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Editor's Introduction

World Literature in National Contexts: Education and Culture

The term „world literature“ was „invented“ by one of the most influential writers of European and world literature, namely J. W. Goethe. When he commented to his secretary Eckermann on the novel he was reading – it was a translated Chinese literary text – he judged that national literature could no longer play as important a role as it had done in the past, and that the time had come for world literature. In this context, Goethe himself realized world literature with the literary-creative reception of poetic forms and motifs in the collection of poems with the meaningful title *West-östlicher Divan* (*West-Eastern Diwan*). A poetic „commentary“ on this literary-creative reception can be read in Goethe's poem „Ginko biloba“. In its two-hundred-year history, Goethe's concept of world literature has been criticized for being Eurocentric, especially in the context of postcolonial studies (cf. Virk 2007). However, it would be difficult to deny the importance of Goethe's concept of world literature for the development of European literature. From the perspective of Slovenian literature, one need only look at Prešeren's love poetry in the poetic form of the Arabic ghazal, not to mention the entry of the Japanese poetic form of the haiku into modern Slovenian poetry of the 20th century.

In modern international literary studies, several different conceptualizations of world literature have emerged. One of the most influential modern definitions was proposed by David Damrosch (2003): In short, a literary work becomes world literature under two conditions. The first condition is that it is read as literature. The second condition is that this literary work circulates outside the space of its linguistic and cultural origin.

The extensive scope of world literature implied by this definition can explain the diversity of selections of literary texts that represent world literature in different cultural-spatial and literary contexts, depending on the historical and literary-historical characteristics of the respective cultural space. In this way, the different images of world literature in the textbooks for literature in the individual national education systems can also be explained. Slovenian ideas of world literature are to a certain extent linked



to the Central European cultural and historical context, which is also the context of Goethe's "invention" of the concept of world literature. In this context, the concept of world literature seems to be inevitably linked to the concept of national literature.

This semantic relationship is based on the Romantic development of the late Enlightenment philosophy, in particular Herder's thoughts on the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the individual European peoples in his four-volume work *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (*Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 1784–1791). Herder's view of the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the individual European peoples establishes the individual (national) identity of each of these communities, and thus also the equal status of the individual communities among other communities – as national communities. The ideology of nationalism was developed on this basis during the Romantic period. The model of the „cultural nation“ originated in the German cultural space and was adopted by a number of Central European (national) communities. It also had a strong influence on Slovenian political and cultural history in the 19th and 20th centuries, in the sense of an almost indistinguishable interweaving of political and cultural history, or as the variant of nationalism that J. Leerssen defines as „cultural nationalism“.

In general, the central factors of the process of this interweaving of political and cultural history can be summarized in the following „matrix: nation–people–language–culture–history–territory–state“ (Juvan, 2012, 327). A comparison of this (abstract) matrix with Prešeren's *Wreath of Sonnets* or with Prešeren's romantic poem *Krst pri Savici* (The Baptism on the Savica) shows clear traces of the process of Slovenian adaptation to the model of the „cultural nation“ under the conditions of the Central European communities that developed in this historical moment of the 19th century.

The notion and conceptualization of world literature emerged in this very context, e.g. in relation to literature written in a predominantly spoken language of this or that nation-state, which is usually imagined as a national language in view of the importance of nation-building processes in European history and literature. Consequently, conceptualizations of world literature are usually related to a national literature. This relationship can also be perceived in school subjects that are conceptualized as (x-national) language and literature in the curricula of (this or that) state's education system, such as Slovenian language and literature (in the Slovenian education system). One can say (with a smile) that the Slovenian curricula for this school subject were created from the position of „under Prešeren's head“.¹ The curriculum of this school subject usually focuses on the historical development and contemporary artistic production of national literature in a given country.

1 This formulation is borrowed from the (same) title of Tomo Virk's monograph on Slovenian literature (2023).

Regarding this Central European „inherited tradition“, it seems necessary to reconsider modern plans for the renewal of the curricula of the school subject of Slovenian language and literature. In connection with the „inherited tradition“ described above, there is (always) the possibility that the teaching of literature in the context of Slovene lessons will be reduced to teaching only literature written in the Slovene language, thus acquiring the status of national (Slovene) literature. The realization of this possibility could lead to a situation similar to that described in the articles in this thematic issue of the journal *Ars & Humanitas* on the teaching of literature in Japan or in France.

Ayako Oku's article examines the post-war history of the Japanese school system and the various changes which led to an apparent decline in the proportion of world literature in high school literature textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education. An insight into the Japanese school system and its language and literature textbooks is useful for a comparison with Slovenian literature education, regardless of the geographical distance between the two countries, as modern Japanese history has also been characterized by nationalism. Ayako Oku also notes in her article that contemporary literature textbooks reflect the desire to represent Japan's cultural diversity. The textbooks thus include Japanese literary texts by authors from international backgrounds, including authors from cultural minorities. The article concludes that in Japan, the acquisition of knowledge about world literature in schools is more or less left to college courses.

Although the greatly reduced proportion of world literature in Japanese literature textbooks would not (in my opinion) be a good example for the current Slovenian renewal of the Slovenian language and literature curricula, the aspect of presenting Slovenian cultural diversity in literature is worth considering if we think of the literary excellence of Maja Haderlap's novel *Angel of Oblivion* (*Engel des Vergessens*, written in German language) or the topicality of the theme of Pahor's novel *Necropolis* or, for example, Slovenian poetry from places beyond Slovenia's borders.

