

CLASSICAL LITERATURE IN THE ARABIC, PERSIAN AND TURKISH LANGUAGES AS A SUPERNATIONAL POETICAL SYSTEM

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Our world is in an ever-worsening crisis. The Muslim world especially is in a difficult situation because it is engaged in conflict at several fronts: it is simultaneously exposed to an aggression of several western countries, as well as to devastating inter-Muslim wars, leading it to a complete chaos and destruction. At a time of this utter destruction, increasing phobias and dehumanisation of our world, every attempt at finding a strong hold for its humanisation and integration as a successful unity in differences is precious. Research and presentation of culture – thus, literature as well – in the period of late classicism of the Muslim world can be a very functional means to achieve this goal. In that sense, it is always beneficial to emphasise that one of the main reasons for a dramatic crisis in the Muslim world is that it has brought the Text (*The Qur'an*) out of the Context (reality).

The problem does not rest in the Text itself; rather, one of the main causes of the crisis is the incorrect relationship of the Muslim contemporariness towards the Text. For, in the Muslim world, the *Qur'an* – as the pivotal Text of its faith, culture and history – has created and motivated the Muslim society *as a subject* throughout history, and for as long as Muslims had understood it correctly, they had been planetary successful. Consequently, I am of the opinion that it is useful, for the purpose of understanding the contemporariness, to observe the successful past/history of the Muslim world in various aspects.

In other words, the crisis is generated also by a wrong interpretation of the past of the Muslim world, where differences are given primacy and are transferred into dramatic contemporary conflicts. Opposite to that, in the classical period of what we call Oriental-Islamic culture, the Muslim society was the enlightened, thus, a creative *subject* that was enlightened and to a certain extent culturally homogenised by its Text. As such, the subject acted very creatively also in contact with other cultures (Ancient Greek culture, Indian culture in Sanskrit, the Pahlavi culture, etc.) and it decisively contributed to what is known as the European Renaissance upon which the European culture rests.

The integrative classical culture of Islam encompassed a vast space, that much greater and impressive since it was not connected or permeated by means of fast communications, as is the case today. One of the main and very powerful factors of integration of that world was the literature of the classical period, even though it might seem odd today, for the position of literature at the time was incomparably better than is the case today, in the world dominated by the demons of profit and politics. In the classical period, the same term (*adab*) was used for literature and ethics.

The vast empire of Oriental-Islamic literature stretched from the Arabian Peninsula to the Middle East and Asia Minor, through North Africa to Andalusia, Sicily, and Bosnia for several hundreds of years. That truly great literature was thus created in a large section of the Mediterranean basin as a unique system at the level of poeology.

In the modern studies of classical Oriental-Islamic literature, literary-historical, theoretical, thus, largely methodological issues appear, and by that I primarily mean that the fragmenting of that literature into independent, even separate *ethnic* literatures: Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Bosniak literature in oriental languages, etc. is problematic. Researching that vast “literary empire” requires a methodological re-examination, even abandonment of ethnocentric approaches as the only valid or the best of the approaches; it seeks prevalence of a strictly philological method, for it often reduces literature to positivism, or to mere factography which is inadequate in the studies of literature as art. The necessity of a re-examination of history, nomination and systematisation of classical literature in Oriental-Islamic languages concerns, of course, also the Bosniak literature of the time, which was created in the period of several centuries in Oriental-Islamic languages, since it was strongly included into the Oriental-Islamic cultural circle in the Ottoman period.

