

## The Frontiers of Knowledge: Shouldn't the Other Speak her Own Language?

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**Abstract:** Using the structuring metaphor of an imaginary meeting between Walt Whitman and Jose Marti, I examine the relationship between American formulations of World Literature and Comparative Literature and investigate how each discipline 'welcomes' the Other. I distinguish between what a European comparatist might envision about the relationship between the two disciplines, as working together in a symbiotic relationship to engage in passive and active canon reform. The European comparatist might take a neutral attitude to the recent American marketing of World Literature. I do not see this phenomenon in neutral terms and examine the American configuration of World Literature as a political program, discussing its origins in Area Studies, its relationship to the American academic model of multiculturalism and ultimately viewing it as a institutional strategy aiding in the management of diversity on US campuses.

**Keywords:** World Literature, Comparative Literature, reform, canon, multiculturalism, diversity

**Resumo:** Utilizando a metáfora estruturante de um encontro imaginário entre Walt Whitman e Jose Marti, examina-se a relação entre as concepções americanas de Literatura Mundial e Literatura Comparada e investiga-se o modo como cada disciplina 'acolhe' o Outro. Considera-se a forma como um comparatista europeu poderia ver a relação entre as duas disciplinas, em colaboração e relação simbiótica, no sentido de desenvolver uma reforma passiva e ativa do cânone. O comparatista europeu poderá assumir, eventualmente, uma atitude neutra em relação ao recente *marketing* da Literatura Mundial nos Estados Unidos. Mas aqui este fenómeno não é considerado como neutro, antes se investiga a concepção americana da Literatura Mundial enquanto programa político, examinando-se as suas origens nos Estudos de Área, bem como a sua relação

com o modelo acadêmico americano de multiculturalismo, considerando-o, em última instância, uma estratégia institucional que ajuda a gerir a diversidade nos *campus* universitários dos EUA.

**Palavras-chave:** Literatura Mundial, Literatura Comparada, reforma, cânone, multiculturalismo, diversidade

In a recent article published in *THE COMPARATIST*, the Cuban-American critic Alfred Lopez discussed Jose Martí's reading of Walt Whitman. From this article, I learned that Whitman was a cursory reader, perusing a dozen books at any time, reading a few pages here and there, seldom getting sufficiently interested in any volume to read it in its entirety, dipping into various genres and reading no language but English. Although he never traveled beyond North America, it did not prevent him from envisioning the many places he evokes in "Salut au Monde" though, as Lopez notes "his own mystical, abstracted vision of an America is at once generalized and exceptional" (Lopez 2011: 5) The world Whitman presented in this poem was populated by undifferentiated Others "facilely reduced to "Camarados" in turn subsumed into his Hegelian vision of America as an ever-expanding end-of-History" (Lopez 2011: 6).

Lopez compares the American poet to the Cuban Martí and speculates on their possible encounter at a reception following a lecture on Abraham Lincoln by Whitman at Madison Square Theater in 1887. If Martí and Whitman did, in fact, speak, it would have been in English, although Martí could have dialogued in Spanish and French. Martí might have broached any number of interesting topics, since he was learned in the Classics and had advanced degrees in law and philosophy, was a renowned journalist, editor, novelist and playwright. One does not want to belittle Whitman, but Martí's considerably larger intellectual scope was grounded, as Lopez notes, in "a keen awareness of cultural and material difference" (Lopez 2011: 7). While Whitman did not possess expertise in a broad range of subjects and disciplines, one certainly would not guess it from the expansive and expansionist claims of his poetry. Whitman did not seem to be aware of his parochial vision or his provincial experience of the world. Certainly, none surface in poems such as "Starting

from Paumanok", where the American poet imagines himself "sailing to other shores to annex the same, yet welcoming/ every new brother. . . Coming among the new Ones myself to be their companion/ and equal." At no point does the poet ever pause to wonder how he proposes to accomplish this encounter in English. One might even question how his prospective new "brothers" might feel about being "welcomed" in their own homeland by some interloper (Lopez 2011: 10).

