

examines the ideological (and politico-historical) background of the concepts of multiculturalism, interculturalism, and transculturalism, and states: “These theoretical frames and questions are no less timely in today’s Europe, a continent that, on the one hand, clamors ever louder for cultural independence, while on the other hand, is increasingly cosmopolitan and culturally heterogenous itself” (18). Zoltán Németh introduces his own concept this time, which applies the aspects and emphases of transculturalism to Hungarian literature in Slovakia. The papers can be sorted into thematic groups: some authors focus on transcultural characteristics in works of certain national (i.e. considered to be homogenous) literatures (Anikó Polgár, Attila Mizser, Ariana Fabiszewska, Csilla Nagy, Gabriella Brutovszky, Magdaléna Hrbáček, Éva Bányai), while others analyze texts connected to bilingualism or language change (Ágnes Strickland-Pajtók, Marcin Grad, Anikó N. Tóth, Jutka Rudaš, Gabriella Petres Csizmadia, István Ladányi, Beatrix Visy, Patrik Šenkár), examine questions of translation (Dmitry A. Yefremov, Olga Maximova), or based on their literary

material, discuss transculturalism as an universal worldview (Alexej Mikulášek), vertically expanding the concept as well (József Keserű, Zoltán Csehý).

The material of the three books is naturally diverse. They cannot be expected to offer a unified, elaborate concept of a transcultural literary analysis and system of categorization (nor do they promise to do so). Their significance consists of focusing on the described phenomena in the works of Central European literatures, aiming to increase sensitivity toward such phenomena, and lifting up such writers and works, usually kept out of the frame of national literary histories, into our field of vision. The research published in these three volumes unquestionably works to loosen the homogenous narrative of national literary histories – primary that of Hungarian literature. Its undeniable result is the expansion of transcultural research to minority literatures.

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### **MIHAELA P. HARPER – DIMITAR KAMBOUROV (eds.): Bulgarian Literature as World Literature**

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The reviewed book is part of the representative Bloomsbury series “Literatures as World Literature” edited by the comparatist and translator Thomas O. Beebee of Pennsylvania State University. Long-awaited and welcomed, the book synthesizes a variety of perspectives of eminent writers, translators and scholars of Bulgarian literature of the 20th and 21st century for the benefit of a world readership. At the same time it offers an informed, concise and impartial overview of the history of this national literature and the Bulgarian literary heritage. The authors endeavor to identify a variety

of key relationships between national, global, local and diasporic categories while also looking closely at the aesthetic and ideological criteria present in contemporary interpretations of the Bulgarian literary tradition in the international literary context. The editors’ location outside of Bulgaria enables auto-reflexive perspectives at Bulgarian literature from a spatial and temporal distance. Mihaela P. Harper teaches at Bilkent University in Turkey, while Dimitar Kambourov is at Trinity College Dublin. For the European reader, it is imperative that a scholarly analysis of the Bulgarian literary tradition opens

up towards contemporary trends in international comparative literary studies and fills in the blank and often problematic spaces left behind by Bulgarian literary studies that have differed from foreign interpretations of the older Bulgarian literary heritage. As a result, the book would make an excellent textbook for students of Bulgarian and Balkan studies all over the globalized world. In addition, it includes a selected bibliography of secondary literature in English, German, French, Italian and Spanish.

The monograph is introduced by Maria Todorova (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), a renowned scholar of Bulgarian origin and the author of the now-classic work *Imagining the Balkans* (1997). Written in an attractive essayistic style, the introduction places Bulgarian national literature on the contemporary world literary map and specifies its worldliness through the prism of its multilingual and multicultural character. This necessarily leads to an attempt at an objective definition and evaluation of the Bulgarian literary space, both past and present, in its relation to the local and global literary networks and contexts.

