

**Anders Pettersson – Gunilla Linberg-Wada – Margareta Petersson – Stefan Helgesson: *Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective*.** Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006, 301 p., 313 p., 205 p., 331 p.  
ISBN-13: 978-3-11-018932-2 ISBN-10: 3-11-018932-1

The Institute of World Literature is closely associated with the theory of history of world literature through the figure of Dionýz Ďurišin. The theory of interliterariness, formulated by Ďurišin, presents world literature as the ultimate category of the interliterary process. Ďurišin critically opposed Eurocentrism in theory and practice and stressed the necessity to expound the categories of the interliterary process on the level of all geographical areas. Particular evidence for this can be found in the international project, *Osobitné medziliterárne spoločenstvá* (Special Interliterary Communities). In this context, the four volumes of *Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective* are especially interesting for Slovak literary studies. They tackle the same problem that haunted Ďurišin's mind. They are based, however, on different assumptions and focus on different questions. *Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective* is a result of a project of the Swedish Research Council, established in 2001 to support and develop scholarly research. The project got underway in 1996 when a group of scholars from departments of literature and oriental studies, from various Swedish universities, came together in Stockholm to discuss cooperation that would deepen knowledge of non-Western literatures.

The project focused on a select set of theoretical questions associated with the global history of literature. Its goal was to find appropriate methods and approaches to literature from a global perspective. The authors of the project were well aware of the different notions of literature in various cultures and of the problems related to genre classification. The first part of the project is therefore devoted to the problem of a definition of literature that would be suitable for the multicultural research of literature, and the second part to the problem of genres in various cultures. No attempt has been made to include all literatures in time and space, however. In the general introduction to the volumes, the editors admit that they did not intend to cover all literatures proportionally and that, moreover, the articles devote little attention to Western literatures that, it is presumed, are well-known to western comparativists. The third part of the project deals with transcultural literary flows in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and with mutual interactions between western and other cultural traditions.

The authors of the project assume that the notion of literature is a European product of the eighteenth century and that it does not have exact equivalents

in other times and in other cultures. In their articles, experts in eastern and African literatures analyse terms analogous to literature in Chinese, Japanese, Sanskrit, Arabic and East- and West-African literary cultures, taking into consideration changes in the use of such terms over time. In most cases, it is to be assumed, a reader will approach these volumes without a deep understanding of the cultures that are dealt with. Unfortunately, the way that concepts of literature in different cultures are presented here is not always easily comprehensible, at least not on first reading. As regards the intentions of the authors of the project, Leif Lorentzon's article is of interest in its demonstration of the ways that western concepts of literature influence discourses about literature in Africa. Similarly, Gunilla Lindberg-Wada article reveals the origin of the Japanese term for literature at the end of the nineteenth century. The articles about Arabic and African literatures address the important question of oral literature, a phenomenon that makes the definition of literature yet more problematic. However, with the exception of Martin Svensson Ekström's article, the contributors to the volumes seldom compare notions of literature in the cultures under discussion with that current in the West.

The theoretical core, and also, frankly speaking, the most stimulating part of the project, consists of the introductory essay, 'Concepts of Literature and Transcultural Literary History', by Anders Pettersson, apparently the leading theoretician of the project. Here, he expounds his own definition of literature as a presentational discourse. By contrast, Pettersson associates non-literary texts with informational and directive discourse. He admits that the term, litera-

ture, designates the object only in a limited way. Literature, as it is understood in the West, has the following traits: first, it is of central cultural importance; second, it is carefully and expertly formed; and third, it is conducive to aesthetic experience. Pettersson does not claim to define what literature is, but only how it is perceived. At the same time, his characterisation of literature underlines the role of language in literature, a role that he sees as decisive. Pettersson's views in general are well-founded, but one can observe a sense of uncertainty when he leaves the well-known terrain of Western literary studies. This is perhaps to be expected, insofar as it is unreasonable to expect any single person to be expert in the complete range of literary cultures that are presented in the volumes. Be that as it may, it is not his intention to come up with a general definition of literature that could serve the writing of a history of world literature. In fact, he does not speak about a history of world literature at all (which he understand more or less as a literary canon of world literature), but about a world history of literature where literature is always seen in relation to the culture and the time of its origin. This notion of world literature can do without a general definition of literature, a definition that would be useful, at best, only for the sake of comparison. The articles, dealing with the notion of literature in various cultures and collected in the first volume, thus serve as introductions to these literary cultures and are designed to show the complexity of this term.

