

## LITERATURE'S OTHERNESS AND GLOBAL EAST-WEST MODERNITIES: AN INTRODUCTION TO JET'S SPECIAL ISSUE

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IN THIS SPECIAL literary issue of JET, the featured articles introduce a spectrum of issues and perspectives, but nonetheless share a focus. The authors reflect on how literature, with its otherness and in search of otherness, plays a vital role in shaping the response to the Enlightenment and its systemized modernity. In this broad context the authors raise and pursue questions related to the global East-West. With the charge from JET, I write to attempt a clarification of the relevant contexts, to highlight the issues brought up by these poignant arguments, and to stimulate further discussions.

### I. Modernity in Fugue and a Fugue of Modernities

The contemporary tendency to speak of “modernities” in the plural indicates an increasing awareness that contrapuntal and alternative discourses of modernity are historically necessitated responses to the Enlightenment modernity and its concomitant meta-narratives.

Modernity, in the singular, generally refers to a system of values developed from the Enlightenment, consisting of grand narratives that center on key words of full presence such as: rationalism (meaning reason-first, reason-only and instrumental reason), subject (mostly the Cartesian notion), truth (in the Platonic sense), science (associated with scientificism as a new religion), and the magic word “progress.” Incredulity towards these narratives, as expressed by literary authors, philosophers or people in the street, has never ceased since the 18th century, leading to an accumulation of critical strategies that emerged as a more expressive problematization of modernity’s grand narratives in late 20th century. This problematization signals the arrival of a new perception of modernity sometimes called post-modernity and some other times, contrapuntal modernities. As Lyotard succinctly summarized it: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward grand narratives” (1984, xxiv).

After several hundred years, “modernity” is now recognized less as a solo, but more as an ongoing polyphonic fugue in which queries, answers and counterpoints develop along with the first-introduced theme. Modernity in fugue is a fugue of modernities, the result of resonances and dissonances from the past and the desire for continued dialogues, interactions and contacts into the future.

“Modernity,” the singular used to signify the dream for a more just, more affluent, more civilized and more humane world, is now a more complex but still valid concept. The dream continues but the strength of its validity is now tested not only by its earlier assumptions but also by the ever-changing history.

Modern world history mocks the kind of romanticism without sobering critical reflections just as modern experiences defy naïve innocence. Even

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Romantic writers in the 19th century believed that innocence must absorb lessons of experience. Romanticism was an earlier, albeit inadequate, response to what Wordsworth called “outrageous stimulation” in the industrialized world that acts “with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind” (2007, 309). Romanticism is defined in part as a confident belief in imagination and in the value of “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth, 2007, 308). But romanticism devoid of irony and a solid sense of reality becomes foolhardy blindness. When romanticism stands in the way of making appropriate judgment of reality, what then has romanticism become? Thus spoke Gustave Flaubert, through the plights of Emma Bovary.

*Bovaryism*, a significant 19th-century literary instance in the critical discourse of modernity, thus figuratively announces the arrival of literary modernism and fictively spells out the doom of naïve romanticism in the face of a world governed by Homais like bourgeoisie and their culture of glorified vulgarity.

Thinkers in the European Enlightenment movement, perhaps well meaning and idealistic but limited in their world views, designed a set of values—a system of modernity—for Europe and the rest of the world, in the hope that this system would guarantee historical progress. However, if Enlightenment-inspired optimism of progress is like light (as the word Enlightenment implies), it casts shadows of doubts and anxieties, shadows which, when conceptualized or figured, would question the optimism for automatic progress. History has witnessed that while the Enlightenment modernity continued as a solo of progress around themes of instrumental reason, scientificism and the full presence of a Eurocentric cognitive subject, European capitalism—justified in these terms—also launched colonialist and imperialist projects, and caused poverty, injustice, violence and wars everywhere. This modernity thus accelerated globalization in a manner not at all free of barbarism.

