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### Title

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### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5kh7h3f1>

### Journal

CounterText, 3(3)

### ISSN

2056-4406

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### Publication Date

2017-12-01

### DOI

10.3366/count.2017.0099

Peer reviewed

# Literary Intransigence: Between J. Hillis Miller and Ranjan Ghosh

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**Abstract:**

Hillis Miller and Ranjan Ghosh think literature from opposite but complementary points of view. Miller is the advocate of close reading and generally an inductive approach whereby specific interpretive problems in regard to specific literary texts critically revise broader theoretical assumptions and presuppositions. Ghosh, on the other hand, plays the consummate theorist, appropriating and critically developing various concepts in dialogue with a wide range of contemporary critical voices, then applying that revised/expanded concept to the analysis of specific works. Each models a different way to move between theory and interpretation, but both ground their thinking in the strangeness of literature, what Miller calls its 'idiosyncrasy' and Ghosh, based on his reinvigoration of the Hindi term, *sahitya*, its sacredness. This piece argues for the fundamental 'foreignness' of literature (and culture in general) as underwriting both approaches. Following upon Voloshinov, Benjamin, and others, I situate both theory and criticism of literature within the larger problem of translation as a crossing between languages that also brings the foreign into the native tongue, an irreducibility I call literary intransigence. As opposed to platitudes about 'world' literature, literary intransigence implies instead a vigorous reading of all literature as foreign.

**Keywords:** literary theory and criticism, translation, inter-culturalism, intransigence.

*Thinking Literature Across Continents* (2016) presents itself as a book co-authored by Ranjan Ghosh and J. Hillis Miller. To be precise, it is more a staged dialogue with alternating chapters by each writer, separate 'acknowledgements' by each, a preface by Miller, and an epilogue by Ghosh. As far as I can tell, at no point is there any joint or collaboratively written statement by the two together, as one often finds in co-authored works. Throughout, Miller and Ghosh maintain the lines of their separate and distinct

*CounterText* 3.3 (2017): 316–328  
DOI: 10.3366/count.2017.0099  
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[www.euppublishing.com/count](http://www.euppublishing.com/count)

authorial personae. On the other hand, each of their chapters seems to be written with multiple iterations of, quotations from, and responses to the other's statements on the topic at hand (poetry, world literature, teaching, ethics), even engaging in broader critiques of each other's methodological practices and principles. So, while the distinction between authors is rigorously inscribed, the chronology of their interaction confounds the more you read along. And unlike the linearity of a simple dialogue, where the alternation of speakers nevertheless seems to move forward toward some kind of consensus, be it the agreement to disagree, in this case the ordering principle feels more like a kind of spiralling movement that circulates between two points, themselves in constant movement, a double helix, or a kind of countertextual slinky that unravels the current DNA of that creature we call critical theory and its ever passionate and ever fraught relation to whatever it is we still call 'literature'.

Within this dynamic, Miller plays the advocate of close reading and generally of an inductive approach whereby specific interpretive problems in regard to specific literary texts critically revise broader theoretical assumptions and presuppositions. Ghosh, on the other hand, plays the consummate theorist, appropriating and critically developing various concepts in dialogue with an impressively wide range of contemporary critical voices, then applying that revised / expanded concept to the analysis of specific works. It would thus seem to be a classic contest between inductive and deductive reasoning, or in Kantian terms, between the reflective and the determinative judgment. But that too would be an unwarranted simplification. Ghosh's theoretical concepts are themselves refined and altered in and by their application to given texts, while Miller inevitably avails himself of a well hewed repertory of off-the-shelf theoretical and rhetorical tools (catachresis, prosopopoeia, etc.). On the one hand, interpretive approaches are developed, and on the other hand, theoretical conclusions are drawn. So, within the world of each author's discreet contributions to the volume, one finds a further helix whose churning charts within each chapter the spiralling iterations of the relation between critical theory and literature, all the while ratcheting up questions about the on-going relevance and vitality of those two terms.