Genres represent another area of interest for a theory of literary history that seeks to transcend national, cultural and temporal borders. In the concluding theoretical study to the second part, Anders Pettersson emphasizes the extent to

which genres should be thought of as intellectual instruments, and not as objects of knowledge in themselves, or as objective classifications. Just as there are different literary cultures, so there are different systems of genres that differ more or less greatly. Pettersson, thus, raises the question of whether it is possible to compare genres in transcultural, comparative literature study, and of whether it might not be preferable to abandon the effort. He understands genres in three ways: first, from the traditional point of view; second, from the viewpoint of Croce's and Todorov's critique of genres; and third, from the perspective of E.D. Hirsch's work that emphasized the communicative role of genres. Pettersson sees all three approaches to genres as relevant for transcultural literary history. His approach is strictly pragmatic.

The golden thread that runs through Pettersson's writing here is the idea that literature cannot be approached neutrally, in isolation from categories of evaluation and classification. He sees reliance on western terminology as an obstacle to the understanding of other literary cultures. He himself proposes the development of an intercultural terminology for the transcultural study of literature. Nevertheless, he is aware that such a project may seem utopian. In spite of this, one

must agree with Pettersson that the transcultural study of literature will probably not be able to avoid this route in the future.

The title of the volumes is indeed accurate. The four volumes, undoubtedly a work of great erudition on the authors behalf, do not represent any self-contained and fully and theoretically argued methodology for the writing of the transcultural history of literature. Nonetheless, they offer a set of problems that any theory of transcultural literary history must contend with. The name of the Slovak theoretician Dionýz Ďurišin, whose contribution to the field of theory of global literary history is undeniable, is, unfortunately, absent from the volumes. His theory of interliterariness or, at the least, his earlier theory of comparative literature could well offer the authors of the Swedish project valuable theoretical stimuli. In my opinion, they could greatly benefit from Ďurišin's discussion of typological analogies or from his notion of interliterary communities and centrism. Nevertheless, it must likewise be conceded that Ďurišin's theory of interliterariness itself ought to engage with the ideas raised by the Swedish team of comparativists and orientologists.

*Róbert Gáfrik*

**Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization.** Ed. Haun Saussy. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, xiii+261 p. ISBN 0-8018-8380-6

This book is a collection of pieces by American comparativists that replaces the more common 'Report on the state of the discipline', published every ten years by the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA). Haun

Saussy, appointed by the ACLA committee members to edit the report for the last ten-year period, decided not to follow tradition and to summarize the work of individual scholars in one article. Rather, he decided to offer various figures of in-

fluence within the field an opportunity for independent reflection on the past and comment on the future of comparative literature. This is the background to his introductory study, 'Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares: Of Memes, Hives, and Selfish Genes', a piece that he has been circulating amongst scholars in various relevant fields over the past few years. The result is a collection of twelve articles from different areas of study that forms, under the title *State of the Discipline, 2004*, the first part of the book under review. So that these reflections might open up a larger sphere for discussion, the entire collection was then sent to further scholars who replied with seven reaction pieces that make up, under the title, *Responses*, the second part of the book. It is this complete set of nineteen papers, whether formed in reflection or in reaction, that was finally presented to the wider reading public for open discussion.

First, it seems quite natural to express admiration for Saussy's approach. This is a form of discussion rarely encountered. It is an approach of diversity, yet of independent scrutiny that makes room for further reflection and critique. This collaborative work displays one of the ways that new ideas can be brought to light.

The opening study by Saussy is extensive and covers practically the entire development of the comparative literature from the nineteenth century onwards. It locates the emergence of the discipline in the beginnings of European Romanticism, an emergence that accounts for several aspects of the discipline that endure today, for example an emphasis on the nation and on national literatures. Saussy then pauses to consider the Russian Formalist school and the work of Shklovsky, Tynjanov and Jakobson, with

its notion of literariness (*literaturnost*). He considers this notion to be important and useful for research even today. As he notes, this notion also underlies Paul de Man's use of the term of the 'linguistics of literariness' (p. 17).

