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Panorama and Perspectives.

Literary Societies and Literary Museums in Europe

Panorama und Perspektive. Literarische Gesellschaften und Literaturmuseen in Europa

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Organised between the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Literarischer Gesellschaften und Gedenkstätten and the Hungarian Petőfi Museum, the conference took place in the context of our project "Panorama and Perspectives. Literary Societies and Literary Museums in Europe". From Norway, up in the North, to Cyprus, down in the South, representatives from seventeen European countries attended the conference: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

Our project started in February 2009 with an international meeting for umbrella organisations and similar institutions concerned with the literary heritage. The papers presented at this meeting have also been published.

With our overall European project we would like to open up opportunities for a long lasting cooperation and networking of European cultural institutions dealing with the literary heritage.

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In Quest for/of European Literature

by **Matthias Beilein** / Germany

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First I would like to present to you some approaches to the questions “What is European literature?” and “What is the canon of European literature?”, then I want to present to you the concept of literary canons as social constructions, and finally I am going to give you some concluding remarks on European canon formation.

1.1 European literature as an idea

Goethe

Up to the present there have been many, many attempts to describe or define the European canon of literature. You can divide these attempts into three general approaches. First: European literature as an idea, second: European literature as a set canon of texts, and third: as a narrative which is a mixture of both of them.

The best known example for the first approach is probably Goethe's definition of Weltliteratur, world literature. Needless to say there is a big difference between world literature and European literature. But most of the insights concerning world literature can easily be translated into the conditions of European literature, since both of them are transnational, transcultural and multilingual concepts and especially Goethe had this possible transfer in mind. Goethe's concept is still important since it re-echoes in the ongoing discussions about canon formation. The late Goethe uses the term Weltliteratur in different contexts and occasions, the best-known and at the same time misleading passage might be from Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* where the then almost eighty years old poet is cited as follows: “Poetry is the common property of mankind, and it emerges in all places and at all time. [...] This is why I study foreign nations and advise everybody else to do the same. National literature does not mean much at present, it is time for an era of world

literature, and everybody must endeavor to accelerate this epoch.”¹ Even if Goethe admired foreign poetry and was able to read and to translate from many different languages, we should not understand this passage in the text as his recommendation to open the canon. It is true that Goethe had on the one side an extensive understanding of literature and had the strong conviction that an educated man should know not only the literature written in his own native language; but on the other side this does not include for him a re-evaluation of the canon, that is to say: for Goethe there is one firm measure of literary evaluation, and that is the ancient Greek and Latin literature which is not to be surpassed in its literary value and has unchallenged cultural hegemony.

As one can learn from other passages in Goethe's work, Weltliteratur is a rather pragmatic concept: The interchange of ideas with poets from other countries is a tool for people and peoples “to become aware of and understand each other, and, if love proves impossible, they should at least learn to tolerate one another”² writes the late Goethe and concedes that “it cannot be hoped that this will produce a general peace, but it can be hoped that the inevitable conflicts will gradually become less important, that war will become less cruel and victory less arrogant.”³ You see, we cannot really learn from Goethe what a canon of European literature should

¹ “Eckermann. “Gespräche mit Goethe, 31.1.1827”. Cit. from: Hendrik Birus. *The Goethean Concept of World Literature and Comparative Literature*. CLCWeb Vol. 2 Issue 4 (December 2000) Article 7. <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss4/7>>: 5. – Original: „Ich sehe immer mehr, [...] daß die Poesie ein Gemeingut der Menschheit ist, und daß sie überall und zu allen Zeiten in hunderten und aber hunderten von Menschen hervortritt. [...] Ich sehe mich daher gern bei fremden Nationen um und rate jedem, es auch seinerseits zu tun. National-Literatur will jetzt nicht viel sagen, die Epoche der Welt-Literatur ist an der Zeit und jeder muß jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen.“

² Goethe. Cit. from: Birus. *The Goethean Concept*: 5.

³ Goethe. Cit. from: Birus. *The Goethean Concept*: 5f.

look like, but we learn why it is necessary for every educated human being to cross the borders of one's own national literature: European literature in this sense is rather a pragmatic idea than a corpus of texts.

Damrosch

David Damrosch, a Harvard Professor of Comparative Literature, is in many ways influenced by Goethe's concept of world literature. In his highly acclaimed book *What is World Literature*, published in 2003, he presents a threefold definition of world literature. Here I can only mention his definition without discussing it. Damrosch says, that world literature is: first "an elliptical refraction of national literatures"⁴, second "writing that gains in translation"⁵ and third "not at set canon of texts but a mode of reading, a detached engagement with a world beyond our own"⁶. So Damrosch's idea of world literature also is a program for better understanding, but his main focus is on understanding literature: By relating literary texts from different languages and different cultures, these works will begin to resonate together in our mind, and by doing this will help us to learn more about certain topics or certain ages. World literature is a "coming together from separate worlds"⁷, and to enable this gathering, some actions must be taken, for example, simply to speak, learn more languages, promote literary translations, and intensify the departments of comparative literature at universities. So Damrosch's concept again is an understanding of world literature in an idealistic way, not as a canon of texts.

1.2 European literature as a canon of texts

But of course there have been many attempts to define a canon of European literature as a corpus of texts and authors. Take for instance the famous book by Yale Professor Harold Bloom: *The Western Canon*, published in 1994, that treats 26 writers in detail and closes with an appendix

listing containing several thousand works by more than 850 writers, whom Bloom considers to be the key figures in the Western Canon as a whole.⁸ This broader canon lists works written only in the dominating European languages: Italian, Spanish, Russian, French, Portuguese, German and English, including some Sanskrit works, some texts in ancient Greek and Latin and, as an exception, two authors from Scandinavia, Ibsen and Strindberg. Bloom's concept of canon is mainly an orientation for readers, since his key question is "What can a man read and reread during a lifetime?"⁹ So, if you are looking for the European canon: simply take Bloom's list, subtract the American and Sanskrit literature and – here you are. But do not expect to find anything written in Hungarian, Finnish or Polish in it.

Another proposal for defining an European canon as a corpus of texts, is, simply speaking, restraining European literature to the Ancient heritage. German classical scholar Manfred Fuhrmann for example, who published his *Der europäische Bildungskanon* (The European Canon of Education or Bildung) in 1999 and his *Bildung. Europas kulturelle Identität* (Bildung. Europe's Cultural Identity) in 2002, defines Europe's identity as resulting from certain cultural traditions. He asks: "What is Europe but Christianity and the humanist's reception of the ancient world?"¹⁰ With this definition the European canon is limited to the major works by ancient Greek and Roman authors.

A third way of defining world literature or European literature as a corpus of texts and authors is an encyclopedic approach. To mention only one example: The third edition of German *Kindlers Literaturlexikon*, edited last year by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, displays the scope of world literature in 18 volumes, containing about 13,000 articles, discussing works by more than 8,000 authors, written by more than fifteen hundred scholars and journalists who were supervised by 75 consultants.

⁴ David Damrosch. *What is World Literature?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP 2003: 281.

⁵ Damrosch. *What is World Literature*: 288.

⁶ Damrosch. *What is World Literature*: 297.

⁷ Damrosch. *What is World Literature*: 284.

⁸ Damrosch. *What is World Literature*: 141.

⁹ Harold Bloom. *The Western Canon*. New York/San Diego/London: Harcourt Brace, 1994: 37.

¹⁰ Manfred Fuhrmann. *Bildung. Europas kulturelle Identität*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002: 80.

1.3 European literature as a narrative

My last example for an approach to the European canon of literature is an understanding of European literature as a narrative. There do not exist many successful examples representing this approach, one is *L'Histoire de la littérature européenne*, published by Hachette in 1992, second edition in 2007, and translated into English as *History of European Literature* by Routledge in 2000. In this volume of more than a thousand pages more than 150 authors try to tell the story of European literature based on social history and on a more capacious basis than the focus on just a few large literatures. In place of nations the volume offers pan-European movements (for example humanism, the Enlightenment or romanticism), genres and broad themes. It was never translated into German, which is rather sad, since it is the only project I know that tries to narrate and explain the history of European literature on a high but not elitist level.

Before I move on, let me discuss the advantages and disadvantages of those approaches that I have just presented to you: Taking European literature as an idea concentrates on literature as a medium for the process of international understanding but does not answer the question what texts do belong to European literature and what texts do not. Presenting European literature as a narrative makes clear that literary history is only partly connected to national history and it is extremely helpful for understanding pan-European movements (like the Enlightenment), but it cannot replace books and national literary history since there are so many different national literary movements in entire Europe. So it can only be a selection of the main movements and eras.

Finally, the purpose of all the attempts to define European literature as a set canon of authors and texts is obvious: They all try to be pathfinders for readers who are lost in the jungles of literature. One should not name these concrete manifestations of canons subjective since these selections result from valuations which are depending on values of a given culture or society at a particular time.

For instance you can easily show how much Bloom's canon is influenced by Anglo-American traditions. These manifestations can only be as good as their reasons for decision, and the problem with most of the concrete canons is indeed that they lack of clear and distinct selection criteria.

Take for instance Bloom's *Western Canon*. As far as I can see he mentions two or three standards for "canonical literature", and these are "aesthetic authority", "creative power" and "aesthetic value"¹¹, but he never specifies these standards. This doesn't make his canon selection arbitrary but at least rather debatable.

So, what we need are clear, distinct criteria of selection to make sure that we have the same in mind when we use terms like European literature or canon. Let me clarify this: the question "What is European literature?" is apparently simple, but actually there are numerous answers to it. One could describe European literature for example as

- a) the sum of all literatures by all nations that belong to Europe (holistic approach),
- b) all literary works by European authors that achieve an effective life outside their country of origin (effective approach),
- c) all literary works by European authors that are translated into a sufficient/adequate number of European languages (translational approach),
- d) all European literary works that deal with specific European topics (thematic approach),
- e) all European literary works that are classified as masterworks within their country of origin regarding aesthetic aspects (formal approach); etc. etc.

The definition of European literature always depends upon one's criteria of selection, and this is also true for one's understanding of European canons, since a canon is a social construction, a selection following from evaluations, that are mainly based upon standards of value. For a reasonable discussion about canons, it is essential to disclose these standards as clearly as possible.

¹¹ Bloom. *Western Canon*: 37, 38.

2. What is a literary canon?

It is about time to discuss a definition. There exist quite different ideas of what a literary canon is or what the term literary canon means. To brighten up things and to summarize the ongoing discussions on canon formation let me give you my short definition and description of the term literary canon, which is mostly based on the results of different articles and books published by Simone Winko and Renate von Heydebrand during the past decades. So I am not going to tell you what the German or even the European canon is or what texts or authors they consist of; but I am simply going to tell you what I mean when I use the phrase canon. So, a canon is a durable but variable corpus of texts, that are considered to be exemplary and thus worthy of preservation by a group (or an entire society) at a certain time. The formation of a literary canon is influenced by many collective actions and institutions (for example the bookmarket, publishers, editors, literary critics and scholars, teachers, syllabuses, mass media or – not least – literary societies and museums). In open, pluralistic societies the formation of literary canons is controllable only to a limited extent, since it is, as I said, a social concept, the result of many individual actions. These actions might be aiming at changing or even influencing the canon and can be described and analyzed as literary evaluations, but only a few of them actually do intend to influence the canon. It is important to keep in mind that a literary canon is the result of collective action: Living in a pluralistic society not only means that canons are not to be controlled, it also means that there is more than one literary canon (and hence it was a good idea to call this conference “The European Literary Canons”). There is no *one* Western Canon of literary works “with binding exemplary status which serve as general measure of quality”¹², in fact there is a “variety of discrete canons, with differing ranges, for the various functions of literature and contexts of utterance. [...]

¹² Renate von Heydebrand/SimoneWinko. “The Qualities of Literatures”. Willie van Peer (Ed.). *The Quality of Literature*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2008: 224.

Looking at the present, pluralistic societies specifically assume the coexistence of a large number of cultural and literary canons, each having its own internal criteria.”¹³ For instance you could describe a canon of detective or mystery stories, a canon of science fiction and fantasy, but also a canon of movies, pop music or possibly computer games. What we mostly have in mind when we use the term canon is the canon of so called high brow literary fiction, the kind of literature that claims to be artistic and that is produced and received under the conditions of aesthetic autonomy, in short: the classics of a nation’s literary heritage. But let me underline once more: even if most of you would agree that Goethes *Faust* or Kafkas *Prozess* belong to the canon of German literature, we could never find a definitive list of books or authors who would represent it entirely.

3. Conclusion

Still the questions arise: What is European literature and what or who belongs to the European canon? As we have seen there are many different ways to describe the European literature and hereby the European canon: as an idea, a medium for international understanding or as a mode of reading; it can be understood as a corpus of texts with rather undefined margins, as an encyclopedia or as a story to be told.

I cannot offer you a definitive answer, but let me finish with eight theses that could be considered when discussing the literary canon of Europe:

- 1) Before one can talk about an European canon of literature one should first define one’s understanding of European literature.
- 2) Literature is a product of speech; thus we should not underestimate the fact that nations retain a major role in canon formation. Canon is a concept of selection based on common values and traditions of a given society. We have an European Union – but do we have an European society? So who should decide about the formation of an European canon? What decisions and actions should be

¹³ Heydebrand/Winko. *The Qualities of Literatures*: 235.

considered as relevant for it and what decisions are of European relevance?

3) Imagine the concept of canon to exist only in plural: As I mentioned before: *the* German canon does not exist. And literary history teaches us, that most of the poets or scholars who reflected on transnational concepts of canon formation were of the opinion that a canon of world literature or European literature could only coexist with the single national canons and not replace them. Most likely the single national canons will continue to exist, and most likely the formation of European canons will depend upon the national canons, which means: every European nation will have their own national canon next to their own European canon and next to their own canon of world literature.

4) The formation of these transnational canons depends mainly on translations. If there does not exist a translation, a literary work cannot gain canonical status in another country.

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5) This is the main reason why European literature is dominated by the so-called major languages English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, French and German.