As good a way as any to begin to track these complex movements is by reading closely the volume's title. *Thinking Literature across Continents*, at first blush, seems less like a title than a rather prosaic description of the book's general framework: two scholars from opposite ends of the globe writing about the topic of literature. Or, rather, not so much writing as 'thinking'. Indeed, the choice of words is intriguing and departs from the endless set of critically theoretical titles that state the intention to 'theorize', 'read', or 'write whatever the subject at hand might be (or *a fortiori*, the countless volumes promising to reread, rewrite, or retheorize a given subject matter). *Thinking*, on the other hand, would seem to be much less grandiose in its aims and expectations, either through a kind of reduction to Cartesian principles of mere 'thinking', or cogitating as the zero degree of human mental activity, or else, perhaps more methodically and reflectively, in homage to the circuitous and laborious Heideggerian exercise of *denkheit* as the recall in and through thought of the Being of

beings (Heidegger 1976 [1954]: 244). All the more so since we are not even thinking *about* literature, but merely and directly ‘thinking literature’, transitively as it were. Moreover, the use of the present participle further complicates the expression between a subjective sense that the authors are subjects engaged in thinking (about) the object, literature; and an objective sense whereby thinking adjectivally modifies the term, literature, as if to draw an implicit contrast between a literature that ‘thinks’ and one that does not. Clearly, the subjective meaning prevails in the text Ghosh and Miller have actually written, but the objective sense haunts my own reading of the book to the extent that one of the primary questions raised has to do with the status of literature itself. It would then be a question not just of a split between two understandings of literature (which we can tag as Ghosh and Miller), but a split within the understanding of literature itself, between a thinking and an unthinking literature.

Of course, raising the question of whether literature can ‘think’ begs the question of reattributing an anthropomorphic concept of subjectivity to literature itself, whatever that would mean. But then again, the so-called self-reflexivity of literature remains one of the sacred cows of critical theory from at least the days of Russian formalism and early structuralism (Roland Barthes’s view of art as self-designating artefact (1967 [1953]) through countless iterations of art’s radical critical potentiality and irredeemable ability to speak truth to power. It is arguably the most powerful myth of critical theory and one that endlessly energises us to read literary texts as somehow, somewhere, deep down, and inevitably on the right side of history and social justice, even when we come up sharp against the starkest evidence to the contrary of ideological entrapment and the play of power. Part of the appeal of deconstruction, in its more popularised versions, was the claim to reveal in any text a counter-text or counter-narrative that would undermine the disequilibrium of hegemonic power. The power of literature would be that of a certain resistance to power, which may or may not be coextensive with a resistance to theory itself. More on this later, but we are first led back to the question of what literature is, the source of its reputed subversiveness, and whether it can be said to be ‘thinking’ in some way or other.

For Hillis Miller, the answer seems to lie somewhat self-evidently in the assumption ‘that *literature* means printed books that contain what most people ordinarily think of these days as literature, that is, poems, plays, and novels’ (46). His way of thinking what literature is relies on reading specific poems, or plays or prose works, which is what he demonstrates chapter after chapter, through typically magisterial close readings of Stevens, or Trollope, or even Nietzsche. Nevertheless, this apparent ease in identifying examples of literature is framed by a broader and persistent questioning of the limits of literature historically, conceptually and technologically. He is quite clear that what we commonly recognise as literature is fundamentally a nineteenth-century invention based in the wider body of print culture earlier centuries had referred to simply as ‘letters’. But just as literature gradually emerges out of the materiality of print culture, so too does the pervasive spread of digital culture – what Miller humorously calls ‘prestidigitalization’ (46) – spell the possible end of ‘literature’ and the advent of multiple other cultural forms, all of which nonetheless continue to raise with spiralling

urgency the relation between theory and interpretation. The double helix continues to turn.