Perhaps, by now, you suspect where I am going with this train of thought. Whitman's inverted logic of welcoming new brothers as long as they speak English presents a crystallization of American exceptionalism that serves as an apt metaphor for what I see at work in recent American formulations of World Literature. Martí's interdisciplinarity, in-depth knowledge of other cultures and languages, and his awareness of cultural difference calls to mind Comparative Literature at its disciplinary best. I fear that Whitman's claims to "welcome" ("annex") the world reflect far more World Literature's rather imperialistic vision of a world to be packaged and consumed in English, the ever-increasing hegemonic language of academe. It is telling that one approach to the Other is theorized today in America as a democratizing force and the other conception, deemed by some as elitist, is espoused by actual others, Hispanics like Martí, Lopez, or myself. In fact, this other approach is also embraced by a European theorist who also stands outside the American mainstream and who might recognize the limitations that the American model of World Literature might pose in an international setting.

I think that a European, much like Martí, the proto-comparatist of our metaphor, might realize the importance of language learning and cultural specificity in the study of literature. She might value the idea of World Literature and feel it needs the input of comparatists in order to hold its own against the institutional power of the sciences. Juri Talvet, an Estonian literary scholar and poet, has written persuasively about the increasing trend to make the humanities more science-like (and to make literature a beggarly appendix to the real/hard sciences) through a widespread mechanical application of theories. He envisions World Literature and Comparative Literature working together, but acknowledges the unique capacity of comparatists to study literature in its widest possible

context. Unlike the often mono-lingual American literary scholar, Europeans tend to see Comparative Literature as offering the necessary detailed treatment of literary phenomena as a substantial factor for a national literature in its linguistic and social dimensions. World Literature depends on translation and canon formation. Certainly in Talvet's Estonia and here in Portugal, one would be conscious of the exile position that a World Literature translated into English really means for certain languages and literatures. Beyond such ideological and political concerns, we must also recognize the role specific genres might play in the World Literature canon. One can place value in a pedagogy of World Literature only in so far as it can avoid what he terms a passive canon and adopt active and diligent canon reform (Talvet 2014). Any number of European and Asian comparatists can envision a more symbiotic relationship between World Literature and Comparative Literature. They even might view the recent American marketing of World Literature in rather neutral terms. It does not carry any historical and pedagogical baggage. Outside the US, it is not seen as serving any specific political aims for its American practitioners. This is an important point. World Literature is not something new that has arisen in the wake of Comparative Literature's "demise." It has a history and serves a purpose. Its arrival on the theoretical and pedagogical scene is not an accident.

It is this trajectory that I wish to examine in the following discussion. Specifically, I would like to investigate how, beyond American World Literature's laudable aims of re-envisioning how we fashion ourselves in relation to geopolitical location, there do exist individuals who dwell outside the comfort zone of the American "we" who might think otherwise. I, for one, view the theorizing about World Literature as a means whereby the American "we" co-opts the Other. It is my thesis that World Literature, as it is formulated and practiced in the US, reflects how the American academic fashions him/herself with respect to the Other. As the poetry of Whitman suggests and as trends in literary theory of the past forty years amply show, it is quite easy to level out this Other. Poets and academics often work from a self-image that does not correspond to social reality. Sometimes, their fanciful creations tell us more about those constructing the categories than about anything else. With this thought in mind, allow me to extend my metaphor a bit further.

Just as in Whitman's poem, so too for World Literature as it is theorized and practiced in the US, there is no imperative to truly encounter (and hence respect) the "other" population. As in the case of Whitman, World Literature's messianic mission of welcoming the Other is not a reflection of humanism, but an attempt at cultural appropriation. Sometimes it is merely enough to evoke the existence of Others (as Whitman did) and offer nominal representation and a selectively partial exploration (as we do today in American World Literature anthologies today). It is really not necessary to grasp the intellectual history and contextualize the Other or broaden its significance by drawing any associations that might extend knowledge beyond the master narrative that one has responsibly engaged the world. In fact, by appropriating the Other in this manner, American World Literature sanctions a selectively fragmented exploration, ensuring a general failure of real engagement. As we saw in the case of Whitman, so too in American World Literature, there is considerable hubris involved when one speaks for the Other.

Presented as an ideal toward which literary studies should aspire, American World Literature falls prey to an overriding impulse to homogenize, taking for granted that there exists a common conception of the verbal/linguistic act, what constitutes a classic in a given society, and differing definitions of literature across cultures. It assumes that the codes of communication that a given system uses to address its intended readers are easily available in other cultures and times (Chanda 2013a: 7). American World Literature's reframing through translation and new cultural contexts reflects far more the translator's framing through his/her hegemonic language and theoretical jargon rather than that of the local language's writer (Chanda 2013b:3). Although American World Literature affects a respect for the Other as a reified object of cultural difference, it only delivers a superficial and unidirectional overview, with Anglophone culture as the one recognizing the non-Anglophone and (often) non-white culture. In order "to be" or "speak out," the non-white and /or non-Anglophone culture must seek the legitimacy and recognition from white culture and use the language of white culture to produce itself (Rizvi 1994:63). In this manner, the Other preserves its own heritage, only as long as it speaks English (Prashad 2000: 112) or is translated into it.