6) Apparently we already have a kind of common European canon, texts which are translated into most European languages, authors who are well known in entire Europe: Shakespeare, Beckett and Joyce, Flaubert, Baudelaire and Proust, Dante and Boccaccio, Cervantes and Pessoa, Strindberg and Ibsen, Dostojewski and Tolstoi, Goethe and Kafka. But then: what about the small literatures and the small languages? Can we manage to open the canon for Sandor Petőfi or will he be lost in translation for ever and ever?

7) It is hard enough to keep our national canons alive: we invest plenty of time and thought, energy and money to teach, mediate and communicate our own literary heritage. But if it is so hard to bring somebody in Germany to read Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* – how shall we Germans succeed in mediating Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*? When our theaters are no longer interested in Kleist and Lessing – how shall we make them to show plays by Mickiewicz or Fernandez de Moratín?

8) And yet: Who else should do it, if not us? We should not expect too much from politics. The quest for European literature is connected with European identity and common European values, and European Union's cultural administration surely invests a lot of money in cultural projects – but are these projects aimed at the implementation of a common European identity which is in my point of view the precondition for a common canon of European literature? The European Union does not represent entire Europe and is as far as I can see especially a community of shared economic interests. Cultural politics remain the domain of the single European states and coming from a country with a long federal tradition I cannot see anything wrong in it. But without European culture there will be no European canon.



Some Questions to be Addressed in the Creation of a European Literary Canon

by **Linda J Curry** / United Kingdom

Chair of The Alliance of Literary Societies

Introduction

Firstly, we need to define what we mean by a literary canon. Literature which is canonised becomes part of a body of work which demands respect. But, who decides which writers enter this elite group, and which do not? Does it mean that those works which remain outside the canon are not as worthy – or does it mean that they are excluded on other grounds (for example, political context, social class or cultural minority)? Over time, new works will enter the canon, and others will leave. Why the latter? Do these works which leave the canon no longer demand the respect they did formerly? Is the canon, therefore, subject to fashion, or to what is regarded as being politically appropriate or socially acceptable at the time?

In European art, we are subject to the Western canon – art, music, literature, etc., which has influenced our culture in the west. This is then subdivided into our own national canons. These national canons will be governed by their own rules (if there are any), will change at their own pace, and have their own judges.

The Literary Canon in the UK

There is no single list of writers or works which make up the UK literary canon (unlike the original canonical books of the Bible). The canon is made up of those classical works which are taught in schools and universities, and appear in literary anthologies.

In 1947, Penguin Books introduced their Penguin Classics range, and within that range specialised series emerged (Nature Classics, Modern Classics, 20th Century Classics, the Penguin English Library, and Enriched Classics). The most prolific authors in the range are William Shakespeare, John Steinbeck, Henry James, Charles Dickens,

Graham Greene, Mark Twain, and Jane Austen (British and American white males – and one woman). The reader was guaranteed quality – an approved title from the canon, and often a familiar text from school.

In UK secondary education in the thirty or forty years prior to the 1988 Education Reform Act, children studying English Literature would read what was prescribed by their local education authority (or what their school actually had copies of!) – always Shakespeare, with some freedom of choice from amongst the canonical group. European works would often be read only as part of a foreign language study. For example, if children were studying French, then Molière, Voltaire, Zola, etc. would be fairly standard as part of the French perceived canon.

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In 1988, the National Curriculum was introduced, whereby all children in state-funded education were to be taught with the same material, to achieve standardisation across the UK. This inevitably led to more rigid prescription, and a jostling for position amongst the great works. One thing which did not change though was that most writers were male, white, and dead. However, since its introduction, there have been some major changes to the National Curriculum, the most recent one seeing a relaxation in the choice of texts relating to the teaching of English Literature in state schools. Outside the prescribed core texts, teachers now have more freedom to use a wider range of non-canonical texts.

Of course, once students move on to university, those studying English Literature will move through selected texts from the literary canon (the Middle Ages from Beowulf to Chaucer and Malory; the poets and plays of the 16th century, including Shakespeare; John Donne to Milton in the 17th century; the diarists, poets and playwrights of the Restoration period; the Romantic period of Wordsworth, Burns, Clare, Shelley and Byron; and 20th century writers such as Eliot and Larkin). The writers chosen will usually reflect the research interests of the lecturers at that particular university. Although students will be prescribed complete texts, they will also depend heavily on books of extracts like *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, enabling them to read more widely. *Norton* was first published in 1962, with several editions since then, and those works which are included in it are part of the English literary canon. Again, the white male predominates. In the 1968 edition, only eight of the eighty four authors included were women. Although, with the rise in the study of feminist theory, more women writers have been introduced in more recent editions.

The literature which we study at school or university can affect our reading patterns for the rest of our lives.

One true sign of acceptance in the literary world in the UK is for a writer to gain a place in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. This is usually in the form of a wall plaque or floor slab (although they are now running out of space and have moved to small panes of window glass), and is extremely expensive. Most of these monuments have been paid for by public subscription, organised by the literary society which supports that particular writer. However, raising the money is not the greatest challenge. An application first has to be made to the Abbey itself and only if the writer is deemed sufficiently worthy by them can agreement be made – canonisation in the original sense of the word!

What happens to literature which is excluded from the canon?

Those writers and their works which enter the canon are automatically set aside as being worthy – as being a serious read. So, what of those writers who are excluded? Are they in a sense being excommunicated? Are they regarded as unworthy, as light literature to be read on a beach or a bus? Can they expect to be taken seriously, without the approval of those who set the cultural standards?

Some female writers in the 19th century had to resort to taking on male persona in order to be published (Marian Evans as George Eliot; the Bronte sisters as Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell). They are now part of the UK literary canon, but if they had not been published would we have ever heard of them?

If the majority of literature studied by those under 21 is from the canon, how is non-canonised literature to make its mark? Are literary societies and museums which revere authors outside the canon regarded as supporters of mere scribblers, and does this have an effect on their potential to receive grants or arts funding?

Creating a literary canon may help to make some writers and their works more widely known, but those writers who are not canonised are left out in the cold.

Is it really possible to create a European literary canon?

If literature entering the national canon is conditioned by national politics and culture, how would literature enter a European list which would be so politically and culturally diverse? How would we achieve unity in diversity? Would we create a single canon from all our canonised works? It would be an enormous and unwieldy list. Perhaps the answer would be to select, say, the top ten or twenty works from each national canon – but who decides, and on what criteria – and how often should it be updated?

Would only those works which had been widely translated be included – or would it be seen as an opportunity to encourage further translation in lesser known works? If writers struggle to have their works accepted into national canons, how elitist would a European canon be?

These are just a few of the questions which need to be addressed.



Why to Seek for a Canon?

by **Katri Sarmavuori** / Finland

Vice-Chair of NIMIKOT (Association of Literary Societies in Finland)

If you make a library search for the word *canon*, you get theological books – for example:

Literary Canons and Religious Identity, edited by Erik Borgman, Bart Philipsen and Lea Verstricht (2004).

One Scripture or Many?: Canon from Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Perspectives, edited by Christine Helmer and Christof Landmesser.

The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation, written by Stephen B. Chapman (2004).

Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism, written by James Barr (1983).

About literature there are only few studies. Juha Rikama (2000) has written a book and a dissertation (2004). His data consisted of the replies which upper secondary school teachers (gymnasium) of Finnish and literature provided in the questionnaires sent to them in 1980, 1990 and 2001.

Results: "Canonised literature consisted of 15 complete books which were most frequently assigned as set books for the whole class/group of pupils. During the whole period under study canonised literature included the following works from Finnish literature: *Seven Brothers* by Aleksis Kivi, *The Unknown Soldier* by Väinö Linna, *The Red Line* by Ilmari Kianto, and *Juha* by Juhani Aho. Correspondingly, the canon included the following works from foreign literature: *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, *The Outsider* by Albert Camus, and *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. – Other canonised works have varied. The 2000-2001 list of canonised literature did not include representatives of more contemporary Finnish or foreign literature." The top names in the canon are *Seven Brothers* and *The Unknown Soldier*.

One result of the dissertation was also, that the time used for literature and its status has

clearly weakened: "The weak status of literature could, at least in part, be explained by the fact that young people had lost interest in literature and their interest continued to diminish, which is seen to be related to the marginalisation of the status of literature in the whole field of communications." (Rikama 2004: 130-132)

In my own study I asked upper secondary teachers (N 60) to answer a questionnaire concerning their use of literature in connection with different mother tongue courses. They were asked what was read, what had been good in their choice, and what choices had proved less successful or unsuitable. As a beginning I used a list published in "Virke", a practical journal of mother tongue teachers. A group of teachers had distinguished the following categories:

- 1) A domestic novel (3): for example Kivi, Aho, Canth, Linna
- 2) A domestic collection of poems (1): for example Leino, Södergran, Kailas, Hellaakoski, Vala
- 3) A domestic present-day novel (1)
- 4) Scandinavian literature (1): for example Ibsen
- 5) A Russian classic (1): for example Tolstoi, Dostojevski, Chekhov
- 6) Other European literature (2): for example Molière, Shakespeare, Camus, Hesse, Kafka
- 7) American literature (1): for example Márquez, Steinbeck, Hemingway
- 8) Literature from other continents (1): for example Brink
- 9) A foreign present-day novel (1)
(Virke 1/1998)

The teachers were asked which of the books they would use in different courses and what they had used.

The results showed that the book selection was broad. The teachers regarded the reading of classics as important. A common

treatment of literature consisted of one book chosen for obligatory reading in class and another choice as option for individual study. The coursework contained individual or team presentations of the reading selection, reading diaries or comparative analyses. According to the teachers, it is important to choose books that give rise to discussions and speak to young people. The list of recommend literature was considered good overall. The teachers of the study used the following writers: Kivi, Canth, Linna, Ibsen, Aho, Hemingway, Moliere, Shakespeare, Kianto, Steinbeck, Sillanpää, Chekhov and Golding (Sarmavuori 2004: 7-8).

My own recommendation using the categories above is:

- 1) Aleksis Kivi: *Seven Brothers*, Minna Canth: *Pastor's Family*, Väinö Linna: *The Unknown Soldier* or Veikko Huovinen: *Havukka-aho's Philosopher*
- 2) Edith Södergran: *Poems*
- 3) Bo Carpelan: *The Shadows of the Summer* or Arto Paasilinna: *Auta armias* (not translated into English, in Swedish *Milda makter*, in Dutch *Wees genadig*) or Tove Jansson: *Moominpappa at Sea*
- 4) Henrik Ibsen: *A Doll's House*
- 5) Chekhov
- 6) Shakespeare: *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet*
- 7) Hemingway: *The Old Man and the Sea*
- 8) Brink
- 9) Herta Müller

Also teachers (Kolu 2004) have deplored that the choice of literature is too free and wild. In Finland there was a debate over literary canon in 2006. The journalist Esa Mäkinen wrote about it in "Helsingin Sanomat" (Mäkinen 2006), the biggest newspaper in Scandinavia. The academic Hannele Koivunen wrote a discussion that she does not agree with the canon, because it arouses the belief that all other literature is bad, if it is not on the list (Koivunen 2006). I wrote for the canon (Sarmavuori 2006) and took out the Curriculum for pupils with native Swedish in Finland (1977) and its canon. There we had a recommendation list, but The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) did not want to take it in the curriculum.

"Parnass" (the magazine of the Swedish Association of Literary Societies, DELS) published it (Söderbergh 2009: 11). The Trade Union of Education in Finland resists the canon. Therefore they did not publish in the paper "Opettaja" (TVF's newspaper) my interview where I had many ideas for a canon. So there are some movements against the canon. We should get more research to give evidence for the benefits of a common canon. We need a new kind of research. It is canon research. Not only opinions.

Curriculum for pupils with native Swedish in Finland (1977)

In the curriculum 1977 there was a recommendation on the native Swedish side of Finland, not on the native Finnish side. For literature reading there was a recommendation that it is important to read works that have had a social and communal influence so that they have changed the view of the community.

From world literature:

Platon: *Phaidon, State*
 Bible: *Sermon on the Mount*
 Darwin: *On the Origin of Species*
 Montesquieu: *The Spirit of the Laws*
 Voltaire: *Candide*
 Rousseau: *Émile*
 Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*
 Beecher-Stowe: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
 Marx: *Communist Manifesto*
 Gogol: *Revisor*
 Turgenjev: *Zapiski ohotnika*
 Orwell: *1984*
 Swift: *Gulliver's Travels*
 De Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*
 Solzhenitsyn: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*
 Anne Frank's diary
 Angela Davis's autobiography

From Scandinavian literature

Strindberg: *Det nya riket*
 Ibsen: *A Doll's House*
 Almqvist: *Det går an*
 Linna: *The Unknown Soldier*

From native Swedish literature

Runeberg: *The Tales of Ensign Stål*
 Diktonius: *Hårda sånger*

Andersson: *Bakom bilderna*
Kihlman: *Människan som skalv*
(Lukion opetussuunnitelmatoimikunnan
mietintö II A 1977: 165-166)

American canon

Arthur N. Applebee has made a research about the most popular books in America. He noticed that “the English curriculum is white, male, and Eurocentric, marginalizing the contributions of women and of people from other cultural traditions”. In American public schools the most used books in 1988 in grades nine to twelve were: *Romeo and Juliet* (84%), *Macbeth*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Julius Caesar*, Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*, *Hamlet*, Scott F. Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (Applebee 1992).

How could the research help us?

What kind of research do we need, if we want to know how useful a canon could be? We could make:

- 1) Inquiry research. We send a questionnaire to different populations and take samples of them: teacher educators, teachers, student teachers, pupils, administrators, researchers, usual readers or representants from different vocations. We try to get to know the general opinion (for or against? why?), in what kind of literature the person places value and what is the person’s own list like.
- 2) Curriculum comparison research. We take written curriculums from different countries and compare how they are similar or different, and look if there is a recommendation for authors and their books. We try to compare the cultures in these countries. Is literature more valued if the country has a recommendation list for the school? We compare the final examination: how important literature is there, and does it lead to read classics?
- 3) Canon and identity. We should make a study about the pupils’ identity. During the last mother tongue course in the upper secondary school there is an obligatory course “Language, literature and identity”. We should ask with a questionnaire or make an

interview how pupils and teachers experience it. What do they feel and think about their literary identity? Which are the books that the teacher thinks are suitable for forming an identity, for giving a national heritage? Which books contribute to forming an European identity? What do pupils learn from the books? What are their views about cultural heritage? What is most Finnish? What is most European? Is there a contradiction between national and European? Is there something different and something similar? The same questions could be asked at the end of the basic school (grade nine in Finland).

