

Kitabhana

A Discussion with Sheldon Pollock, Karla Mallette, Alexander Beecroft, Jesse Ross Knutson, Anna M. Shields, David Lurie, Alexander Key, and Rebecca Gould

Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature

Edited by Yigal Bronner, David Dean Shulman, and Gary A. Tubb

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SMALL PHILOLOGY AND LARGE PHILOLOGY

Sheldon Pollock

Even as the humanities shrink in public estimation and university support, and broad competence erodes in the languages that constitute some 90 percent of the literary humanities—the literatures of the non-West up to 1800—a new day in global classical literary studies seems to be dawning. In a gloomy moment one might attribute this counterintuitive trend to anxiety in the face of a looming catastrophe, as in the Indian vision of apocalypse, where day is brightest—with two suns rising at dawn—before the final night. But whatever its cause, a dynamic reengagement with the classics is clearly in evidence.

Just in the past decade the scholarly world has welcomed a trove of major collaborative histories of non-Western, in particular premodern non-Western, literature. Off the top of my head I can think of one of African and Caribbean literature, two of Japanese, three of Chinese, a vast multivolume history of Arabic literature, and an even vaster one of Persian, aside from innovative, single-author works on more restricted periods.¹ In addition, new series of classical literature have recently been founded that aspire to make major texts in new translations available to the general no less than the scholarly public: the Library of Arabic Literature (New York University Press, 2012); the Murty Classical Library of India (Harvard University Press, 2014); the Library of Chinese Humanities (De Gruyter, 2015); and the Library of Judeo-Arabic Literature (Brigham Young/University of Chicago Press, 2017). And that is just literary histories and editions. The range of important new monographic work in the field is equally impressive.

1. Irele and Gikandi, *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*; Kōno et al., *A New History of Japanese "Literature"*; Shirane et al., *The Cambridge History of Japanese Literature*; Mair, *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*; Chang and Owen, *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*; Denecke et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature*; Allen and Richards, *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical*

Period; Yarshater and Ashtiany, *Persian Poetry in the Classical Era*, the most recent volume in a history of Persian literature projected to cover (depending on how you count) eighteen or twenty volumes; Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily*; and Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*. South Asian literary studies include Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History*; Orsini, *Before the Divide*; and Bruijn and Busch, *Culture and Circulation*.

The ambitious new synthesis of classical Indian literature under review here, *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature (ITP)*, certainly fits this trend. The book represents an attempt to think—across time, space, language, and genre—about the ways that *kāvya*, the Sanskrit term for expressive writing in general, grew and changed over some two thousand years. It does this not in the usual way of literary histories, rethinking eras and areas and audiences. The major periodizations, for example, which have in fact become scholarly consensus only in the past decade or so, largely structure the book's exposition: the origin of an entirely new form of expressivity—*written* expressivity—in the last centuries before the Common Era; a continuous and highly reflexive development through the first millennium and into the second; and an early modern moment, where regional-language literatures, from Gujarat to Tibet to Java, are newly invented, often by adopting the transregional paradigm of Sanskrit (a process that is chronologically, linguistically, and even politically parallel to what occurred in early modern Europe). Where *ITP* itself innovates and marks a turning point for the study of South Asian literature is the method of analysis: close reading of the texts themselves—insightful and accomplished in a manner almost without precedent in the field—and the revelation of historically innovative artistry.

While not itself explicitly comparative, *ITP*, by its careful exhumation of the key characteristics of a classical literary tradition, implicitly issues a strong invitation to comparison to classicists from other regions. Indeed, that this can be taken as an invitation at all comes from a second powerful impulse, in addition to a renewal of interest in the classical, that marks the contemporary literary humanities: a revitalization of the theory and practice of comparativism but now on a global scale. Even as European comparative literature itself has stopped comparing and the very idea of global forms of consciousness and culture have come under attack from nationalists everywhere from India to Turkey to the UK and US, the need for making sense of literary life as a planetary whole, of finding new sources of solidarity by way of thinking difference together—analogueous to the unified planetary response required by climate change, for example—seems to have taken on a new kind of urgency.

This revitalization of comparativism is evident in the readiness, even eagerness, of the seven contributors to this Kitabhkhana to assemble from their different locations on the literary planet to reflect on the meaning of classical South Asian literary phenomena, whether for their particular worlds—Arabic (Alexander Key), Chinese (Anna Shields), Japanese (David Lurie), and Sanskrit (Jesse Knutson)—or their interworlds—classics and Chinese (Alexander Beecroft), Italian and Arabic (Karla Mallette), and Persian, Arabic, and Georgian (Rebecca Gould).

We begin our collection with two general reflections, proceed to views from inside the Sanskrit or structurally analogous traditions, and end with two wider assessments for a new comparativism.

Karla Mallette brings Sanskrit into conversation with two other “cosmopolitan” languages, Latin and Arabic, to assess the morphology, so to speak, of the three literary cultures. Rome may have defeated Greece, but Latin was long defeated by Greek until it made Greek literature Roman via translation (again, analogously to the relationship of Sanskrit to South and Southeast Asian regional languages). Arabic's beginnings were different, and they played out on a public stage. But it too to some degree translated its way to fame (via Greek and Pahlavi, among other languages), while, unlike Latin, it has never receded. Sanskrit's history is far more clouded; like Greek it was not kick-started by a translation project, and like Greek it acknowledges no literature outside itself. But unlike Greek and virtually every other language, Sanskrit can appear reluctant to acknowledge anything *outside* of language—thus perfectly fitting Mallette's definition of the cosmopolitan code, which “situates itself outside time and space.” Sanskrit, or at least the Sanskrit of *ITP*, can thus disconcert readers like Mallette who, rightly, are keen to plot the imaginative against the actual; who, rightly, want to ask, what is the relationship of literature to *life*?

One of the purposes of a literary history, Alexander Beecroft argues, is to inspire readers to actually read the literature, something especially critical for classical texts in the age of a “world literature” that often seems to be coextensive with the modern and postcolonial eras (and of course their mostly Western genres). But if, with David Damrosch, we define “world literature” as work

that gains in translation, how can it incorporate literature like Sanskrit, so much of which refuses translation because it is *about*, precisely, the Sanskrit language itself (phonology, lexicon, grammar, and the like) and the specific history of its literatures (later variations on earlier epics, for example)? This latter phenomenon leads Beecroft to the insight that “world literary” texts are those that not only gain in translation but have the capacity to produce later textual adaptations that can only lose in translation. Yet exposure to the techniques of such works, their rhetorical structure, for example, may offer strong inducements for comparison, as can the commitment to understand works by their own (rather than our) principles of literary creation—that is to say, to take seriously what their authors (and audiences) took seriously.

Looking from inside the field of Sanskrit literary studies, Jesse Ross Knutson acknowledges how often verbal density, conceptual complexity, and intertextual subtlety define the tradition of *kavya*. At the same time he gestures toward the actualities that their apparent artificialities address, in particular forms of kingly power and presence. If Sanskrit sometimes seems forever to be banished from the kind of literature Beecroft finds translatable, it might well embody precisely features of late modern literature that might speak to us most directly, not the least of which is the very dissolution of language’s pretensions toward stable meaning that it is one of *kavya*’s principal goals to produce.² While acknowledging the virtues of the sort of virtuosic readings offered by *ITP*, Knutson, like Mallette, also perceives its limitations, in its tendency to neglect the world outside the text, and offers suggestions of how to reach it.

Looking from outside the field of South Asian studies but within a classical literary formation homomorphic with Sanskrit—in its cultural centrality, for example, its longevity, its learnedness—while radically different in so many particulars, Anna Shields discovers exciting opportunities everywhere for thinking the Chinese and South Asian traditions together. She is sympathetic to the editors’ concern with finding innovation in a tradition long held by Orientalists to be unchang-

ing (except of course when “degenerating,” as they always invariably claimed to do). Yet the Chinese experience, far more via difference than via similarity, raises questions crucial for the South Asianist about, for example, a tradition’s *resistance* to innovation and the rewards for conformity; the decadence and vulgarity of novelty in the eyes of the elite custodians of tradition; the cultural value of imitation; the “ideological power of ‘antiquity’ as a concept,” where the new could be constituted by returning to the old; and the apparent interest traditions evince in masking, by the use of familiar forms and themes, the very impulse to innovate.

David Lurie’s perspective is that of a regional literary culture, Japan, that was powerfully influenced by a globalizing one, that of China. He discusses a wide range of phenomena—everything from lexical choice to metrics to patronage and social status—found in East Asian literary cultures that can profitably be linked with the processes of vernacularization in South and Southeast Asia, and that would make terrific comparative projects in their own right. Rarely does *ITP* itself, however—a missed opportunity for Lurie—provide the kinds of support needed for enabling such comparison. It makes few concessions to outsiders by failing to elucidate chronology, technical terms, and the historiography of South Asian literature that *ITP* positions itself against and the historical factors that have determined that position, for instance why we may be “generations away” from a history of Sanskrit let alone South Asian *kavya* (26). Rather, like Shields, Lurie asks why a classical tradition should be thought to care only for innovation. What about the conventionalism that so often marks the classical? Are the conventional works any less important for literary history? And is it really so straightforward to differentiate the innovative from the conventional? Yet the narrative of innovation that emerges in *ITP* has “a power and grandeur apparent even to the outsider,” Lurie writes, while the “regional *kavya*” section of the book opens up rich areas for a comparative study that has hardly begun.

A more explicit examination of the possibilities the book offers for elements of a theory of

2. See Bronner, *Extreme Poetry*.

comparative literature—hitherto a resolutely European form of knowledge and extending only a grudging welcome to non-Western traditions—is offered by Alexander Key. The scholarly purposes of such an undertaking as *ITP*, he rightly perceives, must include comparison, but what prospects for comparison does it offer? Comparison across literary domains with no history at all to connect them, such as South Asia and the Arab world, requires thoughtful reconceptualization. Key looks at style, technique, and form, starting (like Shields and Lurie) with the very idea of innovation, which works as an engine of creative change in both traditions. His focus is on the individual line, tropes such as paronomasia and hyperbole, and, intriguingly, their embedded syllogistic logic. Comparison, he argues, gets better the closer one gets to the actual poems, which is precisely what *ITP* shows, and formal features have the ability to transcend historical difference.

Comparison and its travails—the realization that all literary study is inevitably comparative but that the method of such comparison, global comparison, still, at this late date, awaits clear and persuasive formulation—form the core problem explored by Rebecca Gould. Foregrounding local forms of understanding through which we first make sense of the local forms of literature seems methodologically sound until we approach the boundary where the emic becomes the autochthonous, frozen forms of culture celebrated by nationalist delusions. But still bigger problems await us. Can we even grasp the local without some reference to nonlocal categories, or even communicate it without making such reference? Answers to these questions form part of a theoretical apparatus, still under construction, for doing global literary studies. More basic theorems must also be included: that literatures are always intertextual phenomena, given that every literary culture is determined by interactions with others; every literary language is always multilingual for the same reason (and not because authors employ more than one language, which is rarely the case). Last, Gould reflects, as other reviewers have done in their own way, on the tension between aesthetic appreciation and historical reconstruction, the latter referring not to the mere chronological concatenation of works

but to something more consequential: the making sense of the historical context of literary production. Gould recognizes the pitfalls of this (long-lamented) “binary” that privileges one kind of comparison over another and rightly insists on the need to synthesize knowledgeably.

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In closing it may be helpful to reflect on a few suggestions for future practices set out by the reviewers.

The very existence of this particular *Kitabkhana*, and indeed of the journal in which it appears, demonstrates the increasing importance scholars attribute, both for epistemological no less than political reasons, to fostering comparative global studies across disciplines. Aside from trying to address the rich theoretical challenges posed by this aspiration (what kind of new knowledge, for example, does comparison in the humanities actually produce?), we are becoming aware of better ways to reach our colleagues in cognate fields, first by making our implicit comparative enterprises more explicit, and second by writing and explaining accordingly. In the case of literary studies, the readership that can forgo the roadmap and guidebook of a specific tradition—the timelines, the glosses of technical terms, the critique of the received literary histories against which we position our own contribution—is vanishingly small. We need to do more to ensure that those located outside our specialism but eager to help construct a truly global (and no longer peripheralized) object of study will not find the entryway blocked by unfiltered particularist knowledge.

Closure of that sort is not, as some might hold, an inevitable product of philology, the discipline concerned with making sense of texts. Or rather, it is not the product of what I would call large philology, a critical practice that Giambattista Vico and Friedrich Schlegel, its greatest European theorists, envisioned for modern Europe, and that was actually in evidence in interpretive traditions around the world from virtually the beginning of the discipline, where scholars of small philology were always complemented by those of the large sort. Meaning held to be immanent in the text was everywhere complemented by mean-

ing held to exist in reading as historically constituted. An important challenge for contemporary global literary studies, as I see it, is to fully combine that small philology of the word with the large philology of the world, and demonstrate that this combination is not optional but necessary.

By “historically constituted” reading I mean both interpretation as expressed in presentist interpretive practices (pejoratively called “allegorical” for earlier eras but in actuality an assertion of the text’s historicity, and found in philologists from ancient Pergamum to medieval south India to Song China) and the larger historicity of the text, the latter half of the binary touched on by Gould and that a number of reviewers wished to see more often addressed in *ITP*. Its absence there does not mean the sources required to understand the historicity of context are lacking; we can answer many of the questions asked about Sanskrit, whether about gender or power or “where the bodies are buried,” as Mallette puts it.

ITP generally offers readings that Knutson calls *anuloma*, “with the grain.” This is an entirely laudable approach, the sort that, in European philology, found its most accomplished expression in the work of Erich Auerbach. In fact, it is the spirit of Auerbach, though he is mentioned in passing only a couple of times in *ITP*, that seems to animate the book (*Mimesis* after all is also a history of turning points and innovations). But while his style of reading has been universally applauded for its insights, Auerbach himself never offered a theory of how and to whom a literary text *makes sense*. His own historically constituted meanings are offered as if they stood outside of time and carry an aura of finality.³

Auerbach and his disciples also exhibit something of the anxiety of critique—the practice of reading *pratiloma*, “against the grain,” of learning to be firm, as Mallette puts it, with languages that want to erase what is outside the text. This anxiety, common to Romanists of Auerbach’s generation and likely exacerbated by the trauma of World

War II, was something about which he was never methodologically explicit, either. It took root in the US academy in the wake of the fin-de-siècle theory wars, finding vocal support over the past two decades in the humanities and the social sciences more broadly.⁴ But this critique of critique seems finally to be running out of steam, not so much because of the fickleness of academic fashion or, more grandly, a swing of the Hegelian dialectic, but because of the unprecedented civilizational catastrophe toward which we are hurtling. That climate-change denialists may have adopted the idiom of science and technology studies, or cultural nationalists the idiom of postorientalism, should inspire us not to drop our critical weapons but to sharpen them. In the case of global literary studies, one way to do this might be offered by a critical philology characterized by attending to both word and world, which are not in fact a binary and mutually exclusive phenomena but rather mutually constitutive; a philology that, at the same time, needs to be equipped with a real theory of meaning, which acknowledges pluralism even as it demands attentiveness to the question of truth at every level.

If the value of a work lies in the importance of the questions it raises as much as in the answers it offers, then *ITP* is especially valuable. For it invites us to ask the hardest questions literary studies can ask: How should we read? What does it mean to read (as we always do read) comparatively? Why do we bother to read at all?

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3. Here is not the place to demonstrate the ahistoricism that sometimes marks Auerbach’s own historical judgments. Reread “Odysseus’ Scar” and ask yourself whether Homer was merely “legend” for fifth-century BC Athens or whether “allegorizing trends” were

“foreign” in fourth-century BC Pergamum. See Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 3–23, especially 13 and 18. *ITP*, it should be noted, typically takes the history of reception far more seriously than Auerbach did.

4. For the former see Felski, *The Limits of Critique*; for the latter see Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?”

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SANSKRIT SNAPSHOTS

Karla Mallette

For someone coming from outside the field, *Innovations and Turning Points* can be a forbidding volume—in part because of its length, and in part because reading the essays in this book feels a bit like turning the pages of another family's photo album. Individuals, relationships, and the history in which they are entangled come into focus briefly, then blur and recede, leaving behind a sense of vague but urgent affection, like the smoke skeleton of fireworks. I take the invitation to respond to it as a way to open a conversation—between Sanskrit and other languages, between *kavya* and other literary traditions, and between scholarship on Sanskrit and scholarship on other languages. And at moments I pause to admire indecipherable passages, irreducible mysteries that remain for the nonspecialist. The result is another photo album: a series of snapshots taken by a tourist to the language, reflecting on the challenges posed by thinking about Sanskrit *kavya* in a comparative context and what seem to me the most compelling possibilities for the comparatist opened up by the essays in the volume.

The cosmopolitan language—provisionally defined as a literary language that positions itself outside of time and space—insists, at times with hauteur, that it is changeless. It provides a touchstone for thought, and even for something more sublime: it alone is capable of producing the rhythm of ritual, or of telling true stories about the divine. Arabic is the extreme example of cosmopolitan language as *lingua sacra* or religiolect. The Quran refers to itself repeatedly as *an Arabic Quran*: "We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an so that you might understand" (12:2; see also 13:37, 41:3, 41:44, 42:7, 43:3, 44:58). And for Muslims, the meaning of the Quran does not survive translation. The believer may use translation as a means to reach the Arabic but must understand scripture itself in its original tongue. Latin complicates the

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picture. It is a serial monogamist among religions. First, in antiquity, wedded to pagan belief and practice, during the Middle Ages and in western Europe it became the language of a monotheistic religion with no mother tongue (Christianity itself was born into Greek as a second language and code-switched between cosmopolitan languages). And yet, despite its mid-career conversion, Latin too is a steady state language. It was not engineered for ease and comfort, like a mother tongue, but instead to give scope and range to thought. According to the position papers of mega-languages like Latin and Arabic, people come and go; literary fashions come and go—but the language remains changeless. This is the bait it holds out to its acolytes: come to me, and I will hoist your thought far above the sound and fury of the *merely* spoken languages.

Sometimes the cosmopolitan language enlists a goon squad to ensure that the language retains its elite, unchanging nature. The essays in *Innovations and Turning Points* provide a firm corrective to this notion. “Older is better,” the language trolls said about Sanskrit in the fifth century CE.¹ And they commanded the litterateur to emulate the standards of perfection that the language reached in the first blush of youth. Fourteen centuries later, the “theorists” of classical Sanskrit insist that literature does not change; neither does the reader’s experience of literature change. But Velcheru Narayana Rao shows us how the modernist Sanskrit playwright Satyanarayana resists this idea (727). The editors of the volume state their purpose to watch and appreciate innovation: “to discern freshness where it exists” (6). How does the language that holds itself separate from time and place transform and renew itself from within? How do language workers contribute to the maintenance of the intricate, unimaginably vast mechanism of the cosmopolitan language? Can an onlooker from without the language understand the arcane ministrations of those who sustained Sanskrit through a long and eventful life?

Whether the subject is language, literature, or art, the rhythm is familiar: a bold departure from the past introduces a muscular new medium

or style. This era of classicism gives way to a period of noodling on the themes introduced in the classics. Classicism becomes mannerism becomes baroque, and practitioners begin to yearn for the self-assurance and clarity of their ancestors. The narrative might describe the culture of classical antiquity: the literature and arts of fifth-century Athens or of imperial Rome. It describes the visual arts of the Italian Renaissance, although Italian literature sinks its foundation into the late Middle Ages. And, as the essays in this volume make clear, the template has been used to characterize the trajectory of Sanskrit literature. Like Greek, Latin, and Italian letters, “Sanskrit poetry reaches its peak very early” (2). Mannerism rears its ornately coiffed head when, for instance, Magha writes a poem in which for eight chapters nothing happens (see Lawrence McCrea’s essay, 135–39). Yigal Bronner uses the term *baroque* to describe Subandhu’s “elegant, complex, and extended compounds” (239).

Some scholars bristle—and rightly so—when labels and categories derived from other traditions are used to analyze their own. Roger Allen, editor of the volume of the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* called *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, contributes an introductory essay that reflects on the infelicities of using the classicism/postclassicism template to describe Arabic letters. Allen points out the value judgment implicit in the label “postclassical”: *after* the classical inevitably implies *less than* the classical.² He discusses the inconsistencies of the periodization scheme in the volumes in the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*: they use dynastic history rather than literary history as an organizational principle, except when they use geography or genre as an analytic metric.³ It’s unclear what scholarly standards and value such a haphazard “method” brings to the field of study.

So, too, do the editors of this volume push back against presupposition that the Sanskrit works after the fifth century all “belonged to a process of long decay” (2), in order to reappraise the literary accomplishments of an unappreciated era. Periodization is a kind of metadata, an abstraction used for the purposes of analysis. It

1. Bronner et al., *Innovations and Turning Points*, 2. Hereafter cited in the text.

2. Allen, “The Post-Classical Period,” 6–8.

3. Ibid.

identifies patterns that help the public grasp and compare very long and complex histories. And it is a convenience—a courtesy, even—for nonspecialists, who look in from the outside and can't be expected to work up the expertise in order to appreciate the contours of another's history (or literature or language). For a nonspecialist, in the case of Sanskrit, it's easy to appreciate the resistance to the classicism-decadence narrative and the need for reappraisal. But at times it's difficult to get a purchase on the insights that emerge when that narrative is pushed aside. More than most, the Sanskrit language appears hermetic, a world unto itself, with flora and fauna all its own. In the case of *kavya* in particular, it seems, there is no outside: it's all about the language.

Comparanda do exist, of course—other models to which Sanskrit might be compared. But looking for parallels between the languages is discouraging; differences and distinguishing characteristics amass as fast as similarities. Latin, for instance, came into being as a language of literature abruptly, in the third century BCE, as the avatar of Greek. Many of the earliest literary compositions in Latin were modeled on Greek poems or plays, or directly translated from the Greek, and were written by men like Livius Andronicus (a Greek slave in a Latin household) or Quintus Ennius (who called himself the man with “three hearts” because he knew Latin, Greek, and Oscan).⁴ And the Latin literary tradition modeled itself closely on the Greek. In a fascinating recent study, Denis Feeney looks at the translation movement that fashioned a Latin literature on the Greek model and at the symbiotic relation between Latin and Greek letters. Describing how Latin piggybacked on Greek, he writes: “We are used to thinking of Greek and Latin as the ‘classical’ literatures, with later traditions as the ‘vernacular’ literatures, but from the standpoint of the Western tradition, at least, Latin is the first ‘vernacular’ literature.”⁵

The Romans did not impose their language on the conquered (except in matters that directly concerned affairs of empire). Indeed, that would be difficult, given the importance of Greek as literary model and given the function of Greek as

Mediterranean lingua franca. Even in the highest political circles, representatives of the Roman state might use Greek. As Bruno Rochette points out, “The recourse to Greek, the language of the conquered, was far from being a concession, but could also appear as a sign of power”: possession of the language of the conquered, in certain circumstances, symbolized Roman dominion over the Greeks.⁶ In contrast to the Mediterranean basin, Europe had no lingua franca to compare to Greek. There, with the retraction of Roman power, Latin lost its fortune like the character in Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises*: gradually, then suddenly. The vernaculars slowly encroached on Latin: bureaucratic records, translations (generally although not always from the Latin), poetry, and finally histories and scholarly works appeared in local vernaculars over the course of centuries in different European vernaculars. The process began as early as the seventh century in English and as late as the twelfth century in Italian (Latin, naturally, held out longer in the Italian peninsula). But Latin was not thoroughly discredited as a language of philosophy and science until much later. Although translations of philosophical and scientific works into local vernaculars existed earlier, philosophers like Galileo and Johannes Kepler wrote in Latin as late as the seventeenth century.