When Michel Foucault, echoing Kant, asked “What is Enlightenment?” in the 20th century, he meant to suggest that the question has to be repeatedly asked and answered, in history and through history. Foucault suggested that if Enlightenment is to remain the dream for human freedom, its positives should be carried on while its negatives—what Foucault calls the “blackmail” of Enlightenment—must be refuted. In that spirit Foucault supplemented Kant and re-defined modernity as an elaborate and ever-changing project in the example of Baudelaire’s *flâneur* (see Foucault, 1984).

Baudelaire, through the re-invented figure of *flâneur*, critically and emotionally observed the modernization of Paris under Napoleon III and Haussmann. With an agonizing awareness that the civil society in old Paris was vanishing with Haussmannization and the ideal beauty was becoming ever more elusive, Baudelaire expressed his yearning for the missing ideal through *spleen*, an emotional mixture of frustration with *ennui*, impotent rage and existentialist angst. It is Baudelaire’s poetic expression of spleen that exposed the severe extent of dehumanization that Haussmannization tended to conceal under the glamour of modernization. Idealistically and spleen-fully, Baudelaire showed his incredulity towards the grand designs and narratives of urban modernization personified by Haussmannization.

As a poet and as a literary critic, Baudelaire, in “The Painter of Modern Life,” argued that modern art must consist of two halves: the transient and fleeting that is contemporary life, and the immutable that is eternity (Baudelaire,

1972, 302). For Baudelaire, a modern sense of the beautiful is to be found in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (translated into English as “the flowers of evil,” somewhat imprecisely) in the modern city.

In 19th century European literature, another powerful critic of the Enlightenment modernity was Dostoevsky. With hindsight, we see more clearly that the polemical debate between Dostoevsky and Chernyshevsky was not just about a utopian vision of society but was one about the Enlightenment tradition of rationalism that Chernyshevsky and many of the 1860s generation in Russia uncritically embraced. Yet another literary instance in mockery of the grand narratives is Dostoevsky's anti-hero character, the underground man who dislikes the Crystal Palace for its totalitarian restrictions on freedom: the underground man protests against this glass-and-steel house because, he says, one cannot stick out one's tongue in it. Through the underground man, Dostoevsky suggested that the problem with rationalism is not so much reason itself as the reason-only and reason-first tradition it has become. Chernyshevsky was a disciple of this tradition; the utopian society he envisioned is based on the kind of reason exclusive of considerations of human desire, impulse, and will; this utopian vision would be translated in the 20th century into a social experiment and would prove to be a totalitarian nightmare. Dostoevsky's critique resonates with that of Nietzsche who traces the roots of this problem further back, to Socrates and Plato. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* is, therefore, not just a treatise on literary history but has far-reaching significance in intellectual history.

Kafka, another powerful critic of modernity, prophesizes by way of “negative capability.” The apparatus in “In the Penal Colony” is a symbolic index of a modern system of enslavement. The exact locale of the tale is less important than its relentless probing into modern systems justified and sustained in chillingly dehumanizing “reason.” This machine is an allegorical reminder of the horror of instrumental reason gone awry.

The first segment of the issue includes an essay by Samantha Goldasich and Toming Jun Liu on Kafka's art of negativity (which displays a negative capability immersed in negative emotions). In the broad sense, Kafka's art of negativity can be seen as part of his modern allegory meant to expose the modern conditions of unfreedom. With combined insights from Lacan (those related to the Name-of-the-Father and the analysis of psychosis) and from Derrida (regarding the logo centric structure), Goldasich and Liu examine one specific story, “The Judgment,” to understand how Kafka exposes conditions of unfreedom and why that exposition through an art of negativity in fact reflects Kafka's passionate desire for the freedom which has been restricted or denied under certain modern condition. The more shocking and also more sobering part of Kafka's prophecy is this revelation: the victim of repressive power, often in the image of a “son,” is victimized partly because he has already internalized the rules of a logo centric system with the “Name of Father” (a phrase from Lacan) at the center, whether this “father” is alive, as in “The Judgment,” or dead, as “In the Penal Colony.” Kafka, a modern prophet in the rank of Goethe, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and others, is another prime example of deconstruction before there was “deconstruction” as a signifier.

