

Understanding Foreign Masters. The Examples of Rabindranath Tagore and Fyodor Dostojevskiy

Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore was received like royalty during his visits to the West after winning the Nobel Prize 1913. The excitement about his person is reminiscent of the intensive media coverage of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi or Dalai Lama during the latter part of the century. In a time when the West appeared to be living under threat of disintegration and when industrialism seemed like a cul-de-sac. Tagore appeared to offer the promise of a return to a lost paradise. A Swedish writer, Anders Österling, expressed this situation in his travel book *A Breath of India* (1923):

“The soot of industrialism is raining over the literature of the West. No dreamer can wear white clothes there. Tagore’s writing must arouse notions of a supernaturally early summer dawn, a morning before the morning, where we wander in a transparent landscape, where the sun has a different position than we have ever seen before.”

Tagore was given a warm reception during his two visits to Sweden in 1921 and 1926. However, interest in him was a relatively short-lived phenomenon. After a steady stream of translations after his Nobel Prize, Tagore’s popularity flagged towards the end of the 1920s and then almost disappeared entirely. In the book *The World beyond the West* (1988), a Swedish historian, Åke Holmberg, makes a negative evaluation of interest in India after Tagore’s Nobel Prize:

“Tagore was an episode in Sweden. When the speeches in honour of the occasion were over, everything returned to normal and lethargic apathy once again settled over the Orient. Behind the conviction that the East was not capable of learning from the West, there was a popular psychology which equipped Turks, Persians and Indians with a passivity that stifled all new approaches.”

The conception of a vegetative and passive East has existed for a long time. However, this is close to another conception, i.e. that India represents a highly advanced, spiritual culture that is superior to the restless Western culture. This idea also has a long history, and it returned with considerable force in the latter part of the 1960s.

Rabindranath Tagore’s career can be associated with the processes that transcended national borders at the turn of the century. In 1878, he made his first visit to England. His idea of a synthesis between East and West took shape and was developed during his second visit to England in 1890. Tagore’s admiration of the English culture diminished around 1905 when anti-British sentiments emerged in Bengal. In 1912, he travelled once again to Europe with a number of poems that he had written after an illness. He translated them himself into English and called the collection *Gitanjali*. Tagore was introduced to the cultural elite in London. He met William Butler Yeats, the Irish poet and dramatist, who later wrote a eulogistic foreword to *Gitanjali*. The book was published in March 1913 and was reprinted ten times before Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in November 1913.

The formal proposal to award the Nobel Prize to Tagore came from an Englishman, T. Sturge Moore, who was a member of the Royal Society of Literature in London. However, Moore did not motivate his proposal in detail. This created problems for the secretary of the Academy at that time, Per Hallström, who had been given the task of

providing an expert opinion. There are two such opinions in the Swedish Academy's archives in Stockholm. In the first, which is dated April 1913, Hallström admits that he is relatively ignorant of Indian literature. With his strong interest in religion, Tagore is likened to St Francis of Assisi. The poems in *Gitanjali*, which form the basis of the opinion, are compared with "Catholic mysticism" and with the *Song of Solomon* in the Bible. Hallström was reluctant to evaluate Tagore's poems: "It goes against the grain to put a monetary prize on purely religious poetry".

The other opinion is more exhaustive. Most attention is still paid to the religious traits in Tagore's poems: "Every poem is a prayer and an absorption in unity and harmony – you can call it monotonous, but the you have rejected the genre, which has never made an effort to find something new for its God". The Nobel Committee now had access to the collection of poems *The Gardener*, and the collection of essays *Sadhana*, both published in English in London in 1913. On the other hand, the Committee knew nothing of Tagore's criticism of religious, social and political orthodoxy. In the Committee's opinion, his poems are said to have been "a surprise of an extraordinary kind". The Nobel Committee aspired to make as balanced a judgement as possible. They did not want to be hindered by "the exotic in his work", by "his Western admirers' publicity", or by "the propaganda of the theosophical enthusiasts". Nevertheless, Tagore's idealism is praised unreservedly. The opinion speaks of Tagore's writing as "evidence of a mystical piety". Tagore "stands out as listening to the voices of nature in a warm belief in noble ideals of mysterious origin", and his worship of God is described as "a type of aesthetical theism".

