trionic or overplayed. Certainly one could take other approaches. But at no point do I urge readers to "forget the ideas and watch Burke's performance." My interest lies in the complex interrelation of his explicit aims and his performance.

Anne Mallory
University of Georgia

Moving beyond Eurocentric Theory

To the Editor:

As a member of the MLA for more than fifteen years, and having lived and worked in India most of my life, I read Shu-mei Shih's "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition" (119 [2004]: 16–30) with interest. I find the essay relevant to my work as a teacher of several Indian languages and literatures. But what I find puzzling is that Shih, in theorizing perspectives of global literature, succumbs to some sweeping generalizations that suit the Western academy, through a process much dependent on Western postmodernist writing—such as Michel Foucault's concept of technology (although Shih, taking a cue from Teresa de Lauretis, wrests it to suit herself) and the postdifference ethics of the French philosopher Alain Badiou. This reliance on Western thinkers gives one the feeling that theorization, at least now, is the prerogative of the West and that the non-West has to follow, comfortably forgetting the Buddhist and other non-Western philosophers who could surely supply much-needed alternative conceptual bases for theory.

This reminds me of the neglect of native and regional languages in favor of English in countries like India—baffling, considering the number of people for whom these regional languages are vehicles of thought and feeling. I note, too, that the production centers of these kinds of postcolonial theory are not Third World universities but universities and publication departments of the West. Shih's mention of Gao Xingjian (who holds a degree in French and lives in Paris while he writes to his diasporic audience) and Mahaswata Devi (who has been introduced to the West by Gayatri Spivak, a postcolonial theorist familiar in the West and the translator of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*) may not be not enough to shift the familiar paradigm of discourse that is produced by the West, for the West. In Shih's group of writers the only exception is Aijaz Ahmad, an Urdu writer with ample knowledge of Indian literature who seems to have moved back to India from the West and writes less now about the problems for which Western writers often quote him.

I am not recommending a binary opposition of West versus East in theory. I am noting the politics of readership of these theories and observing the emergence of an overall picture of how dissent should be manufactured—or should we say "the technology of dissent"? Whether the globalization mechanism is recognition or re-cognition, the products of such theories are the products of a game based in the West, designed according to the market rules of the Western society and its academy.

Moretti's point that the modern novel rose between 1750 and 1950 is attractive, I think, to any student of literature in Indian languages, which count more than eighteen. But in all these languages, without exception, the genre arose roughly between 1850 and 1950, if you include all kinds of experiments in the form. If Shih's theory of technology is relevant, it is only through a comparison of these native novels with their counterparts in England. But this kind of comparative postcolonial study is a rarity, since many scholars who work in Western English departments have neither knowledge of nor interest in what really happened in these native languages during the colonial era, when the genre of the novel put down roots. I believe that even if Moretti's characterization of the Third World novel as Western plot with local characters and local narrative voice is sweeping, his observation can be useful in understanding the complex mechanism of the Indian novel's global identity and difference and in charting all the shades of multifarious meanings that run through the West-East correspondences of this short period.

Sabarimuthu Carlos
Warsaw University

Reply:

I read Sabarimuthu Carlos's letter with great interest. It appears to make two main points: The first is that my critique of Western theory ends up reaffirming the importance of Western theory by neglecting alternative theoretical paradigms from the

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900167549 Published online by Cambridge University Press

non-West and foreclosing the circuit of dissent within Eurocentric theory. The second has to do with Carlos's defense of Moretti's paradigm as "attractive" for the study of literature in Indian languages. These two points are contradictory, the first proposing the importance of alternative knowledge systems against Eurocentric universalism and the second confirming some sort of Eurocentric universalism.

To comment on the second point first: on the most straightforward level, any theory can be "attractive" as long as it appears applicable, but the limits of that application and the assumption of universalism are where the problems arise. Carlos's defense of Moretti exemplifies for me the extremely circumscribed terrain within which scholars of non-Western literatures must establish their relevance to the mainstream or majoritarian theoretical discussions. Since the so-called theorists rarely interact with non-Western literatures, the few examples of engagement often serve as something like "openings" that allow dialogues for those "imprisoned" by culturalism and area studies. These dialogues, in the form of echoes, critiques, or defenses, are from the get-go prescribed by the terms laid out by the theorists and have always been asymmetrical. These engagements are better than none at all, but the question is whether we also bear the obligation to demand more rigorous ones. Gestures toward inclusion alone do not fundamentally disturb underlying, albeit attenuated, Eurocentrism.

As to how a critique of Eurocentric theory is not sufficient without offering alternative theoretical paradigms from the non-West, I agree to a certain extent. In the context of my research on twentieth-century literatures from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Asian America, it is a truism to say that the West and the non-West are not distinct entities. In my essay, I was trying to articulate the complicated positions of diasporic intellectuals like me who have become "Western" to the extent that the Western tradition is also their own. I think the problem with some of the diasporic scholars working in the United States is precisely that they refuse to "become American," which involves admitting minoritization and racialization and engaging with locally grounded political and intellectual endeavors. Herein lies one of the crucial divisions between ethnic studies and postcolonial studies. Some postcolonial scholars avoid ethnic studies, considering it intellectually not rigorous and adding the claim, mistakenly I think, that focusing on racism in the United States obscures international oppression in the Third World. Conversely, some ethnic studies scholars discourage engagement with international or transnational dimensions of racialization in the United States and do not conduct productive comparisons of external and internal colonial situations at home and abroad. While I agree with Gayatri Spivak that the Eurocentric discipline of comparative literature needs to be opened up to a revitalized area studies (see her *Death of a Discipline*), I also think all disciplines involved (comparative literature, area studies, postcolonial studies) need to recognize the importance of the racialization that continues to structure epistemological and cultural formations in the United States. To not recognize the racialization is to turn a blind eye to local oppression and stay aloof from it. Those of us who are not of the majority race are also fooling ourselves if we think that we have not been minoritized and can remain "cosmopolitans" of some sort. The danger is always that a Third World "cosmopolitan" or "diasporic" intellectual may simply be a more sophisticated version of the "native informant," dressed in fine theoretical garb and trying hard not to be embroiled in racial dynamics in the United States.

Civilizational discourse has its place. Pound had his Chinese poetry, Derrida his Chinese pharmacy, Barthes his empire of signs, but what about the Beijing school of aesthetics from early-twentieth-century China with its Hegel and New Confucianism, Chinese modernist writers from the twenties with their Woolf and Yokomitsu? The issue for twentieth-century literatures, at least, is not whether they are sites of encounter or not but that these encounters have always occurred in uneven terrains. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Buddhism has always been a site of encounter for India, China, and the rest of the world and that Buddhism is very much alive in the West. Its uneven terrains must also be traversed daily.

Shu-mei Shih
University of California, Los Angeles

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900167549 Published online by Cambridge University Press