A further question that the study develops is the question of the method of comparative literature. The most important method has always been comparison. According to Saussy, this method is dependent on the finding of a common point, a *tertium comparationis*, on the basis of which comparison can be produced. Such a common point can consist in the notion of literariness, mentioned above. However, as comparative literature has broadened out in the 1990s to address a far wider range of themes, so the notion of literariness has faded into the background as an object of study. In this way, the consistent and clear character of the discipline of comparative literature was lost. The discipline no longer has 'a pre-established object of its own', becoming instead an 'area of application for the disciplines that define it' (p. 20). Thus, the autonomy of the discipline has been sacrificed and literature has been downgraded 'to the status of one mode of cultural discourse among others' (p. 21).

At times, Saussy even adopts a sarcastic tone. In spite of this, he does not consider the discipline unsuccessful. On the contrary, comparative literature has managed to turn its weaknesses into strength. Its interdisciplinary character has led to 'weak ties' with other disciplines, its hospitality towards false approaches, to its status as destination for the migration of every possible disciplinary approach, and a loss of its specificity. Nevertheless, comparative literature was able to turn all this into 'strong ties', into real interdisciplinarity (p. 35).

Reactions to Saussy's essay were diverse. David Damrosch, for example, writes in his study, 'World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age', that although the image of world literature has broadened, the European literary canon has not vanished, so that the famous works of British authors like Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats or Byron have almost become hypercanonical. Emily Apter in her study, 'Je ne crois beaucoup à la littérature comparée: Universal Poetics and Postcolonial Comparatism', defends the comparative method, but she regards it as being in state of transition. She draws as an example the work of Badiou who find common points in the poetry of two different poets (Labid ben Rabi and Mallarmé), not by taking as the common point language and the nationality (contrary to the opinions of Gayatri Spivak), but rather the 'affinities of the Idea' (p. 54). Richard Rorty's shorter piece, 'Looking back at "Literary Theory"', is also of great interest. Here Rorty points out that although literary criticism had adopted many features from philosophy and from the 'Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida intellectual tradition' (p. 63), it is now replacing these features with other ideas and authors, for example, Foucault. The humanities have always shown themselves capable of change, and have been enriched by the 'theoretical turn' and other recurrent crises. Now the process is running full-circle and philosophy can benefit from their advances.

The contribution of Djelal Kadir was also interesting. Because English is not my first or second or even third foreign language, whilst reading his 'Comparative Literature in an Age of Terrorism', I frequently had to use a dictionary. The language of his study is rich and varied, full of neologisms formed from Greek

roots, stuffed with Latin quotations, and so forth. This sophisticated and highly erudite language, however, is employed in the context, not of literature nor culture, but of ideas and their expressions of a quite different kind: terror, oppression and violence.

I could mention a number of other studies, such as the pieces by the comparativists, Caroline D. Eckhardt and Christopher Braider, on questions of early premodern literature. The authors consider the study of 'ancient' literature to be a legitimate part of comparative literature. Their omission from the discipline, which that has tended to limit itself to the past two centuries, deforms an understanding of literary questions. The humanities should not yield to the pressure of certain tendencies and eliminate the problems of literariness from their view.

Only after these pieces does one get to the part dedicated to responses. There is no doubt that unconventional and inspiring ideas and opinions are aired here too; and example of this is Caryl Emerson's piece on Central and East European traditions of comparative literature studies in which she prompts American comparative literature to 'begin learning from them' (p. 210), or the contribution of Jonathan Culler that calls attention to the emphasis on nations and nationalism in current research, whilst considering literary research to be a 'transnational phenomenon', as well as advocating the return of a notion of "*eastheticum*" to literary studies.

