



Europe: Literary Liminalities

Orgs.

Ana Paula Coutinho, Gonçalo Vilas-Boas,
Jorge Bastos da Silva, José Domingues de Almeida
e Teresa Martins de Oliveira

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Índice

7 >> *Introduction.*

Ana Paula Coutinho, Gonçalo Vilas-Boas, Jorge Bastos da Silva, José Domingues de Almeida, Teresa Martins de Oliveira

11 >> *Le Prix du Livre Européen : promoteur et relayeur des liminalités littéraires*

José Domingues de Almeida

21 >> *My Dream of Europe*

Martin R. Dean

25 >> *Transnational Women Writers in Europe: the Italian case-study*

Vita Fortunati

39 >> *Robert Menasse, The Capital. A satirical novel on the European Union*

Teresa Martins de Oliveira

51 >> « *La vie est ailleurs.* » *Sur les mythes littéraires de l'Europe centrale*

Anikó Radvánszky

63 >> *Under Western Eyes, or Can Polish Literature just be European Literature?*

Marta Skwara

Europe: Literary liminalities

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Introduction.

Europe: Literary Liminalities

The political and linguistic diversity of the European continent - which challenges the uniqueness of a global language - induces a multifocal and multilingual approach in literary creation concerning the European issue.

Moreover, the current conjuncture of the Old Continent is confronted with dangerous populist drifts and the temptation of a nationalist closure. The fictional concern of writers focusses on this complex problematic to be addressed by, on the one hand, the still significant sequels of the conflictual History inherited from the 19th and 20th centuries and, on the other hand, the prospective idea of an institutional construction. This idea is essentially focused on the economy and finance, which Europe cannot be reduced to.

The tension between these two perspectives - which raises many questions and debates, as the attempt to write a European “constitution” has revealed - appears nevertheless to be the focus of a discussion about Europe, below and beyond the European Union. In fact, it often takes the form of a subtle narrativization and fictionalisation of our continent as a topic, a theme, a concern, and even an obsession in many European authors’ work.

Besides that, due to globalisation, the rapid displacement of representations and the projection into (re)invented peripheral spaces give rise to literary liminalities that catalyse writings and fictional readings from Europe’s peripheries, and in languages belittled in the context of global communication. These literary liminalities, which look to Europe retrospectively and/or critically, coincide with various geographic peripheries (Nordic, Baltic, Slavic, Hellenic, etc.). Others refer to minor linguistic statutes in the context of the great European nation-states.

Authors who publish in these minor languages might be brought together with writers who publish in a wide circulation language, but do not fall into the literary mainstream. Both groups are subject to the logic of an editorial market that is often circumscribed to very specific thematic and market niches.

Hence the relevance of a proactive European policy towards the promotion and dissemination of these literary liminalities that question, evoke or thematise Europe. Such a policy is namely developed by the establishment of literary prizes such as the European Book Prize. Under the pretext of “making Europe attractive” and rewarding positive views of our continent, these prizes often award liminal European writers.

In short, the approach of the European literary liminalities raises two key questions. On the one hand, it presents the multipolar and peripheral views of the post-1945 European problematic as the central theme of comparative literary studies. On the other hand, it mobilises a reflection on this vast narrative of Europe by works published in minority languages (in a European context) and to their circulation, as well as on the editorial, translational and educational policies that favour or hinder their diffusion.

The first essay published in this volume, by José Domingues de Almeida, analyse the role of the European Book Prize as a promoter and relay of literary liminalities, and identifies certain thematic constants, such as liminalities, postmemory, interculturality, etc.

In the second article, the Swiss writer Martin R. Dean speaks about his dream of Europe, which he imagines linked to the idea of the big city in which the Enlightenment and the liberal thought produced a culture of progress, liberality and tolerance.

The following articles specifically point to European geographical and cultural liminalities, or refer to European authors outside the mainstream. That's the case of Vita Fortunati. In the first part of her work, she focuses on the importance of Transnational Studies, considering that Comparative, Gender and Translation Studies are in a transitory phase marked by a global perspective. In a second part, she presents some women writers from different countries who, in a real transnational attitude, have chosen to write their fiction in Italian. Teresa Martins de Oliveira's paper starts with a short introduction to Menasse's ideas about the European Union and then concentrates on the novel *The Capital* (2016). It focusses on the idea that a detailed analysis of three moments of the novel will show the importance of topics like migrations, terrorism and islamophobia, which critics tend to consider as subsidiary or absent in Menasse's text.

Anikó Radványky considers that Central Europe today is a literary concept rather than an economic, political and spiritual reality, kept alive by writers such as Claudio Magris and Peter Esterházy, among others, whose works *Danube* and *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn* respectively she analyzes as experiences of transfrontality. Marta Skwara, finally, examines some umbrella terms used in Poland and abroad to define Polish literature (such as European Literature or as Eastern European and Slavic Literature, respectively) and warns of the risk of discussing European literature under outdated political concepts.