Likewise, for Ghosh, what begins as a deep interrogation of the Sanskrit word, *sahitya*, to think a comprehensive theory of literature within an even more capacious theory of culture, ultimately faces its value in terms of what it can or cannot tell us about specific works of literature, narrowly defined, whether they be by Tagore, Frost, or Beckett. While *sahitya* is indeed the common Hindi word for literature, such as enshrined in the Indian institution known as the Sahitya Academy (and I note in passing the absence in the US of any equivalent national academy specifically dedicated to the study of literature), I suspect the word will be unknown, strange, or foreign to most of the book's Anglo-American readership. Ghosh's insistence, in this English language text, on using the foreign word, *sahitya*, as such, rather than translating it is deliberately provocative and forces a re-evaluation of what the English term, literature, might mean not just in other contexts, or 'across continents', but also within the book's Anglo context itself. *Sahitya*, as Ghosh explains, derives from *sahita*, which although it 'means "united together"', this does not point to fusion or intermolding but connection (the across-momentum), a kind of being-with' (29). Although he nowhere makes the connection, it seems to me this concept of making a connection, or putting things together across some divide, recalls the etymological sense of English *composition*, which likewise derives from Latin *com-ponere*, to put together. And indeed, the word, *composition*, is also colloquially understood by English speakers as a form of writing, although perhaps a less exalted form than 'literature', which as Miller points out later, derives from *litterae*, or 'letters', such as in the expression 'arts and letters'. Putting letters together might be a clever way to bridge these two concepts of literature, but then again we may be missing the point by looking for a quick consensual solution that in fact works against the dialogical dance not only between Ghosh and Miller, but also chiasmatically within each of them.

The next word in the title, *across*, looms as crucial in *thinking* what Miller / Ghosh are thinking about in terms of literature and from their respective continental locations. Indeed, the word is highlighted on the title page (but not the cover), or more correctly, 'lowlighted', to the extent that it appears in grey while the other three words of the title are in black. The book's spine offers a different take on the relative emphasis of the words in the title, with 'thinking' and 'across' in brown and the remaining two words in green. This would suggest a link between thinking and across, as distinguished from the nouns, which are connected via the present participle and the preposition. One might say that 'thinking across' is the *sahit* that brings together literature and continents, but then is not 'thinking across' precisely a form of *sahitya*, suggesting in fact that thinking about literature should itself be a literary act? Ghosh clearly engages this literariness through his deployment of a poetic and metaphoric writing that contrasts with Miller's more deadpan if heavily ironic prose. But then all the more reason to inquire after the role in com-position (*sahitya*) of the pre-position, *across*. Remember that Ghosh himself speaks of *sahitya* as a kind of 'across-momentum'.

Elsewhere, Ghosh refers to his ‘across factor’ (4), which he also terms his ‘trans-habit’: ‘*Trans*, as a prefix, means “across, beyond, to go beyond,” from the Latin *trans*-, from the prepositional *trans* “across, over, beyond,” probably originally the present participle of the verb *trare*-, meaning “to cross.” This crossing, going across, and staying perpetually crossed is what motivates and characterizes my doing of literature’ (3). I note that for Ghosh this literary ‘doing’, whether we would elsewhere call it literary criticism or even critical theory, is irredeemably a kind of boundary crossing. But his ‘doing of literature’ doesn’t seem to differ from what literature/*sahitya* ‘does’ as a matter of course, that is the putting together of different things, the com-position of different letters, which implies the crossing over or carrying over of those differences, the root sense of the word, *translation*. Literature as *translation*, and thinking or doing literature as *translation*, does not mean a ready convergence or disappearance of the differences brought together or com-posed in *sahitya*. And here, it is precisely Ghosh’s persistent refusal to translate *sahitya* as literature that merits attention, even as it enables him to think through what literature is anew, at least provisionally without the baggage the English word carries after decades of literary theory. Keeping the foreign word in an English context opens up a space that allows a different way to think *across* literature, or to think literature countertextually as what crosses over.