Haun Saussy and his collaborators outline several major questions that face contemporary comparative literature in the United States as well as elsewhere in the world. The primary issue is the question of cultural studies. Cultural studies

were first accepted as a legitimate part of the comparative studies; later on they became fashionable and grew in scope to such an extent that they acquired a quite special status. The result is that, even though their original name has been retained, much of contemporary cultural studies does not relate to neither literature nor culture, but rather to political and ideological struggles and conflict over power. The position of cultural criticism is often confrontational and oppositional, to say the least. Culture and thought seem to be subordinated to exercises of power and the impact of power is overestimated (Remak, Bloom). If cultural studies have been kept and developed anything from comparative literature, this is only the relics of binarity that has endured from a simplified form of structuralism.

The question of power and a binary view have adopted even by some in postcolonial studies, using similar arguments to those of the nineteenth century. There is no doubt that, similar to the nineteenth-century national movements (Herder), postcolonial studies have discovered literatures that were previously unknown. Many things, however, have been forgotten. The fact that processes of colonisation repeat in human history, in diverse periods and places, has been overlooked disregarded. Even today, there are other countries and cultures, apart from former colonies, that have undergone or are undergoing a similar course of development. The claims made against eurocentrism do not take account of the fact that Europe is not only Western. They do not reflect the situation in the countries and cultures of Central and South Eastern Europe, currently experiencing 'fresh' stages of post-colonialism since the fall of the Soviet Union. These

countries have experienced similar colonializations several times (Tötössy de Zepetnek). Comparativists and literary scholars from these countries may be able to provide a significant contribution to a deeper understanding of these phenomena. For example, the Bulgarian literary historian A. Kiossev claims that in order for the colonial process to happen, it has to be supported by a part of the local population, by indigenous forces, local elites and intellectuals, and so forth, and he calls this process 'self-colonisation'.

A return to literariness in the sense of Russian Formalism and its 'literaturnost' or of Prague structuralism (Vodička, Mukařovský) is impossible. Prague structuralism was a theory of the immanence of literature, in direct opposition to the current trend of contextualisation. But a conception of literariness could re-enter the study of comparative literature as a component of the interliterary process. Roland Greene suggested something along these lines in his study *Not works but networks*, by which he meant the interrelations of literary works and cultural phenomena. The Slovak comparativist, D. Ďurišin, reflected on this problem in the 1980s when he created his concept of interliterary communities and published six works developing it. Interliterary communities do not designate groups of people; rather these communities consist of groups of literatures, identified by close literary traditions, that reflect and interact more each other, for example, the literatures of Western Europe, the literatures of Central and Eastern Europe, or groups of literatures connected with one official language in which literary works and texts were created, such as the former British Empire or Spain Portugal and Latin America, and so forth. Even

Spain itself, due to its internally diverse character, can be considered to be such a community of literatures.

There are many fascinating questions in contemporary comparative literature. One of them is, for instance, the role of the otherness in literature, culture, and language. There are cultures where bi- or tri-linguism and ethnic heterogeneity is common. Discovering alterity in an environment that has otherwise been familiar with it can lead to its overemphasis and even to its fetishization. But reality is more complicated. Foreignness, otherness, alterity are never absolute. It is necessary to realise that the alterity can never be full, because, if it were, it would be incomprehensible. The same is true for the specificity of literatures; there is always some common ground – even if this common ground is nothing more than ‘planetarity’, raised in the works of Gayatri Spivak, and meaning the very basic sense of the common existence of the human race on one planet.

If it is claimed that a discipline is in

a permanent crisis, even, as certain authors assert, already dead, or in the state of ‘wraithliness’, as Haun Saussy puts it, it mark of success that it finds itself in the state of mind described above, and that it leads to such results.

Finally, I should like note that reading the collection was a pleasant and stimulating experience. The contributions were very varied, but they all were trying to clarify key questions that face comparative literature. Even works referred to in support of various opinions were different. These opinions were balanced, optimistic and wise. It seemed to me that they expressed the wisdom of a discipline that has overcome many setbacks and changes, and that has learned to draw its strength from impulses, not from outside, but from within its own experience and day-to-day work with literature and culture. And this, surely, is the most important factor for the sustainability and viability of the discipline.