4) Textbooks and identity. What kind of literature, national, European and/or global classics are there in the textbooks? What do they mean for the pupils’ identity? How do they form the pupils’ national, European and global identity?

5) Experimental design. In the experimental class the teacher gives a recommendation list to pupils, in the control class there is no recommendation list. You measure the reading interest before and after the intervention (recommendation list).

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About my concepts

I have spoken here about mother tongue. I mean with it not only the child's first or native language but the discipline that is taught in school. To it belongs not only language but also reading, writing, literature, speaking, drama, media and culture. Mother tongue teachers have as their education, to be qualified, the master's degree (300 ECTS-credits). They can have as their main subject Finnish language, Finno-Ugrian languages, domestic literature or general literature. In the main subject they have 80 ECTS, 60 ECTS in literature, 60 ECTS in pedagogy and 10 ECTS in spoken communication. I lead the students' studies for instruction research. I have developed a new science that I call for the instructional science of mother tongue (Sarmavuori 2007). Some of my students now make research on canon. To the instructional science of mother tongue belongs literature, but also reading, writing, language, speaking, drama and media.

My definition of canon in this context is: a recommendation list of writers and/or their books, or a list about most read books among specific readers.

Conclusion

There is time for a European canon and for a national canon. Every country could compile a list of their classic literature, a recommendation for those who would like to get to know classics of other countries. From those we could select a common European list.

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At the Heart of Myths Revival or Invention, a Permanent Discrepancy

by **Marc Quaghebeur** / Belgium

Director of The Archives and Museum of Literature

“It’s the role of great nations to write History. But it’s to the small ones to tell, here and there, some tales whose *moral is as secret* as if it had been hiding for a long time behind a door.”¹ This statement by Pierre Mertens seems important at a moment when we want to interrogate the canons used to build lists of books constitutive of the European literary space.

As much as it is spread in the world – and the quality of the work born from its literature apart – Portuguese, for instance, weighs less than French; and Camões does not have the same place in people’s Pantheon as Dante and Hugo. If the condition of the work coming from linguistic areas which do not exert any, or just a small imperium, is even less enviable; the condition of literatures written in a language for which they do not (anymore) constitute the historical centre of gravity, reaches sometimes a degree of concealment, even of denial, which undeniably needs to be questioned. And even less, on the one hand, because the power games within a language² have decisive effects on the canons of memory. On the other hand, it would be very useful, in order to create a European conscience, to hear the tales Pierre Mertens talks about. They often escape from the history of powers.

So, I will focus on the case of Belgium – of French-speaking Belgium especially. This is a doubly specific case, as the country is plurilingual, but none of its official languages (German, French and Dutch) is its own.

In addition – in spite of their essential role in medieval production – European history managed to make French-speaking and Dutch-speaking parties of the kingdom to not weigh anymore on the editorial and literary recognition authorities of each of their linguistic areas. Therefore, I will start with some reflections on the situation of the French linguistic space. This is a partially different situation from German or English speaking worlds – to only refer to the closest ones. Then, I will comment on the singularity of some of the works French-speaking Belgium can offer to European canons.

As any French-speaking literature, French-speaking Belgian literature had to face the peculiar problems of this cultural and linguistic field. These problems mainly depend on the fact that language and literature were part of the constitution of the French nation and its imagery, as well as the editorial, symbolic and discursive devices linked to these concepts. It also depends on the French commentaries on a literature, which was the place of nation transcendence. This being, a country like Belgium (where French has become one of the first languages since the end of Latin and where, very early, the first literary monuments and official acts were given to this language) found itself almost dispossessed of its direct and consubstantial link to this language, which had become its cousins’ property. Progressively, they have made it the heart of their identity.

These problems took place when national literatures were appearing in Europe, a Europe of nationalities, following the battle of Waterloo and the Treaty of Vienna. The deadlock became even bigger for the countries not yet called French-speaking, as there were not really any alternatives for them amongst dominating ideologies. It was indeed impossible for a plurilingual country to go

¹ Pierre Mertens. *Une paix royale*. Paris: Seuil, 1995: 287.

² The analysis of the six tomes of the commented anthology by Lagarde and Michaud, which was for many, and even out of France, the Bible of French literature, does not include, for instance for the 19th century, Maeterlinck, Rodenbach or Verhaeren, despite their international fame. De Coster neither is included – despite the impact of *La Légende d’Ulenspiegel* in several countries. The acceptance of the relative gain of autonomy of French-speaking literatures is a long story, not yet won.

straight into the imagery of the German Volksgeist, which associates language, people and space. Being a different form of transcendence from the abstract universality of French culture did not change anything, even if the two visions of the world had some effects (different ones) on the two biggest national cultures in Belgium.

Even more, the monumental and univocal nature of its great neighbours' histories obscured the perception of the own history of the country. Their myths seemed even more exclusive of what had happened in the old Netherlands (from the 15th-16th century), as the expansionist politics of the hegemonic European powers had decided to despise these singularities and rights, to the name of pseudo-historical phantasms and geopolitical interests. This is the case of France (with Hugo himself who yet found refuge there) for which the objective of having the Rhine as a border meant the disappearance of Belgium and assumed its ontological non-existence. It will be the case of Germany in 1914 and in 1940.

So, it is not by chance that Henri Moke, the first national novelist, who published two important novels before the 1830 revolution and the proclamation of Belgium's independence, likes to remember that the old Netherlands of the 16th century (the Jacobins and the Vienna Treaty wanted to erase them from the European map³) are a key to European history, and to the history of its battle for freedom. Even Schiller, he assumed, would have only partially understood it.

So, it is not an accident if the fictional French-speaking production of the 19th and 20th centuries had to invent narrative and imaginary terms, likely to take into account a history, which does not resolve itself in the constitutive mythologies of nation-states. It became then very difficult for this production to put itself up to the literary canons, through which the very singular history of the French nation projected itself.

³ On the other hand, the revolutionary France unified to itself the ancient Netherlands and the ancient Principality of Liège. They were made departments.

From then, the practice of discrepancy and transforming reappropriation became the heart of the Belgian French-speaking literary functioning.

It became a subtle game with literary genres and sub-genres as well as the reinvestment and transformation of myths from abroad. For some, it came hand in hand with the visual influence, which came with the invention of literature. By doing so, Belgian writers made theirs – while transposing it – the French romantic writers' statement which considered Belgium as the country of painters.

The first important French-speaking novel⁴ of French language history, which drew some of the major outlines of the literary specificity of the country, is Charles De Coster's (1823-1879) novel *La Légende d'Ulenspiegel* (1867). He uses a farce character from German legends of the end of the Middle Ages whom he puts in the Netherlands of Charles Quint and Philip II in the 16th century. Even if – as Joseph Hanse showed it in the studies associated to his critical edition⁵ – Charles De Coster uses some facts of the original mould, from then on, the essential stake of the book lies somewhere else.

The cheeky and mischievous kid Tyl becomes the herald of the struggle against Spanish oppression and religious blindness. Tyl is both a hero and an anti-hero. He does not fall into the war game and only fights for freedom beyond power, freedom supposedly emblematic of his country. The character keeps bouncing inside known historical facts and pursues a metaphysical quest, which transcends history. He does not grow old. Therefore, he escapes from history's laws and from the human condition.

It would be the same in Hergé with Tintin, half a century later. By doing so, De Coster won the challenge of not putting, inside a story placed in the heart of history, a major historical character of the 16th century riot –

⁴ Charles De Coster. *La Légende et les aventures héroïques, joyeuses et glorieuses de Tyl Ulenspiegel et de Lamme Goedzak au pays de Flandres et ailleurs*. Bruxelles, La Renaissance du Livre, 1966.

⁵ Joseph Hanse. *Naissance d'une littérature*. Bruxelles: Labor (Archives du Futur), 1999.

which was a defeat for the southern Netherlands. Thus, he plunges his reader in a singular history (which explains the 19th century Belgium) and gets on to a kind of real universality. He propels indeed a fundamentally different subject from the one coming out of the uncompromising national mythologies, which will lead to various civil intra-European wars. He resolves, finally, the difficult question of the reappropriation of French language by non-French people.

At the end of the 19th century, Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) accomplished another mutation, which led to the constitution of an autonomic myth that will last: the Melisande myth. For this princess coming from the unknown, the relationship to people and things is below and beyond words. This playwright's medieval sources have disappeared in this creation – with its strong sense – which also got immortalised by Claude Debussy's opera.

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The interwar years do not lack either in original creations, if we use the structural facts I have already outlined. A good example is Tintin – of which a preprototype⁶ exists in France and that Hergé deeply metamorphosed. Definitely even, with the creation of the Hergéen Trinity, constituted by Tintin, Captain Haddock and Professor Calculus. The three of them correspond to each key positions of the relationship to the French linguistic norm⁷ and to the French-speaking Belgian writers' attitude for the last two centuries.

The fact that, what was considered as paraliterature became literature is obviously a structural effect of the situation of the French-speaking Belgian literary field. But still, it led to the creation of a character that was, for General de Gaulle, his only true media rival.

Contemporary with Tintin, *Monsieur Plume* by Henri Michaux (1899-1984) is also a piece of work, which could be one of the suggestions for canons. Always wonky, but from a kind of metaphysical in-between, Monsieur Plume's relationship to the world, his disengagement and clumsiness to codes and norms, is part of this tradition of productions – which are parallel to historical time – of which discrepancy is constitutive. To the point of becoming here the essence itself of the character.

At the end of the 20th century, Henry Bauchau (1913-) published *Oedipe sur la route* (1990), a story that takes up the Greek myth of the Labdacids. But when, for millenaires, the fictional creation had happened on stage – and so during the short time of the show – Bauchau chooses here the novelistic deployment. The one of time, not of essence. Does it make it necessarily the one of history?

⁶ It is Tintin-Lutin by Benjamin Robier. Cf. *Les Prémices de la bande dessinée ou le siècle d'avant Tintin*. Bruxelles: Biblioteca Wittockiana MMIX.

⁷ If Tintin's language is more neutral and normalised (conform to French standard) than Maurice Grevisse's, Captain Haddock's language is baroque. It is founded on a permanent reappropriation-reinvention of words. And for Calculus, his genius is working below words, as he understands everything the wrong way due to his deafness.

Bauchau does more. He takes his mythical characters (Oedipus and Antigone) where the tradition never outlined them – that is on the way from Thebes to Colonus. In this interval, which has necessarily to do, metaphorically, with the intervening period of the yesteryear of Netherlands and the contemporary Belgium, a metamorphosis slowly happens. She sees the blind and fallen king turning into a sort of king of himself, graved into history but progressively freed from it. A route, which can lead to the assumption of Colonus and to a closing with an infinite opening... This was also the case of the finale of *La Légende*.

Casting doubts on the historical Hegelian teleology and on the foundation of the national myths of the last centuries, these texts (and their peers) draw a singular imaginary space, sufficiently universal to be shared. They offer figures, which the European conscience should not blush about. ■

Reception and Danification of World Literature – A Historic Glance

by **Søren Sørensen** / Denmark

President of the Convention of Literary Societies in Denmark and Chair of the Danish Bellman Society

European Canon

Homer
Virgil
Horace
Dante Alighieri
Francesco Petrarca
William Shakespeare
Miguel de Cervantes
Voltaire
Carl Michael Bellman
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
H.C. Andersen
Fjodor Dostojevskij
Henrik Ibsen
August Strindberg

Over the last fifty years or so we have experienced an astonishing increase in the public concern with classic and classy literature, a phenomenon that might be interpreted as a counterreaction to the vulgarisation and infantilisation of mass media and entertainment. Along the increase in the number of literary societies and their members offers documentation of this fact.

This development includes domestic classics as well as world classics, and concerning the latter, it has found its expression in two ways: First, in a massive translation and edition of the most important works in the European tradition, most important the last 25 years; secondly, in the formation of literary societies of which some concentrate on the authors of what Goethe would have characterized as world literature, namely works that in their essence are not confined to any national frames.

Shakespeare had his Danish society in 1961, one year later James Joyce – both very vivid and active societies, now half a century later. The Klopstock Society is of 1984, the Bellman Society of 1993, and after the turn of

the millennium Marcel Proust, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Jules Verne, Charles Dickens, Gertrude Stein and Edgar Allan Poe got their Danish societies. By the way, this interest in especially French and Anglo-Saxon writers seems to be a Danish speciality among literary societies.

Concerning the editions of classics, we experienced new translations and promotions of both the Homeric epics in the 1990s, followed by Vergil's *Aeneide* and works of Ovid, *Metamorphoses* foremost. Dante became one new danification in 1963 and another one in 2000, as the first translation dated back to the 1850s. Regarding Petrarch, of whom only twelve poems from the *Canzoniere* had been given Danish form earlier – to the effect that when in 2005 a selection of 122 was published, only specialists were aware of his importance – a second edition consisting of 275 poems is being published in 2010.

Further, new and striking translations of Shakespeare plays have hit the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen; also the Shakespearean sonnets have seen a new version in 2008. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* has had not less than two different translations, both very qualified. Goethe's *Faust* and Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* both appeared in a new version. Even the *Rubâi* by Omar Khayyam have been published in a version directly from the Farsi original, as were the earlier. Even Bellman's *Fredmans Epistles and Songs* – two works in these 25 years translated into a majority of European languages, have been transformed into Danish; they used to be published, read and performed in Swedish because of the closeness between the two Scandinavian languages, and, I must add and regret, not quite to the same level as the other European classics.

