

MAGDOLNA BALOGH – ADAM BŽOCH (eds.): A „világirodalom” a „kis” irodalmak perspektívájából: Tanulmányok / „Svetová literatúra” z perspektívy „malých” literatúr: Štúdie [“World literature” from the perspective of “small” literatures: Studies]

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In recent decades, discussions of world literature have been shaped predominantly by theoretical models developed from the perspective of major literary languages. The volume under review, edited by Magdolna Balogh and Adam Bžoch, offers a valuable Central European vantage point from which to reconsider how smaller literary cultures participate in global literary circulation. The collection of texts, originally written in Hungarian and Slovak, accompanied by translations into the other language, makes a significant contribution by foregrounding literatures that occupy peripheral positions within the global literary system. Rather than merely applying established theories of world literature to the Central European context, the volume examines how these theories appear when viewed from within smaller literary cultures themselves.

This shift in perspective constitutes the book's principal contribution. In contrast to the abstract formulations that often characterize debates on world literature, the essays collected here demonstrate that the participation of smaller literatures in transnational circulation depends on historically contingent networks of translation, institutional mediation, and intellectual exchange. Focusing primarily on Hungarian–Slovak relations and their broader European connections, the volume shows that literary circulation in Central Europe frequently follows lateral trajectories between

comparable literary systems rather than the vertical center–periphery pattern presupposed by much theoretical discourse.

The first part of the volume comprises studies of a synthetic character that examine the historical conditions of literary transfer. Particularly significant is their implicit critique of the assumption that geographical proximity necessarily produces cultural openness. The case of Hungarian–Slovak literary exchange demonstrates instead that translation flows may be shaped by ideological tensions, cultural asymmetries, and changing political frameworks. The history of these exchanges reveals that neighboring literatures may remain surprisingly opaque to one another when symbolic boundaries are strongly guarded by national cultural institutions.

The volume thus draws attention to a phenomenon that merits more sustained theoretical reflection: the coexistence of linguistic proximity and cultural distance in Central Europe. As the editors note in the introduction, the book seeks to explore “the possible relations between national literature, regional (especially Central European) literature and world literature” (11). This proposition provides an important conceptual framework for many of the contributions. The region's multilingual historical environment often enabled readers to access neighboring literatures directly, without translation. This circumstance complicates the view of world literature as a system organized primarily

through translation and suggests that literary circulation often develops through historically layered cultural contact rather than simplified global pathways.

The volume is divided into two sections. The first presents historically oriented studies addressing broader patterns of literary transfer; the second contains case studies devoted to specific texts and translation processes. This structure proves effective, linking systemic reflection on intercultural exchange with detailed textual analysis.

Judit Görözdi offers an illuminating account of the reception of Hungarian literature in Slovak translation. Rather than presenting a solely descriptive survey, she reconstructs the ideological and institutional conditions that shaped the translation and reception of Hungarian works from the 19th century onward. She demonstrates that literary exchange between neighboring cultures cannot be explained simply by geographical proximity. As Görözdi argues, the dynamics of intercultural literary relations depend on how a given culture conceptualizes both its own national literature and its position in relation to world literature (19). The selection of translated works reflects changing cultural hierarchies and political frameworks, revealing the complex interplay between literary value and national cultural agendas. At the same time, the study raises the broader question of how such asymmetries in literary exchange may be conceptualized within existing models of world literature.

Jana Truhlářová's contribution examines the reception of 19th-century French literature in Slovak critical discourse. By analyzing responses to writers such as Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant, the study shows how the emerging Slovak literary sphere interpreted foreign literature through normative expectations concerning its moral and social function. Truhlářová thus demonstrates that reception is shaped not only by aesthetic criteria but also by overarching ideological frameworks.

Adam Bžoch addresses the broader problem of international literary visibility

through the case of Dutch literature. His analysis considers the conditions under which works from relatively small linguistic communities achieve recognition beyond their national contexts. By emphasizing both textual features and institutional mechanisms – publishing networks, translation practices, and cultural mediation – Bžoch situates the discussion within debates on global literary circulation. His argument also invites further reflection on the role of cultural institutions in shaping the international visibility of literatures written in less widely spoken languages.