Modern world history witnesses that reason, when instrumentalized, can be put to the use of making the unreasonable seem reasonable and the barbaric

appear civilized, as in various colonialist, totalitarian, racist, profit-hungry or war-mongering projects.

Literature's role, as this brief survey shows, is vital in shaping the fugue of modernities. This review is obviously not comprehensive or adequate since it so far includes only a few modern European authors. Europe alone, of course, is not global and the examples of these European visionaries do not quite constitute "global modernities" although profoundly global implications are already contained in them.

Europe nonetheless is the necessary starting point for considering problems of global capitalism and forms of resistance to it. Modernity as a singular system of thinking first developed from the industrialized Europe, and gradually engulfed the rest of the world and accelerated globalization through bourgeois-capitalist expansion. The arrival of globalization means that nations, civilizations and belief systems can no longer operate independently of each other. In the age of global capitalism, contacts and interactions are the new modes of operation and take place economically and politically, culturally and intellectually, through peaceful means and through violent means.

In the era of globalization, which is also the post-colonial era, contrapuntal themes increasingly come from cultures, civilizations and nations that the West, in the Enlightenment, wanted to bring to its "time" or concept of progress. The nations and cultures that were made the other by the West are now becoming part of the West, just as the West is becoming part of the East.

## II. Literature's Otherness

Literature's "otherness" has various yet interconnected significations.

In the Western context, it is inevitable that the phrase alludes to the relationship between philosophy and literature, but there should be a careful differentiation between two statements: (1) literature is *the other of philosophy*; (2) literature is *the other philosophy*. The first should be understood in connection with the tradition symbolized by Socrates and Plato. The second should be explained in connection with Nietzsche and others who negotiated a turn from Plato's tradition.

Literature became the *other of philosophy* the moment when Plato, under Socrates's influence, denounced Greek tragedy and banished poets and poetry from his utopian republic. Plato's segregation of poetry from philosophy is consistent with his signature dialectical reasoning, namely: poetry is a negative example of "reason" because reason, to Plato, stands opposed to rhetorical thinking, to emotions and instincts that characterize the so-called irrational principle of the human soul. Consequently, "What is literature?" has been made a philosophical question and has to be answered in connection with philosophy.

In the 19th century, Nietzsche saw the separation of poetry from philosophy to be a problem that both underlines and undermines the Platonic tradition of philosophy. Classical ontology in the tradition has managed to justify and sustain itself partly because it has willed blindness to rhetorical thinking that constitutes its grounding. When this tradition of rationalism (whose influence continued into the Enlightenment and into the modern idea of science) turns out to be a reason-first and reason-only tradition, the exclusion of the poet/poetry from reason also has serious ramifications for those values optimistically imagined as the system

of modernity. Nietzsche's re-evaluation of existing values (meaning those values derived from Plato) is sophisticated and simple: Nietzsche begins the re-evaluation by bringing poetry and philosophy back together again.

The defining moment in the Nietzschean turn is *not* an attempt to negate reason (which would repeat the error of Socratic reason) but a well-conceived rhetorical transformation of the figure of Socrates. Nietzsche suggests in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Socrates, the symbolic figure of reason, should be changed to "music-practicing Socrates." If the spirit of Dionysian music, which has been excluded by Socrates and Plato, is re-introduced into reason, then sense, force, perspectivism, rhetorical thinking and, indeed, the value of art in general will be restored to critical thinking, to philosophy. With the Nietzschean turn, the West, after more than two millennia, regains a simple truth: literature is involved in philosophy as it is involved in culture, history and science. Literature is thus no longer *the other of philosophy*, but an *other* philosophical mode. The Nietzschean turn signifies that literature is *the other philosophy*.