Therefore, it is clear from the contributions of this publication that the issue of European geographical and linguistic liminalities not only challenges but is reflected in various ways both in literary creation and criticism.

Ana Paula Coutinho
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José Domingues de Almeida
Teresa Martins de Oliveira

Le Prix du Livre Européen: promoteur et relayeur des liminalités littéraires¹

José Domingues de Almeida

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Résumé: Cet article se penche sur la pertinence de l'attribution d'un prix littéraire tel que Prix de Livre Européen pour la promotion d'une instance de légitimité littéraire européenne, pour l'affirmation de l'adhésion à l'esprit de l'UE, ainsi qu'au dégagement de certaines constantes thématiques : liminalités, postmémoire, interculturalité, etc.

Mots-clés: prix littéraire, liminalités, Europe

Abstract: This paper examines the relevance of awarding a literary prize such as the European Book Prize for the promotion of a body of European literary legitimacy, for the adherence to the spirit of EU membership, as well as the identification of certain thematic constants: liminalities, postmemory, interculturality, etc.

Keywords: Literary prize, liminalities, Europe

Le Prix de Livre Européen a été créé en 2007 par l'association "Esprit d'Europe", avec le soutien de Jacques Delors, premier président du comité de parrainage jusqu'en 2011, à qui a succédé Pascal Lamy. Cette association, présidée par France Roque, organise depuis lors chaque année la remise de cette récompense littéraire (10.000 euros) en début décembre, au Parlement européen à Bruxelles. Le prix récompense un roman et un essai exprimant et promouvant une vision positive de l'Europe.

C'est dire combien notre continent aurait terriblement besoin de motivation et de mobilisation, et combien le "projet européen" demeure vague et dans une certaine mesure, artificiel et éloigné des tout premiers soucis identitaires des peuples qui constituent l'Union européenne, comme le prouve à l'envi le taux élevé d'abstention aux élections européennes. Ceci révèle un insurmontable décalage entre l'approche du Vieux Continent en tant que matrice civilisationnelle et horizon géosymbolique, d'une part, et l'Union européenne en tant que construction politique et institutionnelle, en tant que *constructus*, qui mène au besoin de créer de toutes pièces des attaches à l'"esprit" européen.

C'est justement le cas de la création de ce prix littéraire, mais c'est tout aussi bien la même logique qui préside aux outils promotionnels d'un sentiment d'Europe ("européanité") par l'investissement institutionnel dans des programmes que d'aucuns qualifient d'"idéologiques" (Maurer 2011) tels le *Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues*, le programme de mobilité étudiante et enseignante Erasmus, voire la création d'une monnaie unique et la tentation d'un fédéralisme institutionnel, le tout pour contrecarrer un europessimisme endogène dont le brexit est le dernier avatar.

Autrement dit, les Européens impliqués institutionnellement dans l'Union européenne rechignent encore à sacrifier une part de leur souveraineté nationale, ou à se sacrifier tout court en faveur de l'intégration dans un empire consenti. En effet, la création du Prix du Livre Européen coïncide avec des phénomènes inquiétants et facilement subversifs des idéaux européens: la crise (im)migratoire et les échecs de l'intégration/ assimilation et de la coexistence communautaires dans certaines métropoles européennes, la montée des extrémismes, des radicalismes et des intégrismes, l'ankylose de l'Europe en tant que "projet", laquelle va de pair avec les interrogations autour de la notion d'identité nationale et, de surcroît, européenne.

C'est dire combien la création d'une instance de légitimité littéraire au niveau européen est idéologiquement motivée, régie par des critères de promotion de sentiments forcément "positifs" de l'Europe, souvent dans la doxa eurocratique qui brasse les concepts parfois euphémistiques d'inclusion (*vs* assimilation), migration (*vs* immigration clandestine), résilience (*vs* résistance) ou durabilité (*vs* politique). Disons qu'elle est en phase avec la logique du serpent qui se mord la queue du financement des projets scientifiques européens, relayé par les États-membres, puisque des fonds européens financent des thématiques privilégiant la *doxa* et les soucis européens. Citons-en deux où nous sommes impliqués: le partenariat stratégique de plusieurs universités au sein du projet piloté par Budapest (K4203) en articulation avec LÉA (Lire en Europe aujourd'hui) et le Projet stratégique ILCML: "Littérature et Frontières de la Connaissance: politiques d'inclusion", dont une des lignes subsidiaires concerne les "nouvelles figurations du discours sur l'Europe". Rappelons aussi que l'ILC (Istituto de Literatura Comparada) a explicitement créé une base de données, "L'Europe

face à l'Europe" à deux catégories (poètes et prosateurs) dont la construction est en cours, et dont les entrées pointent des représentations du Vieux Continent dans, et par le fait littéraire.²