Magdolna Balogh explores the methodological potential of regional literary historiography. Drawing on the history of Central European comparatism, she argues that regional literary analysis may function as an intermediate level between national and global perspectives. Her discussion suggests that literary relations in Central Europe cannot be adequately understood solely through center-periphery models, since the region constitutes a network of historically interconnected literary cultures. The chapter, therefore, implicitly questions the assumption that literary influence necessarily flows outward from cultural centers.

The second section offers case studies that illustrate these broader processes. Magdalena Garbacik-Balakowicz analyzes two Polish translations of Sándor Márai's poem "Halotti beszéd" (Funeral oration, 1951), focusing on the role of intertextual references in shaping translation strategies. Her comparison demonstrates how translation functions as an interpretive act that recontextualizes the original text within the cultural memory of the receiving literature.

In the following study, Szilvia Szarka employs the concept of transference to examine the representation of cultural identities in Central Europe. By interpreting Péter Esterházy's historical drama *Mercedes Benz* (2014) as a space in which competing historical narratives intersect, she highlights the complex relationship between literary form and regional memory.

Anita Káli's contribution situates László Krasznahorkai's novel *Satantango* (1985) within a intertextual network that includes 19th-century Russian literature. By identifying parallels with Nikolai Gogol and Fyodor Dostoevsky, the author demonstrates how motifs and narrative structures travel across linguistic and cultural boundaries, creating unexpected connections between literary traditions.

From a methodological perspective, the volume benefits from its combination of historical scholarship and theoretical reflection. The contributors employ diverse approaches – including reception studies, translation theory, and comparative literary analysis – while remaining grounded in close textual interpretation. This methodological plurality reflects the complexity of literary relations in Central Europe. From an editorial standpoint, the volume is coherent and carefully structured despite the diversity of topics it addresses. Particularly noteworthy is the way in which the individual studies remain grounded in detailed historical material while engaging broader methodological debates. The bilingual framing of the book also reflects the project's intercultural orientation, emphasizing the dialogic character of the research collaboration from which the volume emerged. Such cooperation between Hungarian and Slovak scholars offers an important example of how regional scholarly networks can contribute to the field of comparative literature.

A more critical observation concerns the conceptual cohesion of the volume. Although the individual contributions are consistently well researched and intellectually stimulating, the theoretical implications of their findings are not always explicitly integrated. Several essays implicitly challenge dominant center–periphery models of world literature, yet the volume stops short of articulating a fully developed alternative framework. As a result, the reader occasionally senses a productive tension between empirical richness and theoretical synthesis. A stronger conclusion drawing together

the methodological insights of the individual chapters might have made the book's contribution to world literature theory more explicit.

A further possible criticism concerns the relatively limited engagement with recent transformations in the global literary marketplace. While the historical analyses offered in the volume are illuminating, the discussion of contemporary literary circulation remains somewhat underdeveloped. Questions related to digital dissemination, international literary prizes, and the role of global publishing conglomerates might have added another dimension to the exploration of how smaller literatures enter the space of world literature.

These reservations do not diminish the scholarly value of the collection. Its principal strength lies in the historically grounded perspective it brings to questions that are often discussed in highly abstract terms in world literature studies. By tracing the concrete mechanisms of translation, reception, and institutional mediation in Central Europe, the volume demonstrates how literary circulation takes shape in a region marked by linguistic diversity and long-standing cultural interconnections. For this reason, the collection *A „világirodalom” a „kis” irodalmak perspektívájából: Tanulmányok / „Svetová literatúra” z perspektívy „malých” literatúr: Štúdie* will be of particular value to scholars interested in the dynamics of literary transfer in Central Europe, as well as to researchers working more in comparative literature and translation studies. From this perspective, the essays gathered in the volume suggest that the experience of Central European “small literatures” can enrich current debates on world literature by drawing attention to the historically layered and regionally embedded nature of literary exchange.

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