History Compass 3 (2005) AS 151, 1–13

Literary History: The Case of South Asia

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Abstract

This article considers the area of literary history in general and the literary history of South Asia in particular. It focuses on Sheldon Pollock's edited volume, *Literary Cultures in History. Reconstructions from South Asia* (2003). The article outlines the three broad approaches to literary history in order to clarify the methodology underlying Pollock's *Literary Cultures in History*, the additional problems which literary histories of South Asia must address, and it shows how Pollock's volume engages with these problems. Finally, it considers how this volume is an important and revisionary contribution to the study of South Asian literary history.

The relationship between historical and literary studies can be a vexed and difficult one. At the heart of this difficulty lies the possible conflict between historical methods of analysis and the formal or stylistic analysis of texts deemed 'literary'. Here the conflict consists of how the historical contextualisation of a literary text, from the moment of its origins to the history of its transmission and reception, might be inimical to the nature of a literary text as an aesthetic artefact. Historical method might reduce the complexities of literary texts by treating them as documents which are transparent to the historical, social and economic circumstances in which they are produced and received, rather than grappling with their stylistic and formal complexities as verbal artefacts. In this context, historical method and critical analysis appear to work with two opposing ideas of the text, the first operating with the notion of a document as reflecting its historical and social contexts of origin and transmission, and the other working with the notion of a literary work as an autonomous verbal object, a self-referential entity which generates its own techniques of analysis and criticism, and which therefore cannot be reduced to the original context in which it was produced. This model of the text assumes that the meanings of literary texts are always in some way trans-historical.

These difficulties are apparent in the ambiguity of the terms 'Romanticism' and 'Romantic', which can refer to both a critical concept and a historical period. They are even more apparent in a term such as 'Postcolonial', which can be used in antithetical ways by historians and literary critics. On the one hand, it can denote a historical epoch, referring to the period beginning with the formal dismantling of the European empires in Asia and Africa in

the twentieth century. On the other hand, one of the most influential texts in the field of postcolonial literary studies defines the term against this usage, arguing that '"Postcolonial" as we define it does not mean "post-independence", or "after colonialism".' It refers to 'the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being.'[1] While it is clear that such a definition assumes the primacy of historical method, since 'colonialism' is itself a historically specific set of processes (I leave aside here the question of how there is no unanimity among historians themselves about the nature of modern colonialism as historical process), the tendency in literary studies is to focus instead on the intricacies of what another scholar has called 'the textuality of empire'. The concern here is with the dominant meanings and symbolic practices of these texts, and how these were challenged or subverted by 'postcolonial' texts. As Boehmer argues, 'as well as a change in power, decolonization demanded symbolic overhaul, a reshaping of dominant meanings. Postcolonial literature formed part of that process of overhaul'.[2] Here, the term 'postcolonial' begins to refer to a mode of critical interpretation, rather than a historical period as such, so that one can now have postcolonial readings of Renaissance texts, not just of (say) literary texts produced within British and post-Independence India. The obvious example here is the reinterpretation of canonical texts such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, initiated by O. Mannoni who used the play in his book *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1956), as a way of illuminating his own study of colonialism in Madagascar, by considering how it illustrates the psychology which underpinned the political and economic processes of colonialism. This focus on psychological and symbolic processes, rather than with dateable and verifiable historical processes alone, is a feature of an influential strand of postcolonial criticism as a mode of interpretation and is perhaps best exemplified by the work of Homi Bhabaha, as well as the more lucid work of John Barrell in his *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (1991).

The split in the way terms such as 'Romantic/Romanticism' and 'Postcolonial/Postcolonialism' can be used illustrates the complex relationships between historical analysis and literary studies. In the main, there are three representative approaches to the investigation of these relationships. The first is best exemplified by Jerome McGann, who combined historical methodology with a close reading of literary texts in his excellent *The Beauty of Inflections. Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (1985). He argued that the governing approach of all literary investigations must be a historical one. Crucially, he also argued that it is precisely because literary texts transcend their originary moment that they require historical analysis and commentary. Poems and poetry acquire their trans-historical perpetuity by virtue of the 'particular historical adventures' which they undergo as texts from their first appearance through all subsequent constitutions. Our experience of the poem as both a finished artefact and a trans-historical text depends upon our initial experience of

the poem's social particularity. Moreover, failure to employ a historical method of analysis also has a knock-on effect, in so far as by 'losing a critical sense of the past, the interpreter necessarily loses his ability to see his own work in a critical light'.[3] McGann shows how a close reading of the uniqueness of a poem can only be undertaken by grasping the social and historical 'filiations' of its uniqueness, and to this end, he conducts a series of brilliant readings of specific poems, combining close stylistic attention to the texts as verbal artefacts with a historical excavation of their social and historical contexts.