Of course, there is an important literary and critical tradition in refusing the ease of translation, and I have in my own work as a translator at times decided for various reasons that it would be better *not* to translate a given word into its apparent counterpart in the other language. Nor am I alone in such a practice, one whose conceptual justifications hark back to Walter Benjamin’s remarks in ‘The Task of the Translator’ (1969 [1923]) that the aim of translation is not some kind of ideal transparency whereby the content stated in one language is rendered seamlessly and ‘faithfully’ into the other – if only one could find the right words! – but rather to allow the strangeness of the foreign language to be felt within the translated text: ‘the basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue’ (81). Rather than ensuring commonality and consensus across linguistic difference, translation is disruptive, perhaps even subversive, in its enactment of a linguistic activity that highlights the differences between languages, that is, their essential foreignness to each other, in the very act of crossing between them. In a way, translation could be said to be an especially strong case of *sahitya* in its literal composition of two different languages, the “across momentum” of their *mitsein* that holds them together without collapsing them into the same.

On the other hand, such ‘disruptive translation’, or what Philip E. Lewis (1981) after Derrida (2007 [1987]: 67) has called ‘abusive translation’, is not necessarily well received within contemporary post-industrial societies, whose national identities and base of power assert, whether overtly or covertly, a nativist view of language as what is unquestionably their own. And as recent events have shown, rampant “globalization” does not seem to have lessened nationalised anxieties about the foreign: to the contrary,

even. Policing national boundaries is not just about the immigrant at the door but about the very intrusion of foreign words and phrases that undermines the 'pure' version of the national language. Of course, even the most cursory familiarity with the sweeping history of human migrations and the long etymological history of languages can readily debunk such nationalist mythologies of pure race and language, without necessarily questioning the foundations of national identity itself by celebrating the 'contributions' of immigrating peoples and languages as so many incremental additions to the national pride. But such assimilationist narratives frequently come at the cost of ignoring or erasing social and linguistic difference and do not address the fundamental question of what a language is, a question at least as fraught as that of defining literature.

A more radical point of departure might be Voloshinov's contention (1986 [1929]) that the 'alien, foreign-language' word is at the very origin of language and human civilization, that language itself arises not out of some internal expressiveness or primitively imagined cry from the heart, but from the clash of different tribes or groups within tribes. Approvingly citing the work of the linguist Nicholas Marr, Voloshinov discounts any nativist notion of a national language as a 'fiction' and argues that language is always already 'multitribal' and brought about either by economic needs or by the 'alien force of arms' (75–6). This is perhaps another way of saying that language is always the language of the other. For Voloshinov, that other tends to be a conqueror or alien authority, and his subsequent focus is on the social stratifications enabled by the foreign origin of language. But this foreignness preceding the indigenous also recalls Rousseau's (1966 [1781]: 12–14) equally perplexing description of the origin of language in the encounter between one primitive human being and another, with the first one mistakenly exclaiming 'giant' at the sight of the other, metaphorizing that other in a way that makes the figural precede the literal. For both Voloshinov and Rousseau, the primitive encounter with the other is also a cession of power to the other, who by dint of being foreign *appears* as dangerous or more powerful. At the same time, that alien threat becomes somehow assimilated into the sense of being one's own. It is less a metaphor than a catachresis, since it names what has no other name (and *a fortiori*, in these imaginary scenarios, in the absence of *all* other names) rather than a comparison, however loosely defined, between two terms. Voloshinov uses the expression 'linguistic "crossing"' for what he describes as the 'basic factor in the evolution of languages', and Rousseau's imagined encounter takes place also as two humans literally crossing paths. We come back to the 'across' and the 'trans' as the *preposition* for the *composition* of whatever we call literature, which we are here trying to 'think across continents'. That this crossing is said to take place across entire 'continents', to gloss the title's final word, merely hyperbolises the situation of encounter and its creative outcomes.