Literature's *otherness* should also be understood as signifying literature's characteristic modalities, including its fictionality. By the time of Renaissance, the dawning of the modern period, Sir Philip Sidney reinterpreted Aristotle and interpreted the classical notion of poetry as *mimesis* to mean "a representing, counterfeiting [fiction], or figuring forth [thinking through figurative language]" (Sidney, 2007, 139). To say that literature is fictional, figurative and representational is to acknowledge that it is produced from variously interpreted and figuratively imagined *intersections* between this world and the imagined world. A literary text, by definition, crosses the archive of "real" and the archive of "fiction," and conveys insights through new metaphors. Considering this *otherness* of literature, we say that literature exists in an *imagined* and *signifying*, not a mirror-reflecting, relationship with this world. In other words, it signifies not only what poets perceive this world *is* but also what they propose this world *ought to be*.

What has been called "deconstruction," now virtually personified in Jacques Derrida, is not an event that just occurred in late 20th century; rather, it is an event as the result of historical accumulation. Jacques Derrida, in his *Manifesto of Deconstruction* ("Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" 1966), named Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger as his precursors or earlier deconstructionists (Derrida, 2007, 917). One commonality in all three precursors is that they, in their own styles of *bricolage*, have attempted to rebuild the bridge between poetry and philosophy and exemplified, in their own ways, what that rebuilding could look like. Into the 20th century, the efforts to rebuild such a bridge have continued and the examples flourished. Derrida, in his adolescent years, witnessed how surrealism, existentialism, the writings of Sartre and Camus "practiced a fairly new kind of contact between philosophy and literature" (Derrida, 1992, 34).

Derrida's way of practicing deconstruction is one of the many ways of continuing the momentum of the Nietzschean turn which includes, necessarily, the "fairly new kind of contact between philosophy and literature." What makes Derrida's way of philosophizing seem "strange," to both traditional philosophers and traditional literary critics, is that his deconstructive practice is an effort to emulate literature, and to merge philosophy and literature into one. To those who believe that Derrida practiced only philosophy and was opposed to literature, the

following remarks he made in an interview with Derek Attridge could be both surprising and enlightening:

Experience of Being, nothing less, nothing more, on the edge of metaphysics, literature perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It's the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world, and this is why, if it has definition, what is heralded and refused under the name of literature cannot be identified with any other discourse. It will never be scientific, philosophical, conversational. (Derrida, 1992, 47)

Here, Derrida indicates not only the philosophical function of literature but also how, in its special modalities (that which differentiates it from other discourses), literature both engages this world and distances from it. Literature therefore crosses this-worldliness and other-worldliness.

It is with its *otherness* that literature is involved in other discourses. Derrida also explained that “the event [in a story] already crosses within itself the archive of the ‘real’ and the archive of ‘fiction.’ Already we’d have trouble not spotting but separating out historical narrative, literary fiction, and philosophical reflexion” (1992, 35). The New Historicism, as part of post-structuralist thinking, likewise argues that literary modalities—how narratives are structured and made, the use of figures of speech, and the exercise of imagination—are always and already involved in historical narratives.

Literature’s special modalities also include its performativity. Literary texts, says Attridge by way of elaboration, “are acts of writing that call forth acts of reading” (1992, 2). The “acts” of literature open up possibilities of interpretation so that we can think more critically about conventions rather than just live within them. Deconstruction evidently draws from this performativity from literature. Derrida’s deconstruction cannot function unless it performs, like literature and as literature.

Modernist literature in particular also shows a *responsibility for otherness*. In *The Concept of Modernism*, Astradur Eysteinnsson argues that modernism or modern literature can be understood as the aesthetics of interruption in that “not only do we feel that [modernism] acts out the crisis of the symbolic order, of the system of codes that are still, however, essential for us as producers and receivers of signs and meaning, we also seek in it the *other* of the order that is our world, an other which still hints at us what it is like *not* to be caught in the prevalent socio-symbolic network of meaning” (Eysteinnsson, 1990, 220).