Literature enjoys the special privilege of constant revitalisation through our ever-changing perception of it. Hence, theories or reflections on literature do not always succeed in exhausting all of its meanings or senses and “capturing” them in the coherence of their own system. Roland Barthes argues, with good reason, that literature needs to ensure itself the right to frequent re-examination of its own history in the same way that the history of history and the history of philosophy have that right. Artistic literature is a value that escapes definiteness in theory or interpretation: it is always – at least somewhat differently – realized in the open mind of the reader, (that is, readers), even in different epochs, which can “form” a temporary intersubjective value judgement. The best proof of this, if any proof is at all necessary, is the multitude of approaches to literature, be it in the form of the works of individual writers, of certain literary “movements”, or entire literary periods. Methodologically sound approaches, in principle, produce important contributions to the understanding of literature, but do not exhaust it; hence new approaches are formed as a result of the awareness that previous research is incomplete. This gives rise to the significant fact that the inexhaustible vitality of literature rests not only in literature itself, but also in our relationship towards literature as a value. Ergo, the reception of literature – regardless if it is the perception of an “ordinary” reader, theoretical or literary-historical, or some other kinds of presentations of literature – is always a kind of reconstruction made current by various forms/aspects of (our) context. Hence, constant

new readings of literature are a necessity, as well as the constant positioning of literature by various methods. That further inevitably implies that histories of literature, and its interpretations (theoretical or otherwise) become a part of literature itself, in one comprehensive meaning, for literature, as a value, is only realized within a certain context/contexts and with which it interacts in a dynamic relationship of mutual agreement/understanding as a mutual upgrading and permanent revitalisation.

This endeavour of reconstruction is, in fact, one of the essential issues in approaching an individual work, an opus, as well as in approaching each literary period in which a literary work came to life interactively, not by the causality principle, whereby one needs to be aware of certain specificities of the opus and, especially, of the literary periods. It is also necessary to keep in mind the ever-important fact that in artistic literature, we are dealing with values, and that means that the ideal of research or interpretative objectivity in this field is a mere fantasy on the verge of senselessness, and that an ideal reconstruction is impossible, nor even desirable, since we are forming our relationship towards literature that was realised as a value in its time, while we are positioning it as a value in our own time as well.

A constant but also necessary relative inconsistency we are dealing with here is manifested in a special way when we talk about comprehending literature of the classical or ancient period of a culture, in this case, the literature of the Oriental-Islamic cultural milieu. In this sense, it is necessary to warn of a paradox that will show, on the one hand, the insubstantiality of the conviction in the self-sufficiency and isolation of the so-called national histories of literature of the classical period, while, on the other hand, it is precisely there that the “character” of artistic literature is revealed in its dynamism, in the meaning of the impossibility to finally confine it within the history/histories of literature. Namely, this is the belief that literature has become the final and static *order* by a chronology of events in history that may at first appear reasonable, so much so that even the relationships between literary works seem to have been finally and irreversibly defined, and that, given this historical “completeness”, it is possible to offer a final history of classical literature; to complete its *representation* (and I place emphasis on this word). Such “definitiveness” is represented – and literature of this kind bears witness to that – in positivistic histories of literature: in histories that overly depend on chronology as the main stronghold, as well as on description of “literary facts” in chronological order, all in an effort to represent classical literature as an objective reality, as “stable,” since it has already been realised in a past and supposedly forever categorised in time. Since such a representation of classical literature is most frequently aided by its close ally philology, then, at first, all that is related to literature is made more certain and fixed, even with greater self-confidence. And the very representation of classical literature in Arabic, Persian and Turkish has been and remains mainly in “the field of” philology, especially orientalist, hence in presenting ancient and classical literature, “cooperative” methods of philology and history are applied to an extent leading to the inability of mutual recognition; hence literature, in their presentations, is the final fact which can, possibly, be further described in detail, but it is a matter of course that it is not possible to overrate such literature, since philology does not, in fact, pass a value judgement in the course of its research. Oriental philology has for a long time been “privileged” in

its approach to ancient and classical literature, so that many have already conceded to its persistence and its authority. All of that has resulted in inertia.