Thinking the foreign at the origin of the indigenous obligates a radical rethinking of what we mean more generally by culture, or most recently, by the negativity associated with the idea of cultural appropriation. For many years now, I have played a game with my students, asking them to name what they consider the most native element of a

culture and I will show them its foreign origin. Not surprisingly, it is especially easy to play this game in the context of American culture, which broadcasts all kinds of images of 'real' Americanism when it is itself the culture most evidently based upon the appropriation of other cultural traditions. Two of my favourites are the 'cowboy' and California surf music, since they may be less obvious than others and recur exhaustively as signs of true Americana. Everything about the cowboy comes from elsewhere, including the name itself which translates Spanish *vaquero*, the outfit which from hat to boot derives from Mexican, African American or Native American sources, and the horse itself, introduced into the Americas by the Spanish, who in a holdover from their Moorish period equipped and rode their steeds in the Arab style. As for the so-called surf music meant to evoke a great, individualistic 'American' activity itself taken from indigenous Hawaiian collective ritual, that music was the product of a German-Jewish immigrant, Leo Fender, who developed the reverb amplification that gives surf music its distinctive echo, and a Lebanese-American named Richard Mansour, who adopted the stage name of Dick Dale and applied traditional Arabic single-string scales and rhythm to the electric instruments designed by Fender. Debates about the ethics of cultural appropriation are not wrongheaded, but to be meaningful they should begin by the acknowledgement, like it or not, that *all* culture is appropriation and what each culture defines as most its own almost certainly derives from some foreign source. Not some, but all cultures are syncretic, but there are those that understand and celebrate their own distinctive ways of being syncretic and those that deny the foreign origin as a narcissistic blow to their (superior, prideful) sense of self.

To this extent, all culture is engaged in the art of com-position that defines the basis of *sahitya*, and translation may be the strongest case of working between two different things where the very status and sense of the foreign are utterly at stake, whether it is to absorb it out of existence (making knowledge of the foreign language unnecessary or irrelevant, the dream of so-called 'machine' translation) or, following Benjamin, Derrida, and Lewis, allowing the foreign language to permeate and alter the language of the translation. Translation is the ultimate thinking across, but also the very volatility of the crossing as necessarily *transformative*. What crosses over is no longer the same as what it was before crossing (not to mention the medium of the crossing as per Heraclitus's river). Or, to use a metaphor dear to Ghosh, the across-momentum of translation, of literature, of com-position, of *sahitya* is not a simple undifferentiated 'fusion' of what is crossed but an '(in)fusion', where the Brownian swirl of herbaceous particles nonetheless differentially *colours* the hot liquid medium in which they swim, a metaphor that allows us, as says John Phillip Williams (2012: 73) cited by Ghosh, 'to consider what it might mean for a scholar to be steeped in the minute intricacies of an idiom, patiently picking through its margins, and at the same time allowing this work to melt the boundaries of the idiom itself so that other idioms all of a sudden are effectively in play' (4). But if the transformational quality of literary crossing 'effectively' brings into 'play' other idioms, then we have confirmed Voloshinov's insight that language is not only 'multitribal' but also that 'linguistic "crossing" is



the basic factor in the evolution of languages'. One crossing deserves another in an apparently endless proliferation.