Deconstruction can in part be described as a philosophizing practice that emulates literature and “acts” like literature. Like literature, deconstruction functions “in a respect for *otherness*. . . . This responsibility toward the other is also a responsibility toward the *future*, since it involves the struggle to create openings within which the other can appear beyond any of our programs and predictions, can come to transform what we know or think we know” (Attridge, 1992, 5). Indeed, Attridge’s explanation of Derrida’s deconstruction resonates with Eysteinnsson’s description of modern literature.

Literature’s concern for otherness, this responsibility *for* the other in imagination and in real life, makes it “political” in a manner which is to be distinguished from the political in the conventional sense. Literature is thus apolitically political; it practices the *other* politics.

Noteworthy among our featured articles in this issue (in the first segment and under the subheading "Literature's Political Otherness and Deconstruction") is Zlatan Filipovic's argument. In line with Adorno, Blanchot and especially with Derrida, Filipovic argues that the political nature of literature, ironically, lies in how it refuses to be part of any political ideologies, programs or agendas. This inherent "bad faith" of literature, Filipovic suggests by borrowing a phrase from Blanchot, is seen in the fact that while literature "registers historical and political stresses" it also resorts to its fictionality when anyone tries to take literature to be literal. The paradox of literature is that it exercises its own responsibility through its seeming irresponsibility. It is irresponsibly responsible.

Filipovic's argument can also be made differently, in terms of the aesthetic judgment of literature which can be characterized as a "negative capability" in that the best literature is capable of being in "uncertainties, mysteries and doubts" (John Keats). Literature helps us learn to judge by teaching us to learn to doubt and to entertain ambiguities, ironies and paradoxes.

Citing Bartleby's famous dictum "I would prefer not to" as an example, Filipovic characterizes this poetic Nay-saying (poetry's seeming irresponsibility) as carrying "an ethico-political injunction" that both evokes an alternate future and questions the "present," more specifically, "the dispassionate world of emerging materialism in 1850s America and the corporate reality of Wall Street."

Filipovic's argument is thus also in agreement with Attridge's description of deconstruction, as cited earlier, that it is "the struggle to create openings within which the other can appear beyond any of our programs and predictions, can come to transform what we know or think we know" (Attridge, 1992, 5). Filipovic also resonates with Eysteinnsson who suggests that modern literature functions as "aesthetics of interruption" in regard to the prevalent socio-symbolic order.

The "irresponsible responsibility" of literature is also, to coin another word, a "response-ability," for it responds, through Nay-saying or Yes-saying, to history and reality. Ultimately, however, the best literature, immersed in negative capability, is marked by a Yes-saying to the ever-changing and never-ending forces of life. Literature is grounded in what Nietzsche calls *affirmation*.

Filipovic affirms this insight from Derrida: literature and the democracy-to-come are linked, by the unconditional right to say anything (through fictionality, says Filipovic) and by the responsibility to question dogmatisms.

To coin another phrase: literature has a *political otherness*, meaning that with its fictionality and its special *response-ability*, imaginative literature acts out a kind of politics *other* than the politics of any existing ideology, program, agenda or party line. Walter Benjamin makes a similar point in his "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," arguing that aestheticized politics (as in Fascism) is fundamentally different from politicized aesthetics (as in Communism, which was a coded word for progressive literature then) (1969, 239-242). Benjamin's context should be noted: he was analyzing the potential benefits and dangers of the modern culture which is increasingly caught in the matrix of the masses.

### III. Global East-West Modernities and Trans-civilizational Imaginations

This world is one of many worlds. The East and the West, so to speak, are two worlds that are historically and civilizationally separate yet increasingly interconnected.

The East and the West (like “the North and the South”) are not exact geographical terms as they have varying geo-political, geo-cultural and geo-spiritual connotations. It is from the perspective of geo-politics in the world that Edward Said studies the complex relationship between the East and the West. His argument is well known: in a world where levels of development are uneven and powers are out of balance, the West (the Euro-American world from which capitalism originated) has invented a network of discourses about the East from its superior position of power with which the West tries to maintain that power.

