

# On World Literature, Exile and Cosmopolitanism: An Interview with Professor Galin Tihanov

Song Baomei

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**Abstract:** Galin Tihanov is George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature at Queen Mary, University of London, the member of Academia Europaea and Honorary President of the ICLA Committee on Literary Theory, who is a major scholar in the fields of Comparative Literature and Intellectual History. Song Baomei, associate professor from Northeast Agricultural University, interviewed Professor Tihanov when working as a visiting scholar at Queen Mary, University of London. This interview encapsulates Professor Tihanov's view on world literature, exile and Cosmopolitanism. Beginning with the features that differentiate Bakhtin from other contemporary currents of literary and cultural theory and his relevance to the twenty-first century, Professor Tihanov makes thought-provoking remarks on the issues on the necessity and importance of exile and exilic writing for world literature and comparative literature, believing that the prism of exile allows us to go beyond the constraints of national literature, the concept of world literature and how the regional literature fits into the dynamic of redefining of the concept as well as his view on the Euro-American idea of world literature, and finally the concept of cosmopolitanism and its relationship with the study of world literature.

**Key words:** Bakhtin; Exile; World Literature; Comparative literature; Cosmopolitanism

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**标题:** 论世界文学、流亡主题和世界主义：加林·提哈诺夫教授访谈录

**内容摘要:** 加林·提哈诺夫是伦敦大学玛丽女王学院比较文学系乔治·斯坦纳讲席教授，欧洲科学院院士，国际比较文学理论委员会荣誉主席，是比较文学和思想史研究领域的领军学者。本文作者在伦敦大学玛丽女王学院访学期间，对提哈诺夫教授进行了面对面的学术专访，访谈内容主要涉及世界文学、流亡主题文学和世界主义等重要论题。

提哈诺夫教授从巴赫金的独特性和当代性入手，分析了巴赫金与当代文学理论之间的关系；阐释了世界文学与比较文学研究中流亡主题书写的必要性和重要性，认为流亡主题文学可以使我们超越国别文学的界限；分析了世界文学的定义以及地域文学对世界文学的意义，提出了打破世界文学欧美中心论的观点；探讨了世界主义的概念及其对世界文学研究的促进作用。

**关键词：**巴赫金；流亡；世界文学；比较文学；世界主义

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**Song Baomei** (Song for short hereafter): Your first English-language book was on two towering figures of the 20th century theory, Bakhtin and Lukács. Before we start discussing exile, world literature and cosmopolitanism — the areas of your current research and writing — I am tempted to ask you: what sort of thinker was Bakhtin, how did he differ from other contemporary currents of literary and cultural theory?

**Galin Tihanov** (Tihanov for short hereafter): First, it seems important to me to recall the features that differentiate Bakhtin from two currents in literary theory that were particularly influential in the last century: Formalism and Structuralism. Bakhtin's fundamental disagreement with the former is over the formalists' lack of interest in meaning. But Bakhtin does not construe meaning as a stable category that inheres in the text and is then mobilised from time to time to serve an ideological agenda. Nor is he really a thinker in the hermeneutic tradition, despite all protestations to the contrary and despite all semblances. Bakhtin is not excited about involving the work of art in a circle of questions and answers where the parts and the whole participate in a process of mutual disclosure, and do so from a particular historical perspective that eventually fuses with that of the critic's interrogating mind. His idea of meaning is inspiringly monumental: it is cold and distant in its celebration of "great time" as the true home of meaning; at the same time it is reassuring and inviting, in that it addresses the uncertainties of the future with composure and a triumphant declaration of openness and acceptance of that which, to quote Bakhtin, "lies ahead and will always lie ahead". Unlike Structuralism, Bakhtin is interested in the inner dynamics of meaning revealed in the transitions between different discursive genres/types. This change is sometimes context-dependent; sometimes it is bound to the flow of time and is measured on the scale of centuries and epochs; yet most frequently the inner dynamics is generated by the alteration between pre-set discursive possibilities: monologue and dialogue, grotesque and classic, official and popular — as was the case with Bakhtin's great teachers in the art-historical tradition: Wölfflin who constructed the opposition between classic and baroque, or Max Dvořák and Worringer