At the same time, however, such a utopia of difference should not blind us to what we could consider a certain intransigence of literature, namely the ways it stubbornly retains its irredeemable strangeness, its kernel of foreignness. Perhaps this is what Miller refers to as the 'idiosyncrasy' of literature, or Ghosh in a different vein as the sacred in *sahitya*. It is what at once resists theory and yet invites us to read with an eye to theory. The (in)transigence of literature is also what prevents the crossing from dissolving into the indifferentiation of mere transaction, which would inevitably prompt the question literature professors dread: what is it good for? *Intransigence* is a relatively recent word in English, a foreign import in fact from Spanish, where the word was coined in the 1870s to name the radical wing of Spanish Republicanism – *los Intransigentes* – that refused to compromise (*transiger*) with the more moderate *Benevolos* supportive of the constitutional monarchy. The name was subsequently applied to the nascent impressionist movement in France before its better-known moniker (Eisenman, 1989). The prefix *in-* works to negate the verb, *transiger*, which does not exist in English, the closest equivalent being that of *to transact*. The French *Littré* dictionary defines the first definition of *transiger* as 'acomoder un différend par des concessions réciproques'. I hesitate to translate the citation here, not because it is especially difficult ('accommodating a dispute through mutual concessions'), but because I have elsewhere refused to translate the word, *différend*, in translating Jean-François Lyotard's, *The Differend* (1988), and thus introducing that foreign word into English, where indeed it has subsequently had its own intellectual fortune. Why did I, as translator refuse, to translate a common French word, making it seem strange, as if it were potentially a neologism concocted by its author? The *Littré* definition actually supports my case, not because the word, *différend*, is in any way unusual (indeed, it is quite colloquial) but because the author/philosopher of *Le différend* was precisely elaborating in great detail a kind of dispute that cannot be 'accommodated by mutual concessions' without injury and injustice to one or more of the disputing parties. My perhaps questionable intransigence as a translator was motivated by the need to underscore the fundamental intransigence of the situation of the differend where compromise cannot be accommodated, and where the refractoriness of the foreign must be retained. The trans- or across-momentum of com-position is neither an overcoming nor an 'accommodation' but a material inscription of difference. This is what I would call literary (in)transigence, a com-positional crossing that transforms what is put together without reducing them to transactional equivalents. Such a formulation might also point to the longstanding differend between literature and capitalism, evident since at least the nineteenth century and inescapable today (Sartre, 1950 [1947]).

My point in following this long excursus was to reflect back on Ghosh's persistent use of *sahitya* rather than literature, which serves not only to reopen the question of literature in an Anglo-American context while dramatically highlighting the value of the foreign in 'thinking literature across continents', but also to reopen and redirect

the question of literature in an Indian context, precisely by drawing upon concepts and terms (such as *sahitya*) that I suspect are both local and yet foreign to the context to which they are applied. While Tagore is clearly in evidence, most of the texts Ghosh reads through the analytical lens he develops out of the Hindi aesthetic traditions are canonically Western. His extended reading of Beckett's *Endgame* is exemplary of this approach, whereby the plots and characters are interpreted in terms of categories drawn from the *Bhagavad Gita*, such as *dukkha*, *karta*, and *chesta*. Ghosh meticulously explains the terms in question but does not translate them into English-language equivalents. The resulting interpretation is both novel and convincing, but it will likely strike English readers as reading 'out of context' and so, decidedly foreign.

But this is precisely where literary intransigence comes into play. What is the strange call of literature that beckons across time and space, across centuries and continents? Marx himself was troubled by this question in the unfinished introduction to *The Grundrisse* (1973 [1857]: 111), when he wondered why we still remain captivated by the *Iliad*, despite the fact that the society and conditions that produced it are long gone. But perhaps it is precisely the remoteness and the incomprehensibility of the context for us today, its inescapable foreignness, its residual intransigence, that calls us to its crossing and to our own potential transformation. This is not to say that everything 'foreign' is the same, far from it, and why some beckon to us while others don't is the question that bothers Marx without his finding an answer. Curiously, Marxist-inspired literary criticism has generally not followed this lead and has alternatively been the most context-bound of all approaches, focusing typically and with uncommon brilliance on questions regarding the socio-historical conditions of literary production. But then, too, one could well argue that nothing is more foreign than these previous contexts and conditions, and that illuminating the strangeness of history transforms us, just as the Benjaminian theory of translation highlights the foreignness of the other tongue to transform our own language. Coming from a different angle, Miller avows his advocacy of reading 'out of context' precisely as a way of heeding the idiosyncrasy of the literary text.