American World Literature does not adequately address this basic problem of translation upon which it largely depends. Translation into Western languages usually does not strive to transform the essence of the text in its source language. However, in translation, a text becomes different, something commensurate in the target language. You make English, what is not English. It is a one-way street: your ensuing English text does not become changed by the experience of the encounter. Rather, the Other becomes changed. In terms reminiscent of Herder's vision of *Humanität*, the translation in a World Literature anthology becomes the true mediator of genius. This notion presupposes impartiality and an ability on the part of the English translator whose geography, political situation and eclectic character lend themselves to the tasks of ordering the genius of other cultures and building new creations from them. On a more personal level, such mediation is an application of the English translator's/editor's presence in the world (*Hiersein*). What is it about the American World Literature translator/editor that allows him/her to assume another mode of thinking or feeling? In the act of translation, there is not only the expropriation of the Other's artistic production and the communication of knowledge from one tradition to another, but an implicit claim of improving upon it. These are common traits of translation practice (Figueira 1991: 29). No matter how sensitive or talented the translator may be, a translation is an independent work, altered from the original. A translation accommodates a text *à la française* or *à l'anglaise*, etc. – removing foreign elements that might impede comprehension and sometimes even perfecting the original. Faithfulness in translation has historically been seen as a disservice to the reader who expects an agreeable reading experience in which he/she need not question nor be surprised by a text. Translations seek general accuracy rather than complete fidelity. Making the foreign intelligible often encourages a pedestrian style and idiom (Figueira 1991:31). A translation is, therefore, not a practical intermediary but an interpretation. For these reasons, translations are seen to provide a default reading, certainly not the preferred mode and certainly not the mode on which to base a pedagogy. Institutionalizing the study of the Other in a format that relies on translation promotes assimilation with domesticating egalitarian demands attached. American World Literature does not

adequately acknowledge this aesthetic concern, nor does it fully acknowledge the political ramifications.

It should not be forgotten that World Literature has its origins in Area Studies, a field that was a Cold War Pentagon construction for managing the global situation. The new World Literature advocates have not quite figured out that Area Studies was not only discredited as racist and illegitimate a few decades ago, but has bequeathed to World Literature many of the problems that brought it into disfavor. Both Area Studies and World Literature tend to ignore the local in favor of the interests of an abstract universal humanity. Both view notions such as the "nation" or "foundational values" as homogenous and universal. One of the most damning criticisms leveled against Area Studies was its dependence on governmental funding that presumably compromised its objectivity. While World Literature does not carry the stigma of US State Department sponsorship, it is bankrolled by private corporations (such as universities) and large publishing conglomerates whom some might find just as sinister as the government! Whereas Area Studies produced strategic documentation compiled by US State Department personnel from data collected by a peon class of exploited native informants, World Literature appears in anthologies, edited by Western/Western-based scholars, but often translated by new native informants. It is the same old, same old. The West still interprets the rest. Now it even markets the rest. Instead of the baksheesh formerly doled out to Area Studies' native informants, one hopes that their World Literature successors get to share a bit in the royalties, especially since the resulting anthologies are required reading in thousands of World Literature courses throughout the US and are bought by tens of thousands of students. There is a clear capitalist component to this packaging of the Other.

American World Literature is not only modeled after Area Studies, it is also indebted to the theories and pedagogies that have arisen in the past forty years. Due to a radicalization of theory and the ensuing paradigm shift from the aesthetic to the political, it has become acceptable to view literature as an outmoded form of cultural capital belonging to the bourgeoisie. An important stage in this process of radicalization involved the rejection of the canon of dead white males in favor of the cultural studies model. However,



it soon became apparent that dismantling the canon often had less to do with installing a more immediate and less conservative hierarchical format and more to do with establishing a new authority, grounded in ideology and seeking reification by identifying and marketing marginalized populations. In the case of American universities, these commodity populations were packaged and marketed first under the rubric of multiculturalism, then under the umbrella of postcolonial literatures and now, it appears, as World Literature. All these pedagogies of alterity claim to bring the literatures from the margins to the center when, in fact, all they really do is allow critics from the center to co-opt the margins.