Arabic has a different contour altogether. We possess much more thorough documentation of the early history of its scripture than in the case of the other scriptural monotheistic religions. The oldest extant manuscripts of the Quran date to within a generation of the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE. The origins and earliest history of most of the great languages—languages in a class with Sanskrit—are shrouded in mystery. But the early history of Arabic was played out on a public stage, and a stage that expanded its reach by leaps and bounds from one generation to the next, with the Islamic expansion. Like Latin and the vernaculars of Europe, it cut its teeth on translation; it expanded by importing technical vocabulary and scientific treatises from adjacent languages (especially but not only Greek, Pahlavi, and Sanskrit, typically via one intermediary language or

4. Drury, “Appendix,” 804.

5. Feeney, *Beyond Greek*, 5.

6. Rochette, “Language Policies,” 551.

another). We can watch it move with increasing confidence through the centuries: from Sibawayhi to Ibn al-Muqaffa' to al-Jahiz (to name three immensely important writers, each of them native speakers of Persian) in the course of two short centuries, between the eighth and the ninth centuries CE. Thus, while Latin was already ceding ground to the vernaculars 5,000 kilometers to the west, Arabic gathered writers to itself. And Arabic, more than the other mega-languages, still has currency today, in large part because of the essential role it plays in religious ritual and observance.⁷

There are as many points of difference as commonalities in these sequences. Latin and Arabic both expanded swiftly and alongside centralized military power. But Arabic, unlike Latin, was the currency also of a religion, and one that survives (indeed thrives) to the present day. Latin survived a religious regime change, only to crumble when its fatal flaw—its inability to establish itself outside very small elite circles—damaged its standing beyond repair. Yet stepping further out, beyond the disparities in sequencing, the comparatist can identify some parallels, points that the languages have in common: their language workers are multilingual by definition, because the textual language is not a language of daily life. Both Latin and Arabic got their start in translation movements—and Latin generated translation movements on the other end, as it ceded to the vernaculars and the vernaculars hosted their own translation movements. Both language systems, that is, are characterized by complexity: they float on the surface of a sea of languages and are unable to sustain themselves without linguistic multiplicity.

The outlier languages in this scheme are languages like Greek and Sanskrit: languages that have no “before.” Greek did not get its start with a translation movement, although it seems likely that oral traditions preexisted the extant Greek literature and that Greeks wrote earlier poetry and plays that do not survive. Tributary languages—the Anatolian languages and Minoan, for instance—no doubt fed into the sea of Greek during this earliest period. But literary historians must allow archae-

ologists and anthropologists to trace this history, because these cultures were preliterate or because the textual record does not survive. The written tradition as such sparked into life with the epics of Homer, composed in the eighth century BCE, and carried orally and, finally, in written form forward through the centuries.

Just so, the essays in *Innovations and Turning Points* tell us that Sanskrit *kavya* had no beginnings—or, more precisely, that its links to previously existing forms of written literature are multiple and complex, but all contained within the ambit of a single language. The editors suggest that the beginnings of *kavya* are recursive: the earliest extant works riff on other, presumably earlier works, which survive only in manuscripts that postdate the works that take them as models (33–34). Herman Tieken outlines the plausible sources of *kavya* mooted by the scholarship: diplomatic letters, elaborated and complicated by ambitious poets, and Vedic literature (“On Beginnings”). That is, the literary tradition has predecessors—but none, apparently, external to the language itself. Unlike Latin and Arabic, unlike the European vernaculars, it had no translation movement to kick-start its turn on the stage of world literatures. And unlike those other languages, Sanskrit does not acknowledge the ministrations of multilingual language workers who fashion and sustain its literary system (or at least it does not seem to do so within the *kavya* corpus). The *cura linguae*—care of and for the language—takes place entirely within the sphere of the one language, which acknowledges no outside.

All languages of literature hoist themselves, serene and self-sufficient, above the palaver of daily life. But most have moments when they let their guard down: they look with urgent curiosity to what happens beyond their sphere of influence. They use the translation movement to gather information and literary strategies from elsewhere. They call on multilingual informants as grammarians, translators, and writers of original literary works.

Kavya does, of course, acknowledge adjacent

7. This telescoped account inevitably collapses Quranic Arabic, classical Arabic, and Modern Standard Arabic—three distinct registers of

the formal language—and does not take the myriad colloquial forms of the language into account.

languages in the mysterious bitextual and polytextual poems: Kaviraja's bitextual poem (mentioned in the introduction, 9); "a verse that reads in six languages at once" (12); Prakrit-Sanskrit bitextual lines that also mark gender difference in plays by Bhavabhūti (Gary Tubb, "The Plays of Bhavabhūti," 402, 408). I have heard of linguistic mash-ups in other contexts: Akkadian-Sumerian; Hebrew-Italian; English-French.⁸ The extent and the valence of the multilingual text in Sanskrit *kavya* remain mysterious to me, looking in from the outside as I do. But it seems that, most often, when Sanskrit registers the linguistic outside it reads as *also* Sanskrit: not-Sanskrit with Sanskrit as shadow. This is exceptional behavior on the part of the language and calls for theorization. Why, in a region fairly bursting with languages, does Sanskrit so firmly resist linguistic difference? Are other languages present in other literary modes; is it only *kavya* that refuses to acknowledge adjacent languages? What kind of work must be done in order to clear the ground for Sanskrit, to keep not-Sanskrit at bay? If—in the tangled linguistic thicket that is the subcontinent—*kavya* poetry creates a clearing into which it admits no phrases that are not Sanskrit (too), the fact is remarkable and, it seems to me, should be theorized by the scholarship.

In the ambit of Latin, Arabic, and the European vernaculars, translation movements have become objects of study only recently. For scholars of a previous age, translation was of scant interest. The translated text, many thought, apes from a distance the grace and elegance of the original. Translations that change the substance of the text are an embarrassment to everybody—to both the source language and the destination language. Now, however, new ways of thinking about relations between languages have put translation movements in the crosshairs. By translating, a language introduces itself to the neighborhood. It

identifies ideas and specific works that matter to it. An emergent language of literature, or one that seeks to realign itself with reference to other literary and scholarly traditions, acquires its chops in translation. The Greek-to-Latin, Greek-to-Arabic, Arabic-to-Latin, and Latin-to-vernacular translation movements have been proposed as alternate origin stories for the relevant target languages.⁹ In this revisionary view of linguistic and literary history, the Arabic language (for instance) as literary instrument was not born in revelation, but rather in the hard (and multivalent) work of putting the language into a direct, line-by-line conversation with the works of the Greek philosophers. In the process, ancient Greek philosophy was transformed, mobilized to speak to a new historical age and to a monotheistic culture that was itself learning to put its language to new use. One language acquired a philosophical tradition from another; the "original" texts gained a new life, thoroughly transformed, in a new linguistic garb and a new literary tradition. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same is true of subsequent Arabic-to-Latin and Latin-to-vernacular translations.

The translation movements typically affected natural philosophy and legal philosophy most directly. Yet the translations put into play ideas that became part of the surround for the poets and storytellers: the conceptual horizon within which they worked and within which they imagined new worlds. Ideas, passed from language to language and transformed in the process, became part of the intellectual world in which poets and storytellers lived. The attentive scholar can trace the influence of notions from the Aristotelian treatises of Andalusian-Arab scholar Ibn Rushd (or Averroes), recently translated into Latin, on the Christian theology of Thomas Aquinas or the Christian epic of Dante (to allow a single example to stand in for many). In recent scholarship, these mongrel images and ideas—passed from one language and

8. On Akkadian-Sumerian and Hebrew-Italian bitexts, see Michalkowski, "Where's Al?" On English-French, see Van Rooten, *Mots d'heures*—but in this case, the French is nonsense verse.

9. On the Greek to Latin translation project of the third century BCE, see Feeney, *Beyond*

Greek. On the Greek to Arabic translation movement of the eighth through tenth centuries CE, see Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*. On Arabic to Latin translations (twelfth through sixteenth centuries), see Burnett, "Arabic into Latin." For a recent survey of the Arabic to Latin translation movement, with emphasis

on books published in Italy during the Renaissance (fifteenth through seventeenth centuries), see Hasse, *Success and Suppression*. For a particularly fascinating overview of Latin to Italian (and French to Italian) translation (thirteenth through fourteenth centuries), see Cornish, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy*.

one cultural context to another, inevitably mas-saged or thoroughly remade in the process—have attracted the attention and admiration of scholars. The picture of the premodern literary world, in the *terroirs* of Arabic and Latin alike, is intersectional and layered—not by accident mirroring the linguistic reality of the twenty-first century.

I find this kind of intersectionality in *Innovations and Turning Points* in the poetry written beyond one boundary or another. In Dan Martin's essay, we learn that Tibet had its translation movement (585). Thomas M. Hunter tells us about an East Javanese translation movement (740). Both of these translation movements seem to be contemporary with the Greek to Arabic translation movement, which suggests an interesting synchrony across the Eurasian continent. And they postdate the Greek to Latin translation project and predate the Arabic to Latin translation movement. Perhaps in part because Latin had relatively recently emerged as a language of literature, and because it based so many of its literary and philosophical forms on the previous mistress of the Mediterranean—Greek—its sequencing is staggered, relative to Arabic and Sanskrit.

Hunter's essay on the earlier Javanese-Balinese *kakawin*, "A Constant Flow of Pilgrims," layers languages, religious cultures (Buddhism and Shaivism, 200), and religious institutions (Hindu and Buddhist, 202). David Shulman's discussion of Sakalya Malla gives us a fascinating portrait of a plurilingual author with a distinct regional sensibility. Sakalya Malla is referred to as "the creator of poetry in four languages" (616), and he writes a Sanskrit that has "the suppleness, the range, and the rich modal forms of the mother-tongues" (617). This porosity between languages, and the labile register of the mega-language, seems to be a kind of emergent grammar, a shadow grammar that makes Sanskrit mimic some of the behaviors of the vernacular (621). Is it coincidence that Sakalya Malla was not only a poet but also a grammarian? The poet's knowing attention to the medium—the substance of the language that he used to create his poetry—makes this essay one of the most suggestive for a nonspecialist: the details elude me, but the broad shape of the poet's medium and what Shulman calls "the magic of gram-

mar" speaks eloquently across linguistic boundaries (627).

The arrival of Muslims in the subcontinent inaugurates familiar dynamics. In Bronner's essay on Bilhana, we peer out from the demesne of Sanskrit at the Muslims as "other" and as enemy (504). Allison Busch's discussion of a poem by Narottam Kavi that piles up ethnic markers in a hyperrealist (and gently satirical) representation of the ethnic complexity of Akbar's army inspired a whoop of delight, although she didn't translate the poem and I can't read it: Busch's point, that "the sounds are the sense," transcends linguistic difference (658). Busch's discussion of Hindus and the Mughal regime, Mughal statecraft, and royal sponsorship of Persian literature (683–85) feels immediately familiar, presumably because this landscape—shot through with linguistic, ethnic, and confessional boundaries—mirrors the one I live in and the one I study.

In his essay on Tibetan *kavya*, Martin eloquently recognizes the challenge that faces scholars of Tibetan literature, who "are sometimes forced to think their way through two cultures" (565). It seems to me that those of us who teach in the Anglophone world face a similar challenge whenever we discuss literature that doesn't happen in English (or, in North America, Spanish): we must put it into conversation with and explain it to a world of English. This is vexing only to those who lack perspective. Didn't the languages that are our mistresses—Sanskrit, Arabic, Latin, even the European vernaculars—demand the same of their faithful, at the height of their power? At such moments, the cosmopolitan language commands the philologist (the lover of the logos) to disregard whatever humdrum maneuvers occur beyond her magisterial reach. The kind of accretive complexity I am describing—translation movements, the contributions of multilingual language workers—is particularly pitched at moments of transition: when the defensive walls of the language are breached and foreign hordes swarm the citadel of tradition. I am arguing that we are living through such a moment now, in the twenty-first century, and that current events call for scholarship that recognizes complexity in the past. In order to bring perspective to the languages of the past and

the present alike, we need to know how the texts we study created a dense network of links among populations distinct in ethnic, confessional, and/or linguistic terms. The aim of such scholarship is threefold. It enables the scholar to explore connectivity among cultures. It defamiliarizes literary traditions we think we know very well. Finally, it serves as a powerful comparandum. By identifying its entanglement in adjacent linguistic and literary cultures, scholars of Sanskrit *kavya* will make it possible for scholars of other literary traditions to mull the Sanskrit experiment, to use it as point of comparison and contrast for our own fields of study.

For someone accustomed to a world shot through with difference, the first half of *Innovations and Turning Points* is disorienting. Who wrote this text? Where did he (in our periods, it usually was a *he*) live? How does the text reveal the particularities of his life and times: the social history and political history that describes the world he lived in, the intellectual history that informs the world he created? If archives and documents to answer these questions do not survive, then what do the historians tell us; what does material history tell us? Who read the text, and how did they read? How did reading practices change over the centuries? The kind of scholarship with which I am most familiar articulates the networks that bind the text to the world. For the first half of this book, however, there is no “world.” There is nothing outside the language itself, which is not simply coextensive with the world, but is itself the only and self-sufficient world. We may assume that life occurred beyond the pages of the book, but the authors don’t acknowledge it and the scholars don’t discuss it.

One kind of connectivity does enliven the works discussed, however, and gets the occasional nod from the scholars: love, especially the physical consecration of love. In Shulman’s discussion of Bana’s *Kadambari*, “erotic passion” is personified as “a wild, capricious, dangerous, unfettered, invisible (disembodied) male” (281–82). But the text itself is sturdy enough to contain this explosive compound, this volatile force that rattles timbers and bed-boards yet is chained to serve as the engine of the plot. Bronner’s essay “The Nail-Mark that Lit the Bedroom” gifts the reader with the delightful compound noun “Picasso porn” (“the scrambled

signal of a pornographic cable channel as seen by a nonsubscriber” [238]; Bronner is quoting Réka Benczes). Bronner then dissects a single extended nominal compound that describes the tattoo that a night of energetic lovemaking leaves on the skin of one of the combatants and the effect that the mark has on the woman who recalls the exertions that created it. Bronner concludes his discussion of this noun by identifying a kind of Proustian sensibility in the text: the reader must experience the noun by reading it front to back, yet the interpretation of the noun sends the reader plummeting backward in time, watching a woman react to the memory of a night of erotic exploits, like a film wound in reverse. What drives the noun is not nonlinearity but rather “two basic organizing logics or linearities” (245).

It seems inevitable that a language so focused on the play of its nouns will produce complex temporality, in large part by evading linearity. Early in the book, in Shulman’s essay “Waking Aja,” we find ourselves in “a certain space within which linear sequencing no longer works as usual” (42). And Shulman later identifies recursive temporal complexity as central to the functioning of *kavya* in general (642). The classicist who taught me Greek and Latin—Edith Croft, of blessed memory—had two sayings: “The Greek verb is a beautiful thing,” she would remind those of us tormented by our tables of principle parts. And to those who studied Sanskrit (I was not one of them) she would say, “The Sanskrit noun is a beautiful thing.” Here and there, in flashes, from outside the language, I catch a glimpse of this beauty: linguistic Picasso porn.

Yet there is something disconcerting about the lovemaking described in this poetry (at least as I can see it, refracted through the eyes of the scholars). The erotics described is dual in gender—this is not homoerotic desire—and yet only one gender is present in the text. Women are there, yet they are not actors. Perhaps this is not striking given the fact that the majority of the texts discussed in the book were premodern. But even the scholars who contribute to the book are men. Only two essays out of twenty-five—less than 9 percent of the 786 pages of the book—were contributed by women. Particularly a collection that aims to give new energy to the field, a book that aspires to be a benchmark

for the next generation of scholarship, ought to be a beacon for *all* scholars (and if there are truly so few women in the field, then Sanskrit scholarship seems to have a recruitment problem). A literature so focused on heterosexual erotic description has a peculiar need for a feminine voice. In the twenty-first century, we can't allow a masculine voice to speak for all—and particularly not when it comes to describing bedroom athletics.

"Love," Bronner observes, "is typified by 'sweetness' (*madhurya*), a quality often defined by the lack of long compounds" (245). His point, in part—beautifully laid out in the essay—is that this text is not (only) about amorous exertions, but is also a very ambitious linguistic-literary exercise. I take away another point as well. The earliest literary texts in the Italian vernacular were lyric poems, and lyric poems written by men and addressed to women in particular. In his treatise on his own vernacular love poetry, Dante wrote: "The first who wrote vernacular lyrics did so because he wanted to make his words understood by a woman."¹⁰ The poet's aim was to hook up. Latin could not be his go-between, because women didn't understand Latin. In order to achieve his goal, the poet needed the vernacular, which is described precisely as *sweet*. Scholars refer to the style of the poetry written by Dante and his contemporaries (borrowing a phrase from Dante's *Purgatorio*) as the *dolce stil novo*, or *sweet new style*. What made it sweet—I suspect that the same is true for the literary critic whom Bronner discusses in the passage quoted above—was its capacity to convey the urgency of affection and desire. Were the erotic passages in Sanskrit *kavya* also engineered to facilitate hook-ups? Whatever the answer to that question might be, the situation in which they were consumed should be noted by the scholars, because it will give us a clearer sense of the ethics of the literary text: the effect that literature had on life.

In a beautiful moment from the third installment in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, *At World's End* (I hope I can be forgiven a *very* vernacular reference to make my point), one of the most scrawny and hapless characters in the movie, Ragetti, is given a surprisingly powerful scene. In

order to release her from her human form, someone needs to speak to the sea goddess Calypso "as if to a lover." The romantic leads in the film seem incapable of seizing the moment; the pirate captain Barbarossa attempts and fails. Ragetti steps forward, and the audience fears the worse: we don't see this tawdry figure as the hero whom the moment demands. Yet he knows precisely how to handle Calypso. He speaks to her with dignity, with an urgency and sweetness that startles and delights. The moment is precious because it defies audience expectations and reveals the depth of a secondary character. Coming to the field of Sanskrit studies from the outside, I wish for the scholarship an epiphany like this: may it find its Ragetti—may it find a host of Ragettis, of all genders—who can allay (or release) the raving beast of gender and the heaving sea of sexuality.

Of course I am simplifying what is evidently a much more complex reality. With its immensely sophisticated nouns, Sanskrit has multiple words for love—lost in translation into a language that must make do with monosyllabic words that English makes to sound Germanic even if they don't derive from Germanic roots (love, sex) and the occasional polysyllabic émigré from Greek or Latin (erotic, passion, desire). I learn that the outspoken poet Bana has embarrassed generations of scholars (Tubb, "On the Boldness of Bāṇa," 323–24). Bana seems to be a wonderfully genial poet, and I was eager to know more about his sensibility. In his essay on Bhavabhūti, Tubb tells us that female characters speak Prakrit (*only* Prakrit?) except when they speak in verse, which Bhavabhūti will compose only in Sanskrit (402). Later, a male character who wants to pass as a woman speaks verse in Sanskrit that doubles as Prakrit (408): a remarkable drag performance, and one that I ardently wish I understood better. Does the Sanskrit mean the same thing as the Prakrit? If not, what are the differences? How does the female character whom he addresses come to understand who and what he is?

Later, we learn that Sanskrit poets would reject erotic poetry under the influence of Victorian British culture. Narayana Rao discusses a play by Satyanarayana that focuses on an erotic relation-

10. Dante, *La Vita Nuova*, 139.

ship. But his modern woman, unlike her bolder ancestors, “suffers silently and her body wilts—a new image of a woman in love” (723). Satyanarayana doesn’t write about sex but instead about love (728–29)—or at least that’s how we must say it, using our impoverished English nouns. It seems a dreary development, and I mourn the passing of the more robust poets of the past, Bana and his ilk. Perhaps the east Javanese tradition is more open to spicy images? Hunter tells us that Mpu Dharmaja compared “his royal patrons to the Love God and his consort, Rati, goddess of passion” (772). I am curious about these patrons, who did not bridle at being compared to the Love God, “present wherever there are desire and passion” (ibid.).

It seems that the Sanskrit tradition, more than most, walls off literary composition from the tawdry affairs of life. Where does it open itself up to analysis of social, economic, ethnic, or religious difference? How does it acknowledge and mobilize gender? Clearly, the world of *kavya* texts is rich, and scholars may succumb to the temptation not to look beyond. Yet it is sometimes important to be very firm with languages that try to tell us that there is nothing outside the text. That’s a fiction, and it’s a fiction that sometimes is put in place so that we don’t find out where the bodies are buried. We need to look for the tether lines that bind the great parade float of the language to earth, and for the language workers who guide the float through crowded city streets. It seems to me that the obvious place where *kavya* opens itself up to analysis of difference is in its treatment of love: gender difference, the linguistic enactment of gender difference, the literary situation of desire, how that is created in the text and by the text, how it has been used through the years to quicken desire in the audience, how the audience has succumbed to or resisted the poetic depiction of desire—in all the wonderful lexical display that the Sanskrit language makes possible.

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PHILOLOGICAL EMPATHY AND TEXTUAL GAINS AND LOSSES

Alexander Beecroft

What use is a collection of essays about the history of Sanskrit poetry to me? The question inevitably sounds rhetorical, although I ask it in a very literal and practical way, from the position of someone who studies ancient Greek and Latin as well as classical Chinese literatures, and who dabbles in the theory and history of world literature, but does not know Sanskrit. After reading Yigal Bronner, David Dean Shulman, and Gary A. Tubb's *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kavyā Literature*, I have several answers, corresponding to the various parts of my scholarly life. These essays are immediately useful, indeed invaluable, to me as someone who is actually writing a *Global History of Literature*, and therefore has an urgent reason to learn more about the Sanskrit literary tradition, whose treatment in European-language works remains somewhat scattershot, with the limited scholarly resources available sometimes erratically targeted, and with many of the existing reference works (many dating to the colonial era) often smacking of the mandarin disapproval of nearly everything in a tradition, with the grudging exception of selected portions of the canon. Simply put, much of what has been written in English to date about Sanskrit literature does little to inspire its readers to delve into the texts themselves, whether by reading translations (which anyway often do not exist, or exist only in musty and unappealing Edwardian versions) or, more dauntingly, by learning the language itself. The essays in this volume do much to correct this imbalance; they take their philological detail seriously and do not make things easy for the nonspecialist (and why should they?), but they do consistently convey the sense that these texts are inherently worth reading, that they can be appreciated, even loved, by readers in our own age who are prepared to immerse themselves in the aesthetic conventions of a different epoch.

