

CompLit: Journal of European Literature, Arts and Society is the new peer-reviewed journal of the European Society of Comparative Literature/Société Européenne de Littérature Comparée. With two yearly issues, either in English, French, or both, the journal started appearing in 2021 with the aim of “connecting European and non-European literatures and cultures, intersecting literary and cultural theory with different media” (front matter). Published by Classiques Garnier in Paris, the journal invites submissions of research papers with a European focus, welcomes special issues by guest editors and includes a review section. In addition to the literatures of hegemonic languages in Europe, it seeks to explore “literatures currently less visible in more prominent publications” to “ensure a balanced geographical spread” (<https://escl-selc.eu/escl-journal/>). It aims to “connect with other world literatures and with specifically comparative theoretical and methodological approaches, such as current research on Reception studies, Myth-criticism, Imagology, Geocriticism, Adaptation, Ekphrasis, Orientalism, Travel writing, Diaspora studies, Migration studies, (Post-)colonial studies, World Literature, Global Literary Studies, etc., with occasional foci on under-examined genres within Comparative Literature studies, such as Literature and Anthropology, Literature and Science, Ecocriticism, Literature and Psychology, Literature and Philosophy, Ethics in/and Literature, Graphic Novels, Children’s and Young Adult Literature, Popular fiction, Crime fiction, Confessional narratives, etc.”

The journal wants to “act as a porous space, intersecting literary and cultural theory with different media and forms of representation, including cinematic and theatrical adaptation, music, visual arts, forms of electronic literature, etc.” However, its interdis-

ciplinary ambitions go beyond related fields such as the visual arts, to subjects such as medicine, history, commerce and law, philosophy, religion, ethics and morality, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis as applied to literature, anthropology, ethnology, animal studies, social movements, politics, transformation of societies, as well as teaching, learning and education as related to comparative literary studies.

The general editor of the journal is Brigitte Le Juez of Dublin City University, Ireland, the co-founder of the European Society of Comparative Literature. The journal has five associate editors: Emilia di Rocco of Sapienza University of Rome; Shun-liang Chao of National Chengchi University, Taiwan; Asun López-Varela of Complutense University, Madrid; Zsuzsanna Varga of Glasgow University; and Beata Waligórska-Olejniczak of Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. In addition, the journal has an impressive Advisory Board consisting of 26 members. However, since not all members of the Advisory Board receive the journal or can access it electronically, the question is what their role in the journal is and how they can guarantee its academic quality.

Four issues have appeared so far: the premiere issue (1/2021), edited by Bernard Franco (Sorbonne University); an issue on travel writing, cultural exchange and identity construction (2/2021) edited by Sandra Vlasta (University of Ferrara) and Leena Eilittä (University of Helsinki); an issue on narrations and re-creations of origins in linguistics, literature and the arts (1/2022), edited by Chiara Lombardi (University of Turin); and a non-thematic issue (2/2022), edited by Brigitte Le Juez.

In his editorial to the first issue, titled “Y a-t-il une littérature comparée européenne?” (Is there a European compara-

tive literature?) the French scholar Bernard Franco addresses the problem of creating a comparative European journal in the context where Eurocentrism has been the major objection addressed to the field of comparative literature: “Launching a comparative scientific project intimately linked to the idea of Europe, is not self-evident and cannot escape controversy” (18).

The special issue “Comparative Literature and European Cultures” certainly does not avoid this necessary and fertile controversy, but rather sets out the terms, situates itself, and aims to define the legitimacy of such an undertaking. The objective is to reflect on identity and on the purpose of the journal, by questioning the relationship between comparative literature and European cultural identity. Even though comparative literature was created in Europe, as was the idea of world literature, “paradoxically,” writes Franco, “it is perhaps through its colonial heritage that literary Europe achieves globality” (23). He asks a number of probing questions: “In this largely globalized context, what place is left for European literature? Does European culture, as an object, but also as a way of understanding the discipline, still have a place in comparative literature? Is there a European specificity in comparative approaches? And, above all, does it make sense to consider literature from a European point of view at a time of postcolonialism?” (24) In his answer to the question whether there is a European identity in the discipline – a comparative methodology that is European (rather than Eurocentric), Franco evokes, for instance, Moretti’s “distant reading,” or French theory. However, he argues that a back-and-forth or circular exchange between the French and American theoretical schools makes it impossible to identify a European approach or methodology. He concludes that the link between comparative literature and Europe can only exist within the framework of a cosmopolitan Europe, open to the world, in the humanist conception of a space for dialogue and critical debate,

because Europe can only exist in continuity with the world.