This question of context, where Miller and Ghosh unexpectedly converge despite vast continental differences, also raises the troubled question of 'world' literature, the subject for one of the paired chapters written by our two authors. Again, in a striking moment of convergence, Miller and Ghosh both question current concepts of world literature. For Miller, three conceptual stumbling blocks concern translation, representation, and the status of literature itself, all of which seem to support my meditation here on foreignness in literature, starting with the problem of translation. For Miller, the problem of translation with regard to the study of so-called world literature is that no single scholar can acquire the requisite reading ability in enough languages to study them all in the original. This also quickly raises the second problem, regarding which languages and literary traditions are represented in discussions of world literature, since some principle of selection must be in operation to decide what is considered literature of world significance and what is not: 'World literature

will, of necessity, for example, in textbooks or courses, work by way of relatively brief selections from the literature of many countries or regions. Such selections will always be to some degree biased or controversial' (140). Ultimately, the risk is that 'lacking specialized knowledge, the foreign reader is likely to impose domestic-literary values on the foreign work' (140). Finally, there is the challenge of defining what literature 'is', to the added extent that different cultures may have very different appreciations and understandings of what constitutes literature. I most certainly agree with Miller on the virtually insuperable challenges these three problems place before any legitimate study of world literature, especially if that term is meant to grasp in some global way the vast variety of literary works across the totality of human cultures (and *a fortiori* if we include not just the present but also the past of human literary activity). On the other hand, I think these problems merely exacerbate what are already the very same challenges, certainly within a more narrowly construed notion of traditional comparative literature, but also within any given national literary tradition. The question of representation clearly rears its head within the various 'canon' wars that have raged among national literature scholars for decades, and these disputes very often involve underlying disagreements about what constitutes literature within the relevant field of literary scholarship. Questions of translation and the limits of linguistic competence may appear less often but can still occur, especially when one adds enough historical depth (a few hundred years typically suffices) so that even the native language is no longer sufficiently recognisable to most readers, or when the text itself includes foreign languages or local, often incomprehensible dialects; or even when whole swathes of the national literature are deeply indebted to or under the sway of some foreign language tradition. That discussions of world literature exacerbate these tensions is to my mind a good thing to the extent that they raise the fundamental questions about what it means to think literature, either across or within continental jurisdictions. Indeed, they return us right back to the question I keep raising here about the intransigence of literature as the irreducibly foreign in whatever we might consider the homeland. For Miller, this means a recognition of the 'irreducible idiosyncrasy and specificity of each literary work', that its 'most important features' are, in point of fact, 'sui generis' (152).

In his counterpart chapter, Ghosh seems to begin from a similar location:

If literature is truly sacred in the sense that I have tried to explain in chapter 1, then it is crucial to read each literary work more or less in detachment from its local roots in a specific author or locale, as well as in detachment from its place in so-called world literature. The work's sacredness, that is, its complex relation to an imaginary realm, is what is most important about it, more important than its local and global affiliations. Literature is nowadays often said to be at once global and local. This, by extension, also means that, after all, there is nothing either local or global about literature. (112)

For Ghosh, however, declaring the uniqueness of any given work of literature is not enough, and his resultant development of what he calls the 'more than global' focuses

on the general ability of literary texts to make their own world. This ‘worlding’ describes any work’s ‘complex relation to an imaginary realm’ as what is sacred about it, but how is this ‘more than global’? The distinction between ‘globe’ and ‘world’ derives from Jean-Luc Nancy’s (2002) distinction between globalisation as the capitalist reduction of heterogeneity to a globalism of injustice against a backdrop of general equivalence’ and ‘the suppression of every world-form of the world’ (53) – on the one hand; and – on the other – worlding’ (‘mondialisation’ or world creation) as a ‘space of meaning that allows for the partaking of singularities. Ghosh characterises the latter as ‘intra-active transculturality’, which, he continues ‘is not about going beyond the global or reducing the local to a form of representation or meaning formation’: ‘It is the destruction of an expressive and organic “totality” but is also a way of providing a sense of a totality, a world-wide-forming totality, . . . . The more than global is radical immanence, not a choice but an event’ (113).