Neither the East nor the West, however, is a singular entity. The East, in geo-cultural and geo-spiritual terms, includes various different civilizations and belief systems. The Islamic civilization of the Middle East and the Buddhist-Confucianist civilization of East Asia, to name two, are not quite the same worlds within the East, with their distinct civilizational differences. Historically, the former has had more extensive contacts and entanglements with the West (manifested in peaceful coexistence as well as through wars and violence), whereas for the latter, contacts with the West was less extensive in earlier ages. In a later period (e.g., the 19th century), more engaging contacts began, first, through trades and then through wars (the Opium War comes to mind). It is not Samuel Huntington’s oversight but a revelation of his biased stance that when he spoke of the clash of civilizations in the world, he stretched the meaning of the East and treated the Islamic world and the Buddhist-Confucian world together as the same “East,” which is in the same position of “absence” for the Western world. Said, on the other hand, took a position significantly different when he began his discussion of “orientalism” by questioning the notion that the “East” is a singular entity.

It has been a long and slow historical process that the East and the West as separate worlds move towards a global East-West in which the two worlds, still separate to some extent, become increasingly interconnected in a fugue of modernities. Contacts between the East and the West have not always been peaceful but filled with strife, violence and wars. The hyphen that joins the two worlds is therefore full of ambiguities, signifying resonance and dissonance, understanding and misunderstanding, fusion and friction, inclusion and exclusion, but nonetheless interconnections.

The kinds of imagination revealed in literature are historically infused and culturally informed. Trans-civilizational imaginations, a distinct characteristic of modern and contemporary literatures, are always complex and need to be considered in connection with the nature and extent of historical contacts and to the psychologies arising therefrom. Speaking psychologically, trans-civilizational imaginations are either shaped by desires to understand the other, or by fears and anxieties, or, as is often the case, by a mixture of both. The other, if imagined to be exotic, fearful or fantastically strange, only prolongs mutual misunderstanding.

In its earlier contacts with the West up to the 19th century, the imperial courts of China (Ming and Qing) initiated some cultural and commercial exchanges but were largely caught in a Central Empire Syndrome. To China, the



West—the curious but barbaric other—was perceived to exist at the very margin of the Sino-centric imagination; the Chinese Empire regarded itself and its neighbouring countries as the world “under heaven” (*tian xia*), which means the whole world. China then lived in a different sense of time and history within the confines of its own civilizational model and showed little interest in joining in the world process of modernization. What happened next was history: the West forced the door of China open with gunboats and humiliated China with looting, stealing and endless imperialist annexations in the 19th century.

With hindsight, we see how extremely limited humanity's knowledge of the earth and of the universe was at the dawn of the modern age. Our knowledge of each other at the time was also minimal to the point of being comically absurd. Julia Kristeva cites a 16th century case as example: Rabelais's *Fourth Book* (written between 1548 and 1552) narrates the journey of Pantagruel's companions to visit the Oracle of the Holy Bacbus supposedly located “near Cathay [China] in upper India.” “[T]his expedition toward China,” says Kristeva, “is actually a journey toward [Western] myth, dream, [fantasized] ideal, wealth, and happiness” (Kristeva, 1991, 112). As Rabelais tried to allegorize his discontents with corruption in the Catholic church, he depicted a journey through bizarre places such as Sneaks' Island (“where King Lent rules, a stupid and sterile monster”), Savage Island (where the Protestant-like Chitterlings inhabited), Ennasia Island (the island of “noseless people”), the land of Clerkship (alluding to the courts of law and its corruption) (Kristeva, 1991, 112-113).

Rabelais's imagined journey towards China had nothing to do with the reality in China or Asia; it was a product of the collective unconscious in the West. *The Fourth Book* itself shows how Rabelais “takes up again an old and particularly fruitful tradition in the writings of the thirteenth- to sixteenth-century explorers, such as Marco Polo's accounts of the *Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, Jordan Cathala de Severac's *Mirabilia Descripta*, or *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* in the fourteenth century.” These explorers had already added to their discoveries “Western or Islamic legends, even seeing the inhabitants of the new lands as fabulous birds, or as people ‘without buttocks or digestive system,’ or simply endowed with ‘gold, rubies, and infinite amount of other wealth’” (Kristeva, 1991, 114).