The two great mythological works of Fenno-Scandinavian culture, the *Edda* and the Finnish national Epos, the *Kalevala*, are both available in the language of our day. The Russian novel writers of the 19th century, foremost Dostojevskij, have been renewed, and so has The Holy Scripture, in short: the western heritage is well represented in modern versions, widely read, discussed and used as sources of inspiration for the poets and novel writers of the day.

This inspiration is uttered in two ways:

1) Writers have retold the mythological works of *La divina commedia*¹, of the *Edda*² – and of the *Kalevala*-material³, and for children and juveniles mainly – the Greek myths and Homeric poems as well as the Bible.

2) Prosaists and poets have integrated themes and motives from the great classics in new novels, shorts stories and poems, even whole collections of poems, and cartoonists, playwrights and film makers have used classics as foundations of new works.

Researchers have documented and commented this. From my own research I have published reviews of the impact of the *Kaleva* in Danish culture over 150 years, of Dante during the last 35 years, partly in order to try to find an explanation why Danish writers these last hundred years have been neglecting Francis Petrarch, and thirdly of traces of Petrarch in Nordic literature from 1577 to this day. I am not the only one, especially not in relation to Dante, but also Petrarch is revived in university circles in Scandinavia.

World literature has been a subject in education as long as education has existed, in cathedral schools even before the University of Copenhagen was founded. For centuries all educated persons obtained command of Latin and Greek, theologians even of Hebrew, the great writers of Greek and Latin literature became the foundation of the literary culture in Denmark long before

¹ Ebbe Kløvedal Reich. *Billeder og fortællinger fra Dante: Den guddommelige Komedie*. 1991

² Villy Sørensen. *Ragnarok. En gudfortælling*. 1982 (translated into Finnish). – Suzanne Brøgger. *Vølvens spådom*. 2002. – Vagn Lundbye. *Det nordiske testamente I-III*. 2007. – Peter Madsen. *Valhalla* (cartoon book). 1977-2009 (translated into many European languages).

³ Søren Sørensen. *Himmelsmeden*. 2008

anybody thought of translating any texts outside churchly circles.

Even Petrarch was accepted in a Danish translation of his Latin hymns long before his Italian poetry ever met a Danish translator.

European literature in national languages, German, French, Italian, English and Spanish, was the subject of the noble youth, closely connected to the young noblemen's educational travels in Europe.

Some of the learned, one or two noblemen ended up writing literature on their own – and exactly this indirect road to Danish readers is of great importance, in some aspects even more so than translations.

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Literary translations, the danification of the main works of Classic and European literature, are results of the obligatory general school, introduced by law 1814 – and form responses to a double set of demands in a growing market for reading material: one is the interest in the general public for story telling, novels and stage plays, for centuries the theatre was the main scene for literature in general – and plays thus the main genre. Another is the interest among writers, poets in transforming inspirations from foreign poets and writers into their mother tongue.

In this aspect the focus is equally interesting on first, whose works have been translated, and second, whose have not.

Along with the Lutheran reformation in the early third of the 16th century the danification of the Bible became the foundation of literature in Denmark and of the written language in general. The translations of the hymns Martin Luther himself wrote for his German followers formed a trend in Danish literature, the Lutheran hymn, which during the centuries has constructed a unique wealth of our national culture, in parts shared with the Norwegians.

The translations from the 1830s of the *Iliade* and the *Odyssey* became basic of the pre-university education up till the latest reform of the Danish gymnasium. Even more important has been the effect of the Old Norse text, *Edda* and saga, translated as early as 1779; during the breakthrough of romanticism, the golden age of Danish literature, the themes and conflicts of the medieval works formed in many ways the very basis of newly written literature. As in 2007 the poet Vagn Lundby retold the ancient tales, he named them *The Nordic Testament* and initiates his work by saying: “The old Nordic myths which are in progress during the first millennium after Christ, are more than anything else The Old Testament in Scandinavia. They form a deeply rooted inheritance which we meet every day even now a days [...]”

Literature of less fundamental importance consists of works, read for the joy of reading, leisure, but not for that reason less influential in forming the minds of its readers. It is within this field interesting to observe the fact that

Cervantes and *Don Quixote* hit Danish public as early as in 1776-77. Boccaccio hit the book market thirty years later, and had some impact on the writing of short stories – along with Old Norse influence, one should add.

Although Shakespeare was the great idol of young Hans Christian Andersen, his plays were not translated coherently before 1861-73. At the same time, a selection of Sandor Petőfi's poems was published (1867) with the pious hope by the translator that “they might awaken sympathy everywhere hearts beat warmly for democracy and freedom and for the dearest the heart of man owns on earth.”⁴

In those days German was second language in the kingdom of Denmark, so Goethe was translated astonishingly late, in comparison to his influence on Danish literature in his own time; *Faust* in 1847. Dante holds a strong position in Danish literature and spiritual life, for his *Divina commedia* was translated in the 1850s, and even before that time he seems to have been eagerly read, either in Italian or in German translation. His *Vita nuova* was brilliantly translated in 1912, but seems to have had very little impact on literary life, only read by very few, judging from mentionings of reading in the literature.

Some years ago, a prominent critic wrote a book on the subject of translating classic works; he concluded that most of what Goethe would name world literature in fact was available in Danish. The exception as mentioned was Petrarch, but nevertheless his *Canzoniere* has had its impact on Danish poetry.

The unique character of Danish as well as Nordic literature in general reflects the fact that while the rest of Europa more or less is confined to the two foundations of the Bible and Homer, we add Nordic mythology.

⁴ S. H. Thurah. *Digte af Petőfi*. 1867: prologue.

A Short History of the Making of Danish Literary Canons

by **Johan Rosdahl** / Denmark

President of the Pontoppidan Society

In this paper I define canon as a list of literary works that are compulsory in schools and universities – even if there is no written, official listing. The canon consists of what is actually – de facto – read and studied. I will return to this later.

The first attempts to create a literary canon in Denmark take place in the period when Denmark was really becoming a nation. The first half of the 19th century was a period of disasters in Danish history: As a consequence of the Napoleonic wars the Danish fleet was literally stolen by the English in 1801 and they followed up by bombing Copenhagen in 1807. In 1813 the Danish State went bankrupt, and in 1814 one of the consequences of the peace treaty after the Napoleonic wars was that Norway, which had been Danish as part of the twin nation, got its independence. So the need for consolation and for healing the wounded national self esteem was massive. The Danish nation-building is not only the normal process (as in other European countries) of getting a political hold on the different provinces and bringing them together in one, centrally governed nation. It is first and foremost an ideological effort to define Danishness, what is Danish in terms of values and ideals – and dreams. The European romantic movement in art and literature was already searching for the true spirit of the people as can be seen in the poetry and art of the first decades of the 19th century. What was the task for the nation builders was to create a frame of reference that could heal the wounds and create the feeling that Denmark was a great nation, if not in size and power then in spirit and feeling. In 1814 an elementary school law was implemented and this is the modest beginning of the very strong and stable Danish history of canons. There was no official listing of a precise curriculum in Danish literature, but as mentioned above, the point is what was actually read, and that

is what was available. Availability is writing the history of canon and curriculum, so to speak. Before I turn to the history of canons in school books I would like to point to a very special and unique Danish feature: Grundtvig's making of the Højskole (the people's high school). It is important to state that the Højskole is not a high school in the normal sense of the word. The Danish people's high school is the theologian, hymn writer and pedagogical thinker N. F. S. Grundtvig's term for a type of school that had no exams, no Latin and no classical education. Instead the people's high school was to provide enlightening for the common peasant youth, and the subjects were religion, Danish history and literature, Nordic myths, and practical skills such as math. And as a supplement to this life enlightening there would be lectures on current issues. In order to glue all this together and to point out certain aspects of Danish history and religion there was a great amount of singing in the Højskole. In the beginning they sang the ballads and national hymns they remembered, but soon collections of songs were made. Within a couple of decades this effort resulted in the Songbook of the high school, *Højskolesangbogen*, first edition 1894. The contents were romantic poetry from the beginning of the century, but eventually modern texts found their place in the song book. Over the years this collection, the Danish Treasure of Songs, has spread to every other part of the school system, and the total print of the book (now in the 18th edition) amounts to almost 2,5 million copies, so its influence on the Danish self-image can hardly be overestimated. Many of the songs in this important book are written by Grundtvig who focuses on history, patriotism and Christianity. A likewise important part of the songs is poetry about Danish nature and community. For generations the lyrics and music of these songs have been the frame of

reference among the Danish people, so when asked “what is typically Danish to you” many answers would refer to the description of (for example) nature as it is found in the songs.

When it comes to canon building in the ordinary sense of the word, it is as mentioned the anthologies and readers for pupils in schools and students in universities that must be looked at. And here, as in the songbook, the texts are meant to make the readers participate in a feeling of unity: one people, one language, one literature. This is the overall effect of any canon, especially in the first early years of a national school system: to provide unity in order to handle conflicts and dissimilarity. The connection between the canon and a stable national state is underlined by the establishment of a university chair in Nordic languages in 1845. – The next milestone in the history of canon is the book *Dansk Litteratur. Forskning og Undervisning* (Danish Literature. Research and Education) 1912, by the first professor in Danish history of literature Vilhelm Andersen (1908). His canonic guidelines were meant for the upper secondary schools and were explicitly to be a part of the “forming of human beings”. So what we see is that the purpose of canonic literature is slowly changing from being part of the nation building project to become a part of the Bildung of the new generations. In a way this concept of what literature is capable of gets close to what Harold Bloom is talking about in *How to Read and Why* (2000).

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The nationalist and the Bildung purposes are, however, two co-existing sides of the canon thinking: To grow to become an individual person has to many teachers of literature also been to become a proper Dane. But I think it is fair to say that the Danish tradition of freedom of method in teaching and curriculum has diminished a nationalistic tendency – especially because the need for ideological influence was fading away because the Danish national state became very stable. Most of the 20th century was a period of harmony and unity – also in the school system: there was consensus of the official rules for framing the curriculum (based on Vilhelm Andersen’s 1912 canon). But again: what filled the frames of the canonic guidelines was what was available. The anthologies kept defining the de facto curriculum. The interesting fact is, however, that even after 1968, when many rules were given up and many old values were thrown away, the core contents of the Vilhelm Andersen canon survive. From 1971 to 2005 there has been no official listing of a literary canon – only recommendations and advice. Nevertheless – the authors in the old canon survived, so when the Minister of education in 1994 assembled a committee to discuss the possibility of making a canon to ensure the reading of the classics in the schools, the conclusion was that the committee “would not recommend a centrally defined compulsory list of texts”. But 10 years later the political winds had changed: The Minister of Culture was playing the leading part in the revival of canons. He not only focused on literature but had made what was called the *Kulturkanon*, the culture canon, containing all parts of cultural life: arts, theatre, literature, architecture, design, film and music (both classical and popular). The idea was to provide awareness of the cultural heritage as an “eye opener and create discussions about Danish art and culture”. This overwhelming canon was distributed to all schools and educational institutions in the form of a richly illustrated hardback book including a CD with additional introductions etc. And at the same time the compulsory list of canonic writers came back into the schools. There was a massive discussion in the media, especially

because it was said that the hidden agenda was – once again! – to bring the nationalist feelings forward in order to build up a defense against the new religious and cultural influences from the (Muslim) immigrants and fugitives. This might of course be an exaggeration, but it is hard to ignore the timing. The making of this massive definition of what is Danish culture (and therefore also: what is not) came in the midst of very serious discussions of how to handle the immigrant problems, and the powerful Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People`s Party) was arguing that one cannot be a proper Danish citizen without a thorough knowledge of the Danish culture. It is not without problems, I think, to let knowledge about the Danish culture be part of the test for the application for Danish citizenship – but that is what has happened. Even more embarrassing as long as the majority of Danes are not able to answer correctly!

But let us return to literature: As in the 1994 canon discussion the teachers are taking things lightly: the fifteen authors mentioned in the new canon are easily handled with – the majority is part of the average curriculum anyway. What should be discussed (and was and still is!) is that there is only one female writer on the list (and guess who!). One positive consequence of the whole canon discussion is that people have made canons for entertainment, immigrant writers, women writers, children`s literature, canons for what immigrants should read etc. etc. Now we await a canon of canons! Today, a couple of years later there is no debate. Nobody seems to think that the canon texts that are used in the schools make any difference. And in a way that sums it up: Canon in itself is neither good nor bad. It all depends on what you make it do for you in a specific situation, how you use it.



Multiculturalism and Literary Canon: Educational Implications

by Verina Petrova / Bulgaria

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The present report views this, at one moment fading, at another reemerging debate about canon, from the standpoint of education and – quite inevitably – from the standpoint of the Bulgarian situation in secondary education. This is because school plays a radical part in canon formation and canon sustenance – in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, it carries out “an educative liturgy”, reiterates “literary agiography”, and is dedicated to “the divine service in honour of the classics, the cult towards ancestral figures and the gift of the dead”.¹

The most controversial topic within the framework of this problematics is, sure enough, the list of great books required for reading in schools, but also the implicit and explicit agendas and expectations, with which young people’s literary education is inevitably charged with.

There is – we may call it – intuitive conscience that Europe does indeed have a “common literary treasure-trove”. And this common intuition has its educational implications. This idea is present for example in the Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe *Promoting the Teaching of European literature (2008)*.²

The Recommendation does indeed wish “to encourage the transmission – throughout the education system – of European literature in all its wealth and diversity”.³

It states that it is “necessary to go beyond a strictly national concept of literature teaching and offer schoolchildren at all levels a transversal approach to Europe’s heritage,

highlighting the common link of respect for cultural diversity”.⁴ Meanwhile, this same document is meticulously careful to repeatedly articulate that this common recommendation by no means threatens “teaching of native language and literature”, to quote the introduction, “in all Council of Europe member-states, of an innovative method of teaching literature that takes account of its European dimension is not intended to substitute the teaching of a supranational ‘Eurocentric’ canon for the often ethnocentric teaching of native language and literature”.⁵

The document is more that duly attentive when it has to register the painfulness and fears of assimilation on the part of some communities – in the Bulgarian case these fears reach queer heights – insisting that the promotion of European literature learning registers “the pluralism of languages and cultures” and maintaining respect for the existing educational practices in member-states.

