

NORBERT BACHLEITNER – ACHIM HÖLTER – JOHN A. MCCARTHY (eds.):

Taking Stock – Twenty-Five Years of Comparative Literary Research

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The 200th volume of the *Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft* series not only celebrates the 25-year-long history of this well-known book series of “research on general and comparative literature”, but also attempts to encapsulate – if not map out – the most notable trends in the discipline. The book offers a collection of disparate case studies by established and up-and-coming scholars who adopt metacritical, self-reflective takes on the methodologies they employ in line with the view of comparative literature presented in the introduction as a discipline which “contributes to a sense of being at home in a world that is heterogeneous and fractured, rather than affirming a monolithic canon marked by territory and homogeneity” (1). This mode of “being at home in [the] world” supposedly distances itself from pretentious European cosmopolitanism with imperial assumptions (inherited from the Enlightenment and Romanticism) or the arbitrary canon of World Literature generated by the publishing industry of the Global North. All in all, the studies collected in the volume attempt to make room for different, not necessarily neatly convergent traditions and voices from territorial and historical margins, and I must begin by stating that this has been achieved. The result is very varied, yet engaging and high-quality academic prose which at times is quite complex and demanding due to the ever-present tendency toward (trans-)disciplinary self-reflection, a tendency probably required by the editors.

The book consists of 19 texts organized into five parts. Part one, titled “Comparative

and World Literature”, features a mostly theoretical study by John A. McCarthy that can be read as an extension of the rather short and formulaic introduction. The author tackles the issues of identity and the significance of comparative literature. Given the appeals to heterogeneity voiced in the introduction, his proposition, rooted in the principle of our shared *humanitas*, seems refreshingly straightforward: “[T]he notion of being at home in the world requires the text to have literary value already, one imparted to it by its very first reader: the author” (28). Other texts in the first part of the book include Norbert Bachleitner’s study on the ambivalent reception of Voltaire in 18th-century Vienna from the view of book history and reception studies, and a historical case study of literary contacts and transfer of ideas on the basis of the extensive library of Ludwig Tieck (by Achim Hölder and Paul Ferstl).

The second part of the book is titled “Literature and History (of Ideas)” and covers both general and particular topics on how literature influenced – and was influenced by – intellectual life and culture. This section features Ottmar Ette’s reflections on the historical development of self-esteem within the realm of conviviality (i.e. the need for living together) as a function of an inclusive sense of self. Carl Niekerk analyzes two peculiarly transnational theatrical works (one by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the other by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart) as cases of the mobility of cultural material. By doing so, he also addresses fundamental issues of transdisciplinarity of comparative literature, which, to him, is natural and needed, since literature and art “can serve

as a platform to think about our society and as one of the few places in our information-saturated universe today where knowledge is synthesized and not just distributed" (182). Barbara Korte compares two early 20th-century boys' periodicals (one British and one German) and the roles they played in promoting pro-war attitudes by the images and grand narratives they propagated. The last text in this part is Juliane Werner's chapter tracing how Vladimir Nabokov, who is well known to have detested psychoanalysis, reacted to and portrayed Freud and his intellectual grip on 1950s America.

Although part three is entitled "Women and Gender Studies", the themes of femininity, gender, and/or their reflection do not necessarily play a central role in all of the chapters. Stephanie M. Hilger looks into an early medical text which testifies to how epistemologically unstable the emerging medical profession was in the 18th century. Her reading also enables her to shed light on the anxieties of the era concerning sexuality, its exploration, and "colonization". Sandra Vlasta looks into two travelogues (by Fanny Lewald and George Sand) and explores how this genre contributed to the foundation of national identities by discussing the presumed Other and thereby foregrounding the traveling self. Another contribution by Agnes C. Mueller looks at how the literary image of the Yiddish Mama developed from negative to positive and, in the meantime, lost its Jewish connotations. Dobrota Pucherová uses postcolonial reading (represented mainly by the concept of colonialism) as a tool for understanding the complexities of postsocialist Slovak literature and its role in re-evaluating cultural memory. By describing Slovak culture as an example of "trauma culture", she arrives at a new definition of postsocialism, which she basically views as an epistemological and existential condition "marked by long-lasting traces of dependence, but also hybridity, displacement, and liminality as result of its historical instability of borders" (309).