The second, more extreme approach, was to invert the terms of the question of the relationship between history and literature by considering how historiography is itself a genre of literature, and as such, a finished and autonomous verbal object. This approach is best exemplified by Hayden White's provocative and valuable analysis of historiography as a 'verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing them*'.[4] White analysed the key works of canonical nineteenth-century historians in terms of the organizing genres of literary studies (such as romance, comedy, tragedy and satire), and argued that the master historians of that period wrote history in the modes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. While I cannot do justice to the complexity of his argument here, its upshot was to claim that we are free to conceive 'history' as we please, just as we are free to make of it what we will. In particular, he argued that the historical field is constituted as a possible domain of analysis in a linguistic act which is 'tropological in nature'. The dominant trope in which this act is carried out determines 'both the kinds of objects which are permitted to appear in that field as data and the possible relationships that are conceived to obtain among them'.[5]

The third approach is best represented by Paul Ricoeur's three-volume tour de force, *Time and Narrative* (1984–5). This study of the representation of temporality in narrative is *sui generis*, in so far as it combines philosophical rigour with literary analysis, to the mutual illumination of both. Ricoeur's subject matter is how the 'world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world', how 'time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after narrative', and how narrative in turn 'is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal existence'.[6] This brilliant work reinterprets the works of major philosophers (such as Aristotle, St. Augustine, Hegel and Heidegger) as it utilizes them to reconsider the question of the nature of time and its representation in narrative in a range of texts. However, for our purposes, what is central here is Ricoeur's investigation into the relationships and differences between fiction and history. He shows how both historiography and fiction borrow from each other. Put simply, while there seems to be an undeniable asymmetry between the referential modes of historical and fictional narrative, the reference 'through traces' (monuments, documents, ruins) of a real past in history

borrows from the metaphorical reference common to every poetic work, in as much as the past can only be reconstructed by the imagination, and is also added to by it. Similarly, since every fictional narrative is told as though it has taken place, it borrows a part of its referential dynamics from this 'reference through traces'.[7] He concludes that fiction is quasi-historical and history is quasi-fictive, and that this relationship is a circular one, so that it is as 'quasi-historical that fiction gives the past the vivid evocation that makes a great book of history a literary masterpiece'.[8]

These three approaches are not mutually exclusive and in practice most studies of literary cultures in history might contain elements of more than one of these approaches. This is certainly the case with the magisterial 1066 page long study edited by Sheldon Pollock entitled *Literary Cultures in History. Reconstructions from South Asia* (2003). As far as the question of 'history' is concerned, the contributors to the volume tend to gravitate towards the perspectives which structure Hayden White's and Paul Ricoeur's work, that is, they approach the category of 'history' from the viewpoint of the 'literary'. The volume as a whole endeavours to show how the literary cultures in question have constructed their own senses of history. Pollock makes this clear in his 'Introduction' when he argues that the volume will explore how people have done things with the past by examining the different 'modes of temporality' which have worked to structure South Asian literary cultures for the participants themselves.[9] His own essay on Sanskrit literary culture is an intriguing example of this. By examining the poetic genealogies in the genre of Sanskrit praise-poetry, he shows how the attempt to resist all periodization was fundamental to Sanskrit literary culture's self-understanding.[10] Many of the other contributors also focus on what might be called moments of self-representation in South Asian literary cultures, as articulated in anthologies or related texts of compilation and remembrance, in order to tease out the concepts of textuality, space and time which structured pre-modern South Asian cultures. Pollock groups these texts under the category of 'ethnohistories', although the inelegant term 'autoethnohistories', would have been more accurate. This governing assumption of the volume is best illustrated in Steven Collins's essay on Pali literature, which examines the *vamsa* genre of historical literature in Pali from the perspective of contemporary discussions on relationships between historiography, narrative and 'literariness'. Although he does not mention any specific texts which have contributed to these contemporary discussions, the space they open up enables him to consider the *vamsa* genre not as a source for writing 'modern event-history', but as historiographical texts which were significant literary achievements in their own right.[11] Another representative essay in this context is Francis Pritchett's chapter on Urdu literary culture, which examines the complexities of the genre of the *tazkirah* in Persian and Urdu.[12] Norman Cutler's essay on Tamil literary culture explores a fifteenth-century anthology of poems, amongst other texts, for the insights it gives us into the 'ways of cognizing and using literature at