At the risk of seeming a bit impertinent, I might ask whether the ‘more than global’ might not work just as well as a more modest ‘more than local’. Beyond the truism of celebrating the local ‘roots’ of literature or art even in their capacity for world creation, I keep wanting to ask if there even is anything like a purely local work, one that would almost by definition be of no interest beyond that locale nor bear the traces of anything outside those confines however defined. On the one hand, the ability of literature to travel or be read outside its local context is key to whatever we call by that name. It is again Marx’s conundrum about the continuing interest in the *Iliad*. On the other hand, to recall my earlier discussion of Voloshinov’s theory of the foreign as the very condition or origin of the indigenous, the home land and home tongue, the local is always already foreign in itself (without necessarily claiming the more grandiose possibility that the local is always already global). This is where I find Ghosh’s term of ‘intra-active transculturality’ to be most useful. It is not merely a question of the interaction between distinct cultures, not just ‘hybridity’ in the sense established by Homi Bhabha (1994), but of a hybridity or inter-culturality *within* the local, as the very *origin* of the local and of the world in which it comes to take place *as* the supposedly local, as the localised. Just as for the local to be localised, it must take its place within the wider grid of a world, so too does supposedly local art emerge from and within a world of ‘representation or meaning formation’ that exceeds it, as at least the more than local if not the more than global. The problem of ‘world literature’, or even local literature, is not then about some global understanding or super-canon of books but about the irreducible or (in)transigent inscription of the foreign, a ‘worlding’ that is not about a literature *of* the world but rather, the way literature takes place *in* the world as foreign.

The word, *foreign*, is itself a foreign derivative from Latin *foras*, or what is outside the door, *fores*. But *foras* is also the source of the word, *forum*, as the open place out of doors where words, things, ideas are exchanged. The foreign is coterminous with the forum, that is, the social, the political, the economical, the cultural. The foreign is the ‘space of meaning’ that is the world, to recall Nancy’s definition, a space opened

up by the inscription of difference, the *fores*, or doorway to the *foras*. And like other doors, the *fores* too must swing both ways, opening onto the *foras* within as well as the *foras/foram* without, a 'crossing' as well as a barrier, both 'trans' and 'in-trans'. The question then is not whether there is a world literature but rather whether there is a literature that is not in some way always already a *foreign* literature. And the question of world literature, or for that matter literature in and of itself, is to ask the question of the foreign. Or that whatever might come to succeed literature, in whatever countertextual form or platform, still retains the foreign inscription that necessarily enables it while resisting our attempts to domesticate that irreducibility. This may or may not be subversive, but it is what I call literary intransigence, perhaps what Miller calls literature's idiosyncrasy, and maybe what Ghosh calls its sacredness. Perhaps this is the sense in which literature can be said to 'think', but it is certainly where thinking literature across continents both begins and ends, whether one begins by reading or whether one begins by theorizing. It is the well-known dilemma described by Heidegger at the beginning of *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1971 [1953]: 18): how can we derive a general concept of art from the 'comparative examination of actual art works' unless we *already* 'know beforehand what art is'? And, on the other hand, how can we define the principle of what art is without being able in advance to determine and identify actual works of art *as art*? Heidegger's solution is to enter into the circular paths of moving between these alternatives by beginning with what is most closely at hand, or most familiar. In his case, the unfortunate result is to remain resolutely trapped within a despicably narrow ethno-nationalism. Might one propose instead a pathway that begins deliberately with the most foreign, on the one hand; or one that still begins with the familiar but openly avows the fundamental, intransigent foreignness of the familiar? We may even be able to call these two pathways by the names of Ghosh and Miller, or perhaps just 'theory' and 'criticism' (or reading). The challenge is for the two to circle through the literary intransigent without necessarily arriving at the same end, but continuously taking off each time in the opposite direction, incontinently spiralling in an infinite loop that endlessly reinscribes the foreign across the space between continents. For theory to continue to be 'critical', reading and interpretation must also never cease being theoretical.

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