Tagore had already met Swedes before he travelled to Sweden. A young student, Karl Hammargren, had heard about Brahma Samaj (a reform movement that Tagore was active in) and travelled to Calcutta to get to know the country and to improve the standard of living of the poor. Hammargren has almost been forgotten in his home country but Tagore wrote an admiring essay on him in his collection *Creative Unity* (1922). In this essay the young Swede is described as almost a classical Indian sadhu, who worked entirely without consideration of his own person and who also succumbed to the hardships he endured:

"The attitude of his mind, the manner of his living, the object of his life, his modesty, his unstinted self-sacrifice for a people who had not even the power to give publicity to any benefaction bestowed upon them, were so utterly unlike anything we were accustomed to associate with the Europeans in India, that it gave rise in our mind to a feeling of love bordering to awe."

Moreover, in the spring of 1912, Prince Wilhelm of Sweden also visited the Tagore family in Calcutta. After he had returned home, Prince Wilhelm collected his impressions in a book *Where the sun shines: recollections and notes from a journey in the Orient* (1913). According to Prince Wilhelm, his hosts were critical towards the English: "hatred of the English lay secretly simmering, like a smouldering volcano ready to erupt at any time". It is interesting to note that Prince Wilhelm mentions that the "youngest" of the Tagore brothers, "the family's librarian", was not at home at the time of his visit. The travel book is dated "September 1913". In other words, at that time Prince Wilhelm was not familiar with the writings of Rabindranath Tagore. When Prince Wilhelm's information on the Tagore family's critical attitude towards the English reached Europe, Tagore's popularity in Germany grew - as a manifestation of German rivalry with England.

Tagore was not present personally to receive the prize in 1913. He visited Sweden for the first time in May 1921, and then in August and September 1926. The well-known explorer, Sven Hedin, received Tagore as a guest during his visit in 1921. He also met him a number of times during his travels in Asia. The picture he gave of the Nobel laureate in *Great Men and Kings* (1950) is typical of the creation of the myth around Tagore:

“The young Rabindranath could sit motionless for hours in his garden and meditate in deep devotion. Squirrels scampered over his shoulders and the morning birds sat on his head and knees. In his home he was surrounded by literature and music and he loved the Upanishads and other ancient holy Indian scriptures. Later he participated in the publication of new editions of these scriptures.”

The article also gives an on-the-spot account of Tagore’s visit to Stockholm in 1921. Hedin was impressed by Tagore: “It was a splendid sight to see the fine-looking Indian poet beside the equally imposing Teutonic director of the Office of National Antiquities, Montelius, travelling in an open carriage to Tagore’s residence at the Grand Hotel. Hedin’s pro-German feelings are well known and, in this description, Tagore personifies the old notion that the people of northern Europe and India have a common origin.

A description of Tagore’s visit to Stockholm was also given by Archbishop Nathan Söderblom in his book *Sundar Singh’s Message* (1923). Sundar Singh was a Hindu who converted to Christianity and thereby attracted attention in the western world. A section in the book is devoted to Tagore, who is described in the same spirit that characterises so many other descriptions of him.

“It is accordingly a human, not a national, ideal that Tagore - with all his enthusiasm for Indian languages and the future independence and self-government of the Indian nations – establishes for India’s people. Any person alone with Tagore, or in a small group, with Tagore, who heard him speak about these things could see how close these issues are to his heart. He is a man of ideals, in both body and soul. Pure air surrounds him. When he stood there and intoned his address in a high and delicate falsetto like India’s bards and sacrificial priests, he appeared so unworldly, and his manners were so ceremonial, deliberate and measured that one was completely surprised to feel his communicativeness and enthusiasm when talking to him privately.”

Before Tagore came to Sweden, he visited Copenhagen for a few days. A journalist, Märta Lindqvist, gave a lively account of his visit to Copenhagen in a Swedish morning newspaper, *Svenska Dagbladet*:

“Rabindranath’s second day in Copenhagen was blessed with brilliant high summer weather from early in the morning, when Tagore and his Danish friends went for a drive towards North Zealand, to the evening when the students of Copenhagen paid tribute to him with a splendid torchlight procession after his recitation at the Student Union.”