with their juxtaposition of naturalism and abstract art. Bakhtin's history of discursive genres operates on such a vast scale that sometimes the historical dimension in it gets entirely dissolved, and what the reader ends up with is a typology rather than a diachronic account. The conflicts implicit in these typologies are often of epic proportions; Bakhtin enacts in his works a discursive typomachia of an intensity and scope rarely seen before him. His narrative is grand not just in Lyotard's sense, but also in the more immediate sense of breath-taking solemnity and wide-open vistas revealed in his texts.

**Song:** What is Bakhtin's relevance today, in the 21st century?

**Tihanov:** If Bakhtin's labeling as a formalist and structuralist teaches us something about the ways in which his thought was integrated and his reputation made outside the Soviet Union during the 1960s and the 1970s, we also need to ask how Bakhtin's work was able to negotiate the transition to postmodernism and post-structuralism that began to be acutely felt already in the 1970s and occupied centre stage until about the close of the 20th century. For all the virtues he had, he would not have been able to stay afloat in the market of ideas if he was perceived solely as a traditional 'grand narrative' type of thinker, whose work was shaped and peaked during the first half of the past century. Here I come to Bakhtin's most important claim to still being our contemporary today. I think Bakhtin's intellectual brand, that which he did better than most, was the gradual forging of a theoretical platform informed by what I would call humanism without subjectivity (or at least without subjectivity understood in the classic identitarian sense). In the mature and late writings we find an odd Bakhtinian humanism, decentred, seeking and celebrating alterity rather than otherness (in Kristeva's distinction), and revolving not around the individual but around the generic abilities of the human species to resist and endure in the face of natural cataclysms and in the face of ideological monopoly over truth. Bakhtin is probably the single most gifted and persuasive exponent in the 20th century of that particular strain of humanism without belief in the individual human being at its core, a distant cosmic love for humanity as the great survivor and the producer of abiding and recurring meaning that celebrates its eventual homecoming in the bosom of great time. In the Rabelais book this new decentred humanism takes on the form of a seemingly more solidified cult of the people, but even there it rests on an ever changing, protean existence of the human masses that transgresses the boundaries between bodies and style registers and refuses their members' stable identifications other than with the utopian body of the people and of humanity at large. This new brand of decentred humanism without subjectivity is Bakhtin's greatest discovery as a thinker and the source, so it seems to me, of his longevity on the intellectual scene where he sees off vogue after vogue, staging for each new generation of readers the magic of witnessing the birth of proximity without empathy, of optimism without promise or closure.

**Song:** A lot of your recent work has been on exile. Why is it necessary and helpful for students of world literature to study exilic writing?