It is in the light of this idea of a cosmopolitanism inherent in European culture that the issue is conceived. It introduces the investigation of the relationship between comparative literature and European culture with reflections from European scholars (Theo D’Haen, Brigitte Le Juez, Florence Schnebelen, Asun Lopez-Varela Azcarate, Yvan Daniel, Pascal Dethurens, Olga Szmids and Yves Chevrel), illustrating the diversity of Europe, but also through non-European eyes: Haun Saussy (University of Chicago), Long Ao (Nanjing University) and Ping Du (Sichuan University).

In his contribution “Worlding European Literature”, the Belgian comparatist Theo D’Haen joins the discussion by asking “how European comparative literature can best strategically ‘world’ itself so as to remain relevant for the times” (202). He argues that “what is required is a more equitable approach to the contributions of all parts of the continent” and points out that Europe’s South has since the 17th century been considered Europe’s “internal Other” by the dominant North. In addition, it requires recognizing that “European literature, from its very beginning, is marked and moulded by contacts and exchanges with other, non-European literatures, starting with the Greeks, and continuing to this day” (205). This also requires, in his view, an openness towards theories rooted in non-European traditions that are often longer than the European traditions. On the other hand, D’Haen points out that European literary theory has been filtered through the American academe and advises a “de-coupling of European theory from its overweening US shadow” (205) to maintain Europe’s status as the source of Western literary theory. He concludes that in order to remain relevant for the world, European literature and European comparative literary studies will have to “venture outside of its own borders, both those of its national literatures and those of Europe itself, and situate Europe in the world, a world that is no longer

European-made but in which Europe plays a minor, perhaps even a subordinate role” (206–207).

The following two issues of *CompLit* take this “mission statement” articulated in the launching issue as their guiding principle. The editorial to *CompLit* 2/2021, titled “Travel Writing, Cultural Exchange and Identity Construction” by Sandra Vlasta and Leena Eilittä clearly recognizes that travel writing is “a genre through which knowledge – of other places, people and their practices – has been transmitted” (10) and travel writers can therefore be seen as cultural mediators. The contributions to this issue focus on identity construction and negotiation in travel writing that has had an impact on possible processes of cultural exchange. While most contributions focus on 19th- and 20th-century European travellers within Europe, two articles bring narratives from non-European spaces: Jonathan Lawrence’s “Colonial South America, Identity and Race as Seen by a Chaldean Priest from Baghdad” and Samuel Agbamu’s “*Romanita* and Nostalgia: Italian Travel Writing in Libya and Tunisia, 1905–1912”.

Issue 1/2022, “What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Origins?” reflects the contemporary renewed interest and need for myths as hermeneutic models for exploring narratives. The editorial by Chiara Lombardi invokes myths about origins from all over the world to ask why this obsessive need to search for a beginning has dominated world mythology and what hermeneutic potential the recourse to origins gives to a narrative: “Every time the narration unearths origins, it is to take an experience of knowledge that is absolutely synthetic and simultaneous, and provide an intense and astonishing sense of the sublime” (19).

Starting from these premises, the essays collected in this issue of *CompLit* provide new critical perspectives on “beginnings”, focusing on the theories, the languages and the imagery of origins, and especially on their potentiality of significance as applied to texts and contexts that spread from the antiquity

to the present. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the articles range from linguistics and mythology to architecture, the fine arts and cinema, looking at myths from all over the world: Europe, the Caribbean, North Africa, the Middle East.