However, our research relationship towards classical literature and its positioning in our time is far more complex than that what is perceived at first sight and from that what philology considers as definite. Moreover, classical literature in the Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages, is especially suitable for presenting evidence in terms of “time relativity” – to use the term from physics, with full awareness of its differences in this context. Namely, classical literature is not completely contained in philological factuality, ergo, in chronological inevitability. Since we are talking primarily about values, and not only about historical facts as implied and presented by methods of philology, the category of historicity is pungently relativized, for – in order for us to accept that literature as a system of values in a possible optimum, contexts within which those facts were realised as such need to be reconstructed, but, at the same time also contextualised, as such, in their own system of values or within their own contexts. It is precisely this two-way relationship between classical and modern, or contemporary, that is an extraordinary energy point in which the relativity of time is unveiled optimally, for classics that appear finalised in a time strongly affects our time, just as our time – owing to our efforts at reconstruction – again and in a new way gives life to classical literature, which is thus, in a way, constantly “re-incarnated”. It is a permanent and special kind of energy exchange. That is why new studies of classical literature are necessary, ones that are methodologically focused on poetology, rather than on history of literature. Such research of classical literature in the Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish languages leads to a conclusion that the ancient Arabic literature is, in fact, in “the status” of antiquity of the entire classical literature in the Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages: that vast classical literature, in the poetological sense, shares the antiquity, but it also has a unique, although broadly understood, poetics in the late classical period.

This classical literature has not been represented – as far as I know – in that way and by that method. It is significantly handicapped because it contains two predominant methods showing significant limitations.

Firstly, I emphasise that classical literature is represented by an abundance of histories of literature, which, as I have already stated, derive from philology, especially from oriental philology, which has undoubtedly had significant contributions, but has yet to overcome its own obviously limited scope. The majority of histories of classical literature are of a catalogical, that is, positivistic nature, which means that they lack poetologically explicated value judgements. One of the key pieces of evidence of the major shortcomings of this abundance of histories of classical literature is their extremely historical (historiographical) and neutral periodization, which is based on the “historical-political” periods (the Umayyad, the Abbasidian, the Tanzimat, etc.) instead on the criteria immanent to literature. A mere outlining of biographies of authors and literary works in history is still not a representation of a *system* to which establishing relations of certain works and opuses is inherent.

The second important problem in the representation of this literature is (characteristic of the majority of other cultures) contained in the fact that researchers too often approach classical literatures from the position of their own ethnocentrism. They are trying to rein in artistic literature as an important argument of national identity. That is where an enormous problem arises, for a violence of a kind occurs, even a forgery of classical literature. It is difficult to understand the extent to which we have gotten used to appropriate writers and their works on the basis of nationality, thus denying some characteristics of literature as art. It is inappropriate to draw literature into this kind of argumentation, for artistic literature is in essence universalistic and without nationality; hence, its separation into ethnic exclusivities, as a matter of fact, undermines that characteristic of literature, that is, it shows an utter misunderstanding of the nature of literature. A writer's ethnicity should essentially be differentiated from the poetical "affiliation" of his work: those are different kinds of "facts". For example, to which ethnical faction would it be appropriate to place Fevzi Mostārī (18th c.), a Bosniak by birth, who also wrote in all three Oriental-Islamic languages, thus his most important work (*Bolbolestān*) was written in the Persian language and in the spirit of poetics of the classical Oriental-Islamic literature?! The same applies to 'Ushshāqī, a Bosniak (18th c.) who even wrote a poem (*tambis*) in parallel, in the same "artefact", in the Arabic and Ottoman Turkish languages?! By studying, for example, the morphology of genres in this literature, we will easily observe that the production-wise and poetically dominant genres *qasīda*, *madah* (panegyric), *marsiyya* (elegy), *ghazal* (love lyricism) had been formed as genres even in the pre-Islamic Arabic literature, while others – even with certain transformations and amplifications – were formed in the so-called Persian and Ottoman Turkish classical literature, even in the Bosniak literature in Oriental-Islamic languages.