**Tihanov:** I think it is vital to realize the centrality of exile and exilic writing in the making of world literature. Not only is writing about exile a specific mode of producing a particular version of the world; it is also a way of thinking about movement, mediations, transfers, and boundaries. Crucially, exile is one of the foundational discourses of modernity that interrogates memory, identity, and language. Today's notion of world literature is inseparable from a transnational and cosmopolitan perspective, which is intimately — and in a characteristically contradictory manner — linked to exilic experiences and the practice of exilic writing. Exile provides the resources for a critique of the liberal idea of unhampered mobility; it often also unhinges the European model of identity between one national culture (literature) and one corresponding national language — a model which did not exist until the arrival of modernity and the strong nation state, and which crumbles vis-à-vis the experience of places like India that have always been marked by linguistic pluralism, which makes such a model impossible. Romanticism is a key formation in the European experience: it is precisely in the folds of Romanticism that the nexus between language and nation, and between language and national culture, is discursively produced and reinforced. Fichte's praise of the German language; Central and Eastern European purism; the idea of the poet as enunciator of national values and the prophet of national triumph — these are all phenomena engendered by Romantic ideology and inscribed in the metanarratives of Romanticism. And it is against this powerful and resilient nexus that the figure of the exile assumes its ambivalent prominence. It is not by chance that the literary canons of a number of Central and Eastern European countries, particularly those who had to fight in the 19th century for their independence or unification, rest on works written by Romantics who were also exiles (Poland and Bulgaria are two good examples). But today we need to de-romanticize exile and see how helpful it is in relaxing the bond between language, literature, and national culture. It is the prism of exile and migration that allows us to go beyond the constraints of “national literature”: is Nabokov a Russian or an American writer; is Beckett an Irish or a French writer? These questions — dictated by the logic of approaching literature solely as “national literature” — are pretty meaningless, in my humble opinion: Nabokov was both and neither, and so was Beckett. What is more, Nabokov is a brilliant example of breaking up the identitarian model I was referring to above: the language switch in Nabokov does not occur when he arrives in the United States: his first English-language novel was written while he was still living in Paris. Understanding this has everything to do with world literature and with realizing that world literature is sustained, above all, by the movement of languages which change in fascinating ways as they encounter other languages, past and present.

**Song:** Would it be fair to say that exile has been important not just for the field now known as “world literature” but also for the discipline of comparative literature?

**Tihanov:** This is a very good question. Many years ago, I published an article in which I submitted that the birth of modern literary theory around World War One had everything to do with exile and migration. This article proved to be very influential and has generated responses in books and articles by others, not just literary scholars, but also film historians, cultural theorists, etc. But modern comparative literature also begins life in exile, with the Istanbul works of Auerbach and Spitzer, and their post-war continuation in the United States. The qualifier “modern” is not trivial here: I mean by this a comparative literature that had moved beyond the nineteenth-century model of examining cultural bilateralisms and exchanges between nations and had instead embraced a wider perspective that focuses on larger supranational patterns: mimesis, style, genre, etc. Auerbach and Spitzer behaved, of course, differently in Istanbul; Spitzer was eager to learn Turkish and to immerse himself in the local culture; Auerbach hardly looked further than German and French in his communication with colleagues and his teaching. But despite that he wasn’t a total stranger either (contrary to the propensity to portray him, in the Romantic vein, as an example of creative solitude). In contradistinction to Said’s apparent emphasis on the Orient as an environment shaped by Western cultural ideologies, recent research has emphasised Atatürk’s indigenous — and rather proactive — revival of humanist values that marked the scene at the time of Auerbach’s work in the city.

**Song:** Drawing on your answer to my previous question, maybe we can now move in a more focused fashion to questions to do with world literature and, later, also cosmopolitanism. What according to you is world literature, and what is it about a text that bestows upon it the special status of being part of “world literature”? This is a basic question!

**Tihanov:** All basic questions are difficult to answer. There is perhaps a mainstream today, an Anglo-Saxon mainstream, which understands that by “world literature” the circulation of texts, predominantly in translation, is beyond the environment in which they are written, and I think this is a very good starting point. It needs some nuancing and some qualification, but it does capture very well the fact that “world literature” only exists through the travel of texts, and languages. If we want to understand world literature, I always keep saying this to my students: the way to do so is to ask the first primary question— what happens to language as it travels across borders? Sometimes, this is the language of translation, sometimes it is the language of a community which traverses borders and reaches the diaspora, or it is from the diaspora back home. But I’m not entirely sure that there is a set of qualities that make a text part of world literature, because “world literature” in the predominant understanding — and this goes back even to Goethe — undermines this fixed