particular points in time and in particular environments', and for its representation of a 'distinct mode of making and performing Tamil literary culture'.[13] Similarly, Rich Freeman analyses the fourteenth-century grammar-cum-poetic text, the *Lilatilakam*, as one representative moment of the formation of Malayalam as a creative project of social identity, while Charles Hallisey examines the ninth-century poetic handbook, *Siyabaslakara* to show how Sinhala was transformed from a local language into a literary idiom.[14]

The reconstruction of the literary past from 'inside' is supplemented by the 'view from outside' in order to address those ruptures in South Asian literary cultures which are not addressed within the traditions themselves.[15] This reconstructive project is undertaken to superb effect in most of the contributions to the volume, and in doing so, it challenges three main assumptions of conventional literary histories of South Asia. First, the project counters the way in which the modern inception of the nation-state is projected backwards, so that 'literary history manifests itself as national history'.[16] As Freeman puts it, 'the notion of a single, bounded territory belonging to a politically united people bonded by language and a consequent shared sense of identity does not seem clearly articulated before modernity. This notion, however, has been consistently projected back onto the historical record from the vantage point of its modern achievement.'[17] The retrospective projection of the nation-state gives us 'very little guidance about the criteria by which we might distinguish one literary culture from another, or one literary period from another'.[18] For this reason, the reconstructive project of the volume is premised on disentangling South Asian literary cultures from a historical teleology in which the nation-state is the 'necessary end point', and therefore the starting point, of literary history.[19] The second assumption of conventional South Asian literary histories, which is closely related to the first, is what Sitamshu Yashaschandra has called the 'isolationist' literary histories of the regional languages of the subcontinent, which ignore the polyglot nature of pre-modern India. The narratives of these regional literary histories has 'no space at all for the others'. Here, Yashaschandra draws attention to the complex relationships between native forms of speech, premodern regional languages and post-Independence regional languages.[20] It is this complexity which most of the contributors address in their essays. The third assumption which is questioned is the linkage which is taken for granted between literary language and religious community in dominant understandings of South Asian literary history. The volume as a whole suggests that this linkage has very little foundation for much of that history. Here, Pollock's essay on Sanskrit literary culture is representative of the volume as a whole. He shows that the choice of which transregional language to write in was not dictated by religious affiliation, and that the modern assumption of 'an exclusive and exclusionary concomitance between Brahmanism and Sanskrit' is false.[21]

Most studies of the relationship between historical method and literary studies point to how the categories 'history' and 'literature' vary over time, but added to these variations are the equally important variations across and within cultures themselves. In this sense, Pollock's volume has to deal with a second set of issues which pertain to both the cultural specificities and historical particularities of the categories of 'literature' and 'history' in South Asia. There is also another issue as well, which relates to the word 'reconstructions' in the title. Here 'reconstructions' refers not just to the general problem of reconstructing the past through its traces in the present, but also the linguistic specificities of the polyglot nature of South Asia before the mid-nineteenth century. As Pollock himself notes, many of the literary texts in these languages are available in the older precursors of contemporary regional languages, and the expertise to read in these languages is rapidly dwindling, both in South Asia and in the Western academy.[22] In this sense, the word 'reconstruction' has an urgent dimension to it. Moreover, given the polyglot nature of South Asia, it is virtually impossible for any one single figure to study the multilingual literary cultures of the subcontinent as a whole in any historical and/or critical depth. This means that any study of South Asian literary cultures has to be a collaborative one, as is the case here, but it also means that each contribution may have a slightly different emphasis or focus from the others. The critical expertise of each contributor involves a level of specialism which can preclude collaboration just as much as it necessitates it.