Literature has constantly been burdened by the problem of the ethnocentric approaches, especially since the 19th century, and that problem especially concerns classical literature, since it was dominated by *the poetics of similarity*, rather than originality, in the modern meaning of the term. The relationship between modern, ethnic exclusivity and the essential "supra-nationality" in the Ottoman period, for example, can be observed as the relationship between the centre and periphery in semiotic sense of the term. Namely, certain literary talents, of different ethnical background or stemming from the most distant areas of the empire, were exposed to strong influences of the cultural centre, the basic values of a culture, based on denomination, hence they wrote within the framework of an already-established value system, on the principles of inductive poetics. Even if they had possessed certain characteristic traits, given their bordering origin, they would use them as a form of energy in order to establish themselves in a system which had created the norms, and which used the "energy of the periphery" to constantly revitalise and resist the collapse. The writer, of course, wanted to establish himself, but he wholeheartedly incorporated his individual talent – to use the words of T. S. Eliot – into the authority and affirmation of the Tradition. For, the age we are discussing here was not the Ottoman *Empire* only in the sense of a constitutional or administrative construct, perhaps a political edifice, rather, it was – ever more so – a cultural empire which, as such, functioned on the basis of a sketched semiotic relationship between the centre

and the periphery. In the classical epoch, tradition was the hero instead of the nation; what is more, tradition as a supranational or international value acted as a powerful factor of cultural homogenisation, at the expense of ethnic or ethnocentric separate affirmation. Ethnic fragmenting of the classical literature is a more recent phenomenon: it arises mainly in the later formation of nations and in the need for augmenting and strengthening of national identities. That is a flagrant and an inappropriate projection of ideologies, even of different policies, from the point of view of the present to the literary past that was completely different, opposite to the ethnocentric classification that is posed as an argument in the evaluation domain. That is how “national literatures” were formed into which the classical literature was forcibly fragmented; they are nominated and thus studied – as an alleged precious national exclusivities and arguments of ethnocentrism: the Arabic, Persian, Turkish literature, etc. The fact is, however, that the classical literature was a supranational system, as I have already stated, for writers had put in their best efforts to construct common cultural, rather than national, values (that, thus, includes common poetics as well). That is why, for example, certain chapters of Rumi’s work were written in Persian, some in Arabic, with the poetic postulates of the ancient Indian and the ancient Arabic literature, all the way to Rumi’s age. Such cases had become, through time, a commonplace of the Oriental-Islamic culture that even refers to its semiotisation. The more syncretic a work, the more valuable it was held. For example, a monumental work *One Thousand and One Nights* contains a “ring” structure which can be traced back to the ancient India, from literature written in Sanskrit, which was later adopted by the Persians in the pre-Islamic period (in the Pahlavi language). It was then adopted by Arabs who considerably enriched it in the period of several hundreds of years. Even the first translation of the work in Europe (by a French Arabist, Jean Antoine Galland, in the 18th century) was so much processed for the reception in the other culture that one can hardly recognise the source text in some parts. But, that is not all: Scheherazade’s magic of a “ring structuring” of the narrative is obvious in a number of other canonical works of that culture – from *Kalila wa-Dimna* (early 8th century CE), through the *The Masnavi* (13th century CE), and other important Sufi works, all the way to, for example, Fevzi Mostārī’s *Bolbolestān* (18th century CE). That poetic principle, as a structuring principle, dominated on a vast space and for a very long time, and that proves that the roots of the cultural empire stem deeper and further than the borders of the empire in the constitutional, that is, administrative meaning.

History of literature is unable to neutralise the new-age favouring of ethnocentric approaches to the area that used to be highly composite, non-ethnocentric. Simply, it is a method that fails to resist the ethnocentric fragmenting of a unique system of classical literature; it does not even possess such abilities simply because it fails – and I have already warned of that – to present the “soul” of literature, that is, *literature as art*, and, instead, it succumbs to the science of history and its needs. This especially concerns classical literature, since the (oriental) philology had a dominant role in its presentation. Thus, a question arises as to what can be done in such circumstances, how to face the desire of classical literature to be presented in/to our modernity the way that it would be presented, through a reconstruction, in new light: as a universe of values optimally “reconstructed” and that are not antiquities but rather *living val-*

ues for us as well. Before I offer an answer to that question, one should emphasise that the part of the world that inherits classical literature in the Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages does not have a developed literary-theoretical thought like that of the West, and that is an additional handicap for the presentation of this literature in the aspects in which, sadly, it has not been presented.