hierarchy of texts according to aesthetic merit. These works don't necessarily need to be masterpieces to be part of world literature, but they need to be able to open a window, as David Damrosch puts it, on to a different culture for a community of readers who share the conventions of another culture. Whether the texts necessarily are of the highest aesthetic merit or not is of, perhaps, lesser importance. And, when you look at Goethe's experience, when he starts thinking about world literature, part of the inspiration to do so comes from reading a Chinese novel, which, he says to his private secretary, Johann Eckermann, is far from being the best Chinese novel available. So early on, there is this notion that world literature, in order to sustain this reality of circulation, of transfer, doesn't have to confine itself to texts of extraordinary artistic merit. It is more about which texts are better suited to crossing borders and which are less so. And, we probably also need to disentangle success from merit, because you can have a perfectly great work of literature, particularly poetry, that is very difficult to translate and for that reason does not travel very well. This does not make it a work of lesser standard; it just means the circulation I refer to would absorb it with more difficulty.

**Song:** Do the language of origin and the nation which forms the setting to the text have a major say in deciding the status of the text as world literature? Does language have the final word?

**Tihanov:** There are two questions here: one is about language; the other is whether the nation is empowered to compile this list of works that should travel. Now, the whole idea of world literature is that the significance of a literary text would actually be a matter for the receiving culture to decide; just as in the example with Goethe, the Chinese novel would not be seen as necessarily part of the best achievements of Chinese literature at the time, but it is this novel that proves significant for Goethe (he actually read three Chinese novels). And equally today, nation states and their instruments of influencing this process are not as strong as they used to be. In other words, the nation state, the national culture would have produced a particular canon of works, but we might find that works which are not part of this canon are widely read and more influential in other environments. And, the second question is of course the question of language...

**Song:** For instance, we are able to access both ancient and recent texts only because they are available in English. Is it imperative for a text to be written in or be available in English for it to be part of world literature?

**Tihanov:** Not necessarily, particularly if you think of this historically; you would find very interesting thinkers on World Literature, particularly between the two World Wars who actually lamented the demise of World Literature that, they believed, had taken place with the arrival of modernity and the nation state. They were convinced that texts that deserve the status World Literature are exclusively of the time when the educated elites in Europe



wrote and read in Latin and Greek. With the arrival of the nation state, national cultures, and competing cultural nationalisms World Literature was supplanted by these bickering national literatures. If you look at Sanskrit, the argument has been made very aptly by Sheldon Pollock that Sanskrit has been a language of World Literature for about 10 centuries in the whole of the Indian subcontinent, between the 3rd and the 13th century AD. So, from a historical perspective different languages would underpin the notion of World Literature: Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, and today increasingly English. Even now, I would not necessarily say that a work must be translated into English before it becomes a part of world literature. Language, of course, helps greatly. But World Literature actually subsists on the life of cultural zones, which are in dialogue, but are nonetheless, distinctive. And in these cultural zones, different languages have a dominant position. Globalisation, while privileging English, does not abolish these cultural zones: the “zonality” of world literature, as I call it, is an idea I have been championing in recent lectures and publications.

**Song:** Yes, so, then, is the idea of world literature, still largely Euro-American? Or do you see it gaining more diverse ground in the years to come?

**Tihanov:** Now, yes, world literature is largely perceived as a European discourse, which begins some 50 years before Goethe, with, actually, a historian called August von Schlözer, but I don't think this idea of world literature ought to be confined to Europe and North America. What needs to happen, in my view, is for us to get access to versions of world literature, conceived of in other cultural zones that have a different aesthetic experience, different cultural traditions, different sets of cultural conventions, and different dynamics. And, once these versions of world literature emerge, we can examine it by taking into account this heterogeneity and specificity. For example, what would world literature look like from the Indian subcontinent? India, in particular, is very well placed to make a crucial contribution to this debate due to its cultural variety and linguistic heterogeneity. Because of this radical cultural and linguistic pluralism, India can't be easily re-essentialised. We can't easily fall in the trap of talking about the “Indian understanding” of world literature. I think we desperately need the contribution of scholars intimately acquainted with non-European, non-Western traditions in order, then, to have a credible set of reference points that would enrich and also negotiate the way we think of world literature in the future. At present, our thinking about this comes from the sole set of reference points available on the table — the Western, and in many ways I would say, the Anglo-Saxon. And, we do need to hear other voices to realise that there is no single world literature. There are *world literatures*, both historically speaking and also today.