Regarding the West's imagination of China in the 20th century, Jonathan D. Spence once wrote: “China, which once seemed to promise endless wealth to a new breed of Western sea-borne adventurers, now provides endless ground for armchair speculation instead. We do not understand China and we constantly invent it, and what we think we know is constantly disproved” (Spence, 1991, 100). Spence's remark reminds us of how Ezra Pound used to brag of his “invention” of Chinese poetry. In today's China, there is also the perception that even the Nobel Committee does not quite know how to select a winner from contemporary Chinese literary authors since the decision has to be largely based on the interpretations by certain translations in which something either gets mysteriously lost or suspiciously gained. Although translation is extremely hard, what gets lost in translation should not be the result of lacking the proverbial sympathetic ear in transnational and trans-civilizational contacts.

Nonetheless, it is only now that we are more ready to recognize the extent of ignorance and distance that have been separating the East and the West. The arrival of globalization thus affords us opportunities to re-interpret, re-synthesize

and re-imagine what we, in the more isolated era, held to be “knowledge” of each other. In this process, intellectual and artistic efforts to bring the East and West into a global East-West are as important as the political, economic and diplomatic efforts that become headlines. A new breed of literature, trans-civilizational, trans-national and translational in nature, plays a vital role in such efforts, adding the much-needed human sympathy and compassion to the fugue of modernities. Indeed, any consideration of the fugue of modernities would be incomplete today if it lacked the trans-civilizational and transnational dimensions.

Atef Laouyene’s article, included in the second segment and under the subheading “History, Memory and Global East-West Modernities,” is an extraordinarily poignant contribution to the ongoing dialogue in this respect. Laouyene insightfully takes us back to al-Andalus, the time of medieval Moorish Spain from the 10th to late 18th century, not so much to repeat the conventional images of Andalus in the collective unconscious of the Western and the Arabic worlds, but to *re-interpret* the Andalusian as the site of memory from which much of the contemporary conflicts between the Western and Arab world’s arises.

The Andalusian period was not just a quasi-utopian time of peaceful *convivencia* (cohabitation) of Muslims, Jews and Christians. That period was characterized by fusion as well as friction, and, furthermore, it was not unmarred by religious violence and dynastic strife.

Laouyene links Western remembrance of the Andalusian period to a fear-infused imagination that the contemporary influx of Arab Muslim immigrants into Europe would be the ultimate return of Muslim dominion over European soil, thus effectively exposing the uncanny roots of Islamophobia underlining contemporary politics in the West.

On the other hand, Laouyene also critiques “the al-Andalus syndrome” or “pathology of Moorishness” with which some people in the Arab world are preoccupied. This is, in short, the melancholic desire to bring back the glory and greatness that was once al-Andalus. This desire or pathology in the Arab Muslim imaginary, when distorted by anxieties of the present, encourages self-professed missions of conquest and counter-conquest.

How does one re-narrativize the Arab Muslim imaginary linked to al-Andalus? This is the question, Laouyene argues, on which the hope to build a vision of worldly humanism depends, for the West and for the Arab world. In this context, Laouyene’s article examines contemporary Arab fiction, especially one of the post-9/11 Anglophone Arab novels, Lalami’s *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005). Lalami’s novel is not one lamenting the lost greatness of al-Andalus, argues Laouyene, but “an exercise in critical self-scrutiny anchored in the dystopian social reality of the Arab world.”

Also in the second segment, this special issue includes a well-researched article by Ou Li, a scholar from Chinese University of Hong Kong. Li’s article revisits the issue of how William Wordsworth, in several books of *The Prelude*, approaches the legacies of the French Revolution from the introspective perspective of the poet himself, thus displaying both therapeutic and traumatic effects of remembrance. Ou Li’s careful textual analysis of Wordsworth’s *Prelude* validates the value of the “negative capability” of literature and reinforces memory-related theories in literary criticism such as offered by Freud. Wordsworth, indeed, prefigures the modernist “introspective fiction”; his

disillusionment in the French Revolution poetically recreates the inner turmoil as experienced by witnesses of modern revolutions and modernization.