Märta Lindqvist attaches great importance to the agreeable appearance of the poet:

“His makes very few movements. Mostly he sits motionless in his armchair with his arms on the armrests, his head raised but his eyes looking downwards. At times he looks up behind his gold rimmed eye-glasses – the only western aspect of his appearance – and one can meet the gaze of the sparkling dark eyes: mild, beautiful and expressive. His skin is remarkably light – he look like a sunburned white man; his features are pure and noble. The impression one gains from a fleeting meeting with Tagore is that of a pure idealist and dreamer: the resemblance to Christ in his face and character naturally contributes to this.”

A visiting Oriental teacher of wisdom could evidently encounter a strong response at that time. When new impulses are introduced, it is of great importance that they are supported by people who have a good reputation in the recipient culture. These persons legitimise the new signals and thereby make it possible to increase the inflow of new ideas.

From 1916 onwards, Lindquist became an established journalist at *Svenska Dagbladet*. Initially, she mainly wrote about films, fashion and dance. From the mid-1920s - in other words just after her meeting with Tagore - she moved increasingly towards Christianity and became interested in subjects such as the Salvation Army and the activities of the Seamen's Church abroad. Her description of Tagore heralds her new orientation. After the Great War, all parts of Europe sought spiritual regeneration. Sometimes this need could, as in the case of Tagore, give rise to superficial projections. Märta Lindqvist regards Tagore as a "sunburned white man", and Sven Hedin lets him preside at the side of "the imposing Teutonic Director of the Office of National Antiquities, Montelius". The tone in Märta Lindqvist's article is dreamy, although the conversation she refers to in her article should rather have stimulated critical discussion:

"I do not oppose law and government, Tagore explains, and India has experienced invasions and foreign governors before. But the difference has been this – the invaders have then settled in the country, regarded it as their homeland, blended with our people, and made India's interests their own. Now the situation is different. I cannot like foreign dominion whose representatives evade all contacts with the people, above all in a spiritual regard. The English say: India is divided internally. If we left the country to its fate the result would be chaos. I answer: the division has also occurred in other countries and it is up to each country to unite and reconcile. To keep the contending forces artificially calm and in order does not mean that the causes of the friction have been eliminated. England harbours interest, not love, for India and its interest is the same as that of the butcher for the beef cattle. It is this exploitation of our country in the service of selfish purposes that I cannot like."

The criticism of the English is remarkably severe and could well be part of the explanation of Sven Hedin's enthusiasm for Tagore's message and person. However, when the audience is over, Lindqvist ends her description of Tagore on a more elevated tone:

"His followers urge him on; dinner at Nimb awaits, thereafter the Student Union and then the torchlight procession and then, at last, rest – but it will be brief since the daybreak usually finds the old man awake, deep in meditation, deriving sustenance for his inner life whose purity and peace are reflected in his poetry."

The picture of the semi-divine poet obscures his sharp criticism of western culture. This feature in the report on Tagore's visit to Copenhagen recurs in descriptions of his stay in Sweden. Tagore arrived in Malmö in the evening of May 22 and was received "with resounding cheers, for which he gave silent thanks". After he had received a bouquet of flowers and made a short address, Tagore continued his journey northwards: "The train departed on time, at 10.55, to the accompaniment of renewed cheers from the crowd". He arrived with his travelling companions in Stockholm the following morning and was met on the platform by the secretary of the Swedish Academy, Dr Karlfeldt, Countess Willamowitz-Moellendorff, the author Fia Öhman, and others". A large number of people had also assembled here and "the surging crowd" outside the station "received Tagore in silence and with bare heads". Tagore drove with Dr Karlfeldt to the Grand Hotel.

After the princely reception, Tagore held an address in Stockholm in the evening of May 24. The arrangement was also splendid here, which can be seen from a report in the newspaper *Uppsala* of May 27: "The stage had almost been transformed into an orangery, with a colossal decoration of flags at the back of the stage, the rostrum completely concealed in flowers." The author of the article, Baroness Annie Åkerhielm, perceived the address as: "a distant, remote reflex of the religious ecstasy that is the mysterious property of the East". Nevertheless, the message must have been disheartening for the audience. In his address, Tagore distinguished between two powers: the creative and the destructive. The former binds "individual to individual and people to people" and is represented by both Buddha and Jesus. On the other hand, the destructive power, "the material power that is the distinctive feature of the West and which divides and oppresses people and violates the souls of the people in the way that the European factory chimneys blacken the Ganges, the waves of the strange river – this is the destructive force."