As a historian of the literature of the world, I will return again to these essays, both for the rich and complex readings they offer of many im-

portant texts, but also for the broader picture of literary history they sketch out in asides here and there, giving the careful reader some sense of the volume and texture of the even larger quantities of text they do not discuss (note, for example, that many of the introductory sketches for the various sections of the volume draw attention to its emphasis on epic works, as opposed to drama or shorter lyric forms). If we are, as the introduction suggests, “generations” away from a comprehensive history of Sanskrit literature, this is nonetheless a very helpful start. But (perhaps wisely) few people write global histories of literature. What, then, is the value of this collection for the nonspecialist who is not seeking out detailed knowledge of the works discussed for its own sake? I'd like to suggest that this volume has value for those interested in the theory of world literature, and in philology, whether in the kind of comparative or *World Philology* Sheldon Pollock and others have discussed,¹ or in the specific contexts of Greek and Latin philology, or early Chinese philology, with which I am more specifically familiar. From the perspective of world literature, I have argued before for the value of collaborative work of various kinds, informal as well as formal, and have suggested in fact that reading the work of other scholars, particularly those in other fields, can be a form of collaboration.²

World literature as a field to date tends to focus on the era of European colonization and of global decolonization that follows, as well as on the languages originating in Europe, even as they spread around the world. It has long been my thesis that the world system thus described is one of many such systems (both theoretically possible and historically encountered) and that the theory and practice of world literature can be enriched immensely by a serious attention to scholarship on other times and places. These essays offer perspectives on alternative models of literary circulation and emulation, particularly Dan Martin's essay on *kavya* in Tibet, Thomas M. Hunter's essay on Javanese *kakawin*, and Velcheru Narayana Rao's essay on the twentieth-century Sanskrit poet Viswanatha Satyanarayana (1895–1976). The contributions of Martin and Hunter help provide rigor and depth

1. Pollock et al., *World Philology*.

2. Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature*, 32.

to the notion of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, tracing the complex ways in which Sanskrit poetics are indigenized (and indigenized differently) in two regions on the fringes of the Sanskrit-influenced world, while Rao's essay serves as a compelling reminder that not all that is modern in South Asia is English (as many in the North American academy would seem to have it) or even vernacular, but that contemporary, Western-inflected notions of romantic love can find a home in Sanskrit verse. It should really come as no surprise to speakers of European languages that a classical language like Sanskrit has been deployed in the service of modern ideas, given the great quantity of early modern and even later literature in Latin, on themes ranging from the voyages of Columbus (at least six epics, from Lorenzo Gambara in 1585 to José Manuel Peramás in 1777), to the rebellion of Bonnie Prince Charlie (occasional poetry by James Gatt, 1754)—except that, of course, that neo-Latin corpus has itself been obscured by the national-literature focus of European literary history as it is usually practiced, at least with respect to the early modern and modern eras. In broadening the canon of Sanskrit texts discussed in English-language scholarship, *Innovations and Turning Points* makes possible a fuller picture of that tradition for the nonspecialist, revealing more clearly why that tradition cannot be reduced to a homology among language, literature, culture, and state.

These essays contain other potential provocations to the theory and practice of world literature. According to a now-familiar formulation, "World literature is writing that gains in translation."³ By this formulation, some works of literature travel better than others, whether because their content is less rooted in deeply local circumstances, or because more of their meaning and their charms lie on levels of plot and character, which can be conveyed effectively in translation, than on levels such as diction and meter, which are difficult to transpose effectively into other languages. There is no particularly straightforward rubric for establishing the portability of a work of literature: as David Damrosch argues, James Joyce's *Dubliners*, though rooted in local conditions, travels more

effectively than does *Finnegans Wake*, thanks to the simpler language of the former. On the other hand, Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, harder to read than his *Heimskringla*, lacks the latter's deep embeddedness in local history and therefore makes for more compelling reading in translation.⁴ Some works may seem initially resistant to translation, but a skilled translator may be able to frame the text with enough explanatory material, or may be able to project effects of the text found on untranslatable levels to levels more easily rendered, so that, for instance, the ironies of Franz Kafka's diction may be lost in translation but regained on the level of plot.

The essays in *Innovations and Turning Points* deal, for the most part, with texts that would put the notion of gains in translation to a severe test, were they to be translated (as many of them have not been). How, for example, to render in translation the Sanskrit poetic technique of *śleṣa*, where words, phrases, and even entire poems can be read two ways, with completely distinct meanings? Even in cases where equivalent homophones could be found in the target language, the cultural signification of such wordplay is utterly distinct: what is a highly sophisticated poetic technique central to the poet's craft in the one case seems in the other like nothing more than a pun, and so even such a translation would fail on the level of register. As many of the essays in this volume argue convincingly, the highly complex phonological, metrical, and lexical figures discussed do not merely ornament the meaning of the work, but are in vital ways constitutive of that meaning. Moreover, many of the works discussed are retellings of narratives familiar from the Mahabharata and Ramayana, and further layers of meaning are dependent upon the audience's recognition of the play between the ancient epic version of a story and its representation in the present work. A striking example (at least for me) in this collection is found in the changes rung on the contest of the bow in which Rama wins Sita's hand, from the emphasis on the decrepit state of the bow (in the play-within-the-play as well as in the main narrative in Rajasekhara's [c. 880–920] *Young Ramayana*⁵), to the emphasis

3. Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, 288.

4. *Ibid.*, 289.

5. Bronner et al., *Innovations and Turning Points*, 420–27. Hereafter cited in the text.

on Rama's extreme youthfulness, as well as the consequent doubts that he could possibly damage the mighty bow in Sakalya Malla's version of the story, composed in Sanskrit in fourteenth-century Telangana (636). These retellings, and others, are (as Ferdinand de Saussure might put it) not so much signs as differences between signs—texts whose meanings are built out of a system of differences with a primary text and with previous retellings—and any individual version cannot be appreciated fully in isolation from the others. The reading of scholarly analysis of a textual tradition cannot, of course, substitute for a deep knowledge of the texts themselves, but it can at least reveal the general shape of these relationships.

The Ramayana itself is of course a “text that gains in translation” par excellence, with vernacular versions in dozens of languages from Tibetan to Balinese, several of which are documented in this volume, and the narrative has a clear if not especially prominent position in the Europhone world as well. Clearly, all of these adaptations, rewritings, and translations help secure the position of the Ramayana in world literature, and yet the adaptations themselves have a much more precarious status: vast, unwieldy works often written in complex styles in languages seldom studied outside their immediate spheres of influence. This in itself is a potentially useful insight for the study of world literature: texts accrue status within a global canon in part through their influence on texts that do not, perhaps cannot, themselves acquire that status. But beyond that, it is also extraordinarily valuable, in the context of a possibly emergent global literary system, to provide any kind of visibility to these texts, as well as to the rich and complex tradition of which they form a part. The texts discussed in this volume may never participate fully in world literature, particularly to the extent that they seem to have so much more to lose than to gain from translation, but their comparative absence from familiar narratives of world literature distorts the shape, volume, and richness of the South Asian tradition, and thus of the whole.

As a part-time specialist in Greek, Latin, and classical Chinese, I am no stranger to philology, and I share (I suspect) with many of the writers in this volume a profound conviction that it is philological technique that provides the distinc-

tive methodology and perspective that scholars of literature can offer to the broader project of understanding the human world. But a commitment to philology brings with it a kind of paradox when looking outside one's own field. Philological arguments require local philological knowledge to appreciate, and the tools of philologists are so carefully crafted to suit their objects of study that they do not work elsewhere. A philologist who specializes in one language (or group of languages), then, does not have the tools to evaluate philological work in other languages any more than a carpenter, however skilled, can assess the work of an electrician. Craftsmen can admire the care that other craftsmen take in their work, and each can gain some sense of whether each appears to be following some sort of orderly and methodical process, but they cannot be certain that that process is in fact correct.

I find myself in something of the position of the carpenter admiring the electrician's work in reading the essays in *Innovations and Turning Points*. I emerged from the experience aware in much more detail just how rich and complex the *logos* of Sanskrit can be, with an envy for those who can do so with the reading of it and with something of an “if I had but world enough and time” longing finally to sit down and learn Sanskrit myself. But as a philologist, I'm also aware of the extraordinary amount of time, energy, and love that must be poured into the project of first learning how to read an ancient language and then actually reading enough texts in the language to appreciate the play of influences and differences that supply so much of the meaning to literature. The essays in this volume do provide something of a substitute for that labor, though they vary in the extent to which they make concessions to non-Sanskritist readers, who may (as I did) find themselves occasionally scurrying to the internet to uncover the meaning of specific poetic terms or the dates or locations of historic kingdoms with which specific authors are possibly linked.

Reading the essays in this volume was therefore a little like viewing the priceless frescoes in an Italian church under the strong lights provided for a fee, whose glare and whose shadows obscure some things as they reveal others, and whose insights cannot be sustained without the fresh appli-

cation of effort (or cash). But one of the impressions that lingers afterward is that of a feeling I'd like to call "philological empathy," precisely that appreciation one craftsman might have for what seems like good work, and commitment to work, in another. I can recognize, or believe I can, the signs of those who have patiently worked their way toward a better understanding of a difficult text, dictionaries and commentaries constantly at their hands, discovering new puzzles and problems even as older ones seem to resolve themselves. One of the ways in which that empathy expresses itself is in an appreciation for the care with which these essays work through things like phonological tropes, not only unpacking how such tropes work (in a manner almost lucid enough for the dedicated nonspecialist to follow), but in thinking through how tropes are projected onto the level of meaning. Gary Tubb's painstaking and exemplary essay on the *Sisupalavadha* of Magha represents here the fullest and richest version of a phenomenon found throughout. This could be a rich locus of comparison, particularly with Chinese poetry, whose own tonal patterning and phonological effects are unfortunately frequently ignored (a function of a writing system in which the phonological properties of words are nonintuitive). Sophisticated work in Sanskrit could usefully inspire work in Chinese (and in Greek and Latin, too!) where such efforts lag behind. Conversely, the complex worlds of intertextual reference in the Sanskrit poems discussed here could usefully be approached using some of the excellent work of this kind in classical studies.⁶

Another, larger, dimension of philological empathy pertains to the efforts so many of the essays in this volume make to evaluate literary works on their own merits, according to the aesthetic canons that guided their construction, rather than by the retrospective application of later, including modern, canons. This is as much a problem in classics and in early China studies as it seems to be in Indology. Hellenistic and imperial Greek poets were long disdained as *recherché* and mannered, and when Statius wishes at the end of his *Thebaid* (12.816–17) that his epic will not rival Virgil's *Ae-*

neid but will follow it at a distance, worshipping its footsteps (*nec tu divinam Aeneida templa / sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora*), too many readers have seen this as an endearingly frank and modest self-appraisal, rather than the strategic move in an elaborate game of rivalry that it clearly is. Recent scholarship has caught up with these games, as I've suggested above, but the legacy of centuries of neglect of "derivative" or "secondary" or "decadent" works live on.

The Chinese tradition is full of similar claims about the merits or otherwise of many poets, claims that to this day shape what is and is not read in a corpus whose vastness rivals that of the Sanskrit tradition. Beginning in the Song dynasty in particular, new schools of poetry continually emerge, each tracing its lineage back to some particular canon of prior poets. This phenomenon begins in the late twelfth century with the so-called Jiangxi school, which is likely more a retrospective construction than an explicit literary clique, sharing the influence of their predecessor Huang Tingjian (1045–105) and of the earlier Du Fu (712–70). This group was followed by the equally amorphous "Four Lings of Yongjia" in the early thirteenth century, who rejected the influence of Huang Tingjian in particular in favor of the Late Tang poet Jia Dao (779–843). Ever afterward, debates among contemporary poets in classical Chinese would take the form of the praise or disparagement of earlier poets (mostly from the Tang and Song dynasties), with "schools" of poets becoming increasingly deliberate and coherent groupings. Even after the May Fourth movement of 1920 led to the development of a vernacular literary tradition in Chinese, literary histories continued to shape readers' choices through their selective construction of lineages (a practice well documented for the Sanskrit tradition by many essays in Bronner et al.'s volume).

Literary history in Greek, Latin, and classical Chinese, as in most languages, is constructed in such a way as to embed the privileged status of certain authors and works within a historical narrative in which even major works can serve as placeholders, and become little-read as a result.

6. See, for example, Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext*.

The Chinese tradition loves numbered lists of individuals as a mechanism for doing so, from the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove” of the third century AD through the Four Lings of Yongjia, to the Seven Late Masters of the sixteenth century, and beyond. As the introduction to *Innovations and Turning Points* makes clear, such lineages and lists are crucial in Sanskrit as well—and, as in Chinese, often mark as much a means of avoiding specific works as of actually reading them. As the editors argue, “The obvious difficulty of much Sanskrit poetry has generally been viewed as an insuperable flaw or a repellent barrier, blinding such critics to much of what this poetry is about” (14). The essays in this volume could be said to take seriously that question of “what this poetry is about” and to assume (rightly, I am certain) that the complexities of these texts are a key to their meaning, rather than ornament designed to conceal it. In a moment when classical studies in particular is fascinated by reception studies (an approach that, like world literature, prefers to read texts out of context), this attention to sympathetic readings of texts based on careful philological understanding offers a welcome tonic. Not every literary text is meant to gain in translation: some gain, instead, from being read slowly and carefully in their own language and on their own terms. I think I knew that before reading 786 pages on *kavya*, but the pseudo-philological labor involved in working through this volume embodies that knowledge through a kind of praxis in an extremely valuable way. This kind of labor, furthermore, offers difficult texts a kind of back door into world literature, not as works that gain unexpected new meanings in translation, but as the objects of shared and empathetic effort.

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KAVYA AND US

Reading Innovations and Turning Points

Jesse Ross Knutson

Even stupid people can study systematic
thought
well enough under a guru's tutelage.
But *kavya* comes from inspiration,
only sometimes, for some people.
—Bhamaha, *Kavyalankara* 1.5 (7th century CE)

Sanskrit *kavya* literature is famously difficult and famously difficult to translate. Just two decades ago, the readable English versions could all fit comfortably on a single shelf.¹ It is an aesthetic so omnipotently self-referential that to truly tell its story is an act of translation in its own right, and at least as challenging. This is the significant achievement of a recent collaborative volume edited by Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb, *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature* (hereafter *ITP*)—a compelling act of intellectual translation and a groundbreaking contribution to the field.

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lock have begun opening up the primary texts of classical South Asia in an unprecedented fashion: *Historical Sourcebooks in Classical Indian Thought* (Columbia), *The Murty Classical Library of India* (Harvard), and earlier, *The Clay Sanskrit Series* (NYU).

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Even explaining why and how *kavya* is difficult inevitably leads to opacity. *Kavya*'s forms and contents answered only to each other for over a millennium, achieving an extreme *jouissance* in which the writerly itself became readerly and form itself became content. Partly because the form was so studied and technical, it could, ironically, be reproduced, so long as someone had access to some of the blueprints. Hence it was able to span such unwieldy time and space, reincarnated endlessly in the multitudinous languages of South and South-east Asia over nearly two millennia, as *ITP* faithfully represents.

The *kavya* tradition is so intricately layered in its design, both within and among works—over time, space, and language—that, no matter what its momentary theme, it always takes itself as a primary theme. In his *de facto* keynote to the volume—the first in the series of individual case studies that make up the book—David Shulman discerns a “gnomonic”² self-modeling at the heart of classical *kavya*, Kalidasa's fifth-century *Dynasty of Raghu* (*Raghuvamśa*), in which the poem dramatizes its own repetitive structures and patterns of meaning, such that its own process of reproduction becomes a primary content, and it stands in a bewildering iconic relationship to itself. This mind-bending auto-iconicity, observed throughout the *kavya* tradition, might seem to make it impenetrable, and yet it can also become—as it does in this book—a method.

The tradition's dialogue with itself is—even when muted—too loud and clear to ignore, and the most sensitive scholarship listens like a psychoanalyst as *kavya* talks to itself and about itself. Sheldon Pollock articulated something akin to this in another collaborative volume on South Asian literary histories³—an essential precedent for the one under discussion here—as a fundamental methodological point of departure: “to think in

a historical-anthropological spirit: trying to understand what the texts of South Asian literature meant to the people who wrote, heard, saw, or read them . . . to ask what literature has been decided to be and how local decisions may have changed over time . . . to write not literary criticism, but what has been taken as the criticism of literature.”⁴

Kavya decided itself to be, from its inception, nothing if not a separate world unto itself. The earliest literary theorists declared it another life beyond death, offering a separate, celestial body made out of poetry.⁵ Yet it was fully embedded and consummately materialistic: the central mode of political expression in its time.⁶ It was the apex social form in classical South Asia: members of the courtly aristocracy and the monarchical state bureaucracy were interpellated into being by the tropes of *kavya*.⁷ It was thus paradoxically at once public and hermetic, fashioning elite structures of feeling and providing a model of self-referentiality for art in general as much as for real-world rulers and powerbrokers. In a way it did make its own world, and thus, however artificial, it was always actual. Listening to what it says about itself thus makes profound historiographical sense.

These cryptic comments can at the very least suggest something of the complexity a book like *ITP* must negotiate in making the *kavya* tradition speak. Partly for reasons alluded to above, *kavya* has long been out of reach to all but a handful of scholars, often misunderstood and maligned even by Sanskritists. It is no wonder that it has been an illegal alien on world literature syllabi—ironically, Goethe had exactly it in mind when he first spoke of *Weltliteratur*—and in literary studies more broadly. Tragically, if it were better known and broadcasted, this literature could have perhaps continued to speak to us in late modernity as a contemporary—in an unexpected fashion for a classical tradition—given its seamless amal-

2. Bronner et al., *Innovations and Turning Points*, 68–69. Hereafter cited in the text. “I believe mathematicians call such forms of growth or self-reproduction ‘gnomonic’—each new unit or layer precisely repeating the shapes and dynamics of the previous ones, like the concentric rings of a tree-trunk or the patterned whorls of a shell” (68–69).

3. Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History*.

4. *Ibid.*, 14–15.

5. Bhamaha refers to “a lovely body made of poetry” (Bhamaha, *Kavyalankara* 1.6); also cf. Dandin, *Kavyadarsa* 1.5.

6. This is as Sheldon Pollock's extensive work on the Sanskrit cosmopolis has taught us to see: Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*; Pollock, “The Cosmopolitan Vernacular.”

7. Daud Ali has meticulously demonstrated the prescriptive role of *kavya* tropes in early medieval state formation. See Ali, “Violence, Courtly Manners, and Lineage Formation,” and Ali, *Courtly Culture*.

gamation of the cerebral and affective, as well as its metaliterary attention to itself as form: a certain “autoreferentiality” and “self-designation,” as Fredric Jameson once glossed the crux of modernist literature.⁸

ITP comes on the scene therefore as a major event, not just another book. It tells *kavya*’s spiraling story at dynamically differential scales: spanning vast time frames and geographies, yet, paradoxically, doing so through painstaking close reading. These are *explications de textes* of a subtlety and challenging intricacy that take us deep inside works and genres. Finally the collective concatenation of the close readings serves to showcase not only the subtleties of *kavya* literature, but also the power of collaborative close reading to move us forward “toward a history of *kavya* literature.”

The authors acknowledge that this is only a beginning (*toward* a history). By definition there will be silences and conceptual work left incomplete. A bold departure such as this involves bold decisions, and some of the book’s very strengths may also prove its weaknesses. Yet this is easily one of the most significant contributions to the study of *kavya* literature to date, a fundamental innovation and turning point in South Asian literary studies.

ITP resists review in its size and multiplicity, and it would be impossible to summarize neatly. In what follows, I sketch the overall arc but naturally focus more on areas of my own scholarly interest. I explore the book’s central narrative, along with the inchoate periodization of *kavya* its inventory of turning points entails. Finally, I touch on the implicit literary historiography this periodization points to. How does this book change things, and how in its light might we begin to reflect anew on the future of South Asian literary studies?

What *Innovations and Turning Points* Says and Does

Kavya becomes audible here in something of its true acoustic range precisely because the book is orchestral. It consists of a series of independent essays intimately interconnected at points, but just as often completely autonomous. Authors contrast, complement, and cooperate—each is a

soloist—and yet there is no conductor, no over-obsession with harmony. It feels not only collective, but spontaneously so. Part of the project’s power is its fungible frame, as well as its combination of convergence and divergence of scholarly style, subject matter, and thought process. Nevertheless, these are not histories, but a history—at least *in statu nascendi*—even if the authors modestly deny it,⁹ and the noun can be read as a collective singular. This means the book aims to periodize at least inchoately, and it offers at least an implicit literary historiography.

An observation of unilinearity might strike readers of *ITP* as perverse or at least counter-intuitive, since the book is first and foremost a collection of separate studies, each one its own collection of empirically rich thick descriptions. To the book’s credit, these vignettes point in many directions. Still, I think there is a clear thread and timeline behind it all, which one might abbreviate as follows:

The History of *Kavya* in Three Watersheds Watershed 1

This moment might be called “the classical moment” (sections 2–3), including the poets Asvaghosa, Kalidasa, Bhatti, Bharavi, and Magha, as well as early *Kakawin* poems. *Kavya* was born as “mega *kavya*” (*mahakavya*), as a self-aware, autonomous system with a focus on itself as form, along with its own particular view of social and cosmic harmony embedded in its compositional structure. A deeply courtly context (Herman Tieken) and integral relationship to state formation (Thomas Hunter) show that poetic composition was also a political composition. This was also a composition of sensibility (Lawrence McCrea) and a specific semantics of time (Shulman; Tubb). This watershed is in large part chronologically prior to the others but not neatly chronological, since it is oriented as much toward genre, overlapping with Watershed 2 (with Bharavi, Magha, and early *Kakawin*, and also possibly Bhatti, depending on how one dates him). The key genre here is “mega poetry,” or what is often called the “court epic”: *mahakavya*.

8. “So many modernist works can be seen to be, implicitly or explicitly, allegories of their own production. . . . They are obliged to recognize and acknowledge themselves; and autorefer-

entiality is the very dynamic of this process, in which the work of art designates itself and supplies the criteria whereby it is to be used and evaluated (Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 159).

9. “This book is, however, not a history of Sanskrit *kāvya*” (26).