World Literature shares American multiculturalism's mission to recognize the contributions of neglected groups and offer a reform project heralding diversity and promoting a progressive politics. Like postcolonial criticism, American World Literature pretends to uncover occluded and submerged identities and to liberate the oppressed. Yet, the samples of under-represented and repressed literatures offered by this brand of World Literature do not in any way problematize a Euro-Amero-centric perspective. Rather American World Literature promotes an ethos of recognition without adequately questioning Euro-centric definitions of knowledge. Like other pedagogies of alterity before it, American World Literature ultimately consolidates control. Like these preceding pedagogies, it also obscures issues of power and privilege, by rendering the Other tokenistic (Chow 2002:113). As Gerald Gillespie has shown, the current interest in World Literature does not harken to anything new (Gillespie and Figueira 2014), but in its present configuration begs the question of what purpose its resurgence might possibly serve in today's academe? On a primary level, we can speculate that American World Literature as a new theory and practice serves those who teach courses on World Literature. People who teach World Literature may do so because they are not skilled to teach national or comparative literature. By rendering one's parochialism and limitations into something grandiose, more "inclusive" and humanitarian, one can recruit those very values that drives one's parochialism and limitations into reverse and claim a more noble universalism (Chanda 2013a: 9).

As I have noted elsewhere, it is quite possible that the recent American interest in



World Literature betokens an effort on the part of scholars to refashion themselves now that other theories and pedagogies of alterity have played themselves out. Unifocal scholars often feel the need to retool themselves, in order to make their mark. The “new” World Literature scholar whose formation has been almost exclusively in English literature can pretend to reinvent the wheel, do what the comparatist has been doing for decades and claim, in the process, to be non-elitist because he or she does not bother to learn foreign languages. But I ask you, what is more elitist than practicing a brand of criticism that claims to champion a voiceless and under-represented world but does so only in the English language? Since when does the imposition of Western ways of thinking on the non-West make us non-elite? I suspect there is a lesson to be learned from the proliferation of theories and pedagogies that promise to improve the world (and, in the process, assuage white Western guilt) and that lesson is that we should not take at face value academic projects that blithely claim to engage in a reform process. Have Comparative Literature’s standards of cultural and linguistic specificity really been lost, as some critics contend? Or are certain theorists just claiming they have disappeared in order to support the hegemony of the English language and their own positions as experts in the field? I am very suspicious of solutions to the supposed death of our discipline when what certain critics propose is far less than what some comparatists have delivered for decades. I am even more suspicious when academics claim thereby to be striking a blow for democracy.

In my book, *Otherwise Occupied* (2008), I make the case that academic theories and pedagogies of the Other (identity studies, multiculturalism, postcolonial criticism and now we might add World Literature) were constructed and used in America to undermine Affirmative Action by influencing institutional policies for recruitment. I investigate how these various theoretical constructions of the Other proliferated in the US in direct proportion to the failure of statistical evidence to support the success claims of institutional diversity. I contend that these theories and pedagogies, in effect, aid in masking the continued marginalization and containment of America's minorities within academe. I also show how such initiatives dovetail very nicely with university marketing concerns. I analyze how American universities have in the past occluded low numbers in diversity by

establishing various ethnic studies programs and peopling them with under-represented ethnics. Identity Studies first contributed to the balkanization of ethnics into fields for which they were deemed biologically and culturally suited. In other words, minorities were allowed to enter the ivory tower only if they are willing to settle for studying themselves. As a first-generation American with a Portuguese surname, I should have ideally studied my heritage culture. I should have trained in a field to showcase my ethnicity and as a minority (since my father came from Latin America). I could thus be neutralized and contained in such a placement. It did no good for the diversity profile of the universities in which I studied to dare study something other than myself. What right did I have, as a dean at the University of Chicago so graciously put it, to be the “Puerto Rican girl who was trying to learn Sanskrit.” [Deans in the US, whether they are scientists or humanists, think that Portugal is the same as Puerto Rico or any names with too many vowels confuse them!] Race remains a big problem in American universities.