Dans le même sens, on peut considérer l'initiative du "Hay Festival", un festival littéraire annuel qui se produit au Pays de Galles et qui en 2019 s'ouvre à une relecture de l'avenir de l'Europe repensé par vingt-huit auteures, représentantes de chacun des États-membres par le biais de la fiction, du conte et de l'essai, laquelle donnera lieu à une anthologie intitulée *Europe28: Visions pour l'Avenir* qui sera lancée à Rijeka (Croatie), capitale européenne de la culture 2020. L'auteure portugaise de contes Ana Pessoa y représente le Portugal, alors que Leïla Slimani est l'écrivaine française retenue. Les vingt-huit contributrices sont censées exprimer ou évoquer ce que l'Europe signifie pour chacune d'elles par le conte ou l'essai.³

Mais revenons sur le Prix du Livre Européen. Pour ce qui est de la méthodologie d'attribution, notons que les auteurs des deux ouvrages (roman et essai) sont des écrivains contemporains originaires de pays membres de l'Union européenne. Parmi les livres correspondant à ces critères et publiés dans l'année par les maisons d'édition de chacun des vingt-huit pays membres de l'Union européenne, une présélection est soumise au Comité de parrainage. Celui-ci détermine ensuite une sélection définitive, composée d'une dizaine d'ouvrages (cinq essais et cinq romans) qui sont ensuite présentés au jury, présidé en 2018 par le metteur en scène polonais Krzysztof Warlikowski. La cérémonie de remise du prix se tient au Parlement européen, à Bruxelles.

Or l'attribution et la divulgation médiatique d'un tel prix entraînent des conséquences commerciales et éditoriales: renforcement des ventes, relai de la critique, présence médiatique, circulation des œuvres sur le territoire européen, notamment par le biais de la traduction, et souvent à partir des langues minoritaires vers les langues européennes de plus large diffusion et au marché éditorial plus important, comme l'anglais ou le français. C'est d'ailleurs à partir de la traduction française de ces textes que nous nous pencherons sur les thématiques liminales saluées et retenues dans la présélection et chez les lauréats du Prix du Livre européen dans la catégorie "roman".

En effet, une lecture attentive des titres nommés ou vainqueurs, et ce à partir d'un échantillon,⁴ fait apparaître la récurrence de constantes thématiques plus ou moins explicites, mais qui se regroupent toujours autour de l'axe européen qui a motivé leur sélection et dont nous retiendrons, sans les systématiser: les post-mémoires nationales dans le concert européen, les liminalités et la création de nouveaux imaginaires frontaliers, l'entre-deux / la mitoyenneté géo-symbolique et la cohabitation ou confrontation culturelle.

Notre approche de l'Europe littéraire s'inscrit, par ailleurs, dans un contexte où la recherche en littérature a pris acte de la crise de la théorie littéraire après les an-

nées 1970 dans ses différentes mouvances: sémiotique, poststructuraliste, marxiste et psychanalyste, et privilégie de nouvelles approches: études postcoloniales, ethnicité, sexualité / genre et études culturelles, ce qui dessine de facto un tournant du discours (*idée*) vers la culture (*réel*) (Moura 2018: 104), lesquelles coïncident dernièrement avec une “pensée géographique de la littérature” (*idem*: 107) où prennent part justement les “études régionales” (*area studies*).

Cette réorientation des outils théoriques de la recherche en littérature n’est pas sans rapport avec l’infléchissement causé par la perspective du “mondial” ou du “global” sur la littérature comparée (Spivak 2003), à laquelle d’aucuns reprochent, outre le déséquilibre entre théorie et application, l’indéfinition méthodologique et son occidental-centrisme, la quasi exclusive référence au national (Moura 2015). Or la promotion critique d’une perspective régionale et spatiale du fait littéraire (l’Atlantique, la Méditerranée, l’Europe, etc.) coïncide avec le déclin des compétences linguistiques pour lire l’original et, partant, avec un regain d’importance de la littérature traduite.

De ce fait, l’Europe littéraire en perspective – qui plus est relayée par une instance de légitimation et d’institutionnalisation (Dubois [1978] 2005), ledit Prix du Livre européen – suscite de nouveaux sujets et topiques (postcoloniaux) dans l’imaginaire européen, rend l’Europe sous un jour postcolonial (Schulze-Engler 2013), réécrit la ville / métropole européenne, la “ville-monde” (Zemmour 2014: 446-470), la cité globale (Sassen 2001) à partir d’une perspective migrante, diasporique ou mobile; investit des lieux non-métropolitains, sans implication directe dans le colonialisme, comme les espaces ruraux, le terroir, les îles, etc. lesquels accèdent à un imaginaire littéraire européen.