Watershed 2

This thread might be called “the early medieval moment” (sections 4–5). There is a more specific geography to this second watershed, true to the logic of local state formation that marks the early medieval period (late sixth to early thirteenth centuries): an eastern axis for the tradition around Kannauj (ancient *Kanyakubja*) and Bengal. Prose poetry forms a fulcrum in Dandin and Subandhu (as Bronner discusses), but Bana (taken up by Tieken, Tubb, and Shulman) is the undeniable central figure—a watershed in his own right—and one could almost say the central protagonist of the entire book. However, Bana’s vigorous style (*pragalbhya*) is picked up by Bhavabhuti, Rajasekhara (these two also become watersheds in their own right), and the poets of the Pala court in early medieval Bihar and Bengal. Tubb’s set of interrelated essays—really a short book within the book—takes us carefully along this trajectory from Bana, to Bhavabhuti, to the Pala poets. This trajectory ultimately culminates in the post-Pala, Sena poets of Bengal,¹⁰ as a key mediation, a moment of heightened reflection and perspective on Watersheds 2 and 3 (see below), although this does not really figure in *ITP*. This period witnesses a newly exuberant formal extravagance and a further-honed self-consciousness about form, as well as—especially at the Pala court—a new contrasting style of pared down, realistic description of humble rural scenes (Tubb). One could perhaps identify a newly self-conscious separation of—and then dialectical interaction between—simple and complex styles as one of the hallmarks of the period, though the authors do not put it exactly this way. No doubt spawned by this formal ferment, a new autobiographical impulse—relatively notable, where virtual anonymity had been the standard, but humble by any external reference point—emerges within poetry (Dandin, Bana, Bhavabhuti), as authors personalize their innovations. Likewise, a new level of self-consciousness appears: poetry about poets and poetry. Bhavabhuti evinces an entirely new level of self-reflexive metapoetry (Tubb). Key genres are prose poetry (*gadyakavya*) and detached stanzas (*muktaka/subhasita*).

10. See my own monograph on this topic, *Into the Twilight of Sanskrit Court Poetry*.

11. Again see Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, and Pollock, “The Cosmopolitan Vernacular.”

Watershed 3

Finally, Watershed 3 might be called the end of the early medieval, or the beginning of the medieval and early modern (sections 6–7). The second millennium—wave of vernacularization imported *kavya* templates and also witnessed Sanskrit building so high on early medieval departures as to restructure its foundation. Poetry becomes meta and self-referential to yet a new extreme (Charles Malamoud on Sriharsa captures this concisely and brilliantly), turning in on itself in yet a new way and reflecting on its own political orientation and concrete conditions of possibility (Bronner on Bilhana). Finally, a whole series of vernacular poetries emerge, building on Sanskrit *kavya* and constituting an implicit commentary on the tradition (Dan Martin on Tibetan; Allison Busch on Brajbhasha; both Shulman and Rao on Telugu; Hunter on mature *Kakawin*), demonstrating *kavya*’s fecundity even for many developments that transcended it. Vernacularization was destined to supplant Sanskrit *kavya* as the chief literary medium, but it did so via Sanskrit *kavya*.¹¹ This watershed compresses the most time, and ultimately points in directions scholarship has just begun to pursue; finally it culminates in a collision with modernity (Rao). There is no one key genre, since this is a period of dissemination and reiteration of almost all that came before.

...

The above schema is no doubt inadequate even to the most significant details, but it has the virtue of at least sketching a long line of development in continuity, in which the plethora of surface details cohere. In this narrative, Sanskrit literature reinvented itself in a long and slow permanent revolution, via a continuity of innovation, in which poets did similar things in different ways, and different things in similar ways. *ITP*’s authors chose to mark historical change with the seemingly innocent but highly significant term *turning point*. In other words, these were not ruptures, but dialectical metamorphoses of quantity into quality: new forms that continually reiterated old forms, new levels of metapoetic reflection that contained

and transcended older ones. It is a time machine story of instantaneous round-trip journeys, where departures and returns coincide.¹² The abiding theme is the tradition aware of itself as a tradition, its self-consciousness, and the growing shadow of its self-interrogation and self-awareness.

Toward a History:

Kavya as Tradition, Kavya as History

The inquiry throughout strives for historical immanence—a technique outlined in the book’s introduction—which it maintains more or less explicitly: a keen attention to the terms through which *kavya* implicitly and explicitly reflected upon itself, how these terms changed over time, and how time itself was sculpted within *kavya*. There is a lineage of method here that points back to Erich Auerbach’s style-oriented historicism: “The starting point should not be a category which we ourselves impose on the material, to which the material must be fitted, but a characteristic found in the subject itself, which when stressed and developed, clarifies the subject matter in its particularity and other topics in relation to it. An almost ideal starting point is provided by the interpretation of textual passages.”¹³ *ITP* is inspired by Pollock’s aforementioned historical-anthropological turn, itself inspired by Auerbach no less than Daniel Ingalls, who eloquently insists that we meet the text on its own terms: “Surely in the inspection of ancient literatures it should be possible to arrest our judgment long enough for appreciation to grow in our minds of ideals and goals other than our own. . . . The path to a correct understanding of Sanskrit poetry must begin with Sanskrit poetry itself, with trying to understand and if possible reproduce its specifically poetic effects. In finding one’s way one must seek guidance from those versed in the tradition.”¹⁴

The unique contribution of *ITP* might be in pursuing this general *modus operandi* at a new microlevel. At the close of his study of the seventh-century mega-poet Magha’s meticulous and self-conscious obliteration of dramatic tension—for which modern critics have maligned him, but for

whose internal coherence as a poetics of cosmic order the chapter argues superbly—McCrea reflects: “It is essential that we attempt to make sense of each poem as a unique object in its own right, which, while it may in some cases be usefully elucidated through terms and categories drawn from either western or indigenous critical traditions, can never simply be uncritically reduced to them” (140). This might be the book’s most significant methodological meditation, inserted coolly at the close of a chapter on the poetic eschewal of dramatic tension. It is almost superfluous to note that *ITP* often presents its own hints of self-modeling, its own “conquest of the cool.”

The persistent microreading makes possible, among many other striking features, an unprecedentedly intimate grammatical analysis: an account of the core linguistic structures that conjure *kavya*, especially the sinuous syntax of the famously extravagant nominal compounds, but also phonetic texture and other features (the very elements whose variations marked the fundamental category of regional style [*riti*] for the indigenous literary theoretical tradition). Bronner’s “biography of a compound” (chap. 9) is the most patient and evocative presentation hitherto of Sanskrit syntax as an unfolding experience of free association, productive ambiguity, musical tension, and emotional iconicity. Shulman follows this (chap. 11) with a comparable explication of language’s materiality, revealing a central mystery of Bana’s style: the seamless metamorphosis of hypotaxis into parataxis. Both these essays evoke hypervividly the experience of the sublime that can unfold within the very grammatical nuts and bolts of a work, and again, how *kavya* works foregrounded even their most elementary forms as contents in their own right. Linked to this intimate engagement with language is an unprecedented illumination of *kavya* as a dynamic experience or structure of feeling, the literary as an unfolding affect-effect.

The book’s opening chapter by Shulman on the quintessence of classical *kavya*, Kalidasa’s *Dynasty of Raghu* (*Raghuvamśa*), may be the purest extract—in all Sanskrit scholarship—of the

12. Bronner captures this dynamic in his formulation of late Sanskrit poetics (*alankāra*) as a “back to the future” in a 2004 essay of the same title.

13. Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public*, 19.

14. Ingalls, *Sanskrit Poetry*, 47.

vertiginous experience of *kavya* as an unfolding, cumulative effect of interlocking patterns. It is a kind of *kavya*-simulator that can make the patient reader feel what *kavya* feels like in its hypnotic momentum and cathedralic composition. Shulman and Tubb, in tandem—in the opening chapters on Kalidasa’s unsurpassable paradigms—reveal the mega poem for perhaps the first time as the monument to manifold, multivalent unity that it was. It was an empire in words, and it is no accident—to my mind—that it emerged in the first half of the Common Era, in tandem with the classical empires of the Kusanas and Guptas. To reveal *kavya*’s fundamental structure as an unfolding, epiphanic intimation of totality is an astonishing feat and an epiphany in its own right. Yet Shulman’s achievement, precisely by touching a new height, might also showcase the outer limit of *ITP*’s method.

Shulman follows the work into its architectonics and meta-architectonics, touching on its deep structure in what feels like a true communion with Kalidasa. He accomplishes this through what one might call a uniquely honed “reading with the grain.” We can appropriate an evocative Sanskrit term here: *anuloma*, “with the hair/fur,” used to describe acceptable forms of intercaste marriage in legal texts, as opposed to *pratiloma*, “against the hair/fur,” used to describe intercaste marriages whose offspring come to have lower status than either of their parents (the locus classicus is the passage in Manu beginning with 10.25). We might see this as a broader tendency in *ITP*: an intellectual operation built on unique levels of Sanskrit *kavya*-connoisseurship and cultivated concord with the object of study. This is necessary and productive for *kavya* scholarship, but as hinted at the outset, the strength might also prove to be a weakness. Reading so steadfastly with the grain might stunt the last step of historicization, which Auerbach glossed concisely: “Historical relativism is relative in two respects—of the material and those who are trying to understand it.”¹⁵

To grasp the text fully on its own terms requires a reflexive reckoning with our own terms: the very desire we bring to *kavya*. A degree of self-reflexive metareflection has the potential to advance immanent interpretation to the level of immanent critique: to grasp unique potentials presented by the unlikely marriage of our own historicity with *kavya*’s historicity (Hans-Georg Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons”). It is not just about seeing ourselves in a new way; it also benefits the object and advances the emic study in a dialectical direction. We might then see some of the very things the tradition was looking for in a way that no one in this tradition fully could have, possibly even grasping its determining contradictions, its vital moments of nonidentity with itself,¹⁶ which reveal its historical motion and struggle with the limits of its own world. This kind of reflection can then lead to an invigorating dialogue with historians of ancient and early medieval South Asia. In a word: from the text to multiple planes of the *hors-texte*.

I will return to the question of reflexivity and self-reckoning, but I first want to explore the question of contradiction and history further with a specific example of my own, inspired by part of Shulman’s essay. In Kalidasa’s fifth-century *Dynasty of Raghu* (*Raghuvamsa*), we begin with an ideal and end with its demolition. The poem is flanked by contradiction in a startling way. This quintessentially canonical poeticization of perfect kingship is actually ambivalent about kingship. At the very beginning of the poem, the Raghu lineage is said to perfectly instantiate the *dharma* of life stage (*asrama*), which is frequently in other texts juxtaposed with the *dharma* of caste (in the common compound term *varnasramadharmā*), though the mention of caste would be superfluous here.

The concept of *asrama* may therefore be taken as a synecdoche for social order as such:

I will tell the lineage of those who:
In childhood studied the sciences,

15. Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public*, 12.

16. Something the historian Perry Anderson said recently in a discussion of the pivotal Italian communist Antonio Gramsci is just as true of *kavya*: “[There is in the scholarship] . . . an

assumption—so common as to be virtually automatic—that the thought of any great mind must be as coherent as it is august, and that the highest of commentary on it is to demonstrate its fundamental underlying unity. The reality is just the opposite: the thought

of a genuinely original mind will typically exhibit—*not randomly but intelligibly*—significant structural contradictions, inseparable from its creativity” (Anderson, *Antinomies*, 14; italics mine).

In youth, enjoyed the objects of sensual
 enjoyment
 In old age, lived as sages
 And at the end of it all,
 Abandoned their bodies through Yoga.
 (1.8–9)

This single verse, like much of the first canto (and the poem as a whole), is an emblem of the convergence of the personal, social, and political. As the poem winds to a close—presenting members of the lineage more synoptically and giving an aerial view of the royal family over time—we meet Agni-varna, a king who violates the model drafted at the beginning in virtually every respect:

Unable to withstand a single instant
 Devoid of the objects of sensual enjoyment
 Reveling indoors day and night
 He cared not
 For his longing subjects
 If ever out of deference to his ministers
 He gave the royal audience—
 Yearned for by the subjects—
 It was fashioned only by his foot
 Dangling out the window
 (19.6–7)

Comparing the poem's antipodes makes one think of Charles Baudelaire's evocative phrase *spleen et idéal* (the longest section in the *Fleurs du mal*) and the related theme of time as merciless conqueror. The above-mentioned sociopolitical-moral convergence is shown subject to Baudelairean entropy in the longer term. The poem thus presents contradictory temporalities. Time (*kala*) shows its dark side as a destructive force, as it is often figured elsewhere (quintessentially in the Mahabharata). Kalidasa's is not the only poem where we find ideal kingship evoked in its internal inconsistency, and where sexual hypertrophy displays an integral relationship to political decline. Kalhana's twelfth-century *River of Kings* (*Rajataragini*) is much more graphic and detailed.¹⁷ At two opposite ends of *kavya*'s timeline—Kalidasa (fifth century) and Kalhana (twelfth century)—we see kingship at its most idealized subject to perversion and decay. Po-

litical life here evinces the dialectics of the pleasure principle: the churning of Eros into Thanatos.

Kavya might even evince here an implicit immanent critique of the monarchical state. The king was often conceived in classical South Asia not just as the earth's protector, but as its lover and husband: "the enjoyer of the earth" (*bhubhuḥ*), as he is often called. He does not have the option of living wholly as an ascetic—he is implicated in the discipline of pleasure famously illustrated in texts like the *Kamasutra*. This is actually conceived as a mode of rule, and it forms a central ideological trope. Yet here the king's undisciplined pleasure disgraces the people and presents the prospect of political collapse, even extinction. Kingship in a way vitiates itself. Keeping in mind *kavya*'s continuity as an institution with the royal court, the evocations found elsewhere of absolute autonomy might then spell a struggle with lived heteronomy. My point is that such brief moments of negativity in the *kavya* tradition can become highly significant. One might think of them as symptoms or clues.

Shulman believes these very passages have "suffered from moralistic readings that are out of place," and he compellingly explicates the *Raghuvamśa* as "a vast essay on time," embedding a narrative temporality, in which "states of blockage, stasis, death, mantic curse or emptiness give way to—or actually generate—a state of fullness. . . . The wasting away of Agnivarṇa is followed by an imminent rebirth, emptiness issuing into fullness" (63; 61–62). This reading resonates perfectly with the cosmology of Puranic Hinduism, which was being produced as a state project at this time,¹⁸ but the formulation can also be flipped. Fullness can also generate emptiness, for the process never actually stops. Shulman's with-the-grain (*anuloma*) reading is essential, but reading against the grain (*pratiloma*) is also possible and necessary. In fact the two require each other. This passage needs to be telescoped on its own terms, even if on the level of the composition as a whole, it is ultimately incorporated and harmonized to a degree. Incorporation is never, after all, complete.

17. I have discussed themes of sexual hypertrophy and the imagination of political decline in Kalhana and Kalidasa elsewhere in the pages of *CSSAAME*; see Knutson, "Poetic Justice," especially 288–89.

18. See *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual*, Michael Willis's vital account of Gupta religious culture as a state project, and issuing what we think of as classical Hinduism in fundamental respects.

Such a reading is moralistic only to the extent that in Kalidasa the moral is material, and such an approach can also therefore be conducive to a materialist reading. *Kavya* was supremely self-conscious and self-aware, and yet it also had its own sort of political unconscious, identifying which can bring the interpretation of literature into a dialectic with historical interpretation. From many vantage points—perhaps none more so than that of a professional poet, who probably conversed directly with the king, and certainly participated in the crafting of his moral universe—classical South Asian kingship could have indeed felt chaotic.

Both Tiekens's and Hunter's contributions to the volume are more explicitly historical and materialist in their orientation, and it must be said that the volume as a whole is not at all innocent to the relationship between historical-material life and cultural form, which I am talking about, even if it often slides into the background. Though Tiekens's provocative vision of *kavya* emerging from the Mauryan chancellery—alongside writing and its attendant bureaucracy—is unfalsifiable, it is nevertheless an important thought experiment, projecting *kavya*'s concretization in a specific historical context. It does not to my mind, however—as he thinks—contradict Stephanie Jamison's compelling vision of a Vedic starting point for *kavya*'s care for language: an animistic conception of language that ultimately gave us both *kavya* and the Sanskrit language itself (104).¹⁹ The two understandings are compatible and simply express different scales of interpretation, for *kavya* had not one but many moments of emergence. Hunter also shows a compelling homology between state formation and verbal art formation—along with visual art intertexts—an interpretive orientation whose validity is far from restricted to the captivating case study of medieval Java (chap. 8). In a word, to see *kavya* clearly, we need to see it clearly in relationship to other things.²⁰

To historically concretize *kavya* in this way and supplement the reading of its inner workings with a vision of its world helps clarify not only its role in a historical process, but also our own dis-

tance from it. It can even move us in a more immediately self-reflexive direction, which might be fruitful for the future of *kavya* studies. We can ask, “How did we even come here in the first place?,” “What brought us to *kavya*?,” and “What kind of desire has *kavya* for its object?” It is only by coming clean on these sorts of questions that we can answer the hypothetical charge of romanticizing the world of *kavya*.

How do we answer these questions once we have decided to ask them? *Kavya* is an abstruse tradition that anticipates modernity in some provocative respects—as hinted briefly at the outset—which might even call into question the specificity of some of what are identified as the cultural consequences of modernity, especially as regards modes of reflexivity and auto-commentary. Yet more broadly *kavya* could not be further from the cultural forms we know and use, our temporality in which “all that is solid melts into air,” where, to take just one example, sensuality and public life are so mutually alienated by the commodity form. *Kavya*'s turning points—its dynamic internal continuities—enchant our minds precisely because they feel so impossible. *Kavya* presents so much that we might only barely be able to imagine: a literary institution whose contours and interconnections resist intuition—where the personal was political in an unimaginably concrete sense—as well as a contingent and less abstract experience of time that must be largely lost on us.

One could summarize it as the dream of a lost unity. *Kavya* evokes so many mysterious unities: the sensuous and the analytical, the formal and the visceral, the personal and the political, the ecological and the social. These are not just orientalist fantasies, but real possibilities that were actualized at the very least in art.

There is another distinctly utopian potential in the very fact that the way we see *kavya* cannot ultimately be the way it saw itself. We must account for the latter, but we must also account for ourselves in relation to this account. Pleading guilty can perhaps mitigate the charge of romanticizing. All passion for the literatures of classical antiquity

19. See Jamison, *The “Rig Veda” between Two Worlds*.

20. Shulman's brief discussion of the philosopher Bharthari's concept of time in relation to Kalidasa furnishes one model of how productive this can be (66).

must after all contain at the very least a romantic anticapitalism, which it does no harm to thematize more explicitly. There was even an element of this in the old orientalism—incorporated and mobilized for imperialism and ongoing racism—which suggests how important it may be to reflect on and own our desire for premodern South Asian literature. The world of *kavya* is not our own—not necessarily better or worthy of emulation—but there is something sublime in its distance and challenge, as well as the dynamic unleashed when we commune with it in the kind of consummate close reading *ITP* exemplifies.

Self-reckoning in the mirror of Sanskrit cultural form can also allow a more explicit reflection on the aims and methods of future South Asian literary studies. This will undoubtedly prove timely because books like *ITP* bode well for the future of South Asian literary studies, however the sands may shift in the academic humanities. Yet this future South Asian literary studies must, again, own its desire, and recognize that historicizing *kavya* literature is about the imagination of unknown freedoms: the “dream of an existence without shame, which the passion for language clings to.”²¹

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21. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 86.

THE SHOCK OF THE OLD

Locating Innovation in Ancient Traditions

Anna M. Shields

Yigal Bronner, David Dean Shulman, and Gary A. Tubb's *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature* aims to disturb some long-established views on Sanskrit literature—namely, that it became over the course of its long history “monolithic, self-replicating, and ultimately sterile.”¹ To an outsider to the Sanskrit tradition like myself, a specialist in Chinese literature of the centuries around the turn of the first millennium CE, this goal seems both laudable—overturning received wisdom about premodern literary cultures is a goal many of us share—and daunting, even in an 800-page book. The volume does not attempt a comprehensive literary historical narrative of the tradition, but rather offers us new explorations of core texts that focus, as the title explains, on innovation—daring verbal techniques, conceptual leaps, and new relationships that were forged among texts and writers. Yet from the perspective of the *longue durée* of Chinese literary history, the problem of Sanskrit literature's monolithic reputation is very familiar: in a tradition that venerated classical texts and precedents, in which literary experiments could be personally risky, elite genres and styles were slow to change and incentives for innovation difficult to find, let alone justify theoretically. The sociopolitical underpinnings of this conservatism are easier to identify in the Chinese case—the outsized role of literary composition in the civil service examination system is one well-known influence—and less visible in the Sanskrit tradition before the end of the first millennium CE, because of the scarcity of sources outside the primary literary texts. But in both traditions true literary change was often masked by superficial formal resemblances (fixed meters and poetic forms, for example, used for centuries) and the repetition of content (familiar stories, standard plots, and conventional figures).

Although the editors of the volume explicitly state that this series of “pilot studies, sometimes the first serious interpretative essays of major

kāvya works” is not intended to be a comprehensive literary history (26), the volume is arranged chronologically and produces, in the end, coherently linked snapshots in a literary historical narrative, if one with gaps and silences. Interestingly, this choice to focus on the granularity of the tradition may make it more, not less open to readers from other fields, in part because of the contributors' sensitivity to the difficulty of the task, signaled by that preposition “toward” in the title. As a literary historian, I see three scholarly moves in the volume that suggest some fruitful comparative conversation with the medieval Chinese tradition (roughly 200 CE–900 CE, or from the end of the Han through the end of the Tang dynasties) in the areas of literary theory, methodology, and historical analysis. First is the challenge of framing innovation-within-tradition as a positive achievement; second, the rewards of close-reading highly technical and dense literary texts with an eye to newness and fresh conceptions in the history of aesthetics; and finally, how turning towards the sociopolitical contexts of specific literary innovations sheds light on the complex relationship of power and cultural change in premodern societies. *Innovations and Turning Points* gives those of us outside the field models for innovative scholarship as well as new avenues for comparative study of Chinese and Sanskrit literatures.

It should be acknowledged that this book is not for the faint of heart—one requires a basic foundation in South Asian history, Sanskrit poetics, and the literary canon in order to follow some of the knotty textual analyses and discussions of literary antecedents. However, scholars without Sanskrit are fortunate that more and more of this material has become available in English in recent decades. Familiarity with translations of Sanskrit classics from the Clay Library and the Murty Library is helpful, as well as some reading in other useful texts, such as Daniel Ingalls's *Sanskrit Poetry from Vidyākara's "Treasury"* (1968), Sheldon Pollock's *The Language of Gods in the World of Men* (2009) and his recent *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics* (2016), and the edited volume *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pol-*

1. Bronner et al., *Innovations and Turning Points*,

6. Hereafter cited in the text.

lock (2011), edited by Bronner, Whitney Cox, and Lawrence McCrea. Those of us who write on the classical Chinese tradition in English have been engaged in similar foundational work in recent years, hoping to draw more nonspecialist readers to Chinese texts and literary theory—some examples would include Stephen Owen's *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (1992), *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, edited by Kang-i Sun Chang and Owen (2011),² the translations of medieval literature in the new Library of Chinese Humanities series, published by De Gruyter, and, just this year, a more narrow survey that focuses on the tradition up through the end of the Tang dynasty, *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900 CE)*, edited by Wiebke Denecke, Wai-ye Li, and Xiaofei Tian (2017). This kind of introductory scholarly work in English is essential to making our traditions accessible for comparative study.