Although the monograph appears as a generically hybrid collection of texts, it is in fact compact and systematic. The authors – Diana Atanassova, Raymond Detrez, Marie Vrinat-Nikolov, Milena Kirova, Amelia Licheva, Boyko Penchev, Bilyana Kourtasheva, Vassil Vidinsky, Maria Kalinova, Kamelia Spassova, Ani Burova, Mihaela P. Harper, Emiliya Dvoryanova, Todor Hristov, Alexander Kiossev, Dimitar Kambourov, Yana Hashamova, Angela Rodel, Darin Tenev, Miglena Nikolchina, Jean-Luc Nancy, Georgi Gospodinov, Cory Stockwell and Galin Tihanov – offer deep-reaching, dynamic analyses of the corpus of the Bulgarian literary canon through the prisms of multilingualism, translation and the phenomenon of cross-germination. Several studies focus on issues such as “minor literatures” or “the commodification of difference” as well as the related dilemma of how the so-called minor literatures can transform dominant literatures. The authors

provide useful answers to issues such as the “challenging debates about world literature from cutting-edge positions in critical theories today”, *écriture féminine* in the recent Bulgarian literature, and, last but not least, the Bulgarian dissident and diasporic writing that had been silenced, marginalized and unfairly evaluated in the Bulgarian national literary history before 1989. These studies are valuable contributions to the discussion on the “unofficial” Bulgarian literature from 1944–1989, which has also been explored for example by the Czech Slavist and historian Jakub Mikulecký in his monograph *Mezi disentem, undergroundem a šedou zónou – Neoficiální bulharská literatura 1944–1989* (Between dissent, the underground and the grey zone – unofficial Bulgarian literature, 1944–1989; 2021).

The book is divided into four parts: 1. Histories – in search of a national profile of world literature, 2. Geographies – Bulgarian literature as un/common ground within and without, 3. Economies – Bulgarian literature on the global market, 4. Genetics – Bulgarian literature’s heredities, affinities and prospects.

Part 1 focuses on the phenomenon of Bulgarian medieval literature and the writing before and after the national revival until 1878 – the year of Bulgaria’s liberation from Ottoman domination. I will mention only a few chapters pars pro toto to describe how this kind of critical thinking is extremely useful in untying certain knots in the contemporary academic understanding of Bulgarian literature in a wider international space. Diana Atanassova in her study “Medieval Bulgarian Literature as World Literature” considers Old Bulgarian literature and letters, more correctly termed “Old Church Slavonic” in international Slavic studies. The author concludes that “the ‘Bulgarization’ of common Christian saints, Cyril and Methodius in particular, is a widely discussed issue in medieval Slavic studies. Her goal is to note particular tendencies in the texts of this period that speak to a certain surmounting of ‘supra-

nationality', a feature of the literature from the previous period, directing attention to the Bulgarian" (22). Marie Vrinat-Nikolov's study "The Bulgarian Literary Space and Its Languages: Monolingual Canon, Plural Writings" reads the histories of Bulgarian national literature written by Bulgarian scholars (such as Dimitar Marinov, Aleksandar Teodorov, Boyan Penev, and Svetlozar Igov) as the "grand narrative of national literature" and concludes with the observation: "Critics have pointed to the glaring absence of women in the canon that this literary history has established as well as to its teleological character. But it also contains other absences: reduced to just the Bulgarian language, the plurilinguistic character of a Bulgarian literary space is once again effaced" (50). The Slovak scholar Ján Koška, who worked on older Bulgarian literature among others, wrote in relation to Bulgarian literature that "Literary history is not created by theory. Theory serves history, not vice-versa. This approach is based on a full respect for the primary material and gains its full meaning in the context of postmodern tendencies of comparative literary studies. We see the essence of these tendencies in the effort for a greater individualization of concrete phenomena, in the liberation of these phenomena from invented constructs, which often mask their own structure and reality (uniqueness)" (*Recepcia ako tvorba* [Reception as creation], 2013, 8). This approach seems to be valid and useful also in the reviewed monograph.