The article by **Anne-Cécile Lamy-Joswiak** focuses on the analysis of literature textbooks in the French education system. The results of the analysis show a similar situation to that outlined in Oku's article, i.e. a strong dominance of literature originally written in French. However, it is precisely this fact that gives rise to the special nature of modern French literature teaching: Modern textbooks contain literary texts of francophone literature by authors from the cultural areas of the former French colonies and, with this interculturality and the (complex) interliterary relationships at play, at least partially meet the demand for some world literature in the French literature curriculum.

In comparison to the situations described in the two authors' articles, the current Slovenian secondary school curriculum (2008) contains a large proportion of foreign

literary texts, which are categorized as part of world literature, similar to the Estonian curricula for primary and secondary education (cf. Lukas, 2012, 170–173). In the Slovenian literature textbooks, the foreign literary texts. In Slovenian literature textbooks, these foreign texts are presented in terms of the relationship between the literary-historical development of world and national literatures. The interweaving of the development of Slovenian literature with the development of European literature was set out clearly in Janko Kos' monograph *Primerjalna zgodovina slovenske literature* (A Comparative History of Slovenian Literature, reprinted in 2001). In other words, knowledge of Slovenian literature is hardly conceivable without knowledge of European and world literature. The situation is similar with many other, mostly „small“ or “peripheral” (national) literatures, which are examined from the point of view of asymmetrical relationships within the world literary system (in Slovenian comparative literature studies, among others: Juvan, 2012a ; Juvan, 2012b ; Habjan, 2012).

The influence of one of the central authors of world literature, William Shakespeare, on the development of drama and theatre in Central Europe, and especially on the theatre culture and drama of the Latvian playwright Rudolfs Blaumanis, is discussed in this thematic issue of *Ars & Humanitas* by **Benedikts Kalnačs**. Kalnačs' article clearly demonstrates that the development of Latvia's national literary culture, which in many aspects is comparable to the development of Slovenian culture, cannot be thought of without knowledge of world literature.

The similarity between the literary developments of the European national literatures is all the more evident in the case of the geographically close and linguistically related Central European literatures. The article by **Jana Šnytová, Lidija Rezončnik, Špela Sevsšek Šrnel** gives an impression of these similarities, which are important for the image of Slovenian literature. The article provides a brief overview of the literary development of Polish, Czech and Slovak literatures, followed by an analysis of contemporary Polish, Czech, Slovak and Slovenian literature textbooks. Considering the similarity of these national literary histories, the results of the analysis reveal a surprising fact, namely that the textbooks of the modern school systems of these countries contain very few literary texts from Slavic literatures, with the exception of a selection from a number of Russian literary authors. In order to overcome this situation in the Slovenian secondary school literature curriculum, the article proposes the inclusion of literary texts by S. Lem, K. Čapek and D. Tatarka. The proposal is based on the criteria of the trans-historical (and contemporary) relevance of the themes of these literary texts, and their undisputed literary-aesthetic value.

The consideration of both criteria can also be seen indirectly in the article by **Luka Repanšek**, which deals with the significance of ancient Indian literature in the development of world literature. The article critically analyses Slovenian secondary school literature textbooks from the point of view of their inclusion of ancient Indian

literature. In this context, it emphasizes the fundamental inclusion of ancient non-European („ancient oriental“) literature in the textbooks written by Janko Kos (as their author or as co-author). After an overview of the internal diversity of ancient Indian literature, the article provides a comprehensive overview of Slovenian translations of ancient Indian texts and suggests a selection of those that should be included in the Slovenian curriculum for secondary and elementary schools.

The importance of knowledge of world literature is also discussed in **Lucija Karničar**'s article in the field of didactics of literature. The article examines the role of world literature in modern society, including in the context of trying to achieve a more sustainable society in Slovenia. After a theoretical outline of the basic concepts of modern ecological awareness, a selection of literary texts from world literature is presented that promote ecocentric thinking in the didactics of literature, in terms of the understanding of environmental issues and the understanding of otherness (the individual as Other and also the non-human Other). The article also proposes a didactic model that it recognizes as particularly effective in achieving these goals.

The thematic series of articles on world literature in schools and cultures in national environments can be concluded by the editor's highlighting another problem with the (potentially) exclusive role of a national literature in (Slovenian) school textbooks, e.g. the problem that M. Cornis-Pope and J. Neubauer emphasized in the comprehensive contemporary monograph *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* and tried to overcome with their editorial concept. This is the concept of so-called literary cultures. It takes into account the coexistence of *different* literary cultures, such as Romanian, German and Hungarian literary cultures or Italian and Slovenian literary cultures on the *same* - nationalized - territory, such as Romania or Italy, etc. A look at the East-Central European cultural areas shows that the „inherited tradition“ of the concept of literature as a national literature makes it difficult to understand the historical dynamics and thus the inner diversity of literature in these areas, where Slovenia is also located.

From this we can conclude that Slovenian literature cannot be treated in isolation from transnational and intercultural historical and contemporary literary processes.² It is hoped that the works in this volume will help in the development of better curricula for the Slovenian language and literature at primary and secondary levels in Slovenia.

2 Slovenian literature is also discussed in the context of these processes in numerous studies of contemporary Slovenian comparative literature at the Department of Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana, at the Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies at ZRC SAZU and in some projects at other Slovenian universities and institutes, which also include comparatively oriented treatments of literature.

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