To begin with the central project of *Innovations and Turning Points*—demonstrating novelty and development in a tradition too often regarded as monolithic and static—the intertwined problems of literary innovation, imitation, and the construction of authorial genealogies are central to both the Sanskrit and Chinese traditions, and echoes of the Sanskrit problems can easily be heard in medieval China. One argument traced through many of the essays in *Innovations* is that newness and experimentation were not merely literary practices in the Sanskrit *kavya*, evidenced by technical prowess and the expansion of genres over time, but were articulated in metapoetic statements by the writers themselves, as in Bilhana's (eleventh century) claim that "A poet's words are worthiest / when they break the boundaries of traditional style / by their outstanding boldness" (4). However, the greatest obstacle to originality for Sanskrit poets across the millennia covered here is captured succinctly in the introduction to McCrea's essay on the tenth-century poet Rajasekhara's *Young Ramayana*: "how to find ways of telling the story that were sufficiently faithful to the origi-

nal version of *Vālmīki* to capture what it was that made it worth retelling, yet still original enough to be interesting to readers who would, presumably, have already been exposed to many other versions" (413). This tension between the practice of writing on inherited material and the need to introduce original figuration, new types of emotional complexity, and technically dazzling poetic techniques (such as bitextuality, for example, or linguistic "twinning," studied by Shulman in "Murāri's Depths," 443–90) could be said to power much of the literature studied in this volume, at least before the rise of regionalization and vernacularization after the end of the first millennium CE.³

As Pollock has noted, the self-consciousness of Sanskrit poets regarding their own place in the tradition—the "ethnohistorical habit of Sanskrit writers"—can be easily seen in eulogies that prefaced literary works from the seventh century onward, and these provide a useful source for theoretical discussion in the volume.⁴ Although the earlier texts contain fewer metapoetic discussions of originality, as the literary past became more crowded and burdensome over time, the "relationship of the poet to the past" was a problem that later poets had to wrestle with more forcefully, as Phyllis Granoff explores in her essay on Bilhana's *Karnasundari*, noting as an example Bilhana's contemporary, the Jain poet Ramacandra, whose view was "to be original does not mean to invent some new subject for poetry that no one would ever believe, but to use language that is fresh and moving" (542–43). But poets' representation of their own status in the tradition did not necessarily confirm that view: with respect to writing literary genealogies, the use of the figure of reincarnation in describing a poetic lineage could subvert claims of originality, implying as it did a mere iteration of an earlier talent (see, for example, the description by Rajasekhara, 397). Likewise, the figure of a single "path" traveled by generations of poets, although used to praise later-born poets as much as venerable predecessors, could also disguise significant

2. The introduction to the two volumes of the *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* offers a useful overview of the challenges of writing the literary history of the Chinese tradition; see Chang and Owen, *Cambridge History*, 1:xx–xxxii. See also the 2004 review essay of the *Columbia History of Chinese Literature* by

Martin Kern and Robert Hegel, "A History of Chinese Literature?," which discusses some of these problems.

3. This historical shift is studied by Pollock in *The Language of the Gods* and is the focus of the essays in section 7 of the volume, "Regional *Kāvya*s," the introduction to which notes:

"Much of which was really new embodies the creative ways in which poets consciously engaged with the ever-increasing richness of the received *kāvya* tradition" (608).

4. Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out," 76–78.

innovations that require analysis of antecedent texts to explicate—as we see in the discussion of poetic pedigrees created for the ninth- and tenth-century poets working under the patronage of the Pala kings (examined by Tubb in “Something New in the Air: Abhinanda’s *Rāmacarita* and Its Ancestry,” 357–94). The authors of the essays thus have a built-in discursive problem in the tradition that they work to disturb from various angles.⁵

In medieval China, newness as a trait of literary composition was stalked by both practical and theoretical problems. In terms of their attempts to find a place in a narrative of literary history that developed slowly from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) through the Tang (618 CE–907 CE), Chinese writers, especially poets, faced strikingly similar challenges as the tradition matured—the transition from the Tang to the Song dynasty (960–1279) in particular fed Song poets’ concern for originality and achieving a place in a literary pantheon that seemed already stuffed with genius. More profoundly, though the topical and generic range for elite writing was broader than in Sanskrit, Chinese elites had long been ambivalent about innovation and novelty in cultural pursuits. Reasons for this ambivalence ranged from the status of “making” (*zuo* 作) in a culture where Confucius himself claimed to have been a “transmitter” rather than a “creator” (in the famous formulation of *shu er bu zuo* 述而不作),⁶ to the enduring value of the classics and a high Zhou antiquity (*gu* 古) as the ideal of moral coherence, to the common association of “the new” or “contemporary” (*xin* 新 and *jin* 今) in literature with decadence, ornament, and vulgarity.⁷ This traditional bias against excessive novelty was hardened by the practical poetics that developed in competitive medieval court

environments, where poets emulated (*xue* 學) past masters, and made explicit imitation (*ni* 擬, *xiao* 效) of earlier forms, topics, voices, and styles central to literary practice.⁸ All of this was underpinned theoretically by a canonical model of poetry (and by extension, all literature) as affective response to events and phenomena, stated at earliest length in the “Great Preface” to the *Classic of Poetry*, a position that presumed a morally normative, and thus limited, spectrum of appropriate responses.⁹ Paradoxically, in the late medieval era into the Northern Song, the most powerful proponents of literary change were often literati who sought a “revival of antiquity” (*fugu* 復古) in various forms; returning to what were seen as ancient ideals was the innovation required to make poetry “new.”¹⁰ In the context of the medieval “battlefield of literature” (*wen-chang* 文場—and see also the *Innovations* editors’ discussion of the “ferocious and rather dangerous literary scene,” 17), too much literary experimentation could mean political failure or ostracism. The turn toward reviving ancient language or themes was not merely an example of the ideological power of “antiquity” as a concept, though that certainly was the case—it was also a way for late medieval poets to negotiate new positions and speak with new voices in a conservative culture that often frowned on innovation for its own sake.¹¹

By focusing on select moments of literary change, *Innovations* attempts to introduce greater nuance into standard literary historical accounts of the Sanskrit tradition. In Chinese scholarship, we have less the need to identify change in apparent stasis but rather to disturb totalizing narratives that present literary change as organic, inevitable, and top-down. The essays in *Innovations* show how narrow, close studies of texts and liter-

5. The editors call attention to this problem quickly in the introduction: the “dominant, classicizing view” of Sanskrit poetry’s early peak and subsequent decline after the fifth century CE is accompanied by “a perception that commentators within the Sanskrit tradition have emphasized, namely the timelessness of the Sanskrit language, in general, and of its individual literary productions” (2).

6. In *Analects* 7:1. For a study of this problem in key pre-Qin and Han texts, see Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation*.

7. Many medieval texts on literary composition reveal this bias, but one example can be found in the rhetoric of the prefaces to two sixth-century anthologies: *Wen xuan* 文選 (Selections of Refined Literature), a genre anthology that reached back to the Han dynasty, and *Yu tai xin yong* 玉臺新詠 (New Songs from the Jade Terrace), which focused on the works of contemporary poets. See David Knechtges’s analysis of the principles of these two prefaces in “Culling the Weeds and Selecting the Prime Blossoms.”

8. For the impact of these practices on early classical poetry, see Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*.

9. For a translation and discussion of this text, see Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 37–56.

10. See my overview of this cultural trend in “Classicism in Chinese Literary Culture.”

11. But even *fugu* experimentation could be frowned upon by conservative voices, as we see in ninth-century literatus Pei Du’s 裴度 critique of his contemporary Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), whose stylistic daring made Pei state that he was “making a game of literature” (*yi wen wei xi* 以文為戲). *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 538.5461–62.

ary moments outside such narratives can reveal literary development from the point of view of the marginal or microscopic. One excellent example of this approach is found in Bronner's essay "The Nail-Mark That Lit the Bedroom: Biography of a Compound," which examines a complex and long Sanskrit compound because "it gives voice to the central themes of the work of which it is a small part and exemplifies some of the major socioaesthetic trajectories of *kāvya*" (239). Bronner's analysis of this extraordinarily dense compound begins in philology and the challenges of translation but ends in reflection on the limits of the sayable in Sanskrit literature, particularly with respect to erotic experience. Here too we find some provocative parallels in the Chinese tradition. Although literary Chinese does not compound in the manner of Sanskrit, erotic language, when it begins to appear more frequently in medieval literature, such as during the Liang dynasty or the late Tang (and spills into forms other than *shi* 詩 poetry, such as *ci* 詞, song lyrics, and romantic stories), also disrupted linguistic conventions, genre boundaries, and theoretical assumptions regarding the nature and scope of literature. Such texts explored new ways of depicting erotic encounters suggestively but with greater specificity, with the evocation of flushed faces, rumpled bedclothes, and lingering scent, for example—bringing precise poetic techniques honed on other topics, such as landscape, to the boudoir. More close analysis of such texts and moments (particularly since eroticism in literature has been little studied by Chinese scholars) would also nuance our understanding of the socioaesthetic commitments—both their boundaries at given moments and their evolution—in the medieval Chinese tradition.¹² Comparative study of different forms of erotic suggestiveness and in-direction in Sanskrit and Chinese literatures with an eye to their respective impacts on the history of poetics would surely be fruitful.

Many of the essays in *Innovations* stand as excellent defenses of philology and close reading, and as such, they remind us of the rewards of wrestling with the lexical, metrical, and syntactic de-

tails of difficult texts. To the nonspecialist reader, the most appealing of these essays persuade us that a more philologically attuned understanding of the texts also yields insights into Sanskrit aesthetics and literary history. One such example is Tubbs's "On the Boldness of Bāna" (308–54), which examines the verbal techniques and conceptual experimentation in verses by seventh-century poet Bana Bhatta, a writer whose innovative achievements were widely praised but not well defined by his contemporaries. Tubbs's explication of different types of "boldness" in twenty-two of Bana's verses, accompanied by compelling translations, sketches the range of technical and figurative possibilities available to poets of the period—and also serves to foreshadow some literary historical ground covered in the four essays of the following section, "The Sons of Bāna" (355–490). This kind of analysis would be welcome in work on less-studied classical Chinese forms such as the *fu* 賦 (sometimes translated "rhapsody"), a sometimes long and often epideictic form that could be "regulated," with elaborate rhyme and metrical rules, or "old-style," composed in a looser, more prose-like fashion. Although the *fu* first became an important genre in the Han dynasty, it remained central to medieval literature for centuries (and was a composition requirement for the most prestigious literary examination in the Tang); the most intricate *fu* require careful analysis of lexicon, allusion, rhyme, and meter for their density and craft to be rendered intelligible in any modern language. The multilayered difficulty of such texts often leads scholars to study them in isolation, with little anchoring in contemporary literary trends, or, lamentably, to ignore them as part of a medieval writer's oeuvre.¹³

This is not a problem confined to scholarship in English, moreover: Chinese literary historical accounts are dominated by genre narratives, even within accounts of dynastic periods, and forms such as *fu* or song lyrics are marginalized from the main account of *shi* poetry and prose forms that became more popular in later eras. Yet the aesthetic implications of the long popularity of *fu* (to

12. See, for example, Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies*.

13. With respect to literary historical discussions of *fu*, an important exception can be found in Paul W. Kroll's chapter on Tang poetry

in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, which discusses *fu* as part of the broader poetic landscape.

keep this form as an example) are worth probing more intently: in a poetic tradition dominated by shorter forms (the quatrain and the eight-line form being the most common, though the extended regulated verse, *pailu*, that could run to 100 or more lines was a favorite of some poets), which topics did the length and density of *fu* consistently allow medieval poets to explore in greater detail? How did changes in *shi* poetry, which have been studied more thoroughly, reflect or impact the longer form? And how did the allusiveness and craft of *fu* complicate aesthetic ideals of ease and effortlessness, long-standing values of the medieval literary tradition? Similar lacunae in the scholarship of medieval prose are even more glaring; one recent collection of twenty-five essays on Chinese epistolary culture, the first in any language to study the entire tradition, suggests the vast number of forms and texts outside the realm of traditional scholarship to be explored, as well as the need to expand current literary historical accounts to include them.¹⁴ More studies of difficult or marginalized texts that are grounded in philology but still capable of moving outward to aesthetics and literary history are needed to portray the complexity of the tradition to non-Chinese readers, particularly for specialists in cultures with less historical contact with China, such as classical Arabic poetry.

Finally, *Innovations and Turning Points* creates avenues for cross-cultural literary scholarship that incorporates social and political history, at least once the essays in the volume approach the end of the first millennium CE, when there is greater evidence for writers' biographies, political contexts, and social networks. Some issues tackled in the second half of the book that seem especially useful for comparative historical work include the evolving relationship of poets to their royal patrons and how those relations were embedded in their work (in the form of political allegory, for example), or the impact of new regional languages and political ambitions on Sanskrit literary forms, as in Allison Busch's fascinating study of Mughal-era *riti kavya* in Brajbhasha ("The Classical Past in the Mughal

Present," 648–90). Given that structures of power among elites in kingdoms and "empires" of the premodern world sometimes shaped the literary sphere in similar ways across cultures, there is much for Chinese scholars to recognize and learn from here.¹⁵ Several contributors focus on the innovations that arose when writers sought to negotiate new positions in those structures or attempted to stake out a more independent place from which to write. In Bronner's "The Poetics of Ambivalence: Imagining and Unimagining the Political in Bilhana's *Vikramāṅkadevacarita*" (493–524), for example, the poet is described as "an ambivalent and almost renegade figure . . . occupied with carving a space for himself in a world that he perceives as essentially hostile and unworthy of his poetry" (495). Bronner argues that Bilhana expresses his alienation not only explicitly in reference to his distance from his homeland of Kashmir but also in his choice of figures and alterations to conventional characters in his *Life of Vikramanka*, inscribing his sense of distinctiveness at multiple levels of this famous text. Bilhana's example is mirrored in the great mid-Tang writers of "exile" literature—writers punished with severe political demotion to distant posts, usually in far southern China, such as Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819) or Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), whose desire to be recalled to capital office (and the concomitant need for political discretion) vied with the equally strong wish to write powerful and unusual texts, including political allegories, to sustain their literary reputations. In both the Sanskrit and Chinese cases, tension between the writers' political and literary commitments within the system of royal or imperial patronage and their need to speak to different audiences simultaneously led them to experiment, sometimes radically, with traditional forms, styles, and language.

Innovations and Turning Points makes demands on the nonspecialist reader, but they are worth meeting, since the volume illuminates Sanskrit *kavya* from both inside and outside the tradition as well as widens the possibilities of what

14. Richter, *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*. Like *Innovations and Turning Points*, that volume has focused essays arranged chronologically, but it does not attempt a comprehensive history of letters in China.

15. For an exploration of "comparative cosmopolitanism," see Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 259–80. See also Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature*.

“literary history” might become for Sanskrit and other literatures with seemingly monolithic pasts. Rather than replacing older comprehensive narratives with new ones (swapping out one canon for another), the focus on innovation reveals literary change in situ, and in most cases, the essays explain what the stakes were for each transformation. What I have called here “the shock of the old” is thus the vision that the volume conveys of a dynamic tradition, one created by poets who were highly conscious of the importance of originality in both formal craft and emotional expression and who readily adapted inherited forms in response to shifting political and linguistic conditions. As a nonspecialist, I cannot tell if the scholars of the volume have oversold their claims, but from the perspective of Chinese scholarship, their approach opens up many new comparative conversations and provides models of how to do literary history more productively. Particularly in an era where nationalist debates over cultural patrimonies are intensifying, there is a keen need to question accounts that naturalize cultural change as inevitable or linear. In challenging traditional narratives with such a rich array of questions, *Innovations and Turning Points* offers us exciting new paths into Sanskrit literature and ways to reimagine its past.

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PROGRESS, COMPARISON, AND THE NATURE OF LITERARY HISTORY

or, *Notes from the Children's Table*

David Lurie

When I was young, holiday dinners had unequal seating: one long table for the grownups and a smaller satellite table for the children. The children's table became progressively less appealing to its older members, who felt their subordination keenly and cocked ears toward the often only half-understood conversation of the adults at the other end of the room. As a nonspecialist, reading this volume—Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb's *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature*—reminded me of that mild form of exile. What follows are some of my thoughts as I strained to follow the party-talk of the grownups at the *kāvya* table; half-understood though it was, I listened to it with something approaching the awe and exclusion felt at holiday meals long past.

The sense of awe is heartfelt. Even an outsider immediately grasps the magnitude of what this volume has accomplished: the richness and sophistication of its conception and various individual contributions (twenty-five chapters by twelve authors) are overwhelming. But I also find myself dwelling on feelings of exclusion. This great book creates many opportunities for comparative dialogue with other literary histories, but for the most part it does so inadvertently, and reluctant though I am to cavil about what might have been, I cannot help regretting its failure to address a larger nonspecialist audience. Among the measures that relegate the likes of me to the children's table: the lack of a general introduction or overview aimed at readers not already familiar with the outlines of *kāvya* literature; extensive use of untranslated and unglossed technical terms (ameliorated somewhat by the index); a general (though by no means universal) reluctance to propose comparisons or discuss theoretical implications of particular cases; and the absence of any time line, glossary, or other

ancillary aids for the uninitiated reader. Of course publications aimed at specialist audiences are an essential part of modern humanistic scholarship, and given the massive size of this volume, it is understandable that the editors would choose not to bulk it up further with explanations that would, I concede, be superfluous for most of its readers. And yet I cannot help wondering what this project might have been like if all of us had been invited to sit at the same table.

...

In 1900 Arthur A. Macdonell wrote that

nearly all the most valuable works of the Vedic, as well as the later period, have within the last fifty years been made accessible in thoroughly trustworthy editions. . . . Thus in the course of a century the whole range of Sanskrit literature, which in quantity exceeds that of Greece and Rome put together, has been explored. The great bulk of it has been edited, and most of its valuable productions have been translated, by competent hands.¹

In 2014, Bronner, Shulman, and Tubb begin the volume under review by stipulating that

the history of Sanskrit *kāvya* has yet to be written. This book, however, is not a history of Sanskrit *kāvya*. We may be generations away from such a work. Moreover, by no means are all moments of truly consequential innovation in this tradition addressed or even noticed in the following essays. What we hope to offer is a series of pilot studies . . . arranged in a roughly chronological sequence that highlights structural, thematic, and generic breakthroughs. . . . Within this rather polyphonic chorus, representing voices from nearly two millennia in large parts of Asia, fragments of a central narrative are nonetheless manifest.²

Comparing these prefatory passages, the latter's greater sophistication is apparent, of course, but what stands out even more is its relative diffidence. Foremost among the specters that haunt *Innovations and Turning Points* is the notion of progress, and so I find myself wondering, historiographically, at how progress over more than a century

1. Macdonell, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, 5.

2. Bronner et al., *Innovations and Turning Points*, 26. Hereafter cited in the text.

could produce such an apparent loss of confidence. After a certain point in their development, do scholarly communities learn more in order to know less? Or are there other factors behind this reluctance, not only to compile a literary history in the present volume (a choice that is of course the prerogative of the editors and contributors), but even to concede the *possibility* at present of such a history? And if it is indeed the case that a literary history of Sanskrit poetry is generations of future scholars away from becoming possible, what is the status of the “fragments of a central narrative” that emerge from this “series of pilot studies”?

...

As an outsider, the first lesson I learned was the most shocking. Is it really the case that such an imposing and substantial book is necessary to establish the seemingly obvious proposition that a literary tradition as long-term as Sanskrit poetry would involve “innovation, in a positive sense” (2)? For “most so-called histories of Sanskrit poetry,” we are told, “the dominant, classicizing view holds that Sanskrit poetry reached its peak very early, and that everything that happened later—after the fifth century CE—belonged to a process of long decay” (ibid.). These “so-called histories” are not identified—presumably they are obvious around the grown-ups’ table—but the sentence that follows this assertion strongly implies that they were written by Western scholars: “This view paradoxically goes hand in hand with a perception that commentators *within* the Sanskrit tradition have emphasized, namely the timelessness of the Sanskrit language, in general, and of its individual literary productions” (ibid.; emphasis in the original). So this volume sets out to overturn two pieces of received wisdom, one imposed from outside the tradition (essentially, that it’s all downhill after Kalidasa) and one from inside it (that Sanskrit and Sanskrit poetry are unchanging and eternal).

It is hard to imagine contemporary readers, specialist or not, who would be unsympathetic to this goal. Considering the scale and richness of just the *kāvya* writings that are available in translation, it seems patently obvious that the “view that Sanskrit poetry is monolithic, self-replicating, and ultimately sterile is untenable” (6). But given the

care with which the introduction to this volume outlines awareness of change and celebration of innovation by traditional poets, critics, and readers, citing Sheldon Pollock’s call for “studying Sanskrit literary culture from the inside out” (ibid.), it is striking how little attention is paid to what could be called the etiology of the received wisdom that the editors oppose. Since “commentators *within* the Sanskrit tradition have emphasized” timelessness, surely grappling directly with that tendency should also be part of “studying Sanskrit literary culture from the inside out”? And even if narratives of decline were imposed on the tradition from outside by orientalist scholars, some diagnosis of the reasons for that imposition would seem to be called for. Perhaps all of this is obvious to specialists, but as an outsider I felt the need for historiographical explanation of this unusual case of a received literary history paradoxically limited to decline and stasis.

...

Despite the editors’ stipulation that “this book . . . is not a history of Sanskrit *kāvya*,” as the subtitle (“Toward a History of *Kāvya* Literature”) indicates, it is still intended to be a work of literary history. In that connection there are elements of its revisionist project that call for further analysis. To respond to a narrative of decline and stasis by emphasizing change and creativity (the “innovations and turning points” of the title) is understandable, even laudable, but has this polemic produced an implicit model of literary history whose limitations are the mirror image of those that it opposes? Drawing on a vivid metaphor portraying the literary critic as a bee who knows which blossoms are truly fresh, the editors insist that “the mere existence of a shared language of conventional tropes and inherited poetic devices tells us nothing about a poet’s uniqueness. A great poet uses in a novel way the materials he has been given by the tradition” (ibid.). The latter claim is unobjectionable, but I stumbled over the former. Is establishing “a poet’s uniqueness” the sole goal of literary history? And can we afford to be so dismissive of the phenomena of “shared language of conventional tropes and inherited poetic devices,” which in classical traditions are typically so extensive and elab-

orate that enormous scholarly energy is required simply to come to terms with them? Is it, in the end, such an easy matter to separate the fresh from the conventional, the “novel ways” of “great poets” from the more pedestrian variations of their lesser peers?