Åkerhielm emphasises that most of all it was Germany that had understood Tagore's greatness: "the European country where, through their philosophical and mystical disposition, the soul of the people is most closely related to that of India." The judgement on the English is more severe: "England will never be successful again to draw the veil of oblivion over India and what happens there." In general, Tagore had his greatest successes in Germany, while in England and France he was mostly the centre of attention of an intellectual elite. As an example, it can be mentioned that 800 000 copies of Tagore's works had been sold in Germany by October 1921, a figure that widely exceeded the sales figures of acclaimed contemporary German writers like Rainer Maria Rilke or Stefan George.

Åkerhielm made her debut as a writer around the year 1900 and then devoted her time to journalism. According to a reference book, *Swedish Men and Women* (1955), she represented "a conservative outlook" and saw her task as "trying to strengthen the sense of duty in people to create a counterweight to all the slackness and all the disintegrating tendencies of the time". Quite clearly, the aristocratic Åkerhielm had seen a kindred spirit in Tagore. Her pro-German attitude strongly resembled Sven Hedin's enthusiasm for things Germanic and, like Hedin, Åkerhielm saw an ally in the Indian poet.

Tagore also had time to make a visit to Uppsala before continuing his journey to Oslo. He visited the archbishop's residence and, with Nathan Söderblom as his guide, familiarised himself with Odinslund, a historical royal burial site from Viking times in Uppsala. Thereafter, in an ecumenical spirit, he made a visit to the Cathedral. At the Cathedral the choir sang in his honour (both Swedish folk music and sacral music) and the chairman of the Student Union gave a speech in French in honour of the poet. Tagore was thanked for what he had given to humanity and particularly to "nous étudiants de cette université la plus boréale que vous avez visitée."¹

Everywhere he was met by tributes, regardless of the distrust of the West that he expressed. There were few critical voices, even if they were not totally lacking. In

¹ "the students at this university, the most northern university you have visited"

Modern Mysticism (1930), Tor Andrae, a historian specialising in religious history, expressed his apprehensions about the interest in Eastern religion:

“For a long time Europe, and even more so America, has been afflicted by a stream of Eastern prophets with long flowing hair and dark eyes, and they all appear to have found a market for their preaching. A number of good people introduce them and act as their apostles. These people are more eastern than the Orientals themselves and cannot belittle Europe’s culture and religion enough in comparison with the wisdom of the East.”

Andrae is also directly opposed to the Tagore cult:

“Isolated voices pay tribute to him as the spiritual saviour of the western world, even though he says many impolite truths about our western culture, truths which would perhaps be more bitter to hear if they hadn’t been said before by our own cultural critics, and even though his way of thinking with its aesthetic nature worship and its attempts to blend Indian intensity with western activity has little to do with the Indian character but, on the other hand, has unmistakable affinity with literary mysticism in England.”

It is not surprising that Tagore’s popularity faded in England. England was the main target of his criticism. The English were indignant at Tagore’s anti-colonial attitude. In other places, the antipathy represented a general disassociation from the non-European influence that had become established in that period.

Tagore made one more visit to Sweden in September 1926. The coverage of this visit was not as intensive as during his first visit. An anonymous member of staff in a morning newspaper, *Svenska Morgonbladet*, held an interview with Tagore at Grand Hotel where he also stayed on this occasion. The writer was surprised that Tagore seemed to be “a good ten years younger and fitter” than he was the last time he visited Sweden. In this interview Tagore showed great generosity towards the Christian heritage of the western world, even if he maintained his criticism of western materialism. “This mammonism and rush for material values could be the germ of the ruin of the West,” said Tagore. He urged people in the West to “start their Christian lives again from the start, simply, and with a true will to uplift themselves”. It is only in this way that western culture can be saved: Christianity is actually in absolute antithesis of the materialism which has become so prevalent.