Poor knowledge and the lack of translations from literatures written in less used languages, apparent asymmetry in knowing the literatures of Western and Eastern Europe (“‘Western’ Europe is also displaying a regrettable ignorance of major writing in the old ‘Eastern’ Europe”)⁶, the divide between major and minor literatures are being indicated as an obstacle for promoting teaching of European literature in addition to, and not instead of, the teaching of mother-tongue literature, of course.

¹ Бурдийо, П. Правилата на изкуството, генезис и структура на литературното поле. София, 2004.

² <http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta08/erec1833.htm>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

In one way or another, Bulgarian education standards⁷, curricula and lists with mandatory reading (the presence of a compulsory list, with little place for maneuver to pick up “texts of your own free choice” is the principle in Bulgarian educational standards; I am well aware that the educational systems in other countries have selected another principle), developed in a period of Euro optimism, in the years prior to joining the European Union, are an illustration of what the Recommendation calls “desire for more Europe”. The list with European authors from Dante through Shakespeare to Gogol is as a matter of fact quite plentiful and challenging. I would say also quite unachievable in view of the realities of teaching and learning literature.

Though the intentions are noble enough, when the standard manifests their wish to provide for a European dimension of literary education, I firmly believe that it is miles apart from the recommended representation of “the multiple voices of the languages and cultures in which works of literature have been created on our multicultural and multilingual continent”.⁸ Regardless of the fact that it affords some opportunity to choose, the list does not contain enough names of women writers, it is deprived of texts by minor literatures: Italian, English, German and French literature are present, however the list of literatures which are non-presented threatens to prove really massive.

What is more, educational standards in my country, not only on the level of the list, but also on the level of formulated aims of education which are functioning as some kind of a filter of meaning and as a sieve, to read through, seem to sabotage the attempt to hear a multiplicity of voices even in the works of Bulgarian classical authors which comprise the predominant part of the list of compulsory reading within the framework of Bulgarian literature as a teaching subject.

Subsequently – within the necessity to promote studying the diverse literatures of our

multicultural and multilingual continent and the inevitable necessity of selection; within the imperative of the European dimension and the loyalty to a tradition, and public pressure to “work for a cultivation of a feeling for national identity” – what grounds should we select for our choice, what hidden ideological and political pledges indicate existing choices?

In the existing criticism and theory on canon and canon formation the ultimate limits of these choices seem clearly marked.

The highly controversial and challenging book by Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (1994), does not leave the slightest doubts – what is worth teaching, according to the author, are the writers, as those selected by him because they “confront with greatness directly”.⁹ The Canon is much more than the list of books for required study, it is “the Art of Memory”, says Harold Bloom.

It is the aesthetic value, the aesthetic choice that has always been guiding the canon formation. The project for “opening the canon” or demystifying it is an utopia, according to the American author, because “The Canon – a word religious in its origin – has become a name for the choice among texts struggling with one another for survival, whether you interpret the choice as being made by dominant social groups, institutions of education, traditions of criticism or as I [Harold Bloom] do, by late coming authors who feel themselves chosen by particular ancestral figures”.¹⁰

Harold Bloom states that it is only the strong, original author, an author who “overwhelms and subsumes” the tradition who can open the canon. To cite Bloom again: “The movement from within the tradition cannot be ideological or place itself in the service of any social aims, however socially admirable. One breaks into the canon only by aesthetic strength, which is constituted primarily of an amalgam: mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power, knowledge, exuberance of diction [...].

⁷ http://www.minedu.government.bg/opencms/export/sites/mon/left_menu/documents/process/nrdp_2-00_uch_sadarjanie-pril1.pdf

⁸ <http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta08/erec1833.htm>

⁹ Bloom, H. (1994). *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 20

Whatever the Western Canon is, it is not a program for social salvation.”¹¹

While some of all this might hold true, whenever reading is regarded as a completely solitary act that brings you into contact with the aesthetic dignity, teaching can hardly forget that it is necessarily a social act.

Teaching of literature is never teaching only the “literariness of literature” (Roman Jakobson). It is, as a number of people admit or fear – always teaching of certain aesthetic and moral values, as well as political and social values. This, for instance, is quite clear from the text of the Recommendation, quoted earlier, for which the aim of intensified inclusion of European literature in learning is “to present the teaching of European literature as an integral part of education in European citizenship”.¹²

“Opening the canon”, “formulating” counter-canons, diversification of the canon – a number of reforms and alterations have been carried out in “the pedagogics of the great books”¹³, if we make use of the meaningful phrase by Gerald Graff – was based on ideas that go quite contrary to the above.

These reforms have been grounded upon the noble conviction of liberal pluralism, stating that the canon should be a representation of certain so far repressed or marginalized social groups, which, if translated in the terms of the presence of the diverse European literatures in curricula and syllabi, would imply also the adequate presence of authors from peripheral and central, from major and minor literatures, in an attempt to compile the educational formats of the canon as a hypothetical image of social diversity.

However, no matter whether we choose to teach the monumental list of “aesthetic dignity” of Bloom (where many and many books worth reading are missing and many national literatures are underrepresented), or

what he would label as “Balkanizing the canon”, namely alternative canons, counter-canons, lists with women, gay, lesbian, minority etc. literatures, or simply refuse to compile mandatory lists – the feeling of something lacking has been quite persistent.

On the one hand, Bloom’s lists could provoke a number of extremely sensitive reactions in many, who would legitimately object against the absence or under-representation of some national classics, of women, minority literature etc. in this otherwise estimable name enumeration.

On the other hand, as far as the utopia of equal representation in the canon is concerned, I personally would not approve the educational list to be deprived of a great book – a book with a universal message which has withstood the test of time, let me use this frequently employed cliché, in the debate about the canon – for the sake of another, chosen only on the grounds that it has not been written by a dead white male for example.

It is quite easy to compile the school list of compulsory reading to include literature of, say, the minorities. The hard thing is to provide education which is just and supplying equal chances for minority children – a cause in which the Bulgarian educational system is definitely failing. A failure which is not without references to the absence of intercultural sensitivity towards those who are different and culturally determined as having a different attitude to reading practices included.

There is more beyond in this feeling of something lacking, however. We are reminded of it by John Guillory in *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* which outlines the difference between canon and literary syllabus (or a selection of texts to be taught). The syllabus, the curriculum, the list is necessarily limited and selective while the canon is “the imaginary totality of works”.¹⁴

¹¹ *Ibid.* : 29

¹² <http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta08/erec1833.htm>

¹³ Graff, G. (2007). *Professing Literature*. University of Chicago press.

¹⁴ Guillory, J. (1993) *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. The University of Chicago Press.

Let me quote: “So far from being the case that canon determines the syllabus in the simple sense that the syllabus is constrained to select only from canonical works, it is much more historically accurate to say that syllabus posits the existence of the canon as its imaginary totality.” – “The totality of the canon”, Guillory continues, “is always in conflict with the finite materiality of (any) syllabus, the fact that it is constrained by the limits imposed by its institutional time and space.”¹⁵

And by the limits that our own mortality imposes, I would add, because the list of the books worth reading will always be longer than the list of those that we will ever be able to read. If Harold Bloom is right to say that “the canon is the Art of memory”, then it turns out that the syllabus is the art of forgetting.

If we go back to the subject of our conference, the European literary canon is also not entirely settled in any list, and is not present in any syllabus and curriculum, nor in any – no matter how rich – anthology or library.

It is exactly the absence, so to say, described with the earlier quoted terms, a limit of the non-present, overpowering each syllabus and curriculum: an imagined totality, written out by desire (for Europe).

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The noble striving for more European literature along with more European dimension in literary education – which I share and it is being shared by many of my colleagues in Bulgaria – is not a question of writing and rewriting of more and newer lists of required books in the hope that in the foreseeable future a just, representative enough and free from ideological prerequisites and hidden institutional agendas syllabus is going to be worked out.

Although the following is a matter of an enduring and forthcoming intellectual effort, and goes beyond the framework of this paper, and predominantly addresses the realities of Bulgarian education, I would probably engage in the agreement in the first place, that the canonicity or non-canonicity of a text, is a radically significant circumstance about the manner in which it is read. Last but not least, it is different due to the different dynamics of pleasure in which the reading of a canonic or non-canonic text is introducing us.

We could venture with the hypothesis that each text, even lets say the experienced as the most tiresome canonical text out of the Bulgarian syllabus list, that is loaded with expectations to ecstatically recite the nationalistic myth, contains in itself or is more precisely the cross-point, the space in between (as some of the authors in post-colonial theory would say) of the voices of multiple cultures, of plenty and plentiful cultural identities, of traces of the dialogue with other cultures and languages.

The canonical works, as we know, are being infinitely interpreted – this is the essence of their canonicity. In a number of different ways the hearing of the multiple voices, contained in the texts would mean to read critically their previous interpretations – too often in our case charged with nationalistic, ideological and political hidden agendas.

However, all of that is not that much a question of compiling a list but of applying a method.



¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 31

Cultural Identity and the Literary Canon: A Fundamental Issue Regarding a Planned Austrian Literature Museum

by **Bernhard Fetz** / Austria

Director of the Literary Archives of the Austrian National Library

1. The project

An Austrian Literature Museum is being planned in a historic building in Vienna's city centre. It is to be installed by 2013. The building was constructed in the middle of the 19th century for the Imperial and Royal Exchequer Archive (the Hofkammer-Archiv), the predecessor to today's Ministry of Finance. With its substantially intact appearance and structure, the listed building is considered a fine example of utilitarian Biedermeier architecture. Austria's most important dramatist of the 19th century, Franz Grillparzer (1791-1872), was director of the Exchequer Archive from 1832 until 1856. During his term in office, and indeed during the revolutionary year of 1848, the archive was moved to the newly constructed building where Franz Grillparzer's office, as an Austrian civil servant and poet, has remained unchanged to this day. The historic Grillparzer room will be integrated into the permanent exhibition, being an exhibit in itself. Since it was built, the building has continually served as the Exchequer Archive and, together with the archive facilities, forms a historic ensemble.

The central location, the architecture, the available space as well as the historic and intended use of the Exchequer Archive provide a fascinating constellation. The building offers something that cannot be artificially created: aura. The rooms' unique ambiance is in large part due to the wooden shelving. Extending to the ceiling and dividing the large rooms into long sections, the shelves were used to store the historic files. Inside, the building is somewhat reminiscent of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's "Carceri" or Jorge Luis Borges' "Library of Babel".

The Literature Museum will assemble exhibits from different archives to form a permanent exhibition that will appeal to a

large audience. Visitors are to be introduced to the developments and continuities and to the brittle identity of Austrian literature. By means of historic examples, it is also intended to foster the writing and reading skills of children and young people and to contribute to intensifying the social and cultural discussion about Austrian literature. In addition to the permanent exhibition on two floors, a regular series of temporary exhibitions will be staged on the third floor.

The various target groups, the difficult subject matter of literature and the listed building present the curators and designers not just with a major challenge but also with a considerable stimulus. They are forced to reflect on the relationship between the building and the exhibitions, as well as between old and new, object and text, cultural memory and the needs of the individual visitor, while striking a balance that enables the differences to remain clearly visible but which nevertheless preserves the overall impression.

2. What is Austrian literature?

The establishment of an Austrian Literature Museum offers a unique opportunity. After all, the decision of what should or may be considered Austrian is closely linked to Austrian literature: a country that is proud of its cultural identity, whose self-image is to a considerable extent based on its cultural achievements, which still distinguishes itself from its much larger neighbour, Germany, through its particular linguistic and cultural characteristics, but which was prepared to sacrifice these very characteristics unconditionally during the period of National Socialism to create a larger whole – for such a country the critical public that literature provides is a corrective that is almost essential for survival. To clarify these aspects by attempting to put on display the precarious

geographical, political and historic mental boundaries in determining Austrian literature is a task that extends far beyond merely conveying literary history.

To take just three examples: Does Franz Kafka and the so-called Prague-German literature form part of Austrian literature? If you apply the encyclopedic and biographical yardstick of birthplace and date of birth, then most German-speaking Prague authors belong to Austrian literary history. However, this literature provides an excellent example of a supra-national regional literature (compare Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Für eine kleine Literatur*. Frankfurt am Main, 1976) that forms part of a larger, German-speaking and European literature. To give you another example: the Nobel Prize laureate Elias Canetti – he was born in 1905 in Rustschuk, Bulgaria, and lived in London and Zurich for many years. Nevertheless, throughout his life he was influenced by Vienna and the Austrian literature of the interwar period – particularly by Karl Kraus but also by Hermann Broch and others – and therefore he can, with all due caution, be described as an Austrian writer. And the third example, which concerns the – from the Austrian point of view – hegemonic tendencies in German literary historiography: there are numerous examples in literary encyclopedias and public statements in which the Austrian authors Ingeborg Bachmann or Peter Handke are described as German authors. A well-known anthology, edited by the German scholar Benno von Wiese, is entitled: *Deutschland erzählt: Von Arthur Schnitzler bis Uwe Johnson* (Germany Narrates: From Arthur Schnitzler to Uwe Johnson). The former definitely ought to be described as an Austrian writer – you can just see how much this area is littered with minefields.

Austrian literature from the end of the 18th century onwards provides a rich collection of material illustrating the emergence and critique of national clichés and stereotypes. Because of their multiethnic and multilingual history, the political divisions have found a particular place in this literature: ranging from Franz Grillparzer's Bohemian plays, which caused particular consternation among the

Czechs, to Thomas Bernhard's highly critical tirades, whose literary calibre is of international standing. With the Alt-Wiener Volkstheater – the old Viennese popular theatre – the Austrian vernacular found a means of literary expression that today has developed, for example, into the polemical and critical mastery of Elfriede Jelinek.

