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Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: Indeed, there is no consensus among scholars on the necessity of literary histories. The way we appreciate and perceive literature changes over time; that is why there is no agreement about the rules of literary historiography. Perception, interpretation and reception of literature changes from one culture to another and one generation to another; therefore, we can write different histories about the same work. Borrowing Sartre's famous quote "*existence precedes essence*," literature and literary history are always in the process of becoming. Literature is not something that exists but something that becomes.

Furthermore, literary history writers must refashion the way they write because modern literature is heavily loaded with ideologies. In other words, literary historiography must shift its focus of the 'literariness' of the text to the politics of the text. For instance, shall we simply define Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as the first modernist work, i.e., defining the novella and explaining its form and techniques? Or shall we discuss its functionalities? Conrad for some literary historians is a giant of English literature, but for other critics is a bloody racist. So, what history shall we write?

Indeed, literary history remains a hard genre. As an Algerian scholar, I believe that literary history writing is necessary for all cultures and nations as they need a register for their cultural productions. We need to keep literary history up to date. There are countries like my country, Algeria, that do not have up-to-date statistics on how many literary productions and critical works are published each year. I have never encountered a literary historical encyclopedia of Algerian literature even though our literary history can be traced back to the second century AD with the publication of the first known novel in world history entitled *The Golden Ass* by the Numidian Latin-language author Apuleius. I believe it is the job of universities, the ministry of culture and research centers to

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refashion literary history writing taking advantage of technology. Digitization nowadays can help create a literary map or a literary encyclopedia in which different literary genres, movements and works can be readily thought about, studied, and examined. I believe that digitization and statistics can help refashion literary history writing. There are floods of narratives being published each year, and while we try to devour past texts in the hope of charting and mapping them, the shadows of futurity are cast upon us. We need technology. In a word, applying algorithmic methods, quantitative and technological tools will transform this genre into 'digital literary history.' Indeed, it is high time to refashion this genre of literary historical analysis proving that numbers, literature and history are not opposites.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: Yes, literary history is preoccupied with identity that is among the most important formative experiences of human history itself. I cannot think of an author who writes without an identity, culture, or ideology. Authors do not write on a cloud detached from the socio-historical and cultural realities that surround them. The politics of writing literary histories thus reveals that the act of writing itself is turning into a culture, a tradition, and a discourse. Let us say a German writing his history for instance will glorify his literature, we may say he is not interested of 'what is German literature' but 'what is the German nation'. An African will defend his national culture and literature against colonial legacies, an Irishman will celebrate his Irishness, a feminist will advocate women's voices and gender equality. Therefore, literary history turns into a tool to enhance national culture, identity, and ideologies. We thus shall have as many histories as literary cultures.

Besides, literary history writing in that case can borrow from ethno-linguistics and socio-linguistics. In short, borrowing Frantz Fanon's words, I can call this endeavor of charting histories of literary cultures as the whole body of efforts made by a people in a sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence via literature.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy

than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: As I said before, authors do not write on a cloud detached from the socio-historical context that surrounds the act of writing and reading. It is difficult to avoid the relationship between text and context. Even literature that reflects individual lives does intersect with governments, monarchies, bureaucracies, wars, plagues and so forth. The authority of literary periodization as a diachronic model used by anthologies where there is a beginning and an end is epitomized in the comparison and contrast between literary periods and movements. In other words, a literary anthology has to start somewhere and end somewhere, but what makes literary history approaches different from those of history departments is comparison and contrast. For example, I can discuss new literary histories such as post-9/11 literature. How the 9/11 attacks changed the lives of so many people around the world. How literature responded to the so-called war on terror. I, therefore, divided literary history using one of the most important events in the new millennium. We may call this new literary period the Age of Terror. So, we are creating a new literary period.

The problem is that, as you pointed out in the first question, this is a conservative old-fashioned method. I believe we can develop new methods of reasoning better than following linear concepts of time, drawing boundaries, beginning and ends. One can disagree with temporal boundaries used here, notably that modern literature is built on multi-layered and multi-dimensional concepts of time. We as scholars can reject this authority of periodization by focusing on the logical change and development of literature rather than the chronological change. Again, this takes me back to the first question, where I highlighted the importance of digital technological tools that may offer new methods of studying gradual continuous changes of literature.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: In fact, the contemporary or contemporaneity is a word that suffers from semantic ambiguous usage. What is the 'contemporary'? Is it a type of art that comes after modernism? Can we call the art we produce now: post post post-modern? I am interested here in the application of the word in a global context. I do not think all nations are familiar with modernist principles; modernism as a way of thinking and as philosophy is absent in many third world countries. We cannot reach contemporaneity skipping other stages. As an Algerian scholar, I assure you that modernism is nothing but a metaphorical concept that has no

real presence in my country. Modernism is synonymous here with secularism, cultural imperialism and even blasphemy. The Algerian individual fails to cope with modernist ideas. He is living a constant conflict between several binaries, notably the past and the future, the progressive and the reactionary. Therefore, contemporaneity in that case is nothing but a word that describes the actual moment, it is stripped from its philosophical epistemological meanings. The Algerian is living in the past, he glorifies his past and wishes to revive it because of his failure to create a present contemporary identity. His present is declining, his future is degenerating. His present is not a good birthplace for modernist ideas. So, what history shall we write about him? Shall we write about his past only since he is stuck in it? His past is an obstacle for his present and future. It is like he is living in a museum of old glories; he is not trying to create and invent his own heritage. He cannot break with the past. He lives on the crossroads of cultures and times, he is fragmented. In short, we only possess and own modern products and contemporary items like smartphones, cars and others; however, our mindsets reside in the past. I believe art and literary historians will find themselves in a crisis on how to deal with such contemporaneity.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: Before answering this question, I want to say that there is literary chaos in Algeria. Publication is turning into business par-excellence. Anyone can pay a publishing house to publish his work. They do not care about the scientific or artistic value of the work. As a result, there are floods of poor-quality published poems, novels and stories; houses of publications turn into printing shops, nothing more, nothing less. They make dough from these so-called writers obsessed with fame. In well-established publishing houses, they pay you for your ideas. They have reading committees and strict editors. If this was the case here, no one would publish. So, as literary historians, how are we going to choose selected works as representatives of their time? How to select the best novels, criticisms and poems in the midst of this chaos? Is the selection procedure objective? Shall one single person do it or is it collective? Is it the job of research centers, universities and research teams to write literary history? It must become a domain of collective research. It is becoming a huge work that single authors cannot handle. To achieve objectivity, collective research is better.