Tagore was far from being the first person to present Oriental wisdom to a western public. During the so-called Hindu renaissance in the 1700s, a number of classical Indian works of a religious and literary character were translated into western languages. The above-mentioned Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833) was the first Indian intellectual who attracted attention in the West in modern time. Furthermore, the theosophical movement, which was led by the famous medium, Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891), was of considerable importance for the dissemination of Indian thought in the western world. Her main work *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) was characterised by syncretism in which the Indian teachings on karma and reincarnation were blended with esoteric traditions from the western world. Theosophy is to a very great extent the source of what is known today as the New Age. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) also became very influential. His appearance at the World’s Parliament of Religions, a conference held in Chicago in 1893, was of decisive importance for the western image of Hinduism as a monotheist religion that can appeal to representatives of the other great religions in the world.

Tagore's two visits to Sweden can accordingly be seen as an episode in a longer evolutionary chain. It brought to life old conceptions of India as the abode of spirituality on earth. In Sweden, he was mainly regarded as a personification of eastern wisdom. However, Tagore's visits gave at the same time an indication that contributed to the waning of his popularity in the West after just a few years. In the long run, Tagore's criticism of the drawbacks in the western world became too obvious to maintain permanent interest.

Dostoevskiy

Fyodor Dostoyevskiy's *Crime and Punishment* was published in Swedish in two parts in 1883-1884. Few books have been printed in as many editions as this one. The novel has also enticed numerous interpretations. In the following I will discuss some major lines of interpretations of the novel. However, from the example of Tagore we should learn to be cautious in ascribing foreign Masters qualities that are in fact mere projections of our own imagination.

What could be said about Dostoyevskiy's intentions in writing the novel? What quality in *Crime and Punishment* has made the novel so famous? What does the book say about 19th century Russia or about our own age? A popular point of departure is the purely biographical approach. In the nervous main character of the novel, the young student Raskolnikov, one easily recognizes Dostoyevskiy himself. Raskolnikov shares the experience of continuous economic distress and feverish walks through the summer heat of Saint Petersburg with the author of the novel. The text has been composed in a way that calls to attention the disease that tormented Dostoyevskiy himself, his epilepsy. The tension in the novel is steadily increased, and so is Raskolnikov's inner turmoil. He collapses repeatedly, but each time he regains his powers almost instantaneously and resumes his devastating rumbles through the city. This pattern of conduct is associated with various ecstatic states of mind, which also matches Dostoyevskiy's medical record.

The novel was recognized by Dostoyevskiy's contemporaries as a masterpiece of realistic fiction. The famous critic Belinskij praised his young adept as a man of genius in his picturing of a metropolis in decay. Nowhere (perhaps with the sole exception of Dickens) are the basements as cramped as in this novel. Nowhere is the smell of sliced cucumber, black biscuits and half rotten fish as thick as in the quarters around the Fontanka channel. A dress coat cannot be more soiled than the one that the drunkard Marmeladov tries to cover himself with. The throng of characters that the reader comes across in *Crime and Punishment* gives a picture both of human grandeur and of the misery in the Russian society of that time.

Is the novel thus a realistic (or even a naturalistic) novel of the kind one would find in the west? If so, should it be given the epithet "psychological"? The novel is obviously focused on the inner drama of Raskolnikov. His actions seem to be governed by mere coincidences, dreams and the spur of the moment. Consider, for example, the gruesome dream in which Raskolnikov sees a farmer, Mikolka, mercilessly beating an old mare to death. The unmotivated violence of the farmer reflects Raskolnikov's own aggressions. At this point in the novel they have not yet found their outlet in the murder of the old pawnbroker Aljona Ivanovna and her sister. Is *Crime and*

Punishment in fact a novel that points towards Freud and his *Traumdeutung*, published in 1900? Surely it seems fruitful to study the novel from a psychoanalytical approach. It seems to have distanced itself from the purely realistic tradition of storytelling. A Swedish scholar, Owe Wikström, has followed this line of interpretation all the way to Freud's disciple C G Jung. In his book *Raskolnikov: the way of the divided towards unity in Crime and Punishment* (1982) Wikström explains Raskolnikov's "conscious actions and compulsive impulses" as a journey from disruption towards unity and reconciliation.

"According to Jung anyone who gives himself the right to kill, like Raskolnikov does, is a victim of a kind of "apotheosis" of his own personality. When the archetypical need for a god is not projected outwards on the culturally sanctioned image of god, it returns to the individual and, as in the case of Raskolnikov, it results in megalomania."