An example comes to mind from the field of classical Japanese poetry, which also had a highly elaborate “shared language of conventional tropes and inherited poetic devices.” The following is a famous early medieval *waka* poem by Fujiwara no Teika (1162–241), one of the greatest premodern Japanese poets:

As I look out, there are neither blossoms nor
crimson leaves: by a cove, a thatched hut, this
autumn evening³

This poem has been interpreted as a radical break, as an endorsement of a new, more somber medieval aesthetic, connected by some critics with such imported art forms as monochromatic Chinese ink painting and tonally subdued Song dynasty poetry. Perhaps it is possible to see an aesthetic manifesto of sorts here, but that is not the whole story.

By Teika’s time, a rich and complex field of poetic vocabulary with extensive seasonal associations had been established. Blossoms (*hana*), specifically cherry blossoms, were strongly linked with spring, and crimson leaves (*momiji*) were similarly associated with autumn, with poems like the following exploring minute variations on conventional seasonal imagery:

a covering of
bright scattered leaves floats on
Tatsuta River—
were I to ford the waters
the brocade would tear in half⁴

the color of dew
is but an unblemished white—
how is it that this

one hue can dye the leaves of
autumn trees a thousand shades⁵

Over several hundred years, from the eighth through the twelfth centuries, *waka* poets elaborated and collated imagery of this sort—fall foliage as brocade, fall foliage dyed by dew and autumn rains, and so on—into a vast network of conventional associations, for seasonal phenomena, but also for other topics such as love, mourning, and travel.⁶ (There are remarkable structural parallels between this network of associations and the cognate *kavya* network of stereotyped images, such as the moon as representation of female beauty.)

In his “As I look out” poem, Teika seems to reject such poetic associations, proposing an autumn landscape without traditional coloring. But this move is underwritten by his audience’s familiarity with the conventions that are being abandoned. To the extent that it is a departure, the reference to an absence of “crimson leaves” works only because of the powerful preexisting network of associations between them and the season of autumn.⁷ But Teika’s poem turns out to be even more dependent on convention: a number of earlier poems provide precedent for the negative image of “neither blossoms nor crimson leaves” (*hana mo momiji mo nakarikeri*). Many cases involve an abstract notion of transient beauty, as in the following, which responds to a poem from a woman accusing the speaker of fickleness because his affection scattered without regard to season:

Spring and autumn have gone by
But in my heart there were
Neither blossoms nor crimson leaves.⁸

Another common context is the winter poem, such as the following, which draws on traditional metaphorical associations between snow and flower blossoms:

3. Sato and Watson, *Eight Islands*, 193. The poem is *Shinkokinshū* 363: *miwataseba / hana mo momiji mo / nakarikeri / ura no tomaya no / aki no yūgure*.

4. Rodd and Henkenius, *Kokinshū*, 128. The poem is number 283: *tatsutagawa / momiji midarete / nagarumeri / wataraba nishiki / naka ya taenan*.

5. Ibid., 121. The poem is *Kokinshū* 257: *shirat-suyu no / iro wa hitotsu o / ika ni shite / aki no ko no ha o / chiji ni somuran*.

6. For an account of the development of seasonal poetic associations, see Shirane, *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons*.

7. An extensive discussion of Teika’s poem in the context of the larger field of “autumn sadness” in classical *waka* can be found in part 1 (“Autumn Dusk”) of Kawamoto’s *Poetics of Japanese Verse*.

8. *Tsurayuki shū* 867: *haru aki wa / sugusu monokara / kokoro ni wa / hana mo momiji mo / naku koso arikere*.

May the fallen snow
Remain a while unmelted, now that
Neither blossoms nor crimson leaves
Are on the branches.⁹

Teika's poem does appear to be something of a departure in that it is set in autumn, making an implicit claim for the value of a fall landscape bare of "crimson leaves" in particular, but neither the double image as an epitomization of conventional seasonal beauty nor its negation are unprecedented.

A further complication is that a number of commentators believe that by including this phrase Teika alludes to the greatest Heian prose classic. A parallel negation of blossoms and leaves can be found in a passage from the *Tale of Genji* that depicts a beachside musical performance in Akashi during the title character's self-exile: "Notes rang out across the sea while depths of leafy shadow here and there surpassed in loveliness spring blossoms or autumn colors."¹⁰ The "thatched hut" (*tomaya*) of the "As I look out" poem, a word whose use in classical *waka* is relatively uncommon (though by no means unprecedented), has also been taken to represent innovative advocacy of a simple and consciously unrefined aesthetic. But this too can be seen as another allusion, to a poem from the preceding chapter of the *Genji* ("Suma"):

How, then, fares the nun in her seafolk's hut of
rushes [*tomaya*] at Matsushima,
these days when brine is dripping from the man
of Suma Shore?¹¹

As is often the case, delving into the intertextual background dulls somewhat the shine of an apparently new turn of phrase. Teika's famous poem turns out to be the product of incremental transformation rather than a radical break.

Determining the freshness of a poem, a trope, or an author's oeuvre is not, of course, a simple matter—and the introduction to *Innovations and Turning Points*, to say nothing of the many focused studies in the chapters that follow it, forthrightly acknowledges the difficulty of such an endeavor. Another complication is the impact of newness:

Moments of unconventional creativity may well go unnoticed and leave no impact. Innovation is significant when it changes the story. For this to happen, for a new twist in the plot to emerge, a new readership and new modes of reception must emerge with new protocols of reading. The history of any literature is in some sense the history of these evolving protocols. But not all innovations are born equal. We have rarely but most significantly the breaking open of new paths in a way that produces novel paradigms for future poets. . . . Then there are secondary elaborations along such a path, some of them highly original in their own right. And there are also innovations that signify the end of a particular vein of creativity and lead no further. (26)

This provides a rationale for the "turning points" of the volume's title, and here as well there is much to think about. This passage suggests that there is a kind of stability to the diachronic unfolding of significant innovation (newness that made a difference), but are literary traditions so unidirectional? Canonization and decanonization are highly fluid processes, and determining what kinds of newness mattered, at what time, is at least as difficult as establishing what was new in the first place. "Moments of unconventional creativity" that left no impact in (or shortly after) their own time can be recuperated by revisionist writers and critics much later, and conversely, innovators who were once lauded as pioneers can be retrospectively downgraded, or even vituperated. We might think of the vicissitudes of the English Romantic and Metaphysical poets in the twentieth century, or, coming back to premodern Japan, of long-running debates about whether developments in *waka* poetry from the eighth through the twelfth centuries involved progress or degeneration. Despite—or perhaps because of—its extreme canonicity, Teika's own "As I look out" poem was presented at the end of the nineteenth century as an example of the worthlessness of his oeuvre and his inability to compose masterpieces.¹²

Of course I do not mean to deny the impor-

9. Gosenshū 493: *furu yuki wa / kiede mo shibashi / tomaranan / hana mo momiji mo / eda ni naki koro* (alternate versions of the same poem are in *Shinsen waka* [146] and *Kokin waka rokujō* [685]).

10. Tyler, *The Tale of Genji*, 263.

11. Ibid., 240; *matsushima no / ama no tomaya mo / ika naramu / suma no urabito / shio taruru koro*.

12. Masaoka Shiki, "Utayomi ni atauru sho," 293.

tance of change and innovation for literary history (although I would advocate a less value-laden approach to change, conceptualizing it more in terms of inevitable transformation and less in terms of genius-driven deepening and improvement). But in addition to thinking about change and innovation (within a framework of historicized canonicity), literary history must also attend to intertextual networks and the synchronic structure of poetic language for their own sake, not merely in order to establish departures from existing practice. It may not repay the same degree of scrutiny, but the large mass of compositions that lies in the background (in all but the most poorly attested milieus) of the “great works” also deserves consideration. The conditions that made run-of-the-mill literature possible should be just as interesting and vital to the historian as the breaks, ruptures, and turning points where a tradition is disrupted or transformed.

...

The editors’ introduction and the series of sub-introductions to each of the book’s six sections that are its sequels collectively make a polemical case for placing innovation at the center of literary history (or, at least, at the center of the literary history of *kavya*), and they lay out the “fragments of a central narrative” alluded to at the start, tracing a series of heroic creators from Asvaghōṣa and Kalidasa down to Bilhaṇa and Sriharṣa. This diachronic narrative of innovation (strongly linked to named innovators) and turning points, adumbrated in response to received histories of stasis and decline, has a power and grandeur apparent even to the outsider. The central narrative is sketched out primarily through a series of close readings devoted to major works by major authors. Taken one by one these readings are compelling; in aggregate they are overwhelming. And yet some of the richness and value of this volume also comes from other modes of literary history, more synchronic or more focused on social and cultural context, that are no less vital parts of the collective project. To return to the wording of the introduction, readers are afforded glimpses of “a ferocious and rather dangerous literary scene” (17), of “the social and cultural background of medieval San-

skrit poetry” (19), and of “the tremendous expansion of the ecology of genres” (25). We are also reminded that “every verse,” even if uninnovative, “has highly specific contours in the cultural architecture of its time and place” that must be linked to “multiple cultural frames” (28).

For the most part themes of this sort are examined in the margins of the close readings, but in certain chapters they emerge into the foreground. One example is the more general literary historical frame proposed in Herman Tieken’s analysis, “Introductions and Prefaces in *Kāvya*,” which advances a holistic model of the origins of this literature, supported by analysis of the openings of an apparently comprehensive set of early exemplars: court scribes adapted oral epics and performance genres to elaborate written form influenced by the rhetoric of diplomatic correspondence. Another is Yigal Bronner’s tour de force examination of a single compound, “The Nail-Mark That Lit the Bedroom.” Despite the author’s admonition not to take this “‘biography’ of one specimen . . . as representative of the entire species of long Sanskrit compounds” (260), this chapter is (as implied by the title) an illuminating introduction to a crucial and (for the outsider) unfamiliar feature of *kavya* literature, augmented by comparative materials that include a remarkably apt passage from a little-known Dr. Seuss poem.

...

One of the most stirring and successful elements of *Innovations and Turning Points* is its sustained attention to the extension of *kavya* literature across geographic, linguistic, and temporal boundaries. This is another component of the volume’s implicit vision of a literary history that stretches beyond polemical emphasis on great authors and their innovations. The final section, “Regional *Kāvyas*,” covers a range of border-crossing phenomena, including regionally localized Sanskrit *kavya* (Shulman on a Telangana *Ramayana*, Tubb on a play set in Bengal and Orissa, Velcheru Narayana Rao on a modern play by a master of Telugu poetry), neoclassical Hindi literature in northern courts of the Mughal period (Allison Busch on Brajbhāsha *kavya*), and the Old Javanese *kakawin* (Thomas Hunter on the development of the genre in East

Java). Somewhat awkwardly, because of thematic parallels with other sections, two more chapters (one by Dan Martin on *kavya* in Tibet and another by Hunter on the early *kakawin*) that could have been included here are found elsewhere in the volume.

This attention paid to the transformation and adaptation of *kavya* literature outside the linguistic boundaries of Sanskrit and the geographical boundaries of India is a quite progressive aspect of *Innovations and Turning Points*, comparable with recent developments in multiauthored histories of Chinese literature. The 2001 *Columbia History of Chinese Literature* included chapters on Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese writings in classical Chinese (and related styles), and the newly published *Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900 CE)* has an entire section, “Early and Medieval China and the World,” with chapters on Korea, Japan, and Vietnam along with discussions of other key issues, including translation (mainly of Buddhist texts) and the nature of “shared literary heritage” across the East Asian region.¹³

Along with works of this sort, the “regional” chapters of *Innovations and Turning Points* bring us closer to a transregional comparative taxonomy of the processes Pollock labels as the localization of cosmopolitan literature and the superposition of cosmopolitan features on emerging vernacular literatures.¹⁴ Martin and Hunter discuss reading and translation of Sanskrit texts in Tibet and Java, respectively, but do not have much to say about *writing* in Sanskrit produced in those areas. But the chapters by Narayana Rao, and especially Shulman, are highly suggestive about the influence of the non-Sanskrit languages of place (Telugu, in both cases here) as a kind of substrate for localized modes of Sanskrit writing. This is a topic of great comparative interest, in that localized forms of literary Sinitic are essential aspects of the literary history of East Asia. Historically there has been

a tendency to stigmatize deviation from classical Chinese norms (as displayed by a traditional term for writing that “stinks of Japanese” [*washū* 和臭]), but more recently scholars have approached this kind of stylistic diversity less pejoratively. In that sense many will respond with a shared sense of mission to Shulman’s forceful statement of principle: “‘Correspondence’ is . . . a rather weak explanatory device: it is time we stopped hunting for calques and patterns of translation and set about the more serious task of describing this kind of Sanskrit in its own terms, including syntactic features such as aspect, mode, tense, and their associated morphologies” (621). The localization discussed here involves “verses that are, of course, entirely Sanskrit, though such verses could be said to be differentially ‘Sanskritized’” (623), but perhaps this phenomenon could be juxtaposed with Busch’s tantalizing allusions to “incorrect Sanskrit” in vernacular *kavya* (662)?

The superposition of elements of cosmopolitan Sanskrit on the emerging vernaculars is another area that promises rich ground for comparative inquiry. Taken together, Busch, Hunter, and Martin provide a catalogue of components of vernacularization, in the specific sense that Pollock intends. Given his strong emphasis on philologization, it is unsurprising that all of these cases involve extensive translation and adaptation of metalinguistic texts and fields of knowledge, including treatises on poetics and rhetoric, lexicography, and commentary. Of particular interest is the importance of Sanskrit metrics, which played a central role in the creation of vernacular *kavya* in all three areas. Busch provides a remarkably clear and accessible discussion of the interplay between cosmopolitan meters and verse forms and new, non-Sanskrit features of Braj prosody (including widespread use of rhyme and distinctive forms of alliteration). In this connection, I would have liked to learn more about indigenous forms of versification in Tibet and Java and their absorption by and/

13. Mair, *Columbia History*; Denecke et al., *Oxford Handbook*. An exception is Chang and Owen’s *Cambridge History*, which neglects all pre-modern literary production beyond the borders of what is now China but includes an epilogue on the recently trendy topic of “Sinophone

writings and the Chinese diaspora,” creating the unfortunate misimpression that border crossing by this literature is a modern phenomenon. This seems to be a byproduct of the rigorously chronological organization of these two volumes, but nonetheless it is regrettable.

14. Pollock, *Language of the Gods*. For a collection of studies considering Pollock’s theorization of cosmopolitan/vernacular interaction from an East Asian perspective, see King, *Language of the Sages*.

or influence on the vernacular *kavyas*, which seem to have been more conservative than Braj in their adherence to Sanskrit metrics (or at least, that is the impression one gets from these chapters). In the East Asian context there is little direct influence by classical Chinese prosody on non-Chinese vernacular literature, with the signal exception of Vietnam, where Tang-style regulated verse (which was composed in the literary Sinitic cosmopolitan everywhere in the region) was adapted as a Vietnamese-language vernacular genre. I do not think it overly deterministic to posit a role for linguistic typology here, as the syllable counts, rhymes, and tone patterns of regulated verse do not have obvious counterparts in Korean or Japanese. It would be interesting to compare Tibetan and Old Javan (and perhaps other languages that vernacularized within the Sanskrit cosmopolis) along these lines: one can imagine differentials in the adaptability of Sanskrit metrics, in general, and perhaps also in terms of particular meters.

In both Tibet and Java translations and adaptations of Sanskrit *kavya* works played a crucial role. On the one hand, this parallels in striking ways the massive projects that translated the Buddhist canon into literary Sinitic (and indeed, into Tibetan as well, as Martin mentions in passing), but on the other hand it throws into relief the comparative absence of translation into vernaculars in premodern East Asia. This is related to the technical functioning of Sinitic logographic writing, accompanied as it was by localized forms of reading that eliminated, or at least vastly reduced, the need for free-standing translations.¹⁵ (But if one includes adaptations as well as more narrowly defined translations, then the picture changes somewhat, as there are numerous vernacular retellings of stories from Sinitic sources, even if none of them have the prestige and omnipresence of, for example, versions of the *Ramayana*.)

Both Hunter and Martin emphasize the prevalence of Sanskrit vocabulary in Old Javan and Tibetan *kavya*, which leads to another comparative theme: the role of loanwords in the superposition of cosmopolitan elements onto emerging vernacu-

lar literatures. Unlike rhetorical figures, which can in many cases be adapted seamlessly in new linguistic contexts, loanwords more clearly mark texts as hybrid. In premodern Japan, the initially canonized vernacular genres—*waka* poetry like that discussed above and *monogatari* prose fiction like the *Tale of Genji*—involve many structural and thematic superpositions from Sinitic cosmopolitan literature, but they avoid Sinitic vocabulary (virtually completely in the case of poetry). Hybrid prose such as that of the medieval *Tales of the Heike* was an exception, though uncanonized until fairly recently. In poetry it was not until the late medieval and early modern genre of *haikai* that Sinitic loanwords were incorporated, where the (at first largely parodic) effects of this newly enriched vocabulary paralleled those described in Busch's rich discussion of Brajbhasha hybridity (marked by the additional cosmopolitan register of Perso-Arabic as well as colloquialisms). That stylistic variety also seems reminiscent of Chinese *baihua* texts, which interpolate verse and bits of prose in literary Sinitic into colloquial contexts, much as some of the Brajbhasha *kavya* incorporate Sanskrit passages.¹⁶

Up to this point in this section I have focused mainly on literary genre and style, but in conclusion I would like to touch on a few additional comparative issues raised by these “regional *kavya*” chapters, issues related to matters of intellectual and cultural history. Martin suggests as a further “avenue” of exploration “a study of the systems of patronage for the literary arts” in Tibet (599), but it is clear from Busch's and Hunter's contributions that this is an urgent issue for all of the vernacularizations discussed here. This potentially involves a number of comparative vectors: among vernaculars that emerged in the Sanskrit cosmopolis, across the cosmopolitan/vernacular divide in that context, and more broadly across different cosmopolitan realms, such as Arabic, Chinese, Greek, and so on. Another intriguing element foregrounded by Martin is Tibetan “concern with the myths of non-Buddhist Indian gods,” which he proposes “is somewhat parallel to Renaissance Humanist literary interest in the myths of classical

15. On this point see Kornicki, *All under Heaven*.

16. On *haikai*, see Shirane, “The Rise of Haikai.” On *baihua* writings, see Shang, “Writing and Speech.”

antiquity” (ibid.). One might pursue this idea further in various ways: as Bernard Faure and others have argued, “non-Buddhist Indian gods” are relevant elsewhere in the region, but more generally there are parallels between the “non-Buddhist” and the European “pagan” that bear further consideration.¹⁷ Finally, another theme shared among these chapters (and echoed elsewhere in *Innovations and Turning Points*) is the role of literature in “the evolution of social practices and conventions like the ‘viewing stands’ of the Javano-Balinese tradition” (750). Along these lines Hunter makes an immensely stimulating connection. He briefly discusses a *kakawin* short lyric that “represents a Javanese version of a courtly form of domestic literacy around courtship that once was widespread in the archipelago,” and suggests that this phenomenon “can indeed be compared to similar cultural patterns” in the use of poetry in classical Japanese works such as the *Kokinshū* and *Tale of Genji*, calling for us to “begin to think of the various forms of ‘courtship lyric’ in comparative perspective” (761–62). It is a measure of the fecundity of this book that this is only one of many such asides that could easily lead to edited volumes or collaborative projects of their own.

...

Ultimately, those at the children’s table eat the same food as everyone else. It may rankle a bit to be separated from the adults, but a feast is a feast. And yet, overflowing with bounty though this volume is, one can see within it the outlines of an even more expansive meal to come. I admire the circumspection with which the editors stipulate that this “is not a history of Sanskrit *kāvya*,” but I fervently hope that they are wrong to speculate that such a work “may be generations away.” This volume fosters visions of that comprehensive literary history to come, and of the breathtaking comparative space that will open up even further once it is written. When it does emerge, may that project be conceived in a way that renders it maximally open to all who wish to think about the nature

of literature in premodern societies; that is, next time, may there be more room around the table for outsiders and specialists to partake together.

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17. Faure, *Fluid Pantheon*, and Faure, *Protectors and Predators*.

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KAVYA

Prospects for a Comparative Poetics

Alexander Key

The volume under consideration here, Yigal Bronner, David Dean Shulman, and Gary A. Tubb's *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature*, is a survey of two millennia of Sanskrit poetry. But it is a survey that knows its limits: "The history of Sanskrit *kavya* has yet to be written. . . . We may be generations away from such a work."¹ The authors offer us instead a series of what they call "pilot studies," of themes, authors, genres, and literary cultures, linked by editorial frames and placed in a rough chronological order. There are 781 pages of text.

I write my contribution to this *Kitabhkhana* as a scholar trained in classical Arabic. My only prior acquaintance with Sanskrit was brief graduate school glances at the shelves of the Indl. classification, glances filled with longing and the sense that I had missed an opportunity, on my way to the Arabic books I was still learning to read. Now, as a scholar of comparative literature who has both completed a PhD and read *Innovations and Turning Points*, my overwhelming feeling is intrigue at the potential for comparative work. Why write a mag-

isterial survey like this, in English, if not to enable conversation with scholars who are not specialists in Sanskrit? Conversely, why read 781 pages of this breadth and depth in English, if one already knows the poetry and is deeply familiar with the tradition? Might scholars of Sanskrit only dip into *Innovations and Turning Points* for reference, or use it for teaching, or read it in its entirety for a review? These are exaggerated questions, but I am keen to stress that I think this book creates the potential for a comparative conversation between scholars of Sanskrit and scholars trained in other traditions. This is a rare achievement; the problem that comparativists usually face in the European and Anglophone academy is that our conversations stall on the thinness of our knowledge of each other's traditions outside Europe.

Absent a sense of how a language culture's conceptual vocabulary works and has developed, absent an orientation to the genres and disciplinary conventions of that language culture, absent a comprehension of the depth, complexity, and historical weight of ideas that have no analogue in the traditions with which one is familiar, comparative conversations tend to stumble. For Arabists, for example, the questions we most often encounter are variants of an assumption that Arabic or Islamic literary culture became stagnant and is dominated by the Quran. My answer is always a mutually unsatisfying, "No, not stagnant at all! And as for the Quran, well yes, to a certain extent, but not quite as you may mean . . ." In order to avoid stumbling when asking and answering questions like this, one needs both parties to the conversation to have read hundreds of pages of sophisticated orientation, surveys that in the case of Arabic must go beyond the tired Orientalist tropes of decline and fetishization that dominated twentieth-century scholarship and still hold sway in popular culture. *Innovations and Turning Points* provides exactly that prerequisite for Sanskrit poetry. Bronner et al. have their own Sanskrit version of the Arabic trope of Quran-centric decline: "the [untenable] lingering view that Sanskrit poetry is monolithic, self-replicating, and ultimately sterile" (6). They also have their own core conceptual vocabulary

1. Bronner et al., *Innovations and Turning Points*, 26. Hereafter cited in the text.

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Absent a sense of how a language culture's conceptual vocabulary works and has developed, absent an orientation to the genres and disciplinary conventions of that language culture, absent a comprehension of the depth, complexity, and historical weight of ideas that have no analogue in the traditions with which one is familiar, comparative conversations tend to stumble. For Arabists, for example, the questions we most often encounter are variants of an assumption that Arabic or Islamic literary culture became stagnant and is dominated by the Quran. My answer is always a mutually unsatisfying, "No, not stagnant at all! And as for the Quran, well yes, to a certain extent, but not quite as you may mean . . ." In order to avoid stumbling when asking and answering questions like this, one needs both parties to the conversation to have read hundreds of pages of sophisticated orientation, surveys that in the case of Arabic must go beyond the tired Orientalist tropes of decline and fetishization that dominated twentieth-century scholarship and still hold sway in popular culture. *Innovations and Turning Points* provides exactly that prerequisite for Sanskrit poetry. Bronner et al. have their own Sanskrit version of the Arabic trope of Quran-centric decline: "the [untenable] lingering view that Sanskrit poetry is monolithic, self-replicating, and ultimately sterile" (6). They also have their own core conceptual vocabulary

1. Bronner et al., *Innovations and Turning Points*, 26. Hereafter cited in the text.

without easy analogue in English: *kavya*, the word in their title for which their book provides a successful 781-page gloss.