*Libuša Vajdová*

### **History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries.** Volume I, II, III.

Eds. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Amsterdam–Philadelphia 2004, 2006, 2007, 647 p., 512 p., 522 p.  
ISBN-10: 9027234558 ISBN-13: 978-9027234551

The work under discussion, a three-volume project inspired by l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (AILC), represents one of only few successful attempts to map the literature of Central Europe. Primarily a comparative history of literatures written in the languages of the region, the project is based on a critical attitude towards traditional eurocentric and universalist approaches. The project is divided into parts that con-

tain introductory and descriptive texts, followed by further sections devoted to the interpretation of selected works of individual national literatures, with its methodological theses outlined in the first three chapters.

Whilst a detailed appraisal of the project must be left to experts in the histories of the relevant national literatures, it is possible to indicate the basic premises of this unique project, a project

that ought to be much discussed by Central European scholars. Out of the array of confusing terminology related to the region (Naumann's *Mitteleuropa*; Central Europe; Eastern Europe; the Balkans), the editors of this project have adopted the relatively neutral term, East-Central Europe, a term that is close to the more general concept of classical Central Europe, embracing the area between the Balkans and the Mediterranean, on the one hand, and the area that extends from the Czech Republic as far as Moldavia, on the other. Here lies this concept's difference from the Polish notion of Central-East Europe (O. Halecki, J. Kłoczowski, P. Wandycz, and others) as the interspace between the Adriatic and the Baltic that stands in opposition to Eurasian, 'barbaric' Russia. The project's heuristic of comparison (inspired by the French *Annales* School, the thought of Michel Foucault, hermeneutics, and in particular, by the post-structuralist conception of history as mutable narration, multilayered text, as living organism) abandons the expository procedures, evaluative criteria, and the apparatus of periodization that stem from a linear and teleological approach to history and from a sense of history as temporal consecutiveness and continuity. On the contrary, the mode of comparison that is adopted here oscillates between the poles of formalism and contextualisation, moving freely from social-political history, literary topography and geography, to the key concepts of literary history, such as genres, literary categories, movements, streams, periods, schools, institutions, and so forth. Furthermore, Central-East European culture is frequently regarded as specifically post-colonial. For example, the comparative scholar of international repute, Tötösy de Zepetnek, describes the

region in the period between 1945 and 1989 as colonial. Nevertheless, he speaks in terms of secondary colonisation by ideological, social-political, or cultural means. According to him, the colonial influence of the West (mainly France and England) in Central and East Europe is in competition with mass culture, imported from America. This is not only the case of the twentieth century where, according to Tötösy de Zepetnek's 'Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application', the mediatory function of cultural value was of a 'self-referential' nature and constituted a means for the construction of national identities and claims to sovereignty; here, moreover, attempts to imitate Western culture were conceived of as integration and as a return to historical roots.

Similar questions, relating to Central Europe, were also raised by the Slovak literary theorist, Dionýz Ďurišin, who drew on the insights of geography and geopolitics to come to a deeper understanding of European, including Central European interliterary processes. By means of a thorough analysis of central categories of interliterary communities (namely, 'special' and 'standard' categories, as well as the category of 'interliterary centrism'), Ďurišin was able to formulate the principles of a theory of interliterariness and to come to an understanding of the notion of world (universal) literature. According to Ďurišin, interliterary communities are constituted by phenomena and formations that are historically unsettled, internally structured, and whose historical evolution has been influenced by diverse determinants. Amongst these determinants is the principle of ethnical affiliation by which is meant the analogies and relationships between individual national literatures and their subsystems. The



principle of ethnic affiliation is closely related to factor of language that historically has not only connected various literary systems but also radically differentiated them. Thus for example, the monolingualism of literatures written in English affects a number of national literatures that are typologically different and that, for various reasons, have become an organic component of a range of interliterary communities or centrism (see, for example, the relationship of colonial literatures to the metropole). In Europe, geographical considerations result in a more pronounced 'detachment' of individual literary 'spheres' (zones, regions, areas, and so forth), allowing one to project onto literary map of Europe Mediterranean (medieval), Central European, East European, Balkan, Scandinavian, and other segments. Thus, Āurišin, on the one hand, conceives of centrism as a type of community that has originated from a long-standing neighbourly position as a specific form of coexistence, and, on the other hand, he conceives of community *per se* as the product of unity, similarities and analogies. One might state simply that a community is of a metaphorical nature, while centrism, by contrast, tend to be formed metonymically, as geographically supranational units, and derive from a concrete character, based on a non-related geographical position of proximity. Such units are defined neither by similar mentalities, nor by economic or socio-psychological determinants, but rather by geographical region and proximity.