In this sense, *Literary Cultures in History* is a highly visible reflection, both in its sheer size and the relationships between its contributors, of the complexity of the multilingual nature of South Asian literary cultures themselves. Moreover, the contributors have to grapple with yet another problem, which relates to the identification of, and the boundaries between, individual languages in the pre-colonial period. While the mapping of languages by the British State in India culminated in G. A. Grierson's monumental 11-volume *Linguistic Survey of India* (1927), even he was led to question the 'fictionality' of the mapping of languages when he noted that

> [t]he identification of the boundaries of a language, or even of a language itself, is not always an easy matter. As a rule, unless they are separated by great ethnic differences, or by some natural obstacle, such as a range of mountains or a larger river, Indian languages gradually merge into each other and are not separated by hard and fast boundary lines. When such boundaries are spoken of, or are shown on the map, they must always be understood as conventional methods of showing definitely a state of things which is in its essence indefinite. It must be remembered that on each side of the conventional line there is a border tract of greater or less extent, the language of which may be classed at will with one or other. Here we often find that two different observers report different conditions as existing in one and the same area, and both may be right.[23]

This recognition of the provisional nature of identifying and mapping South Asian languages in the twentieth century is even more germane to the literary landscape of pre-colonial South Asia, in which it is impossible to think of languages as stable, single and discrete. In this context, there are a number of points which differentiate *Literary Cultures in History* from other literary histories. The first is the self-conscious attempt in the volume as a whole to grapple with how the literary cultures at issue, in varying degrees, themselves 'invented' and stabilized their languages. This is one of the common threads running through the volume as a whole. Many of the contributors define themselves against what Pollock calls 'the homogenizing procedure of literary history'.[24] V. N. Rao argues that there was no such thing as 'Telegu literature' as we now understand it before literary historians produced its historical narrative in the early decades of the twentieth century. His essay avoids this retrospective linear construction, paying attention to the linguistic varieties of the texts which were produced in what later came to be known as 'Telegu'.[25] Similarly, Norman Cutler deliberately eschews what he calls 'an omniscient master narrative', opting instead for focusing on three key moments in the genealogy of Tamil literary culture. In doing so, he rightly argues that the realms of the literary as evinced in these three moments are in striking contrast to the writing of Tamil literary histories in the twentieth century.[26]

Thus, in keeping with the volume's project to 'reconstruct' the literary cultures of South Asia, the contributors define themselves against the homogenizing imperatives of twentieth-century literary histories of South Asia. The contributors show how the terms for the contemporary languages of South Asia were often multiple, and examine how these precursors stand in complex historical relationships to the contemporary linguistic entities they contributed to. Rich Freeman opens his essay on the literary culture of pre-modern Kerala with precisely this point. In his consideration of the texts which were produced in what is now the modern state of Kerala from roughly the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries, he makes it clear that the writers of these texts did not regard the language varieties and hybrids in which they composed as aspiring towards a regionally standardized and uniform language medium. Until the gradually stabilizing term 'Malayalam' over the last few centuries, there was no distinctive name for the local language; it was just *bhasa*, speech in its many varieties.[27] Furthermore, the use of the term 'Tamil' overlapped with 'Malayalam' into the British colonial period.[28] Similarly, S. R. Faruqi and Stuart McGregor consider the language varieties and hybrids which have now been subsumed under the terms 'Urdu' and 'Hindi'.[29] The difficulty of identifying stable and discrete languages in pre-modern South Asia is compounded by what Ali Asani calls 'scriptural pluralism'. He shows how the scripts used in Sindh varied from one geographical region to another, and how different religious and caste groups favoured distinctive script styles.[30] This scriptural pluralism was also a feature of the linguistic varieties which were later subsumed under the terms 'Hindi'

and 'Urdu'. In the case of the 'Indianization' of English, here 'Indianization' refers to the way in which the indigenous languages of the subcontinent have penetrated into the English language, rendering the boundaries between English and the languages of South Asia porous.[31]