Underlining Li's study of Wordsworth's reprocessing of memories of the French Revolution is a concern that has contemporary currency and global implications. Li suggests that Wordsworthian remembrance "also illuminates many later literary works written on a violent political experience, including those recollecting the 1989 Democracy Movement in China. What happened in 1989 in China is not a revolution, but it is certainly the most significant political experience in contemporary Chinese history. Like the French Revolution, it is marked with contradictions. . . . Like *The Prelude*, many recollective works of 1989 reveal the tension between commemoration and repression, emphasizing both the disturbing and the healing power of remembrance."

The third segment of this special issue, "Re-imagining Global East-West: The Case of Octavio Paz," includes two separate articles by Roberto Cantu and Margarite Nieto who focus on the Mexican Nobel poet Octavio Paz. Both scholars bring to their studies insights and expertise that result from many years of research on Paz.

Paz, a poet passionately devoted to translations of ancient Asian poetry, found that the Western sense of modernity is at a juncture of crisis due to its obsession with a one-way direction towards the "future." Paz's re-imagination of a poetic "present" is not just a projection of simultaneous co-existence of Western and Eastern civilizations but, more importantly, a synchronic vision of different times or ages. The vision of global East-West gains special meaning as well as powerful advocacy in Paz.

Cantu himself has gained much from his long friendship with Paz. His essay, as included here, brightens our special issue with insights about Paz drawn from the spiritual affinity between him and the poet. Cantu argues that Paz has an extraordinary vision in seeking to redefine modernity through incorporating Asia as the other. This redefinition is figuratively expressed in Paz's poetry and poetics. Paz's *Blanco*, Cantu suggests, is "a series of 'ultrarapid exposures' of appearances (the worldly shadows, replicas) and apparitions (the archetypes) with a fugue-like representation, synchronous and contrapuntal."

Cantu makes an especially insightful point that, to Paz, the East represented by the former U.S.S.R. and the West represented by the USA "were the wayward offspring of one civilization and one single historical orientation: the Enlightenment and industrialization"; it is this same civilizational force represented by both that declined during the Cold War. Thus, Paz hoped that a redemption myth would emerge from an *other* civilization on a global scale. As is the case with *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Paz's sense of the other is based on "Paz's reflections on ancient civilizations (hence not limited to India's) and is part of a "project of recovering *living* portions of the past." This otherness, poetically expressed, is a blend of various spatial and temporal categories figured forth through a stream of symbols such as a ritual, a pilgrimage, a river, a mandala, a human body, and lovers. Paz's poetry also transforms the activity of reading, argues Cantu. "The reader of *Blanco* thus turns into Isis" who "gathers the scattered limbs of Osiris, resuscitates the body, and makes it our contemporary."

It takes a poetically enthused critic like Cantu to articulate so well Paz's vision expressed through poetry. Cantu argues that Paz's "operating *ars poetica* is

really an *ars combinatorial*” and with that art Paz refutes the impossibility of love and recovers the possibility of love to rebuild another vision of the world, in fugue.

Margarite Nieto, in her focused study of Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and *In Light of India*, provides insights related to Paz’s biography and his hermeneutical self-examination. *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) was composed while Paz lived in Mexico and combined his observations of the everyday Mexican life with his search of “the other.” Two years later he observed “the other” through his experience in India to which he returned in 1962. *In Light of India* (1995), in part, narrates Paz’s sense of the other as embodied by India. An important agency through which Paz made his excursions into the realm of the other is Heidegger who too is interested in Asian thought.

Paz once used a phrase that Heidegger had borrowed from a Buddhist saying: “the Other, Share.” It is a whisper which requires that we listen to it in a Zen-like thunderous silence. In that silence we hear it and experience the strength of hope and wisdom. So it is on this note that I end this introduction: “the Other, Share.”

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