Pedagogies such as multiculturalism, postcolonialism and World Literature are popular in America because they level out otherness. American universities need not recruit or hire minorities at all, if alterity can be represented in such formats. When we view alterity initiatives in the context of American racial politics, pedagogies of alterity seem far more to reflect strategies of containment that obscure the stasis of power and privilege rather than imaginative innovations that redistribute rights and rethink recognition. Under the guise of inclusion and hospitality, they mask a racist agenda. Such pedagogies deflect attention away from social issues such as real discrimination, real unequal access, and real hierarchies of ethnic privilege that are far from being resolved (Huggan 2000:126) in academe today. Under the guise of promoting tolerance, American World Literature, like the other pedagogies of alterity before it, enables academic elites to displace, diffuse, and thus intensify class, gender, and racial contradictions.

Such pedagogies serve a demographic purpose in American academe of contributing to the representation of diversity. Multiculturalism and postcolonialism allowed an often privileged Asian and Middle Eastern diasporic professorate to speak on behalf and in lieu of their supposedly mute brethren. With World Literature, the most recent bureaucratic

institutionalization of Othering, we can now witness the process of “taking back” the American university from both the ethnics and minorities housed in identity studies and the Third World model minorities supervising multicultural and postcolonial studies. We have come full circle back to Whitman. We too can now embrace and celebrate linguistic limitations and fragmentary knowledge. With World Literature, we too can now engage in a quasi-mystical endeavor that glorifies nothing but good old American exceptionalism. Whitman was able to indulge his fancies because he lived in an openly imperialistic age, in an America that reveled in its belief in white supremacy and gloried in an aura of rural utopianism. Our modern theorists of the world must be more subtle. And here, as in all scholarly justifications for shady political postures (from academic Marxism to the moral relativism of deconstruction), we call upon theory to assuage our consciences. Rather than examining the economic and political forces at work during the final stages of decolonization and its aftermath, literary theory has focused on postmodernist views of a hybridized and syncretic world.

The work of Baudrillard has proven particularly useful in this regard, especially his notion that travel can be viewed as a spectacular form of amnesia. According to such a theory, any part of the world can be recreated or made to stand for another. In a world of third-order simulacra, encroaching pseudo-places merge to eliminate geographical or ethnic space entirely. This leveling out of the world has contributed to theoretical creations of metaphorical space in which critics might dwell that are separate from the real space they inhabit. In this metaphorical space, critics can voice ideologies of subversion and rebellion that are simply too unsettling, if voiced from their own actual space. Their delicate balancing acts stem from the paradox of their inhabiting a space of bourgeois comfort, while needing at the same time to distance themselves from global capitalism. When critics appropriate the metaphorical space of the Other, whether it be postcolonial, the nomad, the exile, or now even the entire world, they hope to exonerate themselves for all the benefits they receive from this same capitalism. In this process, we find the meeting of incommensurables, a deep seated need for the experience of political engagement coming out of the 1960s meeting a 1990's need to be media savvy, and the new

millennium's desire to package and market intellectual capital. There is no small irony in how easily these three conceptual frameworks have melded. If the belief in criticism as a viable intervention is a relic of the 60's that has proven itself bankrupt, we might want to view "new" purportedly "cutting-edge" pedagogies as responses to this socio-political impotence. Potency, when it exists, resides in the critic's relationship to colleagues as it is constructed through the coinage and the use of new systems, accompanying jargon and business collaborations with university administrators and publishers.

In American institutions today, the marketing concerns are, therefore, twofold. First, there is marketing to and through university administrators who buy into the idea that an initiative such as World Literature (like multiculturalism and postcolonial criticism before it) provides the most advanced and "logical" approach to the miasma of competing cultures and ethnicities. Through an "innovation" such as World Literature, American institutions can recruit and pretend to "restructure" with supposedly radical responses to new socio-economic realities. However, amidst all of World Literature's talk of multilingualism, translation, reframing, flows, and inclusivity, there is really no discussion about the relations of power, the market, canon formation and even the notion of "literature" in the moment of global capital (Chanda 2013b: 7).