**Song:** In India, which you mentioned earlier, could this change come about with greater focus on regional literatures?

**Tihanov:** This is arguably one way. Another would be: We talk about world literature, and that is the Western tradition of world literature, as if we actually are in possession of solid knowledge of all major traditions. With reference to Chinese, Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, this might be the case at least to some extent. But how much do we know, for example, about the literatures of Central Asia? There is very little expertise on this in the Western mainstream, and it's largely a blank page! So, how could we possibly talk about world literature, while not being able to identify this entire regional variety? Therefore, I think China, India and Russia, because of their historical ties with this region, would be very well placed to close this gap, to bring these literatures to light. And, also through the exploration of Indian regional literatures, we can begin to construct a scenario of world literature that is non-Eurocentric — that does not have national literatures and national cultures as the sole prism of reflection; that works with large supra-national, regional prisms, or with a sub-national prism. This is very important.

**Song:** Could you give us a historical retrospective on the changing definition of literature, and elaborate on how East-European literatures fit into the dynamic of redefining or recasting the concept of world literature; especially since you have done a lot of work in the area of East-European cultural and intellectual history?

**Tihanov:** This is a wide-ranging and complicated question because if you look at the European notion of literature, what it comprises, and what it doesn't, fluctuates over time. As late as the 17th century, a good piece of philosophy would perfectly well deserve to be called "literature", and to be studied as literature. This also applied to autobiographies, essays and other forms of writing.

There is a tipping point in Europe associated with the second half of the 18th century, where gradually emerges this notion of "literature" which insists on literature being a discourse that is autonomous from other discourses. At first, in what we still, partly by inertia, refer to as "the Romantic period", this separation of literature from other discourses proceeds not so much via language but via the figure of the writer. The writer is marked out as exceptional. He is not a philistine, not a bureaucrat. He is someone who produces texts that have no immediate purpose, no immediate utility; and literature becomes the social and aesthetic practice recognised for its intrinsic value, unlike journalism, unlike sermons in the Church, unlike court decisions.

Only actually fairly late, around World War I, do we begin to think of "literature" as an autonomous, specific discourse by attributing this autonomy to language. This is, chronologically speaking, a late phenomenon. But if you go to China then you discover that the European classification would no longer necessarily work, because a lot of earlier Chinese texts would be seen, for instance, as an example of didactic writing. These texts, particularly



after the 18th century, would no longer be considered “literature” in the European mainstream.

China preserves this broader notion of literature for longer. And texts we would think of as didactic — and, therefore, not original enough, in the sense of not quite seeing the traces, the presence of authorial imagination and originality in these texts — in the Chinese tradition these texts would be credited and recognised as literary texts for longer, and there would be no such sharp contrast between didactic texts and texts that are grounded in authorial imagination and originality.

If you go to the Arabic cultural realm, on the other hand, you’d find that a lot of what defines there whether a text is literary or not hinges on criteria drawn purely, and primarily, from rhetoric. In other words, how sonorous, how beautiful, how symmetrical a text is; and the content itself, while important, doesn’t take precedence because it is often anchored in a religious message that should not be varied; that message is inimitable, it can only be rendered with a varying degree of rhetorical sophistication and perfection.

Finally, with reference to Eastern Europe, it seems to me that what distinguishes these literatures is the fact that, historically speaking, they have retained their function as instruments of nation-building and platforms of social and political debate for much longer.

**Song:** I’d like to ask another question related to West Asia. Most of the reading lists of departments and universities that offer programmes on world literature don’t usually include texts from West Asia. The exception is, of course, Orhan Pamuk. Could it be that the Muslim World is rather under-represented in such curricula, or do you see any kind of conflict of interest at play here?

