). A shift towards method would not mean the use of a particular method, but to be sensitive to the singularity of literature, in that each work would, in our engagement with them, demand a certain perspective unique to the event of reading. Only by opening oneself to the possibility of coming to terms with the work’s field of sense does the world become as a singular sense, which is the condition for its appearance. Comparative Literature, as an approach open to possibilities emerging from readings, could unpack some of the problems associated with compartmentalizing categories. But could not every individual and institution achieve this? If so, why stress on Comparative Literature. Most certainly, such an attitude can be in theory practiced in every corner of academia and beyond, but it would be strenuous for a great transformation in outlook would be necessary. For Comparative Literature, this transformation would also no doubt be demanding, but it is already equipped with the potential towards such an outlook in its very definitions. If Comparative Literature is understood as an involvement of more than one entity and a coming to terms of self-identity always in relation to the other, it remains an open definition; not a definition at all in fact, but an openness towards plurality without subsuming the other to the self and a critical attack on

abstraction that tends to represent a thing as isolated and self-complete by itself (Chanda 23:20-25:30). Self and other would no longer be a stable boundary but a transcendently empirical condition of being in the world; empirical because encountered as something concrete, transcendental because its otherness is an inescapable condition. When the selfhood of the individual as well as the work is accorded a fluid status, then our engagement too would correspond attitude-wise to the productivity inherent in the literary phenomenon. Only by becoming poor by sacrificing all standard, textbook, categorical notions of the world, do we get it back, as it returns over and over, gleaming while holding itself back in becoming, hued in shades which would take more than an eternity to count.

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