Part 2 contains six studies, of which the most notable are Boyko Penchev's "Europeanization or Lunacy: The Idea of World Literature and the Autonomization of the Bulgarian Literary Field" and Ani Burova's "Telling History in Many Ways: The Recent Past as Literary Plot." Penchev's chapter is especially valuable in opening a discussion on the dis-identification with the normative Western models in Bulgarian literature that had for a long time been neglected in Bulgarian academic circles. The author observes, among others, that "A common

trait among the national cultures formed in the periphery of Europe during the Age of Nationalisms was the ambivalent attitude toward cultural influences and stylistic patterns, recognized as pertaining to the 'core' of Western civilization. The Bulgarian case was no exception" (81). Ani Burova focuses her attention on the fact that in "Bulgarian literature, the topic of the legacy of socialism and the events from and immediately after 1989 began to emerge as a significant trend primarily after 2000, somewhat later than its appearance in most of the other East European literatures" (112).

In Part 3, the notable contribution by Todor Hristov, "Tame Domesticity and Timid Trespasses: Travels and Exoduses", uses the case study of *Bay Ganyo* by Aleko Konstantinov as an impulse for an analysis of Bulgarian travelogues that became known worldwide. The author insightfully notes that "Bulgarian travelogue literature is perhaps one of the most sustained failed attempts at cognitive mapping of the world, which work precisely because of their failure" (157). Alexander Kiossev's chapter, "The End of Self-Colonization: Contemporary Bulgarian Literature and Its Global Condition", analyzes the past and present of Bulgarian book publishing with its achievements and failures. Publishers and translators represent a particularly interesting area for studying cultural transfer, which is often enabled by personal motivation, and the reception of foreign literatures often depends on publishers' activities (book presentations, reviews, etc.), showing that the commodity character of the cultural product has become part of the process of intercultural transfer. This research shows that the demand for a methodological pluralism is unavoidably related to the need for mutual communication about particular art-historical, cultural-historical and cultural-anthropological knowledge.

The contributions in Part 4 focus on the presence of Bulgarian literature worldwide and Bulgarian writers writing abroad and in foreign languages. It includes a text by the French philosopher of Bulgarian origin Ju-

lia Kristeva (translated from French), titled “1963, 2016: Two Perspectives on Blaga Dimitrova” in which she reminisces on her meetings with Dimitrova in Paris and on the reception of her texts in France. Symbolically, these thoughtful and provocative analytical essays are rounded up by the texts by Georgi Gospodinov (“Writing from the Saddest Place in the World”), perhaps the most translated contemporary Bulgarian writer and scholar at the Literary Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia, and by the Bulgarian comparatist Galin Tihanov (Queen Mary University, London), the author of the terms Bulgarian postmodernism / Bulgarian postmodernity, whose afterword is titled “Beyond ‘Minor Literatures’: Reflections on World Literature – and on Bulgarian.” At the end of his essay, Gospodinov sees a ray of hope for Bulgarian writers: “Maybe if you are a Bulgarian writer, your fears (and sorrows) are one or two more than they are for others, in places that are less sad. But this would also turn into literature sooner or later. Which is not a bad end” (247). Tihanov, on the other hand, reminds us: “‘Minor literatures’ is thus a construct of literary history; it experiences today significant difficulties conditioned by changes in the arrival and consolidation of transnationalism, an epistemic paradigm that has always professed a value-neutral approach to the phenomena it seeks to explain. Transnationalism drew on a twofold discontent: with the undifferentiated, blanked concept of globalization and with what social scientists termed in the 1990s ‘methodological nationalism’. ‘World literature’ as a paradigm for literary studies responds to similar discontents. It takes away the right of national cultures to determine the value of their literary production, which now becomes the subject of intense, multilateral, and never quite transparent bargaining in the process of circulation” (262).