Attempts to stamp Austrian literature with a specifically folkloristic or national character, to explain it with reference to the Catholic and Baroque nature of the Austrian soul or, with patriotic pride or a critical gesture, to ennoble it by linking it to the multinational and multilingual traditions of the multiethnic Habsburg state – can be justified only to the extent that it leads to stereotyped and distorted images of Austrian literature. Attempts to identify specifically Austrian characteristics range from Hugo von Hofmannsthal's famous comparison "Preuße und Österreicher" (Prussians and Austrians) to the far-reaching concept of the Habsburg myth promoted by the Italian literary scholar and writer Claudio Magris. One specific irony of Austrian history is that none other than the Austrian communist Ernst Fischer (a friend of George Lukacs and his wife here in Budapest) wrote a pamphlet while exiled in Moscow in 1944 on the "Austrian National Character", distinguishing it from the German communists. In his text, Fischer draws comparison between the humane, baroque, Kakanian Austrian myth and Prussian-organised German imperiousness (including that of the German communists exiled in Moscow).

The Austrian situation is different from the German one because the main political upheavals – in 1848, 1918, 1933 (including in Austria the civil war year of 1934 and the annexation year of 1938), 1945, 1968 and 1989 – were necessarily recorded differently in Austrian and in German literature. The reasons for the different developments in the wide sphere of German-language literature lie in the different experiences of nation-building, in the different developments media and public criticism took – even before the collapse of 1918 – and the differently evolving contrast between provinciality and urbanity with regard to the political and literary conditions. In addition, there are the specific

literary traditions that would legitimately justify the concept of Austrian literature: Austrian popular plays of the 18th and 19th centuries and their further development in the 20th century, literary language scepticism, the significance of the fragment and more regional literary forms.

This can and must be put on display by the Literary Museum, without succumbing to the temptation of providing a purely national perspective. Due to the specific literary field, the visual appeal of Austrian literature is certainly very high, as is expressed through the diversity of its aesthetic forms or its multimedia character, with strong links to fine art and music and ranging from Adalbert Stifter and Hugo von Hofmannsthal to more recent authors such as Thomas Bernhard, Ernst Jandl and Elfriede Jelinek.

In its often pronouncedly poetic outlook, the literary critique of the (Austrian) situation should not be (mis)understood as explicit standpoints in debating the direction to be taken but as an aesthetic and political experimental laboratory that permeates all social, political and individual levels. The construction of reality through language, ideology and art has always been a crucial issue in this context. This links classic Austrian modernist writers such as Robert Musil and Hermann Broch to, for example, members of the avant-garde Vienna Group of the 1950s. The *Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa* (Improvement of Central Europe), which is the legendary title of a

novel by Oswald Wiener from 1969, is for many 20th century Austrian writers a poetic mission to free reality from the corset of conceptual and visual fixations. One contemporary Austrian author who should be named in particular in this respect is Peter Handke, who once described a central aspect of Austrian literature as follows: “It is the literature that in fact shapes the image of a country in that it contradicts all preconceived images with tenacity and gentle force.” The establishment of an Austrian Literature Museum is both an Austrian and a European project. This is the best answer to the question, what the nature of Austrian literature is: It is part of German-language literature and, owing to the historical circumstances and the self-conception of its most important protagonists – including many who were forced into exile – it is genuinely a European literature.

Manuscripts, pictures, letters and memorabilia, which can be found in large numbers in the collections of the Austrian National Library and in other important literary archives, gain a second life when presented as museum exhibits. For this reason the vitality of the presentation of literature in a museum does not diminish its vitality, especially when the previously canonised are confronted with more recent and current literature, which must be a prerequisite for an open and lively Austrian Literature Museum. It is at that central square between the Vienna Hofburg and the Vienna Ringstrasse, the Heldenplatz, where Hitler announced the return of his homeland to the German Reich, that Austria’s political and literary topography intersects: Thomas Bernhard’s controversial play *Heldenplatz* from 1986 and Ernst Jandl’s poem “wien heldenplatz” from 1962 exemplify how Austria’s literary canon depends on its political history. In Austria, the confrontation with Austria’s complicity in the Nazi atrocities first started in literature, before this debate ever entered the political and media discourse. In this regard the relationship between political and cultural identity and the literary canon forms the main aspect determining the concept of an Austrian Literary Museum.

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The Relationship between Cultural Identity and Literary Canons in Czech Literary Context

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Introductory remarks

The topic of literary canon is very extensive, so it seems necessary to introduce some initial conditions for our inquiry.

We will leave aside some general questions related to the phenomenon of literary canon – that is the questions why certain literary works are called classical, what are the criteria used to include texts into a literary canon, and other theoretical questions. We will be interested in the character of mutual relationship between cultural identity and literary canon in a specific partial context – that is, in the context of Czech literature.

Literary science has introduced different concepts of text interpretations during the recent decades. A concept of discontinuity replaced the idea of a continuous development. Intertextuality, denoting the process of texts absorbing and transforming earlier texts, is used instead of a text conceived as a closed system. Other theories applicable to the topic of literary canon are hypolepsis or continuation, the theory of permeable layers and the reception theory. Foucault's concept offers a necessary variability of different literary canons without compromising their uniqueness. According to his approach, the literary text is not characterized only by its inner configuration and autonomous form, but it is also immersed in a system of references to other texts, thus appearing as a knot in a network.

To conclude my preliminary remarks I would like to use a paraphrase: the writer's ambition is not to do it better than his predecessors, but to see what they have not seen and tell what they have not told. No poetic devalues the previous one as far as it was original, any new idea is not interchangeable with another one and each contributes to the history as we know it. According to Julien Graque, "history of literature is a history of

values, not of events", and precisely because it is a history of values it is ever present.

Cultural identity of the nations of Central Europe

An extraordinary position among the extensive specialized literature concerning the literary canon is occupied by the brilliant essay by Milan Kundera entitled "The Curtain". Kundera develops his thoughts from his own concept of the evolution of the European novel and from its historical contextualization. The part of his text which deals with Central Europe is relevant for our present contribution.

According to Kundera, it is not possible to define the area of Central Europe with any precision, nor to invent an idea that would make the nations living there a coherent community similar to, say, Scandinavia. Kundera remarks that the sole phenomenon shared by the nations in this area is a similar historical experience that results in an anxiety that they may lose their historical memories. Kundera continues with reference to what he calls "provincial attitude of small and large nations". However paradoxical the notion of provincialism of both small and large nations may look at first sight, in fact they both share the incapacity to see things in a wider context – that is, to see innate culture and literature in a wider context. The provincialism of small nations stems from the anxiety of not being respected by the world that surrounds them. The large nations, at the same time, often show uncritical self-centredness and are convinced of their own self-sustaining capacity. The image presented by literature is just the same. Many tokens can be brought together to testify to the fact that the dynamic of European canon is not conceivable without a participation of all the individual national canons and that their diversity contributes to ever fresh inspiration. Just one example must

stand for others. One of the most important novels in history, *Ulysses* by James Joyce, was prohibited for many years in its own country, but it was published for the first time in Paris in 1922, and already in 1930 in Prague – the Czech translation being one of the very first ones. Innumerable examples like this could be found, that in contrast to the textbooks of literary history would present national literatures like nothing like the supposedly enclosed entities: Rabelais was undervalued by the French and found sympathy with Bakhtin, while Dostoyevski was discovered by the French Gide.

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Is the Czech literary canon part of the European one?

Similarly to other European literatures written in minor languages, Czech literature has often during the centuries of its history served to defend the national existence. But how did Czech literature contribute to the European literary canon?

Principles of cultural continuity and coherence

Czech literature that entered the European canon often expressed the ideas of humanity and tolerance, as employed by František Palacký and T. G. Masaryk, up to Jan Patočka with his notion of “care for soul” in regard to responsibility for a communal whole. Evidence in this respect is provided by the works of Karel Čapek or Jaroslav Hašek who managed to transform these ideas into a universal appeal addressed to the whole world.

Czech literature and its canon have not developed during the history in a strictly monocultural environment. For example, so-called Prague German and Jewish literature developed parallel to the Czech one in the first half of the 20th century. Its key representative is Franz Kafka whose work exercised an important influence on the European and world novel.

Canonical texts under the ideologically controlled totalitarian systems

After the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, the literary canon has changed as a result of a reevaluation of Czech literary history. The works previously excluded from the canon on an ideological basis could be reintroduced to it. Some of these have already entered the European canon by that time – this concerned primarily the novels by Milan Kundera, Ivan Klíma and Ludvík Vaculík, and also dramas by Václav Havel that mediated to the foreign readers the experience of absurdity of power under a totalitarian political system.

Image of Czech literature abroad

New discussions of the national literary canon after the fall of Communism culminated at a regular conference of Bohemian studies in Prague in the year 2005. The topic was part of the main session and specialists from all around the world participated in the debate. In a contribution reflecting the reception of Czech literature in Great Britain, the handbooks, dictionaries and studies in literary history produced at British universities during the 20th century were analyzed. Significant differences could be established between the list of names included in the British representations and those featured in the Czech literary canon. According to the author of the contribution, the differences were caused both by the personal preferences of the scholars who have written the British publications, and by the availability of translations. The image of a foreign literature is constituted by reading the texts recommended by handbooks and those that are available in translation. This image may not fit the value criteria of the canon in the home country and such criteria are thus less valid for an ensuing image abroad.

Besides a certain degree of contingency which is active in creating an image of Czech literature abroad, its likeness is also influenced by mistakes and false interpretations present in encyclopedias and handbooks; Milan Kundera has listed them in his "Curtain" essay.

Literature in the situation of opened borders

Czech society is still searching how to establish its identity in Europe, so far with rather mixed results. The same holds for Czech literature. In the new situation of open borders, contemporary Czech literature is searching for universal topics that could address foreign readers and that would enable an entrance of Czech literature into the dynamic process of the ever changing European canon.

According to the philosopher Erazim Kohák, a community is formed by free individuals who decide to participate in it and who are thus creating it on the basis of

everyday choices. Cultural identity is formed not only by shared memory but also by shared hopes and tasks in everyday life. These democratic principles can be considered as a foundation not only of national identity, but also of a kind of supranational, cultural identity in the unified Europe.

In his vision of future Europe, Kundera uses the words "maximum diversity in minimum space", while the French historian LeGoff speaks about "Europe that should become more homogeneous in order to remain plural". Fulfillment of these visions is blocked by unsolved problems of isolation of both large and small nations, and we can conceive similarly also about the individual literary canons. From the perspective of new concepts of literary theory it is not important what is or what should be included in the canonical lists of texts. Much more important are clearly the intertextual references and communication networks that could serve as devices of mutual understanding.


Museum of literature and cultural heritage – redefinition

The Museum of literature fulfills different functions. Its universal mission consist of care for cultural heritage (namely of all documents related to the language and literature) and of efforts to make it accessible to the general public. Even in today's conditions of an all-pervading medialization and cultural globalization, the language and literature still form basic pillars of national identity. Even today we cannot escape the term national literature meaning a historically and socially founded structure denoted by language. Instead of negative associations connected to this term and concerning the tendency towards closeness and isolation, there appears a possibility to conceive national literature as one of the knots in the supra-national communication network. From the point of view of this discourse, collections of literary museums provide a reservoir of topics and references to other contexts, caches for any future shared projects.

It has been difficult to find a balance between the texts of the national literature

and texts from other cultures until recently.
But is that question topical any more at all?

Goethe was the first one to say that national literature still means a lot, but that we are entering the era of a world literature and it is up to ourselves if we will help to quicken the development. Although the words were pronounced two hundred years ago, it may seem at first sight that we have not proceeded much further. This is, at least, suggested by the image given by handbooks, dictionaries and school curricula. As long as we pursue a creative debate among the European museums of literature there remains, however, a chance to move forward.



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The Role of the Literary Museums when Literary Canon and Cultural Identity Diverge

by **Maria Gregorio** / Italy

ICOM Italy

Italy has certain historical and social peculiarities which have no counterparts in other countries, and for this reason it may be worth briefly looking at them, since they determine the specific nature of Italian culture in general, and of our literature, and play a fundamental role in the construction of a national identity.

I am forced to be extremely schematic, while aware that the devil is in the details. I hope you will forgive any inevitable generalisations.

Among the main particularities, we should first of all mention the fragmentation of the country, which has persisted for centuries, and the extremely long subjection of the various regions of Italy to a variety of foreign governments. Probably for this reason, ours is a community with little in common and little shared memory.

We should also mention the enormous influence always exercised by the Catholic Church on politics, culture and education. In Italy there has never been any religious reforms, while in other countries the Protestant Reformation, by urging the direct reading of the sacred texts, created a new relationship with the population starting with language. This had extremely wide-ranging repercussions.

Moreover, the unification of Italy took place relatively recently, in the mid-19th century, whilst the various social and regional components preserved significant social and cultural fragmentation. This, together with other political factors has meant that the idea of belonging to a single nation has never profoundly taken root in the self-awareness of the Italian people.

Lastly, the consequence of such late unification was the extremely late birth of industry and therefore of a real middle class,

with everything this meant for civil, cultural and also literary life.

The combined effect of these factors first of all led to a literature which lacked unity and displayed significant regional differences. In some aspects, this is a source of enormous richness (for example, in terms of the splendid poetry and theatre in dialect), but in itself this is certainly not a unifying factor. I might also remember that almost a thousand years separate the first document in Italian and the unification of the country.

The second extremely important element, linked to the late birth of a middle class, is the absence of the great 18th-19th century novels found in other European countries, and the consequent absence of literature conceived for and read by a wide public. It has been said that opera, above all Verdi's, managed to seduce the collective imagination in Italy, becoming a shared cultural heritage, and may thus be considered the Italian equivalent of great 19th century popular novels. There is undoubtedly some truth in this, but there are also evident differences, since here mediation takes place through music and the stage set, not language. Besides, language in opera is far from everyday speech.

The fundamental element is thus the question of language, in particular the enormous distance between the language of culture and common speech. This is a problem which to a certain extent still persists today.

There is a short text written in 1824 by our leading poet philosopher of the 19th century, Giacomo Leopardi: *A Discourse on the Present State of Italian Customs*. This extremely clear text provides a perfect summary of Italian history and society, obviously at that time, but whose consequences are still visible today.