**Tihanov:** No, I don’t see a conflict of interest, but I’m wary of the fact that the curriculum, after all that has been said and done, is still biased, by and large, towards European and North American literatures. Having said that, anthologies such as Norton and Longman have gone to great lengths to actually widen our access to texts that are believed to be representative of the Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit traditions. Pamuk, of course, is a major presence amongst contemporary authors, but if you go back to the classical period you will discover excellent samples of Arabic and Persian poetry, and texts in Sanskrit... Turkey, of course, thinks of herself as a country that is divided between Europe and Asia; looked from China and India, of course, it makes a lot of sense to refer to Turkey as part of West Asia. But, no, I don’t think there is a conflict of interest.

Religion does, of course, play a role here, but in a more fundamental way, in my view. We tend to neglect religion generally, not just Islam, in our present Anglo-Saxon understanding of World Literature. We bracket out religion, we work with a very “secular” notion of world literature at present, forgetting two things: First, historically, religion has played a huge role in shaping up large realms of shared languages and shared religious practices which

sustained world literature before globalisation. And then, equally important, we forget that at this particular juncture in the 21st century, religion is very much back, disrupting this secular Western order.

Neglecting religion and not entertaining this necessity to actually integrate religion into how we think about world literature is something we do at our own peril. Without recognising the role of religion in the formation of world literature and in the contacts (often through competition and sometimes also conflict) between large cultural zones, in the past and at present, we will end up working with a rather shrunk and impoverished notion of world literature.

**Song:** The themes of cosmopolitanism and translation seem to be your current areas of interest. How would you prefer to put these issues across to your students? What is the methodology that you adopt here? Would you prefer that they embrace this ideology of cosmopolitanism, and shape themselves into cosmopolitan citizens? Or do you expect anything else?

**Tihanov:** I think there are forces larger and stronger than the instruction in the classroom that would shape the way these students grow and develop. You are right to point to the fact that cosmopolitanism, in a sense, is a product of Western culture, and it does have an ideological baggage which people tend to neglect sometimes. And it's a word that doesn't travel very well in non-European languages. In China, for example, if you try to translate "cosmopolitanism", you would get an equivalent which retains the component "cosmos" but entirely omits the other component, "polis". That has to tell us something about the fact that cosmopolitanism originates in a set of European concerns at a particular historical moment. We are talking here, in particular, with reference to the modern political doctrine of cosmopolitanism which begins with Kant and his project of "eternal peace". I have always insisted we should carefully distinguish between two "cosmopolitanisms": one is what I call "cultural cosmopolitanism", and the other is "political cosmopolitanism", and they don't always overlap. They are very distinctive doctrines; I am analysing them in a short introduction to cosmopolitanism that I am writing at present.

**Song:** Which do you think is easier to practise?

**Tihanov:** I think they both come with their baggage, and with their benefits. There is a brilliant early essay by Nikolai Trubetzkoy, the great linguist, which focuses on the role of national intelligentsias in resisting attempts to forcefully westernise non-Western cultures. Trubetzkoy believed that the intelligentsia is particularly susceptible to such westernisation. We can, then, ask: why is it that in *War and Peace* you can find entire passages in French, or, in Miroslav Krleža's play *The Glemboys*, entire passages in German, in conversations between people whose language was not German; why is it that the upper-class in India embraced and

sustained English? The intelligentsia, due to the nature of its preoccupation, the nature of its work, always has divided loyalties — loyalty to the nation but, also, loyalty to this, sometimes invisible, community of other intellectuals, other scholars, other writers, without whom the entire process of writing, of research and teaching would not be possible. It would collapse. And even if it didn't, it wouldn't be achieving its very best, and it would be to the detriment of those who are involved in it immediately and those who are meant to benefit from it.

**Song:** Do you think that this concept of cosmopolitanism could be used to further discussions of literary texts and the study of world literatures?