Having seen an abundance of histories of literature that present the classical literature in Oriental-Islamic languages, it is necessary to introduce a poetological approach, because I consider poetology to be highly competent for the presentation of literature as a system of values based upon immanent criteria. Poetologically consistent and coherent endeavours are able to bring about novelties in the understanding and presentation of that vast literature.

Poetological approach has an advantage over history of literature. It is necessary to warn that neither is it possible to completely separate history of literature from poetics, nor do they overlap, notwithstanding some significant efforts to conjoin the immanent and chronological approach (in that sense, the Russian philological criticism of the late 19th century and Alexander Veselovski's *Historical Poetics* are well-known). In the effort to apprehend classical literature, historical approach has greatly produced findings on literature, but it is also greatly suppressed by historicity, suspended by the historical nature of philology, while poetology overcomes it all because it encompasses the vast classical literature as a system of values that are realised in mutual relations. Poetology abandons positivism in the very essence and is dedicated to the outmost efforts to present the very soul of literature as a form of art.

It is here necessary to emphasize the distinction between the terms *poetics* and *poetology*. Namely, by poetics I mean a coherent approach that attempts to grasp and present exclusively literary structures of a work, that is, of an opus. Poetology, on the other hand, is dedicated to those different poetics, in an attempt to present them as functional segments of a (higher) system.

(I have applied that method in my study "Classical Poetry in the Arabic, Persian and Turkish Languages. A Poetological Approach", which is in the final stages of completion. In this study, I present classical poetry in the three languages as a unique, coherent system at the level of poetology.)

Poetological approach to classical literature deconstructs ethnocentric fortifications within which ethnically-nominated literatures are imprisoned, independently separated from a vast system of the classical literature, and that has been done (and it seems to me that it is ongoing) through non-literary factors that include different ideologies, especially national, even nationalistic, and which are fully supported by different politics. Thus, I expect to see denials of my study, but I hope it is protected by consistency and coherency, since it deals with a system rather than its supposedly self-sufficient fragments. Possible opposite argumentation by naming certain works as potential exceptions directly contributes the "damage" of those potential exceptions that have broken away from the system, for, classical literature, keeping

in mind the *poetics of similarity*, truly was a vast, powerful system, hence projecting the modern ideologies to it would be highly inappropriate.

In studying classical Oriental-Islamic culture in general, even the one written in the Ottoman period, the poststructuralist conviction that a closed and completed work does not exist and that every identity is intertwined by traces of the other/others, including other texts as well, proves useful. In other words, there is no text without a context, but the context too is a part of a text, rather than its frame. In the classical Oriental-Islamic literature, the importance of context is very high because *the poetic principle of the sameness* constituted the entire culture as a system with an emphasised activity of centripetal forces in it: that poetic principle acted as a centripetal force in the culture. Namely, culture has strongly and for a long time spread in space and time, so there existed a serious danger for its collapse or disappearance in that vast a space and too deep a time. The poetical *principle of similarity*, that is, an optimally nourished intertextuality, acted as a protection mechanism of that culture, in order not to collapse in space and time. Thus, studying this culture from a national, monologue perspective is futile in the sense of its valid systematisation, and that entails its adequate evaluation.

“National literatures” separated from a unique poetical system of the classical period of the Oriental-Islamic culture – thus, literatures that are today analysed as separate, self-sufficient units – are to be reinterpreted. Ethnocentric, monologue interpretations of the classical literature need to be overcome and situated in history in accordance with the “criteria” deduced from that very literature.