*Bulgarian Literature as World Literature* shows that the demand for a new reinterpretation of Bulgarian literature has posed certain methodological challenges in selecting primary material, its categorization

and literary-historical and theoretical evaluation. The dominant trend in Bulgarian research of the national literature has been based on confronting and contrasting Bulgarian literature with foreign literatures and classifying literary phenomena. Here, this approach is overcome by more contemporary comparative approaches. It shows that the understanding of Bulgarian literature in the context of world literature and its mutual interactions provides entirely new handles for defining the object of study and raises fundamental questions about the essence of the so-called interliterariness as defined by the leading Slovak literary comparatist Dionýz Ďurišin (1929–1997). The monograph confirms that the study of literature and culture within narrow national categories has been overcome by a wider focus on regional or in between spaces, Europe and the world. It also explains and problematizes certain ideas that have for decades dominated cultural research. The publication shows that writing literary history must be based on the analysis of particular literary material rather than on political generalizations and that the subaltern can not only speak, but in many ways also creates situations for speaking. In fact, this speech does not necessarily have to be an expression of “self-colonization”, as claimed by the above-mentioned Bulgarian literary historian Alexander Kiossev. Even though some contemporary literary scholars believe that the so-called spatial turn is no longer relevant, the studies in this book, on the contrary, explicitly work with the space of South-East Europe (the Balkans) and more specifically Bulgaria and its various aspects: geopolitical, the changes in occupying space, violent and forced resettlement, the loss of space and the securities it provides, the significance of collective memory in remembering past or mythical spaces, the meaning of space for and on the human body, gendered space, etc.

In line with the expectations of the series, the editors Mihaela P. Harper and Dimitar Kambourov have followed the traditional literary-historical approach of describing

literary and translation phenomena from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Simultaneously, they also observed new developments that have become integral to the formation of Bulgarian literary identity. This approach has proven to be most useful in the effort to understand the complexity of the subject even though its goal was not to provide a definitive history of Bulgarian

literature. The book is a highly valuable contribution to the study of Bulgarian literature, Bulgarian literary studies and international comparative literary studies in general.

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**SZÁZ PÁL: A tizedik kapu. A haszidizmus hatása a magyar irodalomra**  
[The tenth gate. The effects of Hasidism on Hungarian literature]

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The monograph *The tenth gate* by Pál Száz provides an introduction to interpreting 20th- and 21st-century Hungarian Hasidic literature. The title of the book references the allegory of the gate of Hasidic knowledge and tradition, a recurring motif in Central European works related to Hasidism (see e.g. Jiří Langer's *Nine Gates to the Chassidic Mysteries*); in Száz's monograph, the gate opens to a literary-critical interpretation of Hasidism-related works of literature. As such, the works considered in the book are interpreted not as documents but primarily as literary constructions and works of fiction. At the same time, however, Száz's analyses also consider the socio-cultural context and trans-cultural aspects of the texts, as well as their intertextual connections to the textual tradition of Judaism.

Among the significant merits of Száz's research are an intention to join the broader discourse on Hasidism and the literary works it inspired (pointing out the Western inspirations of the Hungarian Hasidic legacy and the influence of Martin Buber's German-language collections as well as the works of Jiří Langer) on the one hand, and an attempt at outlining a Central and Eastern European Neo-Hasidic transcultural and minority canon in its socio-cultural context on the other. Such a canon simultaneous-

ly becomes a general medium for Hasidic phenomena through its open and fragmented nature, and unique due to its regional constraints. The latter attempt is a unique and innovative enterprise as until now, the only available general study of Hungarian-language Hasidic works of literature has been Zoltán Kelemen's essay "Az emlékezet szépirodalmi nyomai" (The literary traces of memory). Száz highlights that whereas Hasidism constitutes an organic part of the Eastern European Hebrew- and Yiddish-language Jewish literary tradition as well as of Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish literature, in Hungarian literature it is cast as a form of otherness, as a phenomenon of in-betweenness, fluidity, peripherality and marginality, and as such, it provides ample grounds for investigation through the lenses of transculturality, cultural hybridization, regionality and many others.

The main text of the monograph consists of three major parts and an appendix. The first part treats the contextualization and literary connections of Hasidism and the matter of literarization of Hasidic stories, considering the historical and cultural embeddedness of Hasidism beyond national and regional levels as well as its reception in Hungarian literature. The chapter also describes the Hasidic movement, clarifies key