Leopardi looks beyond national borders and compares the situation in Italy with what he glimpses in other European countries, where, with the birth of modernity, the principles of ancient ethics had necessarily been lost, but had been replaced by an “associated life”, where people had the opportunity and habit of “talking to each other in an authentic relationship based on real *conversation*”. This was the birth of “civil society”.

A country which does not have conversation, writes Leopardi, does not possess that middle language which is indispensable to ensure that the ideas become a common heritage. Failing that language, public opinion cannot be formed, nor even a real public. Whereas, thanks to all this, in foreign cultures literature has become an important part of a civil project which regards both the public and the private.

This happened extremely late in Italy and only partially. Nor did the unification of the country radically change things. It did not solve what has been called the fracture between Italy and the Italians, and specifically as it interests us here, between literary and popular identity. National literature in Italy remained even then mainly aristocratic and elitist, and the identity of the leading intellectuals was cosmopolitan and universal, but never popular. Although they often address the people, writers never speak the language of the people, from which they remain linguistically and anthropologically distant.

This is probably one of the reasons why the great literary tradition – what today we call the canon – has never been perceived by the people as a common value and heritage.

Despite this, the figures of great writers, and of many characters they created, have had an important role in the widespread collective imagination. Both, authors and characters, were obviously mediated to the public, and not assimilated by the direct reading of the works. Nonetheless, they played a central role in forming an identity linked, in particular, to the city or region in which writers lived or worked. This fact still has an extremely significant influence on our literary museums, that I would now like to

bring up, hoping you will forgive me if I have spent too much time on the foundations.

It is true that precisely the situation created on those foundations poses specific problems also for the museums. In fact, the greatest risk is that their collections may reproduce a reality which faithfully reflects the situation outlined so far rather than modifying it.

In the seminar held in Berlin in February last year on the initiative of the ALG, I outlined a brief picture of the literary museums in Italy. Here, I would only like to mention that in many of them a territorial approach prevails, with the celebration of a legitimate local pride, and strong emphasis is placed on the figure of the writer and/or of his/her characters. On the contrary, there is little reference to Italian literature as a whole and to the overall social and political context.

Moreover, and this is a second fundamental point, there is for the most part little attention to representing the real essence of literature, that is the literary work itself, which is made of language. It is precisely that language which in Italy has separated most citizens from their literature. Avoiding the issue is pointless: museums have to deal with it too, even if we know how extremely difficult it is.

How could we identify new ways of conceiving the exhibitions in Italian museums with the explicit aim of building and strengthening a national identity?

Here I would like to mention another great Italian author, Pier Paolo Pasolini. In his work and person society and literature were united in perfect symbiosis, to the extent that in his desire to build a new Italy, he felt the need to reject literature. He explained with revealing words his move towards a new creative form, cinema: “It’s not that I changed the literary technique; in reality I changed the language, and this implies perhaps a certain protest on my part against Italian literary language, even against the Italian language as a whole, and perhaps even against the society that expresses itself in this language.”

This quote strikes me as central to our discourse. The obstacle is the language itself

that does not allow the public at large to recognise literature as a common heritage or to identify itself with it. We are thus forced to work towards a new language and to use a different medium. We have seen that in some way this already happened with opera.

Pasolini chose film, creating a cinema of the highest quality and of great popular impact.

As for us, why do we not choose the museum, since this also uses its own language? Every museum, in fact, can be seen as the result of a shared work of interpretation, mediation and translation into a new language. Of course, museums were also, and in part still are, a cultural tool of the elite. But the New museology which dates back to the 1970s has radically innovated their language.

It is now mostly based, we know, on the dialogical relationship established in exhibitions by the objects with each other as well as with the curators and visitors. Starting from here, I then try to imagine how we could present the literary thing to those who still feel that distance between themselves and that thing.

These concepts are not particularly new to museum professionals, but they are extremely important for our literary exhibitions.

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The attention to objects linked to the figure of the writer and to his/her origins in the territory remains essential in the exhibition, insofar as those objects represent a sort of primary attachment that visitors develop with the museum: looking at those objects, where literary language has no place, visitors do not perceive distance.

After this, our main aim is now to create a context which brings relationships into the foreground: in our case, the kinship of the writer and especially of his/her work with the whole of Italian history, society and literature. Also with the present time. But relationships shall be staged, not simply written in captions or on panels: in fact, museums' new language is made not only of words, but primarily of visual and emotional elements, interwoven with the new relations created in and by the museum. A language that the exhibition designers can help invent each time in an intense continuous dialogue with the curators and with the public.

I would like to give just one example. A text that in itself is difficult to comprehend for the majority, being written in a language that we perceive as distant and perhaps hostile, within an exhibition project focused on the context and the relationship may radically change its nature. Not because it acquires a different meaning from that intended by the author, but because that meaning, interpreted, contextualised and inserted within a network of relationships, has a completely new emotional even more than intellectual resonance. By becoming part of a different linguistic register, that of the museum, words are no longer marked by a literary tradition based on exclusion and subjection, and in the end become familiar to visitors. Facing that work, previously perceived as extraneous, visitors might now recognise it as belonging to their own heritage while at the same time learning to know themselves better.

As Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote, "I discover in the world what I already am, but I need the world to discover what I am." That world could be the museum.



Literary History and Literary Canons in a Bilingual Written Culture – Some Experiences from Norway

by **Ottar Grepstad** / Norway

Director of the Ivar Aasen Centre

The relationship between cultural identity and literary canons may be rather complex as it is. Nevertheless, I will draw the attention to the role of written culture. Speaking in capital letters, I present an outline of the history of written cultures in Norway and a short story of Norwegian literary history and literary canons. This develops into a discussion whether there are one or two literary traditions in Norway. I conclude with some Norwegian experiences with literary history and canons which might be relevant even for other written cultures.¹

The meaning of a written culture

To me, one of the best books about written culture is Peter Steins *Schriftkultur*.² His amazing overview of the history of writing and reading, in that order, proves beyond all doubt how important literature in every meaning of the word has been in the development of mankind.

Mr. Stein's point of view is that *Schriftkultur* "ist – wie Kultur überhaupt – weniger ein Zustand, sondern ein Prozess, der keineswegs als ein geradliniger aufzufassen ist".³

A written culture may be defined as the infrastructure of all kinds of literature, from writing and reading to the teaching, publication and distribution, including the use and reception of literature. Literary museums and literary societies can be, and should be, important institutions in a written culture. Only in Norway, there are about 15 literary museums and at least 26 literary societies.

The use of writing cannot be isolated from speaking. A written culture should also be understood as a culture of spoken language. This makes a written culture quite complex.

At least, this is the case of Norway, which may be regarded a nation with a bilingual written culture. The borders within this culture may be distinct, but often they are not, because the two varieties of Norwegian – Bokmål and Nynorsk – are mutually understandable. In fact, they are also mutually dependent of each other. Therefore, I offer a rough guide to Norwegian history of written culture.

The development of a bilingual written culture

The territory of Norway has been an arena for multicultural affairs for more than a thousand years. When the Catholic Church entered Norway a thousand years ago, it introduced the Latin language to the people of the Old Norse language. In the centuries to come, the two languages were used in different domains and partly written with different alphabets.

From the 14th century Norway was a part of the Danish monarchy, which means that Danish language was the de facto written language in Norway. The spoken language was quite different. Norwegians kept on speaking their dialects, which in their structures remained mostly unchanged for many hundred years. Already from the 18th century, most Norwegians could read, but quite few of them managed also the art of writing, and this writing was mainly in Danish. This means that most Norwegians were speaking one language and writing another, because almost everything printed was in Danish.

About 1800 this distance between spoken and written language became a hot issue in Norway. One solution was to keep on with the Danish language. Another solution was to Norwegianize the Danish language. The third solution was introduced by the 22 year old teacher Ivar Aasen in 1836. He wanted to

¹ The paper was presented with some glimpses from the Ivar Aasen Centre for written culture in Norway, just in case there are some connections between the canonized aesthetic of literature and the aesthetic of other forms of art, such as architecture.

² Peter Stein. *Schriftkultur. Eine Geschichte des Schreibens und Lesens*. Lüneburg, 2005.

³ Peter Stein. *op. cit.*: 22.

reconstruct a written language based on the dialects still spoken and connect this to the Old Norse language. Mr Aasen looked for the opposite of the typical written language in Europe, which was a language quite far away from the spoken one. Mind the gap, he said, let us diminish it and make a written language out of the spoken languages of the common people, not the one of the social elite.

And so he did. Mr Aasen finished his work with a grammar in 1864 and a dictionary in 1873. This changed the future of language in Norway. As early as in 1885, the Norwegian parliament decided that both this new language, now called Nynorsk, which literally means New Norwegian, and the Danish language, should be official languages of Norway. The next decades, a lot of work was done to Norwegianize this Danish language, which is now called Bokmål – the book language. Even today Bokmål may be more familiar than Nynorsk to Danish people.

Since 1885 Norway has been a bilingual society with two official varieties of the language called Norwegian – Bokmål and Nynorsk. At this time, the language of the Sami people was forbidden. Until the 1950s, the Sami people were obliged to learn Norwegian. Now the Sami language is an official language in some regions, and every year about 40 books are published in Sami.

Book publishing illustrates the bilingual written culture in Norway. Every year about 8,000 books of all kinds – the figure really includes all kinds of books – are published in Norway. 82% are in Bokmål, 6% in Nynorsk, 12% in English.⁴ The percentage of books in Nynorsk is the same as for hundred years ago.

Translation of classics from Europe and Asia was basic for the development of Nynorsk as a literary language. As a consequence, Norwegians can read very different and still very good translations of Goethe as well as Shakespeare and the Bible.

Overall, Nynorsk is a lesser used language than Bokmål, but in some regions Bokmål is the lesser used. This makes Norway a

country of linguistic plurality with shifting linguistic majority. Worldwide Norwegian may be regarded as a strong written culture, heavily institutionalized and integrated in the society, even if the pressure from English is remarkable, especially for Bokmål.

The tradition of literary histories in Norway

The first major Norwegian literary history was published in 1896, written by Henrik Jæger. The romantic border between fiction as literature and non-fiction as non-literature was yet not closed. Therefore, Mr Jæger included both fiction and non-fiction in his work, and the few books published in Nynorsk.

In this very year, Mr Ivar Aasen died. A few weeks after his death, a volume of his best writings was published. In that way Mr Aasen was canonized before anyone could be able to forget him or diminish his work. His work as a linguist was highly respected, and so were his literary texts. The controversial factor was his political work and the aim of a new language in addition to the Danish language in Norway.

This controversy was very intense in the first part of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the literature of Nynorsk was included in all literary histories. After the two volume work by Mr Jæger it was impossible to write a Norwegian literary history without including both parts of the written culture.

In addition to his dictionary and grammar, Mr Aasen also published some essays and short stories, and he wrote about 130 poems, most of them songs. The majority of these poems was published after he died in 1896. At that time, his most important poem had already become a hit. Today it still is an unofficial national anthem, and one of the few songs most Norwegians are able to sing without reading the text.

A short history of literary canons in Norway

In 1925, the Norwegian department of a major publishing house in Copenhagen, Denmark, Gyldendal, was established as a pure Norwegian publishing house in Oslo, Norway. In 2009 Gyldendal sold books for

⁴ Ottar Grepstad. *Språkfakta 2010*. www.aasentunet.no: table 15.1.

more than 13 billions euro, which makes Gyldendal the largest publishing house in Norway.

A literary canon is one part of this success. In the 1920s, Gyldendal needed to make a profile of its own. The publishing house started to present itself as the publisher of The Four Great Authors. These included Mr Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Alexander Kielland and Jonas Lie.

The Four Giants was a slogan, but ended as a proverb with unknown author. All through the 20th century, Gyldendal managed to make Norwegians stick to this idea of The Four Giants, defining who were the four most important authors in Norway. At least two of the authors, Kielland and Lie, were hardly read by anyone unless they had to read. Their literature was vivid only in the text books. To the common readers these authors were not the best nor the most important, besides of Ibsen. Nevertheless, the proverb is still in use and has become a common place.

The idea of canons was revitalized in the 1990s. The intellectual reason was *The Western Canon* by Mr Harold Bloom, published in 1994. But again, there was also a commercial need for a canon. At this time the largest book club company in Norway counted more than 600,000 members, or 14% of the population.⁵ The company grabbed the idea of canons and invited 100 Norwegian intellectuals to make a score of the 100 most important books – in world literature, “The Library of the Century”. Later on, the same book club launched a series called “The Books that Changed the World”.

The difference is obvious. In the 1920s, the building of the nation Norway was the major issue. 70 years later, the issue was global communication. The national literature was still interesting, but not as important as before. Strangely enough it seemed easier to pick up the best books in the world than to decide which Norwegian books are the best. Some years earlier, the same book club had tried to make an update version of The Four Giants, now called The Great Eight. The

⁵ Trond Andreassen. *Bok-Norge. En litteratursosiologisk oversikt*. Oslo, 2000: 375.

members could not care less, and the book club dropped the slogan quickly.

In 2005, a literary festival asked a jury to make a list of the 25 best books of fiction from the contemporary literature. The festival managed to get in the news and do something which seemed a bit controversial. However, the effort hardly changed the opinion about authors or current literature in Norway.

For several years a major Norwegian newspaper, “Dagbladet”, asked juries to make more lists – including the 25 best novels and the 25 best books of non-fiction. The aim was commercial. “Dagbladet” wanted to do something which made people be aware of and talk about this newspaper in the lazy summer days of July.

One or two literary traditions?

Both the literary histories and the literary canons include literature in Bokmål and Nynorsk. Today this goes without saying in Norway. However, in writing literary history gender, genre and region have been more obvious categories than language. A combined Nordic literary history of women was published in the 1980s, written by researchers in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. History of women’s literature, non-fiction literature, children’s literature – it has all been written in Norway, together with several cultural and literary histories of different regions. None of these books deals with the different languages in different chapters. Books written in the lesser used language Nynorsk are presented and discussed side by side with literature written in Bokmål.

