

## Frontier Orientalism in Central and East European Literatures

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The starting point of this issue of *WORLD LITERATURE STUDIES* was a research project by its co-editor Charles Sabatos, conducted as a visiting scholar at the Institute of World Literature in Bratislava in spring 2016, and supported by the National Scholarship Programme of the Slovak Academic Information Agency. It also relates more broadly to the recent work of the Institute, in particular that of this issue's other co-editor Róbert Gáfrik, Dobrota Pucherová, and other colleagues in applying influential literary theories such as postcolonialism to the Central European context.

Just as Central and Eastern Europe was until recently overlooked in the field of postcolonial studies, it has also been marginalized in analyses inspired by Edward Said's *Orientalism*. In his anthropological research on the Austrian context, Andre Gingrich has proposed the concept of "frontier Orientalism" for countries that have not themselves colonized, but have been in contact with the Oriental world by means of Ottoman invasions. He defines it as "a relatively coherent set of metaphors and myths that reside in folk and public culture" (1996, 119).<sup>1</sup> While his work (first published more than twenty years ago) has great potential for the rest of the former Habsburg realm and other borderlands between Europe and the "East", it has received little attention among literary scholars. The main purpose of this issue is to develop this discussion, opening up the field of Orientalist criticism to European cultures that have themselves been "Orientalized" by the major powers.

The contributions in this issue address a range of national literatures along the frontiers of Central and Eastern Europe, from Czech and Latvian to Bosnian and Georgian. They discuss Gingrich's concept from various perspectives and test its applicability in a variety of contexts. Some contributions acknowledge its usefulness, but at the same time demonstrate that it does not exhaust all possible forms of experience with the "Oriental Other" captured in the literature of the region.

This editors hope that this initial selection will inspire future work on this topic, not only within individual national literatures but comparatively across the region and between different regions as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Gingrich, Andre. 1996. "Frontier Myths of Orientalism: The Muslim World in Public and Popular Cultures of Central Europe." In *Mediterranean Ethnological Summer School*, ed. by Bojan Baskar – Borut Brumen, 99–127. Piran: Institut za multikulturene raziskave.