No matter what psychological theories one refers to in order to explain Raskolnikov's personality, the novel surely functions as an exciting crime story. To a large extent it is Viktor Sjklovskij and other Russian formalists from the 1920s and onwards who have taught the western audience to understand the specific nature of the crime story. The classical detective story runs from effect to cause. A story of this kind usually starts with the discovery of a crime, and the major part of the plot is focused on the attempts to uncover the causes of the crime. In *Crime and Punishment* the relation between cause and effect is the opposite. The story runs from cause to effect. Raskolnikov's crime is the starting point, but the tension in the novel is mainly built on the question of whether and when he will acknowledge the fact that he is the murderer.

The game that Porfirij Petrovitj, the judge conducting the trial, plays with Raskolnikov is psychologically credible. He makes friends with the suspect and thereby evokes a spontaneous confession. He would probably not have been that successful if he had used tougher methods. However, the confession itself points toward another plausible interpretation of the novel. Isn't this a story about religious conversion? After the murder Raskolnikov is tormented by his own conscience. He realizes that his dreams of becoming a superman has lead him to disaster. The confession and the following deportation to Siberia become nothing less than a rebirth. Like Lasarus in the Bible (whose story attracts a lot of attention in the novel) he is awakened from the dead, and together with Sonja he starts a completely new life. Sonja is also a fallen human being, but it is the fall itself that makes it possible for the hero and his heroine to accept love as the prime force of their entire existence.

The theme of conversion has a special meaning for Dostoyevskiy. For him the conversion also meant an acknowledgement of the specific nature of Russia itself. In his younger days Dostoyevskiy was connected to different groups who were influenced by western anarchism. When a conspiracy against the Tsar that he took part in had been unveiled he was sent to prison. This experience had the paradoxical effect of turning him against his former convictions. Instead he became devoted to the Tsar and traditional Russian culture.

Ever since Russia was Christianized in 988 the conflict between traditional Russian values and western influences has been obvious in Russia. When Constantinople was conquered by the Turks in 1453 the Russians began to think of Moscow as the new Rome, and Russia gradually became spiritually self-supporting. Along with this

came a tendency towards isolation. The idea of a continued Byzantine empire was secularized under the regime of Peter the Great. He developed the vision of Russia as a great power. This idea was transformed after the revolution in 1917 and took the shape of a communist world empire with Moscow as its centre.

If *Crime and Punishment* is studied from this particular perspective it takes the shape of a line in a dialogue that still continues in Russian society. The Russian literary historian Mikhail Bakhtin, who is probably the most famous interpreter of the works of Dostoyevskiy, has become famous precisely by emphasizing the importance of dialogues in novels like *Crime and Punishment*. According to Bakhtin, this novel, like the works of Plato or Shakespeare, is characterized by its multitude of voices and different styles. Various ideas are confronted with each other, and each one of them is personified by one of the characters in the novel. The author has resigned from his position as the superior monitor of the text, and he leaves it to the reader to decide what interpretation is the correct one. As Bakhtin states in *Problem's of Dostoyevskiy's Poetics*, this places the idea at the centre of *Crime and Punishment*:

“The idea –as it was seen by Dostoevsky the artist – is not a subjective individual-psychological formation with “permanent resident rights” in a persons head; no, the idea is inter-individual and intersubjective – the realm of its existence is not individual consciousness but dialogic communication *between* consciousnesses. The idea is a live *event*, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses. In this sense the idea is similar to the *word*, with which it is dialogically united. Like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood, and “answered” by other voices from other positions.”

The great variety of interpretations of *Crime and Punishment* seems to support Bakhtin's point of view. Maybe it's even impossible to find a specific Russian or western way of reading the novel? This could also be said about the works of Tagore. The western audience tried to turn him into a detached mystic. This meant that his critique of British colonialism was neglected. On the other hand, anyone who travels to India today will soon discover that he is greeted as a spiritual visionary in modern India. In the same time, he has kept his position as a symbol for national pride and independence. Just as in the case of Dostoyevskiy, the quest for the most proper way to read the texts of Tagore leads us astray in an abundance of possibilities.

What characterizes the literary Masters, as I have called them in this essay? One answer would be that their texts have a never-ending capacity to stimulate new interpretations. They seem to touch upon something broadly human. In addition to this, the problem of finding the true essence of the Masters becomes even more complicated when they come from other cultures. In these cases the reading of their texts is not only a flight into the universal, but also a journey through a specific cultural environment.

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