The volume's reconstruction of South Asian literary cultures extends to considering how languages were not necessarily tied to any specific regional territories in pre-modern South Asia, so that the question of the 'space' which languages and literary cultures occupied also needs to be rethought. As Pollock argues, literary culture exists not just in time but also in space.[32] The re-examination of pre-modern literary cultures as a 'spatialized phenomenon'[33] is especially pertinent given that the provinces of India were demarcated on a linguistic basis between 1956 and 1960. This demarcation reinforced the 'territorialist' imperative behind Grierson's linguistic survey of India, by assuming that the administrative and geographical boundaries of the Indian states were coterminous with the dominance of specific, stable and discrete languages. In taking issue with the 'anachronistic teleology' implicit in the writing of modern Bengali literary history, Sudipta Kaviraj argues that this teleological historical reasoning obstructs the asking of some interesting questions, by re-reading the past in terms of a development towards a 'single territorial configuration' for a homogenous literary culture.[34] As Matthew Kapstein demonstrates, this is equally the case with the category of 'South Asia' itself. In his fascinating discussion of 'The Indian literary identity in Tibet', he argues that Tibetan language and literature are both of and alien to South Asia, and that they resemble Persian and English in having lives both inside and outside the realm we call South Asia. From the perspective of language and literature, 'South Asia' is not a clear cut conception, but one that blurs as its margins are neared.[35] The general point is also made by Pollock, who in his 'Introduction' stresses that the terms 'South Asia', 'India', 'Bengal' etc. are culturally and historically constituted, and intrinsically relational, which is why they can be revised, with the partition of 1947 and the creation of Bangla Desh in 1971 being the most dramatic revisions.[36] Similarly, V. N. Rao argues that the literary geography of Telegu is not easily identifiable as the area of Andhra Pradesh today. He shows how Telegu literature was produced in many areas that are not included in contemporary Andhra, and also how writers articulated variable notions of the extent of Andhra at different points of time. Conversely, even when Telegu literature was produced in areas that are now part of Andhra Pradesh, Telegu was not the only language of importance.[37] In his lucid and rigorous exposition, Sitamshu Yashaschandra shows how in the case of Gujarati, political and linguistic boundaries cannot always be mapped onto each other. He analyses the problem of the territorial extent of literary cultures in South Asia in terms of four different relationships, which is a very useful way of tackling the issue.[38] In doing so, he unsettles terms such as 'Gujarat' and 'Gujarati literature', which he argues have been misleadingly employed as stable signifiers in contemporary historical accounts of Gujarat

and its literature. A similar approach is evident in Freeman's essay, which shows how the territorial concept implicit in the literary culture of Kerala is at odds with contemporary notions of single, bounded territories belonging to a politically united people sharing a homogenous language and a consequent common identity. Instead, he argues that this notion has been projected backwards onto the historical record from the vantage point of its modern achievement.[39]

Thus, one of the foci of the volume is the way in which reconstructing South Asian literary cultures in history involves recognizing that the languages of pre-modern South Asia cannot be clearly demarcated from each other, either linguistically or spatially. The governing viewpoint of the volume is how literature stabilized the idioms of these hybrid varieties, thus paving the way for the subsuming of these varieties within the apparently stable languages of contemporary India. Rich Freeman's essay perhaps speaks for the rest in its aim to reject the notion of a single language in favour of an array of language varieties anchored to different social communities and working in different contexts. It is only thus, he argues, that we can reconstruct the literary cultures of South Asia.[40] In this sense, then, Freeman's essay is less a descriptive taxonomy of the literary culture of South Asia as it existed in the past than a methodological prerequisite for the volume's project to reconstruct pre-modern South Asian literary cultures. However, another way in which the contributors approach this question of the identification of the languages of pre-modern literary cultures is to consider the multilingual environment of pre-modern India and how it differs from that of contemporary South Asia. Here, they focus in particular on the relationship between transregional and cosmopolitan languages such as Sanskrit and Persian, and the so-called vernaculars. In doing so, they offer a series of nuanced and revisionary readings of the relationships between these master languages and what Pollock calls their 'vernacular others'.[41] There are a number of key points which emerge in this context. First, the cosmopolitan and transregional languages of Sanskrit and Persian were hardly monolithic unities. Muzaffar Alam's essay is devoted to showing how Persian was Indianized in many ways, and he also considers the reasons for its increasing identification as the language of Iran alone.[42] Similarly, Freeman makes the point that by the tenth century CE Sanskrit drama was already a multilingual sphere, in which characters were socially differentiated by whether they spoke Sanskrit or the various artificial Prakrits that had developed from Indo-Aryan vernacular languages.[43] He ends his essay by arguing that far from being a monolithic edifice, Sanskrit was playfully fractured by the 'vernacular spirits' of writers such as the eighteenth-century Nambyar, who brought together the content of Sanskrit literary and religious works with the performance metres, modes and songs of purely local festival forms. Secondly, as D. R. Nagaraj argues, the categories of cosmopolitan and vernacular, as opposites defined against each other, are inadequate for treating South Asian literatures. To this end, he shows how the first