Innovations and Turning Points is comprehensive, successful, and a challenge. It is a call to comparative work, and its challenge is the question “how can we think comparatively about Sanskrit poetry?” We can no longer fall back on the excuse that more orientation is needed. What are the prospects now for comparative poetics?

In order to answer this question, I would like to work through a few options for comparativism, before settling on a tentative suggestion for future comparative poetics. I will structure the options with the help of some (still useful) theory from prior decades: Claudio Guillén (1993), Patrick Hogan and Earl Miner (1996), and Revathi Krishnaswamy (2010). How might a comparative engagement with Sanskrit *kavya* and classical Arabic poetry fit into some of the models they suggested? In 1996, Hogan and Lalita Pandit edited a special issue of *College Literature* titled “Comparative Poetics: Non-Western Traditions of Literary Theory.” The issue was divided into sections on China, Japan, the Arab World, and India, and it included an article on the epistemological problems of comparison by Miner, who had earlier written the influential monograph *Comparative Poetics*.² In that 1990 book, he presented a tentative vision of comparative poetics based on genre: drama, lyric, and narrative in Asian and European literature. In the 1996 article, Miner returned to the problem of relativism raised in the book six years earlier. He reframed it as a concern with names and labels where the comparative goal was the “conception of meaningful categories, with examples rightly comparative, because the exemplars are of equal status in relation to the category.”³

Miner was aware that this standard, which requires the identification of both accurate labels for genres and parallel structures across cultures, is hard to meet. Two of the categories he considered were the practice of making literary compilations

and the emergence and use of prefaces. In both cases, if our goal is to compare Sanskrit *kavya* and classical Arabic, we are in a position to start work. Literary compilations were fundamental to classical Arabic poetry from the eighth century onward (the *Mu‘allaqat*, *Mufaddaliyat*, and *Hamasa* being perhaps the most famous),⁴ and they were increasingly equipped with prefaces (notably the collections written in the tenth and eleventh centuries by al-Tha‘alibi).⁵ In *Innovations and Turning Points*, Tubb discusses *Pala* poets in the oldest surviving general anthology of Sanskrit verse, Vidyakara’s *Subhasitaratnakosa* (366), while Herman Tiekens has a chapter on “Introductions and Prefaces in *Kavya*” (86). Another of Miner’s suggestions, accounts of two men traveling as a pair, seems at first glance not to be a persistent trope in either Sanskrit or Arabic. This is a risk of which Miner was aware, but he raised the prospect of stages of comparison that create difference and similarity: “Japanese poets who seem so different from the Chinese when only these two East Asian literatures are in question, become comparable—more alike—when compared to the European poets.”⁶ In our case, the Sanskrit and Arabic poetic traditions might be brought together by their shared lack of accounts of traveling pairs in comparison with Japanese and European literatures.

But exactly what kind of comparative work is being envisioned here? One might well start with broad comparative assertions but, as Miner knew, such assertions can only be maintained if they are accompanied by some excavation of detail, a process that he called “the hard georgics”⁷ and that I might call philology. It is at this point, as we move toward such detail, that it is useful to consult Guillén, whose 1985 *Entre lo uno et lo diverso: Introducción a la literatura comparada* was translated into English in 1993 as *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*. Guillén identified three modes of “supranationality” and five “basic issues”: three modes in which comparative connections could be made around the world, and five issues that

2. Miner, “An Allegory on the Banks of the Nile”; Miner, *Comparative Poetics*.

3. Miner, “An Allegory on the Banks of the Nile,” 88.

4. al-Dabbi, *The Mufaddaliyat*; al-Marzuqi and Abu Tammam, *Sharh al-Hamasa*; Ahlwardt, *Divans*.

5. See, for example, Orfali, “The Works of Abu Mansur al-Tha‘alibi,” and Orfali, “Sketch Map.”

6. Miner, “An Allegory on the Banks of the Nile,” 86.

7. *Ibid.*, 91.

could be connected. The three modes were (1) “implied internationality” in which, for example, Franz Kafka was identified as having actually read Charles Dickens, thereby creating an international conversation; (2) “genetical independence with common sociohistorical conditions” in which, for example, the novel develops within similar class dynamics in unconnected contexts; and (3) “genetical independence with a universal theory of literature” in which, for example, Roman Jakobson identifies parallelism as the fundamental problem of poetry worldwide.⁸ The five basic issues were genre; form; theme (ranging from “the woman on the train” to “characters derived from mythology”); international literary relations; and historical configurations. The contribution this ambitious classificatory model can make to our discussion of the prospects for comparing Sanskrit *kavya* to classical Arabic poetry is not that it necessarily represents a final account of how comparative literature works. What Guillén’s framing gives us is a structural reminder that if we want to read Sanskrit *kavya* in comparative context we must either look for connections or contend with some account of universality. Miner found himself in the same position, hence his global account of genre.

Both Guillén and Miner were looking for connections. If we do the same, we find that the international conversation that linked Sanskrit and Arabic was indirect. In the early seventeenth century, Narottam Kavi wrote Hindi *kavya* about a Rajput king who grew up in the Mughal court. This praise poetry used Persian and Turkish words that in some cases had Arabic origins (such as *havai*, “airborne,” used of gunpowder-propelled arrows) (657), and in some cases, those Arabic origins remained epistemologically salient (*khalāqa*, “creation,” for the world in “give pleasure to the world,” or when the poet receives divine encouragement to write *kavya* and that encouragement is a *hukam*, “legal judgment/reason”) (653, 672). But it is significant that the *kavya* in which these words appeared were not written in Sanskrit. In her contribution to Bronner et al.’s volume, Allison Busch sees Hindi as providing an opportunity

for poets that was “not easily available to Sanskrit writers, whose medium [was] long-heralded for its linguistic purity” (662). It would seem that in pursuit of an international conversation we have only succeeded in finding out that Arabic-Sanskrit connections were marginal to some original pure Sanskrit category; when we look for *kavya* that connects westward we only find it in Hindi. Even if we equip ourselves with a model of intertextuality created to avoid pursuit of “the old notion of source or influence,”¹⁰ we would still end up with single words here; Kavi had not read the *Hamasa*, but Hindi was linguistically connected to Arabic via Persian. This was not an international conversation like Kafka reading Dickens.

Miner and Guillén both inclined toward the pursuit of points of comparison. Hogan, however, thought that the alternative to investigation of historical relationships was the identification of either similarities or differences. In his introduction to the special issue of *College Literature*, he framed this as a choice: “Any comparative study may be ‘sequential’ or ‘parallel’; in other words, it may focus on the historical relations between the traditions being compared or it may set out to study similarities or differences between the traditions insofar as they are not historically related.”¹¹ We can reduce this observation to a naive triad of comparative options: the identification of similarities, differences, or connections. And having dealt with the paucity of links between Sanskrit and Arabic, we can now turn to the differences. They come, not surprisingly, from the fact of separate historical contexts. Murari’s Sanskrit *kavya* was “laden with Vedic overtones,” and the Vedas provided him with a millennium-old ideal: “A link is forged between Vedic speech and the crafting of poetic utterance; not pure, visionary inspiration but the artisan’s ability to shape and polish is what raises language to the level or pitch of Vedic utterance” (445, 450). Classical Arabic, on the other hand, had a millennium of prehistory that was far less constitutive of its literary present. While the “first clear attestation of an Arabic word occurs in the Kurkh monolith inscription of the neo-Assyrian

8. Guillén, *Challenge of Comparative Literature*, 69–71.

9. *Ibid.*, 198, 202.

10. *Ibid.*, 246.

11. Hogan, “Ethnocentrism,” 5.

monarch, Shalmaneser III (853 BCE),”¹² the literary record for the next millennium and a half consisted largely of oral history, monumental inscription, and graffiti. Arabic literary culture from the eighth century onward saw itself as the innovative heir of a desert imaginary; its scripture was a recent miracle and not a millennium distant; its poetry was a living tradition remembered over the last few centuries.

Such large-scale historical differences are accompanied, unsurprisingly, by different literary concerns and different genre boundaries. Shulman reads the *Raghuvamsa* as “a vast essay on time, or on the rhythm of kingship as embodying and creating time” (63). Might one want to say that there is less concern with time in classical Arabic literature? Equally, when classical Arabic literature produced vast essays or modeled abstract concepts such as time or power, it did so less in poetry and more in the genre called *adab*—the iterative, problematizing, probing, ironic juxtaposition of prosimetrical narratives within authorial structures that we read in writers such as al-Tanukhi in the tenth century.¹³

After linkages (which are limited) and differences (of which there is no shortage), we come back to similarities and an attempt to do more than simply identify a shared concern with prefaces or with the creation of literary compendia. A comparative poetics that consists of the identification of such shared concerns will, in the absence of historical linkages, have to devote much of its time to the elucidation of differences. It will be saying, in effect, that while we have a potential *tertium comparationis*, the nature of different contexts is such that the point of comparison appears differently in different traditions, and thereby ceases to be a logical *tertium comparationis* at all (this is the conclusion that Miner was moving toward in 1996).¹⁴ If we do not want to abandon the idea of a comparative poetics to the tight restrictions of actual historical linkages, and if we want to do more than simply explain how genre structures that first appeared similar are in fact different in different times and

places, then we need to push further on into the poetry itself.

I would like to order the following comparative notes according to scale: broader matters of style first, and then a narrowing down to more granular questions of technique and form. The first major point of contact between Sanskrit *kavya* and classical Arabic appears in the title of the book itself: innovation. Bronner, Shulman, and Tubb write in their introduction that “the notion of innovation is a remarkably consistent topos throughout the classical and medieval literature” (3). In classical Arabic, “innovation” is a consistent goal and by the tenth century the word (*badi'*) is itself the name for a poetry movement: “The New Style.” Shortly thereafter, the author of the famous episodic story-set the *Maqamat* was given the honorific title *Badi' al-Zaman*—“the prodigy of the age.”¹⁵ By the fourteenth century, there was a genre of highly complex poetry formed through the reflexive use of rhetorical figures: the *badi'iyah*.¹⁶

Sanskrit *kavya* and classical Arabic poetry also share a focus on the single line. In both cases, this was connected to both the practice/performance of criticism and to pedagogy (145, 148).¹⁷ And along with the single line as a unit of analysis came a valorization of concision, in Sanskrit *arthagauravam* (“weight of meaning,” glossed by *arthabhuyastvam*) and in Arabic *ijaz*, which has been explained as a great deal of content (*ma'na*) being communicated by a small amount of vocal form (*lafz*).¹⁸ Complexity and concision would produce knots that had to be untied in Sanskrit (*granthi*) (13), and in both traditions a fascination with the aesthetic potential of techniques related to word-play: *yamaka* being one locus in Sanskrit and *tajnis* (paronomasia) another in Arabic. In both cases critics contested the value of that complexity: *yamaka* could be “exceedingly obstructive to *rasa*” (Bhatta Lollata, early ninth century) (158), and knotty complications in Arabic were criticized “not because they require effort from the audience on the sentence level, but because the poet is making you stumble, making your path thorny, making the

12. Al-Jallad, “Arabic and the Other Semitic Languages.”

13. Margoliouth, *Table-Talk*.

14. Miner, “An Allegory on the Banks of the Nile,” 84.

15. Blachère, “al-Hamadhani.”

16. van Gelder, “Badi'iyah.”

17. See also van Gelder, *Beyond the Line*.

18. See Key, “Language and Literature,” 53–54, and van Gelder, “Brevity.”

terrain difficult as you try and reach the content” (‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, eleventh century).¹⁹

If we pursue these observations about critical discourse into the realm of technique, we can find more similarity. The causal conceits identified by Tubb in Vidyakara’s *Subhasitaratnakosa* are the fantastic etiologies identified by Geert Jan van Gelder in Ibn Tabatabah:

... you to whom the senate of the gods
gives joyous praise at seeing heaven’s safety
unbroken even when your head zooms up
because the earth must then sink down
under your weighty feet.
(315)

Compare the above image from Vidyakara to these from Ibn Tabatabah:

He rises, until the ignorant think
that he has some business in the sky.²⁰

And:

Do not be amazed that his shirt is worn out:
its buttons are buttoned on a moon.²¹

In all three cases the poet is creating a hyperbolic image in which the person being praised has such incredible qualities that they change the natural laws of gravity and space. The whole earth sinks down, the human being flies up, and the round shining beauty of the moon is someone wearing a shirt. Arabic criticism had a label for this technique: *husn al-ta’lil*, or “the beauty of a causal attribution.”

In Shulman’s opening chapter, “Waking Aja,” the criticism of Kalidasa’s *Raghuvamśa* is in dialogue with the fourteenth-century Sanskrit critic Mallinatha, who was, like ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, a grammarian and author of pedagogical works (20). Shulman uses Mallinatha’s identification of grammatical agents and subjects, as well as Mallinatha’s perceptive notes on the specific reference of each word, to help him read Kalidasa’s use of syntax. He concludes that “these somewhat tentative connections—linking syntax, stylistic repetition, and theme—can perhaps be fleshed

out . . . but there are, perhaps, more powerful ways to explore their meaning” (42–45, 47). One of those more powerful explanatory paths is logic. Shulman provides a series of logical paraphrases that turn a single image into sets of logical propositions. It is a step that Mallinatha did not take. But it is the central step taken by the literary criticism of ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani: grammatical analysis informed by logic is the key to understanding affect. Here, just as we expand the scope of our analysis beyond an individual poem and its technique to broader observations about traditions of literary criticism, we meet another comparative moment of divergence. Shulman is using a twenty-first-century refraction of an idea first found among Aristotelians in Alexandria: poetic images could be read as syllogisms. It was an idea that proved attractive to Arabic Aristotelians,²² and this connection was in fact the subject of one of the “Arab World” contributions to the Hogan and Pandit special issue of *College Literature*.²³ But it is not the connection between logic and grammar that was made by ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani. As Kamal Abu Deeb has shown, classical Arabic literary critics did not make use of Aristotle’s *Poetics* or *Rhetoric*.²⁴ They had their own conceptual toolbox, which al-Jurjani expanded, as I have argued elsewhere,²⁵ through the potential provided by Ibn Sina’s (Avicenna) analyses of logical cognition for a more epistemologically rigorous account of the cognitive and lexical processes involved in metaphor and metonymy.

There is more potential for comparison if we return to the granularity of specific techniques. Bronner describes in his reading of Subandhu’s *Vasavadatta* how, in a description of lamps going out from exhaustion at having strained to catch a glimpse of women, the poet first uses “the necessary ‘as if’ (*iva*),” and then describes how the morning breeze actually took pollen from the women’s hair without using any explicit comparative particle (255). Arabic has a particle, *ka-anna* (“as if”), that functions in exactly the same way in poetry, and the choice poets made to use or eschew it was

19. al-Jurjani, *Asrar al-Balaghah*, 135, lines 6–8.

20. van Gelder, “A Good Cause,” 228; van Gelder and Hammond, *Takhyil*, 57.

21. van Gelder, “A Good Cause,” 229; van Gelder and Hammond, *Takhyil*, 59.

22. Aouad and Schoeler, “Le syllogisme poétique.”

23. Ludescher, “The Islamic Roots of the Poetic Syllogism.”

24. Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjani’s Theory*, 303.

25. Key, *Language between God and the Poets*.

one of the things that fascinated al-Jurjani. In his *Asrar al-Balaghah* (*Secrets of Eloquence*), al-Jurjani provides a vocabulary of analysis for exactly the move in Sanskrit that Bronner identifies. Al-Jurjani is interested in the poetic impact of an image such as al-Buhturi's, "and a moon lighting the earth from East to West." He writes that if the poet had included *ka-anna*, then it would have weakened the image because the word *moon* would still be in its original, customary, lexical place where it refers to a bright celestial body. Instead, it is by leaving out that explicit comparative particle that the poet has created the image; what creates the sense of wonder is the abandonment of lexical precedent and the new assumption of a fixed fact that the person in question is actually a moon.²⁶

Classical Arabic literary criticism has here provided a vocabulary for reading the techniques of Sanskrit *kavya*. It is a vocabulary that comes with its own account of how language works, one that the Sanskrit grammarians and critics may not have shared, but the classical Arabic critics could, like al-Jurjani, be grammarians too,²⁷ and it would be interesting to see how much of his grammatical theory could be said to be shared with Mallinatha. In the end, there is no avoiding some engagement with universality. This is what Guillén, for all his faults and ambition, recognized and struggled with. Al-Jurjani believed that his theory of metaphor and more applied to all languages,²⁸ and the existence of language itself (and lexical precedent) is a largely inescapable fact of human existence.

The argument I wish to make in this *Kitab-khana* is that the closer we get to the poems themselves, the more successful our comparative moves become. This conclusion is close to that reached by Lawrence McCrea at the end of his chapter on Magha: genre (in his case "epic") does not work so well as a comparative category, and it is "essential that we attempt to make sense of each poem as a unique object in its own right" (140). But McCrea wants to avoid the categories of Sanskrit criticism as well as the categories of European literary history, and he is concerned about anachronisms in

Magha's reading of poetry from seven hundred years earlier. I am more optimistic about the potential for classical Arabic literary criticism to work comparatively. And there is a great deal of work to do. Krishnaswamy wrote her engagement with Guillén, Hogan, and Miner's question in 2010 in the journal *Comparative Literature*, and her frustration at the lack of a world poetics to accompany world literature is evident.²⁹ Her frustration is familiar to Arabists who have read Abu Deeb's magisterial 1979 *Al-Jurjani's Theory of Poetic Imagery*, a book in which he integrates al-Jurjani with sensitivity and success into the discourse of literary criticism in mid-twentieth-century England. Despite the respect in which his book is held among specialists in classical Arabic, it did not gain a readership among comparativists or scholars of English literary criticism, not even making it into the references of Hogan's 1996 special issue. Perhaps now, late in the second decade of the twenty-first century, comparativists are better primed to engage with both Sanskrit and classical Arabic. If so, the challenge presented by *Innovations and Turning Points* needs answering.

My answer is that formalism is a good comparative route out of the bind created by historical difference. When we pull our focus down to the level of the single line, or the single image, as both Sanskrit and classical Arabic critics did, the techniques used by poets are comparable. The grammars and syntactical structures of languages are different, but the existence of some form of syntax is shared. There is no reason why one analysis of syntax should not be used to read another instance of syntax. And there need be no problematic or political assertion of priority. Sheldon Pollock recently used his introduction to classical Indian aesthetics to warn of this "proclivity . . . to assert claims to conceptual priority." The type of work he had in mind was "Rasa in Shakespeare," a fallacy of universal applicability for a core piece of conceptual vocabulary from India.³⁰ The type of work I have in mind is rather a comparative literary criticism that sees the potential in accounts of syntax

26. al-Jurjani, *Asrar al-Balaghah*, 307, lines 4–12.

27. Gherstetti, "'Word' in the Linguistic Thinking of 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani."

28. See my forthcoming article in the *Journal of Abbasid Studies* on al-Jurjani's translation of Persian poetry, "Translation of Poetry from Persian to Arabic: 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani and Others."

29. Krishnaswamy, "Toward World Literary Knowledges," 399.

30. Pollock, *A Rasa Reader*, 44.

or metaphor, and is comfortable with the prospect of finding these accounts in classical Arabic. We could call this a comparative formal anachronism. I think that anachronism can be productive if we limit it to certain formal observations and avoid definitions of anything as historically contingent as genre or as broad as *rasa*. I use “anachronism” with approbation and not as a pejorative. But we must be conscious that anachronism is the game we are playing. Jakobson’s formalism, for all that it crossed Slavic and European boundaries, was still a formal poetics that developed in symbiosis with the poetry it read. The comparative formal anachronism I am tentatively suggesting, however, takes the work of classical Arabic literary critics and uses that work to read poetry of which they had no knowledge. To achieve this, comparativists will need to rely on translations of the classical Arabic literary critical canon that, with the honorable exception of Helmut Ritter’s 1954 translation of *Asrar al-Balaghah* into German, are not yet available. They will also need to be comfortable in the language of the poetry under consideration, a condition that currently (and for the foreseeable future) excludes me when it comes to Sanskrit. Nevertheless, the achievement of *Innovations and Turning Points* stands: it has created the potential for comparative conversations.

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TELLING THE STORY OF LITERATURE FROM INSIDE OUT

Methods and Tools for Non-European Poetics

Rebecca Gould

How do we compare the literatures of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, when the very tools through which these literatures are to be engaged have been devised for other purposes? When the chronologies, the typologies, the categories, and the genres were formulated with a view to European literary histories? These questions hurl us toward another abyss: how in rejecting or seeking to transform these tools, as most of us will, do we avoid the trap of nativism or of narrow historicism? How do we move beyond refutation and deprecation to negotiate the complex dialectic of understanding literatures on their own terms while making the most of tools and methods already in general currency? Failing to engage with this dia-

lectic mires us in Eurocentrism. Yet, if we reject the tools available to us and refuse to engage with the discourses in widest currency within our immediate academic spheres, the results we obtain will communicate nothing to the broader world.

Such is the dilemma faced by a work such as Yigal Bronner, David Dean Shulman, and Gary A. Tubb's *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature*. It offers a preliminary history of *kāvya*, the Sanskrit term for literary composition that encompasses poetry and prose, for a world wherein the conceptualization of this subject is as yet in its infancy. It does so through sections focused on specific authors (Kalidasa, Bana), genres (the *mahakāvya*), historical periods ("poets of the new millennium"), and specific geographies ("regional *kavyas*"). The *kāvya* conceived of here is broadly South Asian rather than Sanskritic, and yet all of its iterations bear the traces of Sanskrit. The editors identify four major sources for writing *kāvya*'s history: "what poets have to say about other poets"; "what poets have to say about their own poetry"; "popular accounts and assessments"; and "the explicit remarks of professional critics and theorists."¹ These four sources constitute the archive, not only of literature, but also of literary criticism and literary theory. These texts are commentaries on other texts, as well as on themselves. They constitute the material of literary scholarship while also exemplifying it, enabling the reader to step back from the text and consider how it has been—and might and should be—read. The words of poets about the work of other poets, about their own work, popular accounts, and the accounts of critics are the core sources available to the would-be *kāvya* chronicler.