The last issue so far, issue 2/2022, is a non-thematic collection of various articles on topics such as Latvian literature, representation of race in literature, Pier Paolo Pasolini, or the representation of penal life in José Revueltas and Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

As a descendant of journals such as *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, founded in 1921 in France (the oldest comparative journal still published today), or *Acta comparationis litterarum universarum*, published from 1876 to 1888 in present-day Romania, *CompLit: Journal of European Literature, Arts and Society* has famous precursors to measure up to, even as it seeks to define its own scope in the light of the developments of comparative literary theory over the last hundred years. With the leading comparative literature journals already based for some time on the other side of the Atlantic, and as a platform for the scholars gathered in the European Society of Comparative Literature the journal makes its *raison d’être* clear and incontrovertible. It remains to be seen how it fulfils its ambitious mission and can develop an own distinguished identity even as it accepts the cosmopolitanism inherent in European comparative literary theory.

In light of all this, the journal’s sub-title is perhaps a bit misleading: it implies that the journal’s focus is European only (which it is clearly not), and obscures its institutional affiliation with the ESCL, a useful identity-marker (especially since publication in the journal is open exclusively to paid-up ESCL members, as written on the journal’s website). The journal’s contents seem to be indexed in no international scholarly databases or citation indexes so far. This means that the journal is not currently accessible through scholarly databases, it is not cross-referenced

with other journals in the field (any citations are therefore not searchable), and it does not have a visible ranking – something that will hopefully be soon resolved if the journal has ambition to join the ranks of top journals in the field of literary studies. Finally (this could be a personal issue), the journal's graphic layout makes it rather difficult to navigate, since authors' names appear at the end of articles, rather than at the beginning, while article abstracts appear at the very end of each issue, rather than following each article.

In spite of these few inconsistencies, the journal promises to be a serious platform

for scholars in comparative literature. Its dynamic, interdisciplinary and multi-media conceptualization of comparative literature makes it an ideal space for testing the potential and limits of comparative literary theory “in the making” and opens up the opportunity for the journal to play a serious role in shaping, updating and redefining comparative literary studies and its relevance in the contemporary world.

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JÁN JAMBOR – JAKUB SOUČEK – MONIKA ZÁZRIVCOVÁ (eds.): Aktuelle gesellschaftliche Probleme im Kriminalroman der Gegenwart am Beispiel von deutsch-, französisch- und slowakischsprachigen Texten / Les problèmes de société actuels dans le roman policier contemporain de langues allemande, française et slovaque / Aktuálne spoločenské problémy v súčasnom kriminálnom románe na príklade textov z nemeckej, francúzskej a slovenskej jazykovej oblasti [Current social problems in contemporary crime novels as seen in German, French and Slovak texts]

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Pozoruhodný sborník trinácti kritických statí venovaných detektívnym románom ze tří rozdílných jazykových oblastí a pěti rozdílných zemí – Německa, Švýcarska, Rakouska, Francie a Slovenska – skýtá množství průhledů a srovnání. Týká se jak žánru samotného, tak témat, ale v neposlední řadě i metodologických přístupů, které jsou ve sborníku zastoupeny. V tomto posledním bodě nelze nezmínit postřeh Emily Apter (*Debating World Literature*, 2004, ed. Ch. Prendergast, 76–109) o rozdílech mezi literárně teoretickými tradicemi anglosaských, francouzských, německých a slovanských (v jejím podání slavistických) univerzit. To, co ona považuje za překážku jednotné koncepce světové literatury, je možno pokládat za metodologickou výhodu pro mnohostranné probádání literární matérie.

Ze zmíněných aspektů si všimněme nejprve hlediska žánrového. Detektivní (kriminální) román má za sebou již dvousetletou historii a doba jeho formování se do něho promítá dodnes. Vznikl a stále se drží na rozhraní mezi komerční a vysokou literaturou, a dle Bourdieuy kategorizace tedy prolíná oběma komponentami literárního pole. Tento činitel pak nabývá v situaci globalizace a v proměnách knižního trhu nové podoby. Pohlédneme-li na dobu vzniku, neunikne spřízněnost detektivního románu s literárními formami, které v období nastupujícího romantismu se podobně jako detektivní příběhy objevily na okraji literárního pole a tematizovaly tajemství a záhady, ať už se jednalo o gotický román, fantastické povídky, folkloristické sbírky pohádek s motivy zázračna, případně o futuristické vize