non-inscriptional text written in Kannada, the ninth-century *Kavirajamarga*, sought to build its literary tradition by accommodating both the cosmopolitan and the vernacular. Moreover, he also makes the important point that while vernacular literary tradition is often conceptualised in terms of its tension with the cosmopolitan traditions from which it is excluded, it becomes a zone of exclusion itself in its bid to achieve literary propriety or what he calls a 'territoriality of admissible forms'. Vernacular literary traditions valorize the speech of certain geographical locations as a 'privileged linguistic space' which ties together authors spread over different regions.[44] He further suggests that the author of the *Kavirajamarga* sought to represent the vernacular in the image of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan.[45] Similarly, Freeman's analysis of the adaptation of Sanskrit and its genres to the milieu of Kerala shows how the Sanskrit cosmopolis 'is writ small within the regional compass'.[46] The other contributors to the volume also revisit the relationship between cosmopolitan and vernacular literary cultures from a different perspective. In his 'Works and persons in Sinhala literary culture', Charles Hallisey argues that Sinhala literary cultures have participated in more than one translocal cultural formation at a time, not just Sanskrit, and have been inflected by the appropriation of literary practices, genres and values from a number of these. He challenges the assumption that Sanskrit was always a translocal literary culture whose values and practices were superposed onto a local literary culture for reasons having to do with the aspirations of the local. In contrast, he argues that between the tenth and fifteenth centuries CE, Sinhalese authors combined an appreciation for the vision of the literary in Sanskrit culture, with a resistance to the encroachment of Sanskrit on the forms of Sinhala used for poetry.[47] Finally, Sitamshu Yashaschandra develops a new understanding of the relationships between Sanskrit and Gujarati. His essay argues that in the early phase of Gujarati literary culture, poets saw the relationship between Gujarati and Sanskrit as 'two denominations of the same system of currency' rather than two different systems. Moreover, their metaphors also suggest that regionality should contain a sense of the larger world, and vice versa. Yashaschandra goes on to show how in the second moment of Gujarati literary culture's emergence, it was the regional literature which transformed the transregional literary culture. Pre-colonial South Asians learned how to be regional and transregional simultaneously, place-specific and place-transcending at the same time and through the same texts. His analysis bears fruit by showing how Gandhi's *Hind Svaraj* exemplifies this inverted relationship, by producing a work of global significance within the parameters of Gujarati literary culture.[48]

It is clear then that *Literary Cultures in History* is a monumental work of revision, which is a valuable contribution to South Asian literary history in particular, and conceptions of literary history in general. It seeks, by and large successfully, to undo the dominant contemporary understandings of South Asian literary history which, in my experience, structure the teaching of South Asian languages and literatures in some major university