For a specialist in the literatures of the Islamic world, particularly Persian and the multilingual Caucasus, the fourfold typology of sources set forth in this volume gives rise to the question of how they can provide a model for writing literary history, and the history of literature's reflection on itself (otherwise known as literary theory). How does such meta-reflection work for literatures that have yet to be fully integrated within the world lit-

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

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

erary canon? I share much common ground with the contributors to this volume: we all struggle against a general condition, wherein the texts and traditions we work on are positioned at the margins of literary studies as a discipline. As Dan Martin rightly complains on the basis of his expertise, “Literature as such does not fill the cultural niche that the academy reserves for Tibet” (567). The terrain of Tibetan literature is instead given over to religious and area studies, with occasional admixtures of history. The same might be said of the literatures of the Caucasus, especially Georgian, but Persian too, to a lesser extent.² Although this state of affairs may not trouble scholars who do not prioritize the study of literature above everything else, it is immensely frustrating to those of us who were first drawn to the literatures in question in part because of the unique forms of aesthetic experience literary texts specifically—and not historical or religious texts—make available to us.

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

My engagement with *Innovations and Turning Points* in these pages pursues several goals. First, I situate this volume within ongoing efforts to rewrite the history of world literature and to extend

the tools available to us for embarking on this project. Next, I offer reflections on the methodologies appropriate to comparative poetics, or for doing what Sheldon Pollock (cited many times in this volume) has called studying “literary culture from inside out.”⁴ Throughout, I consider how *Innovations and Turning Points* fulfils or departs from the methodological aims that seem to me most relevant to a discipline that aspires to do justice to the aesthetic and linguistic diversity of literary forms. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on how the stories we tell about world literature from non-European points of view might collectively challenge the methodologies that have been bequeathed to us by prior generations of literary comparatists. I consider how, by enriching the study of their most proximate subjects, non-European viewpoints will also eventually transform the study of literature as such. Along the way I engage in nonsystematic comparative reflections on how the patterns and themes revealed in the scholarship in *Innovations and Turning Points* intersect with the literary traditions of the Persianate world, broadly understood.

I want to begin briefly with where we find ourselves at present, in an age when scholarship on literature is programmatically global in its stated aspirations, yet persistently Eurocentric in its methodological and empirical foundations. Emily Apter has polemicized against this kind of world literature, and many have joined her in her call.⁵ Gayatri Spivak proclaimed the death of comparative literature a decade earlier, on similar grounds to those decried by Apter: the homogeneity of a discipline awash in outmoded Eurocentric categories, without yet being able to draw on or refer to alternative epistemic norms.⁶ These depredations are striking, not least because they largely ignore the groundbreaking work underway in self-described area studies departments, of which *Innovations and Turning Points* is but one of many examples. What lends an aura of plausibility to Apter’s and Spivak’s critiques is the fact that the discipline of comparative literature as yet remains aloof from the areal

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

contribution central to the theorization of literature on a global scale?

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

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

5. Apter, *Against World Literature*.

6. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*.

focus of volumes such as the one under review here. What does it mean to claim that comparative literature is dead, when those who are engaged in such condemnations also fail to engage systematically with texts outside European canons, most notably those from before modernity?

On this reading, it is less that comparative literature is dead than that it currently lacks the empirical and conceptual foundations necessary for its successful realization. As the editors of *Innovations and Turning Points* understand well, these foundations consist of critical editions, translations, anthologies, and commentaries, not only academic articles and conference papers. The “pilot studies” offered in this landmark volume do much to fortify world literature’s material foundations from a South Asian point of view (26). Their collective success is most visible in three domains, which I address in turn: the treatment of multilingual literary cultures, the theorization of literary difference, and vernacularization.

With regard to multilingualism, a number of contributions in this volume allow us to move away from a vision of literary history as a series of discrete monolingual literary traditions that only occasionally converge. All studies of *kavya* by definition rely on Sanskrit aesthetics, just as, across the Islamic world, all discussions of poetry refer back to the Arabic conception of *shiʿr* (poetry). Yet, increasingly in scholarship on South Asian literatures, the supremacy of Sanskrit is situated within a heteroglossic geography.⁷ The contributions of Thomas Hunter, Martin, Shulman, and Allison Busch bear this out in different ways. Tibetan, Braj, Telugu, and Old Javanese all take their place in this volume “inside and outside the history of Indian *kavya*” (601). *Innovations and Turning Points* is a literary history oriented toward a single conceptual ideal, *kavya*, that reflects the multiplicity of ways in which this ideal has been engaged. The volume’s structure shows that no adequate account

of a given literary tradition can examine the fate of one language in isolation from that of others. That isolationism has been the model for most literary scholarship to date in modern European academies is a result of the national basis of modern literary study and the consequential division of the discipline into specific language departments (most commonly French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Russian).

Like its predecessor, Pollock’s *Literary Cultures in History* (2003), *Innovations and Turning Points* turns away from the monolingual framework that has dominated much of literary studies to date.⁸ Rather than offer us a history of literature in Sanskrit, this volume works toward a multilingual history of *kavya*. From a methodological point of view, this endeavor is more promising for the future world literature than are earlier contributions that tend to adhere to a monolingual European model.⁹ Even from a European perspective, the limits of approaching the study of literature through the paradigm of national traditions have been widely critiqued; hence, the South Asian multilingual paradigm has broad relevance. Increasingly, South Asianist scholarship is the focal point for the argument that monolingual literary histories are constraints imposed by a nation-state model that makes territory coterminous with linguistic and ethnic identity.¹⁰ Recognizing that South Asian literatures offer the resources for moving beyond monolingual frames of reference, Francesca Orsini has pioneered the study of South Asian literatures on a multilingual basis.¹¹ Orsini’s “multilingual local” shares much in common with the assumptions that guide this volume.¹²

Perhaps as a result of the preeminent status of Arabic within Islamic culture (enshrined as it is in the concept of Quranic inimitability, *iʿjāz*), scholars of Middle Eastern literatures have not done as much as South Asianists have (generally

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

8. Here it is worth referring to the review symposium that was organized around Pollock’s *Literary Cultures in History* that appeared in the

Indian Economic Social History Review in 2005. See Subrahmanyam, “A Review Symposium.”

9. See, for example, the *History of Indian Literature*, for which Gonda served as general editor. While literatures other than Sanskrit are given extensive treatment in this series, they are treated *separately* from the general history of Sanskrit, and crossovers among these literatures are structurally obscured.

10. For such critiques they pertain to Hindu-Urdu in relation to Persian, see Busch, “Hidden in Plain View,” and Phukan, “Through Throats Where Many Rivers Meet,” 36.

11. Orsini, “How to Do Multilingual Literary History?”

12. See Orsini, “The Multilingual Local in World Literature.”

and in this volume) to forge new methods for engaging with the multilingual dimensions of their respective traditions, particularly before modernity. And yet, the heteroglossic landscape is similarly complex. It would be impossible, for example, to name a major classical Persian contribution to literature or to literary theory that is unaffected by prior Arabic contributions. Whether its primary linguistic medium is Persian, Ottoman, Chaghatay, or another language of the Islamic world, Islamic poetics (*‘ilm al-balagha*, literally the science of rhetoric) is as profoundly Arabic in its foundations as South Asian poetics is Sanskritic. Yet scholarship on *balagha*, such as it is, has tended to focus on single linguistic traditions, notwithstanding the significant continuity, and in many cases the full isomorphism between (for example) Persian and Arabic in the realm of rhetoric.¹³ Although the meanings of key rhetorical terms, such as metaphor (*isti‘ara*), simile (*tashbih*), and metonymy (*kinaya*), shift as they move across languages, the lexical pool for rhetorical terminology flows from a single, clearly identifiable source: classical Arabic, the language of the Quran. The supremacy of Arabic is inviolable and constant; it is a condition of possibility for the emergence of every other literature across the Islamic world. Just as *alankarasastra* conditions the Sanskritic orientation of texts in Brajbhasa, Telugu, Tibetan, and Old Javanese, so does *balagha* condition the relation of Persian and Turkic poetry to Arabic.

The variability of literary meaning across languages was accompanied by a relative constancy of literary figuration across all Arabic-script Islamicate literary traditions. So long as the script was Perso-Arabic, the lexicon drawn on for poetic figuration belonged to a common rhetorical tradition. And even when the script in use was not Arabic, as with Judeo-Persian, which was written in Hebrew script, the fundamentals of Persian rhetoric shaped its poetics as much as with any text composed in the Perso-Arabic script.¹⁴ As with the Indic vernaculars that emerged during the first half of the second millennium, even when new terms were grafted onto an older tradition, the old

foundational Sanskritic terms never completely disappeared.

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

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

Second, to return to the question posed at

13. These convergences are discussed along with their divergences in Gould, “The Persian Translation of Arabic Aesthetics.”

14. Moreen, “The ‘Iranization’ of Biblical Heroes.”

15. Sperl and Shackle, *Qaṣida Poetry*.

16. Bauer and Neuwirth, *Ghazal as World Literature*, vol. 1, and Neuwirth et al., *Ghazal as World Literature*, vol. 2.

the beginning, of reconstructing the history of non-European literatures when the very tools through which this history is to be written have been devised for other purposes, scholars of non-European literature face in acute form an epistemological dilemma shared by everyone. How can we be sympathetic interpreters of the past while writing from a vantage point that is alien to it? This is the problem, stated in general terms. In the context of South Asian and other non-European literatures, the general problem of temporal distance is compounded by cultural, linguistic, and regional differences, internally within South Asia as well as in relation to Europe. How can difference be narrated from a point of view that is necessarily external to its frame of reference? Here too, the means devised by scholars of South Asian literatures for dealing with this problem in the acute form in which it is posed by *kavya* are relevant to all scholars of literature, regardless of the familiarity or proximity of the traditions in which they work.

In their introduction and in the prefatory notes for each of the seven sections, Bronner et al. offer a series of methodological observations that structure the volume as a whole and that broadly speak for much groundbreaking work underway within South Asian studies. “How,” they ask, “does one recognize change—especially in the context of tremendous continuities in language, figuration, and many structural and formal features? What kind of language is available to describe moments of innovation? One place to begin is with the internal perspectives that the Sanskrit tradition itself offers on its history” (6). Questions like these clarify why much recent scholarship on South Asian literary history is qualitatively distinct from the more conventional work that dominates much of what is called world literature, specifically scholarship focused on Europe (which is to say, the object of Apter’s and Spivak’s critiques). The point of view that makes the South Asianist approach unique can be characterized by its focus

on, and interest in, newness, as well as the desire to use newness as a methodological framework for the scholarly project itself. All scholarship is in one way or another driven by the discovery of what is new, but the material resources within South Asian studies make the discovery of newness rather distinct. The methodological orientation to identifying emergent forms of knowledge and new ways of thinking, being, and experiencing literary form set this volume apart from its predecessors, offering a discursive elaboration on the more explicitly multilingual *Literary Cultures in History*.¹⁷ Beyond the introduction, Tubb’s interest in “patterns of innovation” (72–75), Herman Tieken’s interest in “beginnings” (86–108), Peter Khoroché’s engagement in Bharavi’s originality (111–12), Busch’s focus on literary newness (“Literary Newness in Dialogue with Tradition”) (648–50), and Hunter’s discussion, titled “Innovation and Change in the East Javanese *Kakawin*” (739–86), all concern themselves with different kinds of newness. Countless other explicit invocations of newness as an organizing trope could also be cited from this volume.

When a scholarly tradition orients itself conceptually to the discovery of the new, the question becomes: what criteria do scholars use to adjudicate this newness? New for whom? The operating assumption of the editors and contributors seems to be: new for the poets and texts in question, and new for the tradition itself. The newness they seek is new not on our terms, but on the terms of the texts and traditions themselves. It follows, however, as a matter of methodological necessity, that if an aspect of a text is new within the horizon of its own tradition, it can be made new for us as well. This transformative process, of making the old new for us in the present, is the task of the scholar of the scholar-critic. Understood in this way, originality in scholarship is attained when the newness of the tradition being studied converges with the scholar’s ability to reveal this newness within contemporary horizons. When this conjuncture is reached, the goal of literary theory and criticism has, how-

17. At the risk of generalization, I would further argue that this methodological focus sets South Asian studies apart from other fields. I would be remiss not to refer to the key contributions of Sheldon Pollock in this regard, given

that his work is an obvious *locus classicus* for any reflection on newness in a South Asian context. Most relevant to the present are “The Death of Sanskrit” and “New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India.” Subsequent

commentators, such as Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason*, 3–5, and Kaviraj, “The Sudden Death of Sanskrit Knowledge,” have added many nuances to Pollock’s approach.

ever fleetingly, been attained. The insight reached may then fade away or be lost in the details, but for the one who had witnessed this flash of newness—and here I write as a non–South Asianist who has been heavily impacted by the innovations of colleagues in South Asian studies—such apotheoses leave an indelible mark. This volume offers glimpses of such encounters at several junctures, most strikingly for me in the contributions that focus on Braj (Busch), Tibetan (Martin), and Rajasekara’s Young *Ramayana* (Lawrence McCrea).

Having gone this far in recognizing the originality of this monumental contribution to the study of South Asian literatures, I would like to pause, for there is an aspect of the framing of this project with which I find myself in disagreement, because it seems to me to conflict with the goal I endorsed above, of writing literary culture from inside out.¹⁸ Bronner et al. state in their introduction that theirs “is not a history of Sanskrit *kavya*,” and add, “we may be generations away from such a work” (6). This admission begs the question: is it precisely a *history* of *kavya* that ought to be our ultimate goal, as scholars of literature? I would submit—and here I part ways with many of my colleagues—that the answer is no. Of course, anyone is entitled to write a history of anything he or she wishes. The issue lies with what then happens to the study of literature *qua* literature when scholarship on it becomes an exclusively historicizing enterprise. What is lost to literature—or to *kavya* or *shīr*, as the case may be—when reconstructive history becomes the goal? Might an exclusively historicizing approach to a literary tradition that rarely if ever regarded itself historically cause scholars to miss dimensions of these literatures that can only be perceived through engagement with their literary form?¹⁹ Is literary history the only way of making premodern non-European literatures come alive in the present and of ad-

vancing our knowledge of these traditions? Are literary scholars simply historians who happen to use literary texts as their primary source? Does literature exist simply to “provide glimpses into the socio-cultural and historical contexts of literary activity” (197)? To the contrary I would suggest that the excessive focus on historicizing methods that had traditionally marked South Asian and other area studies goes a great distance to explain why the study of South Asian literary theory has lagged behind its European counterparts. The focus on history had impeded our ability to promote, and to theorize, the experience of literature in all of its ahistorical and affective force.

Let me pause then over a minor moment in this magisterial work that led me to register these hesitations. My remarks should be taken as signs of a broader disagreement with a certain approach to non-European knowledge that dominates area studies, rather than simply a critique of the volume under discussion. In the introduction to the third section, on the development of the *mahākāvya* (courtly epic), the editors posit that “all the essays in this section posit as a working hypothesis a far-reaching isomorphism among these poetic devices and what McCrea calls the ‘overall narrative and thematic content’ of the poem” (110). This comment seems to gesture toward the aesthetic category of wholeness, which is a major concern of European aesthetics, from Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel to Benedetto Croce and Roman Ingarden. It also more broadly links up with genre theory, an abiding concern of modern European comparative literature that is noticeably absent from premodern non-European approaches to literary form. Many scholars of Middle Eastern and Islamic literatures have discussed how the European emphasis on the wholeness of the work of art has no counterpart in classical Arabic literary theory, notwithstanding seemingly cognate concepts like

18. In some respects, I am rehearsing a debate that has many times been waged within South Asian studies between emic and etic approaches to knowledge, as well as the implications of these differing views for the writing of history. See, for example, Sheldon Pollock’s review of Rao et al.’s *Textures of Time*, “Pretextures of Time,” and the authors’ response in the

same issue of *History and Theory* (Rao et al., “A Pragmatic Response”).

19. I should note that Busch directly contests this point about the ahistorical nature of the material under discussion, noting that “Brajbhāṣha *kāvya* was history — ‘history in the vernacular’ — produced in accordance with an epistemology that, while hardly historical in

the Rankean sense, constituted a significant narrativization of the past for its local readership” (“The Classical Past in the Mughal Present,” 687). In this case, it might be noted that, if we are not to lose sight of the literariness of the literary text, it is important to think more deeply about what “history in the non-Rankean sense” might look like.

nazm (concinnity), pioneered by al-Jurjani.²⁰ Indeed, the editors recognize this dissonance when they write that “neither the *alankara* writers nor modern Sanskrit scholars have ever formulated such a hypothesis or addressed issues such as the pacing of plot, the role of large-scale repetitions, [and] the interplay between figurative and metrical structures” (110). In short, *alankarasastra*, much like *balagha* (rhetoric), lacks a theory of the work of art as an integral whole. The core texts from these disciplines can therefore only take us so far in our efforts to reconcile the theoretical richness of premodern non-European literatures with the questions driving contemporary literary theory.

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

My point is rather different, and it is aimed specifically at the nonspecialist, who will not be able to draw on his or her existing knowledge

of *rasa* theory or the many types of bitextual poetry when engaging with this work. There are instances here, and indeed in most scholarship on non-European literatures, when the opportunity for maximizing the benefits of literary difference remains underrealized, because of an overhasty reliance on European aesthetic norms and the expectation that nonspecialists will be able to fill in the gaps in their knowledge of indigenous poetics by themselves. However, it is more likely that the cognitive gaps opened up by our ignorance of the relevant indigenous concepts will be filled by already familiar, if less relevant, concepts, such as genre and organic unity.²¹ In such encounters, historical explanations will necessarily overshadow text-immanent analysis, and the theoretical paradigms through which we process aesthetic experience will lag far behind actual reading practices.

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

I know I do not speak for everyone when I insist that literary scholarship entails much more than historicization. When the goal is to “histori-

20. In Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, respectively, see Van Gelder, who proposes in *Beyond the Line* a concept of the molecularity of the classical Arabic *qasida* (15); Abu Deeb, “Studies in Arabic Literary Criticism”; Clinton, “Esthetics by Implication”; and Pritchett, “Orient Pearls

Unstrung.” For *nazm*, the closest cognate concept to the European conception of an organic whole, see Gould, “Inimitability versus Translatability.”

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

cize a literary tradition” (26), a tension between the work of historical reconstruction and the work of aesthetic appreciation is inevitable. That the latter is crucial to the editors and contributors is apparent from many contributions to this volume (in particular Tubb, McCrear, Bronner, Phyllis Granoff, Charles Malamoud, Shulman, and Narayana Rao) as well as from the editors’ prior publications.²² My hesitation, however, pertains less to what the volume actually achieves than with how it theorizes its own existence as a contribution to the study of literature. There is a great deal more than literary history in this volume, and that is to its credit. Yet, theoretically and methodologically, its conceptualization of its task is dominated by a historical framework that stands in tension with the intrinsic aesthetics of the *kavyas* it excavates.

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

alankarasastra to its European counterpart is that of transformation rather than subordination. An overly strict insistence on historical reconstruction as the endpoint of literary scholarship conflicts with the intrinsic aesthetic experience that is *kavya*’s fundamental concern, as well as its most lasting and original contribution to world literature.²³

To state this point more concretely, while engagement with *alankarasastra* enriches this volume and clarifies many dimensions of the reading experience, there is also room for a more radical conceptual shift. The front-loading of indigenous literary theory sets this volume apart from prior histories of Indian literature. Future efforts in this direction should even more programmatically foreground the basic elements of *kavya*’s conceptual universe—*rasa* (aesthetic flavor), *yamaka*, *riti* (style), *upama*, *vakrokti*, and many other tropes and devices that cannot be described here. This type of paradigm shift would enable scholars of non-European literatures to think beyond their current confinement, to break with the historical method, as conventionally understood, and to problematize further the tools that have been bequeathed to us, although they were devised for other goals.

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

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

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

this in mind, I will conclude with some specific observations about the parallels suggested by the histories of vernacularization and of *kavya* in languages other than Sanskrit, traced in this volume, to a scholar of Persian and Persianate literatures in their diverse transregional manifestations.

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

Just as the transition from Arabic to Persian as the dominant language of literary production in the eastern Islamic world entailed a paradigm shift, so too did the more granular interactions of Persian with non-Persian vernaculars transform the dynamics of literary culture. As with the complex trajectory of *kavya* across South Asia and beyond, the fate, first of Persian, and subsequently of Persianate literary cultures, is difficult to systematize. Three types of Persianization can be identified and compared to parallel trajectories with the circulation of *kavya* discussed in *Innovations and Turning Points*: Judeo-Persian, Persian-Ottoman/Chaghatay, and Persian-Georgian. The first case involves Persian written in a different script, Hebrew. The second case involves Persian's influence on a language with which it shared a script. In the third case, Persian idioms inflected an unrelated language that had long been written in a different script, and which predated New Persian itself. The flexibility of South Asian scripts, which permitted any language to be

recorded in any script, means that Judeo-Persian (or Judeo-Arabic) has no direct parallel in South Asia. South Asian scripts were not tied to specific languages, ethnicities, or religions in the way that the Islamic identity of the Arabic script caused Muslim cultures to adopt this script universally, even when a different script was already in use. In the case of Persian-Turkic interactions, vernacularization transpired among languages that already shared a script. This relationship is paralleled in South Asia by the turn to Braj from within a Sanskritic medium (as Busch discusses). Finally, the example of local vernaculars domesticating global literatures so thoroughly that the visible signs of influence were erased is paralleled in this volume by the discussions of *kavya* in Tibetan and Old Javanese (Martin and Hunter, respectively).

With these rough parallels established, perhaps it would be wise not to probe further, as further inquiry would surely lead to digressions. The broader point worth making is simply that Sanskrit, in the mode of *kavya*, Persian in the mode of *sukhan*, and Arabic in the mode of *shi'r* each lay a foundation for a global literature that circulated in local spheres and that cultivated its own intrinsic aesthetics. In each case, there was tension between the perceived supremacy of the foundational language and local deviations. Equally, the tension was productive for literary history and integral to its broader trajectory. Each of these circulations, whether across the Islamic world or across South Asia, calls for a way of narrating multilingual circulation that is not held captive by nationalist ideologies, monolingual premises, or historicizing agendas. Each story of circulation and exchange, of negotiation and revision, should be told in terms immanent to that literature's own theories of what makes literature work and what constitutes aesthetic experience. Finally, each story of circulation is itself an instance of comparison, whereby one literature impinges on another, one text generates another, and one imagination stimulates new ideas in another poet or reader.

Intertextuality, broadly conceived, is the story of literature. It is the basis of all literary history and the source of all literary meaning. The task

24. For a recent study, see Fakhreddine, *Meta-poiesis in the Arabic Tradition*.

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

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