According to D. Āurišin, Central Europe, as the cultural and geographical zone that constitutes the crossroads between the West and the East, has always been distinguished by its changeable position, by its impermanent cen-

tres and peripheries, and by its specific interweaving of ethnic groups, cultures and religions. The territorial principle of mutual contact has resulted not only in more intensive communication, more intensive exchange of literary values, and in deeper mutual understanding, but it has also lead to clashes and conflicts between artistic traditions, poetic norms, and conventions. The metonymic form of such communication, a result of a 'neighbourly' contact rather than of any genetic relationship between languages, can bring into being an intercultural process (E. Miner) founded on the existence of an open horizon of receptive expectation (H. R. Jauss) and on an endeavour to postulate and codify the mythical and literary unity of diverse wholes and systems, with reference, for the most part, to western Europe and its roots in classical civilization roots. The hegemonic and universalistic character of this paradigm, grounded in the notion of 'major', 'developed', and 'influential' national literatures, has been strengthened by the historiographical models of the last two centuries whose 'ethnocentric ideology' have promoted the myth of western European literary unity and common origin, regardless of the 'diverse' values of peripheral literatures with their different roots.

If Āurišin prefers typology and parallels to genetic contacts, the editors of *History*, Cornis-Pope and J. Neubauer, also deliberately avoid a positivist 'theory of influence'. The editors' typological method of historical-geographical modelling tends to leave in the shade authors, biographies and analyses of works, and, rather than producing an all-embracing synthesis and a complete picture, the editors assemble heterogeneous viewpoints and fragmentary utterances in a partial

and pluralistic discourse of 'microhistory' that—metaphorically, at least—provides an overview of the literature of the last two centuries. This, leads to an interest in intercultural dialogues amongst individual literatures that, through the theory of regionalism, develop the antithetical values of centre and periphery. As a result, the editors devote attention to the perennial phenomena of emigration, censorship, and suppressed literature; to the categories of bi-literariness and bilingualism; to authorial multilingualism and minority literatures, to modes of 'coexistence' of diverse national literatures within one country. This approach reflects, in part, a Bakhtinian conception of cultural dialogism and the influence of postcolonial theorists, such as H. Bhabha or A. Gnisci, on contemporary comparative studies. The editors seem to be correct in their analysis of the Slavic/non-Slavic character of Central Europe, of the region's conflicting ideologies and its local, ethnic, and linguistic atomisation, and of cultural nationalisms thanks to which the cultural unity of Central Europe did not result from mutual communication, but rather from an analogous attitude towards western centres such as Paris. The editors' general preference for sociological and cultural approaches entails a semantic shift from a conception of 'pure' literature to a conception of 'liter-

ary culture' as a complex polysystem of literary communication embedded in institutions. Literary cultures, thus, come to be represented by cultural models in mutual relations, both textual and non-textual. Notwithstanding the indisputable value of the *History* that offers a paradoxical sense of diversity in cultural unity, those sections that seek to apply the theory and that offer interpretations of particular works of national literatures tend to deviate from the editors' methodological framework and pose something a problem. For example, in the case of Czech literature, this is true of the essayistic treatment of Hašek's *Švejk* and of the interpretation of Hrabal's short story, *Jarmilka*, both of which descend into superficiality and regurgitate conventional views without attempting to set the texts 'structurally' into a Central European context (Veronika Ambros, 'The Great War as a Monstrous carnival: Jaroslav Hašek's *Švejk*', Vol. I, pp. 228-36; Kees Mercks, 'Censorship: A Case Study of Bohumil Hrabal's *Jarmilka*', Vol. III, pp. 101-11). All in all, the three-volume project is an original attempt to grasp methodologically the supranational history of literature, by means of straight philology, on the one hand, via area theory, to sociology and cultural studies, on the other.

Miloš Zelenka