departments. The volume as a whole both celebrates and recovers a historical narrative of linguistic hybridity in which multilingualism consists of languages merging into and interpenetrating each other, rendering any notion of clearly identifiable regional languages tied to exclusive religious communities in pre-modern India simplistic in the extreme. It also celebrates how in pre-modern South Asia, with its multiplicity of literary traditions and multilingual scholarship, texts moved across languages in different ways, and how the audience / readership for literary texts was always a multilingual one. On this basis, V. N. Rao goes so far as to suggest that 'the concept of a mother tongue is a foreign, post-nineteenth-century idea in India'.[49] There are, to be sure, some exceptions to this celebration and re-possession of pre-modern literary cultures. The contributors on Hindi appear to disavow the multilingual histories of South Asia's complex vernacular traditions, seeing in the case of Hindi the assertion of 'full literary independence' from this past.[50] Here, the title of both the essays on the 'progress of Hindi' reflects the progressive teleology of conventional South Asian literary histories as national histories, which the other contributors define themselves against. However, both McGregor's and Trivedi's concluding remarks are in conflict with the sound scholarship which forms the bulk of their essays. There is a similar conflict in Faruqi's essay on Urdu literary culture, between his rich scholarship on the multiple names for Hindi/Urdu, and his assumption that the complex vernacular traditions these names refer to are the legacy of Urdu alone.[51] In this sense, the divide between his essay and Trivedi's and McGregor's essays is a revealing one. The latter seek to disavow the hybrid pre-histories of 'Hindi', while the former seeks to repossess these narratives under the subsuming and dominant term of 'Urdu'.

Nonetheless, these aspects of their essays are very much exceptions which prove the rule, and as a project of reconstruction, Sheldon Pollock's *Literary Cultures in History. Reconstructions from South Asia* will remain required reading for students and teachers of South Asian literary cultures for many years to come. Students of literary history in general would also greatly benefit from this volume, which in addition to engaging incisively with the defining problems of all literary histories, rises magnificently to the challenge of the many other complex issues which are central to the study of South Asian literary cultures as a whole.

Notes

[1] B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 117.
[2] E. Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 3.
[3] J. McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections. Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 22, 125, 131.
[4] H. White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 2, emphasis in the original.
[5] Ibid., p. 430.

[6] P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984–5 [1983–4]), vol. 1, p. 3.
[7] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 82. This argument is developed through the three volumes, but see especially vol. 1, Parts 2, 3, Section 2.
[8] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 190.
[9] S. Pollock, 'Introduction' in *Literary Cultures in History. Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. S. Pollock (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003), pp. 1–36, 18, 19.
[10] S. Pollock, 'Sanskrit literary culture from the inside out', *Literary Culture in History*, pp. 39–130, 79–80.
[11] S. Collins, 'What is literature in Pali?', *Literary Culture in History*, pp. 649–88.
[12] F. W. Pritchett, 'A long history of Urdu literary culture, Part 2: Histories, performances, and masters', *Literary Culture in History*, pp. 864–911.
[13] N. Cutler, 'Three moments in the genealogy of Tamil literary culture', *Literary Culture in History*, pp. 271–322, 271.
[14] R. Freeman, 'Genre and society. The literary culture of premodern Kerala', *Literary Culture in History*, pp. 437–500; C. Hallisey, 'Works and persons in Sinhala literary culture', *Literary Culture in History*, pp. 689–746.
[15] Pollock, 'Introduction', p. 21.
[16] Ibid., p. 12.
[17] Freeman, 'Literary culture of premodern Kerala', p. 443.
[18] Hallisey, 'Sinhala literary culture', p. 721.
[19] Pollock, 'Introduction', p. 12.
[20] S. Yashaschandra, 'From Hemacandra to Hind Svaraj. Region and power in Gujarati literary culture', *Literary Culture in History*, pp. 567–611, 582, 568.
[21] S. Pollock, 'Sanskrit literary culture', p. 69.
[22] Pollock, 'Introduction', p. 3.
[23] G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, 11 vols. (Calcutta, Government of India, 1927), vol. 1, pp. 30–1.
[24] Pollock, 'Introduction', p. 18.
[25] V. N. Rao, 'Multiple literary cultures in Telegu. Court, temple, and public', *Literary Culture in History*, pp. 383–436.
[26] Cutler, 'Genealogy of Tamil literary culture', pp. 271–322.
[27] Freeman, 'Literary culture of premodern Kerala', pp. 437–500.
[28] Ibid., p. 442.
[29] S. R. Faruqi, 'A long history of Urdu literary culture, Part 1: Naming and placing a literary culture', *Literary Culture in History*, pp. 805–63; S. McGregor, 'The progress of Hindi, Part 1: The development of a transregional idiom', *Literary Culture in History*, pp. 912–57.
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