**Tihanov:** I think so. There is already important work in this field by my colleagues in the United States — Rebecca Walkowitz and Aamir Mufti come to mind, and that's just a couple of examples—, in Britain, and elsewhere. But we need to be careful not to conflate cosmopolitanism with universalism, even as globalisation frequently tempts us to do this. We need to remain aware of the fact that cosmopolitanism, unlike universalism, and often against the grain of globalisation, insists on cultural difference being preserved, cherished and embraced rather than simply tolerated. This link between cosmopolitanism and world literature needs to be made carefully, in a nuanced manner, in a fashion that doesn't produce an indiscriminate playfield in which texts simply circulate in a single language — forgetting their own past. Even English is different in Britain, in Australia, in India, in the United States, with a different history and baggage; and sometimes with a different set of functions.

**Song:** So retaining pluralism is something that you believe is important.

**Tihanov:** Yes, and also retaining a sense of things not always being equivalent across borders, retaining this notion of difference that can't be dissolved even in the age of globalisation. It is, of course, another issue that globalisation is now facing challenges, and what the right response to these challenges might be: not to retreat from it, in my view, but to revisit nonetheless some of the dogma associated with its seemingly unstoppable march. But this is another set of questions.

**Song:** You just now referred to some of the French passages in *War and Peace*. This brings to mind *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot. How would you look at this text and its incorporation of different European and Eastern languages?

**Tihanov:** Yes, that's my point. Even texts that we associate with High Modernism, which is so constitutive of the Western tradition, and still so dominant in the classroom when you teach English Literature of the inter-war period — even these texts are wonderful examples of polyglossia sustained by impulses from other languages and cultures. Eliot is not the only example. Look at Ezra Pound, who can't be understood or appreciated without an understanding of Chinese culture; look at the impulses he draws from China, at his recreation of Chinese culture — because what he does in *Cathay* and other pieces is not really translating

Chinese poetry, it is a recreation of Chinese culture in this medium of High Modernism.

**Song:** So both Eliot and Pound give us a very good clue to look at their works not singularly through the Western prism, but through the prism of a real cultural encounter?

**Tihanov:** The irony, of course, is that for a long time, because of Ezra Pound, Western scholars would think that Chinese literary modernism was little else but a product of the penetration of Chinese culture by the West. The truth is that some of what gets exported to China had already itself benefited from earlier impulses drawn from Chinese culture. So it's not as if the West directly impacts on non-Western cultures. Considering this example, we see that what arrives in the East and proves to be seminal there, has sometimes already been shaped by impulses coming from the East. It's very important to appreciate this.

**Song:** Yes, you are right. Over the last few years, various non-Western writers have produced some of the best fiction in the world. What is it about these books, for example, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* or Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* that appeals to a global audience? Or, let us say, to readers back in your homeland of Bulgaria?

**Tihanov:** It's very nice of you to refer to Bulgaria. I hesitate whether to go into this question of home because this is precisely part of the work I've been doing lately on exile and cosmopolitanism. I'm trying to see how the notion of home is not immediately available, is complicated, and is sometimes simply not there as a reference point. So we should probably leave this idea of Bulgaria as "home" aside. And I don't exactly know how a Bulgarian audience would respond, or has responded, to these two novels. The other difficulty is that if one is invited to comment on global responses or Western responses to these texts, there is always the danger of beginning to inadvertently either essentialise them or orientalise them, or both.

Rushdie's position, of course, is different in that respect because he's been a traveller and border-crosser. Many in the West, when they read *Midnight's Children*, were fascinated by these stories of dramatic reversal; but also of patience, of love, of miracle, of something which we have learned to refer to as "Magical Realism". As for Roy's text, it's seemingly along the lines of a family novel, extremely dramatic, tragic in many ways; and yet also slipping over into conventions that a Western reader might recognise sometimes as family saga, pressing on buttons that are sometimes close to the melodramatic. It is this beautiful mix of all these different strands that make it so rich. However, in response to your question, I think it's very difficult, and sometimes not the right thing, to speak for a global audience.

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