There is one exception. In 2010, a four volume press history of Norway was published.⁶ This project treats the history of the newspapers published in Nynorsk in separate chapters, as has been done with the quite short story of Sami newspapers. The reason is mainly pragmatic. The idea was to edit all together into one unit, but running short of time, this became impossible.

Lack of time was perhaps not the only reason. Writing the Nynorsk history of

⁶ Hans Fredrik Dahl et. al. (ed.). *Norsk presses historie*, 1–4. Oslo, 2010.

Norwegian newspapers, I discovered that the histories were different. The press history covers more than 2,000 different newspapers from the last 350 years. Less than 10% of these were published in Nynorsk, and very few before 1900. The major changes in this part of Norwegian press occurred in other periods than the similar changes in the Bokmål press. Both the financial structure and the organizing structure were different in the Nynorsk press. The editors-in-chief in the Nynorsk newspapers moved mostly to other Nynorsk newspapers, not to the Bokmål ones. There was an identity of language and a similarity in culture.

This identity of language and similarity in culture was the main issue in a cultural history of Nynorsk which I had published in 2006.⁷ I had tried to draw an outline of Norwegian history based on the use of this language, how it developed, what were the main challenges, and what was the influence in the society. A couple of years later, I found the same traits when I studied the newspapers in Nynorsk. They represented something else in Norwegian history. Nynorsk made the difference.

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Written culture – imagined community

Mother tongue represents a strong vehicle of cultural identity. Throughout the centuries the use of Danish as written language in Norway could not express this identity. The concept of imagined communities, as developed by Mr Benedict Anderson, can explain the Norwegian situation.⁸ In an imagined community people are connected because they think they share a common idea, self-understanding, a cultural tradition. For Mr Anderson this concept regards the development of a nation. I may add, even insist, that also within a nation, even across the borders, such imagined communities can be founded. Many people using Nynorsk in Norway, but not all of them, share a common idea of the value of this language and the cultural tradition created by using this language. In the same way, Sami people take part in an imagined community across the borders between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The basic item of these communities is the language. Such communities are real just because they are imagined.

The meaning of such communities may very well disappear if the differences within and between them are ignored in the name of the nation and a common literature or a common language. This is not a question of political separatism, at least it is not so in Norway. It is just a matter of understanding some of the mechanisms of a multicultural society in the past, and today.

Some Norwegian experiences

To understand the history of language and literature in Norway it is necessary to understand the differences within this literature and the bilingual written culture. Whenever speaking about literary canons, one should be aware of such differences. It should not be taken for granted that a literature is common and that everyone shares the same linguistic identity. We have to look for the differences and not go straight to what seems common.

Literary canons can be useful as a commercial idea. Both publishing houses and book clubs are in need of literary authority. By

⁷ Ottar Grepstad. *Viljen til språk. Ei nynorsk kulturhistorie*. Oslo, 2006.

⁸ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined communities*. London, 1991.

creating a literary canon they make themselves more important, and they offer a connection between the commercial and the intellectual contributions to literature.


It is likely that such lists are dominated by literature in the major used language of a country, unless the list maker is connected to the imagined community of a lesser used one.

The national encyclopedias might be a waterproof of the state of the written culture. A typical national encyclopedia in Norway has included the most important authors of the Nynorsk tradition, but the readers will find little or no information about the variety of authors, books and publications which all together establish the Nynorsk part of the literary institution in Norway.

The time is out for the idea of one nation – one language. In Europe almost every nation has more than one vivid and written language. Over time a written language will develop an institution of its own. For two reasons there can be a need for separate literary histories and literary canons. First, to understand the development of the use of one specific language and its role in the society. Second, to be able to make a reliable literary history of the nation as a whole with more than one cultural perspective.

In the age of Internet such making of lists has become very popular. All such lists tend to freeze a cultural situation. They reflect Zustand, not Prozess. I think we also should be aware of the cultural industry, not only the educational system. The cultural industry heavily depends upon imagined, transnational canons of literature, which means that most canons are also a question of cultural economics.

The working out of literary canons tends to be blind to the hegemonic cultural power. What is regarded as important looks different due to one's own place in the hegemonic hierarchy. The cultural tradition of a nation is always more than one. Making literary canons with no regards to this cultural, linguistic and cultural diversity makes only some sense. The conclusion hides in the differences within and between the written cultures.



Works in Search of a Literature

by **Adrian Grima** / Malta

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Over the past few years those of us who write literature in Maltese have often talked about the need to engage with new audiences, new critics, new readers. We realize that without an audience that is sensitive to the dynamics of the art of literature, an audience that is in touch with the little waves that rock Maltese literature from time to time and indicate or provoke new directions, different spaces and perspectives, other depths, our writing cannot evolve. Barthes believes that the writer cannot be defined in terms of his role or his value but “only by a certain *awareness of discourse*”. A writer is someone for whom “language constitutes a problem, who is aware of the depth of language, not its instrumentality or its beauty” (23-24), and literature is “the exploration of names” (26).

The engagement of the reader in the writer’s dynamic relationship with language is vital. Because the work has several meanings, each age can indeed believe that it holds “the canonical meaning of the work to be transformed into an open work”. Barthes believes that the very definition of the work is changing: “it is no longer a historical fact, it is becoming an anthropological fact, since no history can exhaust its meaning”. He sees this variety of meanings not as a matter of a relativist approach to human mores, or an example of the tendency of society to err but as “a disposition towards openness”, because “the work holds several meanings simultaneously”. This is the result of “its very structure, and not as a result of some infirmity in those read it”. This is where its symbolic nature lies, because “the symbol is not the image but the very plurality of meanings” (25-26). The symbol is constant and the only things which can change are the awareness society has of it and the rights society gives it (26). The symbol is free. Barthes points out that if words had only one meaning, that enshrined in the dictionary, and if a “second

language”, what he calls a certain “beyond” of the text with which the reader enters into contact, did not appear, disturbing and liberating the certainties of language, there would be no literature. The rules of reading are not those of literalness but those of “allusion” (26), an allusion made possible by the open nature of the text and the fundamental role of the reader.

Significantly, therefore, the literary work has “no real existence” until it is read, and its meaning can only be discussed by its readers (Selden et al.: 48). The role of the reader is even more vital in the case of what Barthes calls writerly texts that allow the reader to produce meanings. But readers do not only make the literary work; they also make the literature. Since it is abstracted from any situation, the literary work by that very fact offers itself for exploration: to those who write or read it, the work becomes “a question which is put to language, the foundations of which are experienced and the limits of which are being reached”. The work thus makes itself what Barthes eloquently calls “the repository of a vast unceasing investigation into words” (28) by what must be a community of readers. When we free the work from “the constraints of intention” imposed by the idea that the writer is the sole creator, we rediscover what Barthes describes as “the mythological trembling of meanings”. By erasing the author’s signature, “death founds the truth of the work, which is enigma”. This allows us to see literary works not as works determined by one person, but “traversed”, as Barthes puts it, “by that great mythical writing in which humanity tries out its meanings, that is to say its desires” (30-31).

This conception of the literary work prompts us writers in Malta to question whether ours are literary works without a literature, and not merely whether our literature lacks an audience. Because a

literature is not just a body of published (or even unpublished) works: it is also a dynamic reading and discursive environment within which the literary work is realized, within which literary works become a necessarily dynamic literature. In 2004, the young poet and academic Norbert Bugeja read an uncompromising paper in which he reflected on the predicament of the new breed of so-called emerging Maltese writers. “The aspiring writer today emerges from what? Emerges from where?” He argues that: “We have inherited a perception. We are emerging from a perception that this ‘Maltese literature’ shares with itself, and, alas, only with itself. The perception that it *matters*, to the exclusion of *any other alternative memory to the contrary*. Such has been ‘Maltese literature’s’ perception of itself as mattering, that in its business of mattering it has managed to elide *the matter-of-fact* itself.”

In recent years we have witnessed the creation of a series, perhaps one could even call it a body of works, which would constitute what Paul Xuereb has called the new wave of Maltese literature, but these works, like many others before them, will not become part of the Maltese cultural imaginary, except perhaps in a exasperatingly superficial way. If we forget for one moment the niche audience at events organized by Inizjamed, Poeżijaplus, and other literary groups, and the fact that students have to attend to Maltese literary works at school, almost like a nurse to a wound, we realize that literary works by Maltese writers are absent from Maltese life, arguably even from Maltese cultural life, in practically all spheres: they do not feature in everyday conversations or jokes, on television, in Parliamentary or other public debates, in the streets, they hardly feature in national celebrations or, perhaps more significantly, in more private celebrations... “This construct hailed as ‘Maltese literature’”, as Norbert Bugeja describes it, may exist for a rather small mixed group of interested, not necessarily well-read or perceptive readers, but otherwise it appears to be non-existent. For Bugeja “‘Maltese literature’ and its *weltanschauung*” are nothing but “a psychic facade” or

“perpetuation of apologies for the non-existence of a dynamic literature”. Maltese literary works have a presence on national radio and in the local papers, but how does this compare with the literary discourse on the Italian national station Radio 3 or perceptive articles in newspapers and magazines published abroad? Does this lean presence in the Maltese papers and on the radio contribute in any significant way to create the literary text and consequently to create a literature? Does it produce Fish’s “informed” or Riffaterre’s “competent”?

Over the years those of us within and around Inizjamed (www.inizjamed.org) who write literary works have realized that although our writing is moulded by a handful of perceptive readers in the cultural spaces of our literary initiatives, we write within a larger cultural milieu which is peacefully indifferent to and consequently ignorant of Maltese literature. We drop our writings into the hollowness of a critical environment that does not exist.

Criticism is meant to produce meanings: its relationship to the work is that of a meaning to a form. But in Malta criticism is practised by a handful of committed and overworked specialists. Although the critics cannot claim to translate the work, and particularly not to make it clearer, for nothing is clearer than the work itself, they are vital for the literary work because what they can do is “to ‘engender’ a certain meaning by deriving it from the form which is the work” (32); critics prompt or provoke the literary work into existence. Against this background we sense that we cannot have a literature without a readership and a critical reading, and that we cannot have a good literature without a good readership. Perhaps, as Ivan Callus suggests in his article on cultural poverty in Malta, “what it is we need is not necessarily more concertedness or better policies or more coherent visions, but the will and support to allow our substantial cadres of the competent and the professional to do more effectively what they already know needs to be done.” He believes that “many within those cadres do not feel an overwhelming need for more focusing in groups, State, or Church, but they

do require better resourcing and the courageous decisions that would make such resourcing possible. If this sounds too much like a 'give us the tools and we'll do the job' kind of appeal, then so be it" (15).

It's not that we don't have perceptive readers, or a handful of committed and insightful critics – it's that the environment and infrastructure for Maltese literature written in Maltese does not exist. (Incidentally, this void arguably exists even more in the case of Maltese works written in English.) Our literature is absent from many of those public spaces, be they physical or discursive, where one would find literature in many other countries. Where is Maltese literature? is not a rhetorical question. Or perhaps it is. With the sole exception of literature for young readers, till the age of eleven or so, Maltese literature exists, in an often pitiful state, in schools, but that it only exists there is probably symptomatic of the indifference that allows it to drift (albeit blissfully) in non-existence.

Both because Maltese writers live and write on the periphery of the literature markets, and therefore "find themselves marginalised from literature's most prominent markets", and because their works cannot become literature without an audience and much more, many of us cannot but agree with Ivan Callus that "the next frontier" for Maltese literature "must be a coordinated (rather than piecemeal or individual) effort to find a presence, through translation, in the consciousness of foreign readerships" (2004 and 2009: 35). Ivan Callus acknowledges, like few others, the plight of the Maltese writer when he states that for Maltese works a certain kind of visibility is possible only through translation. "Maltese writers *cannot* just write or cultivate solitude," as Maurice Blanchot would suggest, because they "must chase, if what is in view is a readership that is not only local but a broader-based one heartily admitting them to the ranks of *Weltliteratur*, after encounters that might see them translated from a language that is both their opportunity but also their limit." For Maltese writers, then, "a presence elsewhere is not only consequent upon the disciplining of their craft or the pursuit of their

art, or upon such practicalities as finding an agent or working with a publisher's editor, but, and at least as crucially, upon making sure their encounters lead somewhere." For the Maltese writer, writes Callus, "writing is just the start and, indeed, perhaps the easy part" (2004).

Apart from writing, if they want to engage with a readership, Maltese writers must be able to type, set, market, distribute, and promote their work. They are often their own promoters and reviewers, their most valuable readers and critics. When they crash through the various stages that take a set of words in a mind all the way to a book on a shelf in a bookstore, they come face to face with the absence of Maltese literature, of a substantial reading public that ultimately creates a literature, with an almost complete lack of critical appreciation of the work, with the often stubborn indifference of publishers, distributors, and booksellers who are meant to deliver, in the widest sense of the word, their books. Like a letter that never reached it's destination and was never read, Maltese literature is caught between the essential solitude of its writers and the absence of its readers.

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Bugeja argues that the way forward for the emerging Maltese writer requires the “shrugging off of the essentialization of ‘Maltese literature’ as Literature”. He says: “I am convinced that a number of writers have already made much way in terms of realizing this need to perceive the fullness of the death of a perception of ‘Maltese literature’ as we know it, no more and no less than a historical construct of egocentrism, disparticipation, and keen safeguarding of mediocrity.”

This distancing is ever more possible at a time when the hagiographic study of Literature has arguably become a thing of the past. Audacious theories that developed in the second half of the twentieth century demolished literature by historicising and politicising it, and by challenging notions of the authority of the author, the so-called text itself, inherent meaning, and essential interpretation. These theories of literature also revealed its not-said and what Widdowson has called the “contradictory discourses within it which it could not know itself”, and opened literature up to “infinite variations of re-reading in history” (90-91). Without for one moment underestimating the fundamental, if ambiguous role of a national literature in the writing of a literary work, one must consider the fact that this deconstruction and demystification of literature can rid the new generation of Maltese writers of the anxiety that they do not belong to any literature.



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