The studies collected in part four, "Aesthetics and Textual Analysis", cover topics

which overlap with literary theory, and they also markedly focus on the discipline's conceptual framework. Werner Wolf discusses the nature of aesthetic illusion against the backdrop of literary and reader-response studies and specifically looks at how this phenomenon worked in ancient literature. Annette Simonis looks at human fascination with animal otherness in the context of 20th-century poetry (namely in the works of Guillaume Apollinaire, Ted Hughes, and Durs Grünhein). The genre of autofiction is discussed by Stefan Kutzenberger, who not only provides references to the most recent and notable studies on the topic but also brings to the fore another aspect of the genre (namely the involuntary use of real people as literary characters). Gianna Zocco ends this section with a look at how the intertextual bohemian world of Berlin in the novel *Black Deutschland* contrasts with the stark and disappointing experience its gay protagonist faces when actually living there.

The fifth part of the book, "Translation and Tradition", expands the understanding of translation toward adaptation and even beyond, toward other intertextual relations between texts that could be said to involve rewriting. Daniel Syrový discusses the trope of referring to a fictional source text (by any means a broader category than pseudotranslation) in Western literature from the Middle Ages until Cervantes and discovers a rich web of metanarrative devices which translate into one another and form a web of textual (and cultural) history of the (chivalric) romance genre. Christoph Schmitt-Maaß provides an interesting analysis of a collection of 17th-century crime stories by a Catholic bishop that were translated/adapted by a Lutheran translator, in view of the theological disputes and literary tastes of the era. Manfred Pfister's comparison of three German adaptations of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* shows not only how these differ from the source text but also how they respond to the pertinent issues of their day. Russell West-Pavlov compares the Indian-Kenyan-Canadian M.G. Vassanji's *The Book*

of *Secrets* with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, viewing the former novel not only in relation to its prototext, but mainly as a product of a new, postcolonial literary history of the Global South with its unique matrix of textual and cultural values.

The volume *Taking Stock* offers a valuable overview of current trends in comparative literature, which I follow due to my own research and background in translation studies (a discipline which itself emerged partly from this field). Since this book is very broad in scope, nearly any scholar of literature and cultural history will find some topics, approaches, concepts, and references of interest. Given that the collected texts are for the most part, case studies, they can be viewed as heuristic examples as well.

However, the title of the book can be seen as its primary drawback. What the individual studies bring to the fore in terms of range and novelty of topics and approaches, the book lacks in conception. The phrase "taking stock"

implies the need to catalog and describe what has been done; one takes stock to think and move on. Yet the introduction to the volume is very brief and its declaration that "[v]iewed conjointly, the essays seek to expose enduring deep structures of Comparative Literature" (3) seems self-servingly vague. What it needs instead is a deeper, extensive introduction that would help readers (some of whom might not be experts in comparative literature) understand the development of the discipline over the last 25 years. If one is to assume that the reader will understand the position of the book in the system of the discipline only by virtue of its being part of an established and well-known series, this does great disservice to an otherwise well-edited collection and goes against the spirit of openness and transdisciplinarity epitomized by its authors.

IGOR TYŠŠ

Institute of World Literature SAS

Slovak Republic

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3172-9369>

ÁGNES GYÖRKE – IMOLA BÜLGÖZDI (eds.): Geographies of Affect in Contemporary Literature and Visual Culture: Central Europe and the West
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Even though the concepts of affect and translocality have recently been a popular field of study in the Western context, the inclusion of the frequently-overlooked region of Central and Eastern Europe into the discourse had long been overdue. In addition to being an important step in the recognition of the region's intellectual composition, *Geographies of Affect in Contemporary Literature and Visual Culture: Central Europe and the West* edited by Ágnes Györke and Imola Bülgözdí, introduces a refreshing contemporary look at the affects of social changes regarding spatial features in literary and visual media. It highlights the intersection of affect theory and translocality, since the chapters emphasize both the impact of an environment

on the process of identity formation and the reverse effects of emotional experiences reconstructing the space. While affect theory provides the authors with the opportunity to explore the senses of regional belonging and estrangement as the indicators of environmental impact, the adoption of the term translocality enables the contributors to foreground "localities and subjectivities *within* the context of global flows" (4). Moreover, the volume pays particular attention to gender in making localities accessible globally without jeopardizing the specific cultural heritage of the region.

Geographies of Affect is a collaborative effort with 13 scholars from various European countries, whose editors accentuate the