The American brand of World Literature has thus entered into the fray as the latest avatar of earlier theories and pedagogies purporting to engage the Other that have sprung up on American campuses in the last four decades. Like the earlier fads in multiculturalism and postcolonial studies, the newly-minted World Literature Programs are practical in that they are all relatively easy "specializations," demanding no in-depth knowledge of another culture or foreign languages, a skill that has fallen by the wayside among American students. In fact, one of the explicit justifications for the creation of World Literature departments is the difficulty of adequate language training eroding the competency of many Comparative Literature programs in the States. The inability to train students in languages and literatures derives from a decline in learning and standards beginning in the 70's. World Literature's solution to these lower standards, to quote Gerald Gillespie, is to universalize them (Gillespie and Figueira 2014). World Literature claims to eschew the

“elitism” of Comparative Literature’s mandate to learn foreign languages. With World Literature, students who are not trained in elite American universities, deemed the only real sites where one can study languages like Sanskrit and Nahuatl, can still “welcome” of the world’s literature in their midst. Moreover students who, because of their content-light training, have not studied even common foreign languages and their literatures can do World Literature. Likewise students whose training prevents them from doing broad-based comparative or theoretical study can do World Literature and they can pretend to “do” the Other “better” than Comparative Literature does.

As we saw in the case of Whitman, so too with World Literature, co-optation can be achieved under the pretense of democratizing. The reality is that World Literature feeds the same brand of American isolationism of which Whitman sings. Like Whitman, all these pedagogies of alterity claim to engage the Other without allowing it to speak its own language. However, the resounding global education that such pedagogies actually offer literature students can consist of nothing more than snippets from endless recycled “representative” authors writing or translated into the English language. In the case of World Literature, there is a sense of *noblesse oblige* in formulating a field that demands so little from its future practitioners just as it is odd to call Comparative Literature elitist (especially given the immigrant status of many of its practitioners) because it demands knowledge of foreign languages. (Are statisticians deemed elitist for needing to know calculus?) What is really going on here? Eliminating standards does not democratize anything. It only points to American cultural provincialism, triumphalism, and a deep indifference to the world. It reflects American racism and its privileging of the Self to “speak for” the Other.

In literary studies today, we have become rather promiscuous ventriloquists. Spivak muted the subalterns to make a place for the critic (herself) to speak on their behalf. She filtered Mahasweta Devi who herself is a high-caste spokesperson for tribals. The Indian critic Jasbir Jain draws a fundamental distinction regarding this issue of spokespersonship when she compares what she has termed a “literature of empathy” to a “literature of experience.” She asks where the lack is located in the “empathetic” privileged writer or

critic that enables him or her to speak for others? In posing this question, I feel that Jain has cut to the heart of what is at issue here: there *is* no lack that ethically renders spokespersonship legitimate. In academe, to cite Aijaz Ahmad, textual culture can only pretend to be activist culture. Theory and criticism do not change the condition of the disenfranchised. Critics who claim otherwise are fooling themselves and others. When academics speak, they usually do so for personal gain, something as simple as a new job or “proper” recognition. One speaks for the Other to co-opt that Other, to take his or her apportioned voice and sometimes, as a wonderful consequence, the place allotted for that Other by the system that tries to or, more often, pretends to redress past discrimination.

In all these attempts to “speak for” the Other, I cannot help but think of how Walt Whitman blithely welcomed his “camarados” in their own land. We must be wary of those who undertake the task of speaking for others and articulating their experience. The motivations behind such acts of masquerade and collaboration are not noble. Just as it is unsavory for middle -class whites to speak for Blacks, Native Americans and Chicanos, those institutions that promote such performances are no less odious. Similarly, there is just something silly about monolingual Western or Western-trained World Literature scholars packaging the world. Nevertheless, this marketing of empathy and representation has become standard in American academe. It is possible because (again a legacy of the 60’s) in the university setting (perhaps more than elsewhere) we can be whatever we say we are. What counts are not one’s actions but the narrative about the action that one constructs. One can certainly speak for the Other, regardless of one’s own subject position. Yet, in the outside world, the last decade has taught us some harsh lessons. The willed failure in the US to grasp the essential role played by source contexts and languages has led to failures of interpretation and understanding among peoples. The academic postmodern tendency to treat all literatures as a kind of meta-language that can be lifted out of their natural linguistic context and examined on the a-historical specimen tray of contemporary theory has proved to be woefully inadequate. What is urgently needed is not a continuation of these cynical and Lilliputian exercises but a commitment to understanding the world’s literatures’ connection to and elucidation of the socio-cultural context of the cultures from

which they spring. It is clear that students in the twentieth-first century need to be able to experience and interrogate this totality of the world's literatures, not just the constricted and diluted product packaged and marketed by the self-serving managers of American academe.

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