Aussi, s’il est possible de lire dans certains textes fictionnels un phénomène de “provincialisation” de l’Europe à partir du dehors, d’un regard exotopique postcolonial sur le Vieux Continent (Chakrabarty 2000), comme dans *Alentejo blue* (*Café Paraíso* pour la traduction française d’Isabelle Maillet) de Monica Ali (2007), Anglaise originaire du Bangladesh, dont le récit choral retrace plusieurs strates de l’existence dans un village imaginaire de l’Alentejo (Portugal) baptisé Mamarrosa; ou encore le roman *Un rêve utile* de Tierno Monénembo (2007), lequel transpose carrément une société africaine dans une ville française imaginaire nommée Loug, où l’on retrouve subtilement l’étymon Lugdunum (Lyon), c’est en raison de la réévaluation des espaces périphériques du continent européen où s’opère un réaménagement des rapports entre marges et centre, (Peeren, Stuit et Van Weyenberg 2016; Ameel, Finch et Salmela 2015), voire une redécouverte de la province européenne, ou un regard nouveau sur les centres métropolitains perçus comme lieux de transculturation et de cosmopolitisme.

Le Prix du Livre européen prime, lui aussi, de telles perspectives en signalant à partir d’une démarche de légitimation institutionnelle de l’Union européenne des aspects géo-historico-culturels d’un continent bien plus vaste que cet ensemble

politique. C'est le cas, par exemple, du récit primé en 2017, *Zinc* de l'écrivain et activiste belge David Van Reybrouck (2017). Il s'agit là d'un documentaire fictionnalisé, mais aussi utopique, qui a pour sujet l'originale autogestion dans un espace et un temps bien déterminés (les deux Grandes guerres) à Moresnet-Neutre, petite commune germanophone annexée par la Belgique au Traité de Versailles, mais dont le statut autonome fut respecté jusque-là par les trois États limitrophes. Bien évidemment, ce village métaphorise une certaine idée de l'Europe frontalière, de région liminale et des confins entre les domaines germanique et latin de l'Europe.

La neutralité de Moresnet-Neutre, maintenue entre 1816 et 1919, grâce à la présence d'une ancienne mine de zinc dans le village (La Calamine), enviée par les États limitrophes, permet ainsi d'illustrer des théories politiques de démocratie directe ou de gouvernance locale improvisée prônée par Van Reybrouck: "Le compromis consistait en une absence de compromis (...). Cette zone devenait territoire neutre" (2017: 18).

Le récit retrace le parcours historique d'Emil, enfant adultérin d'une domestique allemande chassée de chez ses employeurs au début du XXe siècle, qui se réfugie dans le sanctuaire neutre de Moresnet-Neutre, ce qui en fait un emblème d'un pan de l'histoire de notre continent:

Sans avoir déménagé une seule fois de sa vie, il a été successivement citoyen d'un État neutre, sujet de l'Empire allemand, habitant du royaume de Belgique et citoyen du Troisième Reich. Avant de redevenir belge, ce qui sera son cinquième changement de nationalité, il [Emil] est emmené comme prisonnier de guerre allemand. Il n'a pas traversé de frontières, ce sont les frontières qui l'ont traversé. (*idem*: 63)

Dans le même sens, on peut lire le roman de la lauréate finlandaise du prix en 2010, Sofi Oksanen, *Purge*. Dans cette fiction, la romancière renoue avec son activisme contre toutes formes de totalitarisme, ressasse l'identité des pays baltes (Estonie-Finlande), s'attaque au mythe de la "finlandisation" en interrogeant les clichés de la culture et de l'identité finlandaises - cette idée construite et entretenue d'une société pacifique et exceptionnellement heureuse -, et exhume les crimes idéologiques commis sur ces territoires à la faveur des changements successifs de régime: nationalisme balte, national-socialisme et communisme, pour en arriver à l'intégration européenne.

C'est d'ailleurs ce que représente et synthétise le parcours historique personnel du personnage de la vieille Aliïde, à savoir un regard sur la mémoire de cette liminalité géographique du Vieux Continent (grand nord, baltique) qui apparaît, certes, comme périphérique, mais fortement connectée aux déboires causés par les événements qui ont marqué l'Europe au XXe siècle. Dans *Purge*, nous suivons le parcours tragique d'une famille sur trois générations de femmes imbriquées et impliquées sous plusieurs régimes politiques successifs, avec leur lot d'espairs, d'arrangements,

de compromissions, mais surtout de trahisons et de délations, le tout dans un incessant va-et-vient historique fait d'analepses et de prolepses qui expose différentes tranches historiques:

Les yeux de sa grand-mère ont brillé lorsque Zara lui a annoncé son intention d'aller travailler en Allemagne. Sa mère n'en avait pas été enthousiasmée, rien ne l'enthousiasmait d'ailleurs, mais surtout, elle n'aimait pas ces projets, car elle pensait que l'Ouest était un endroit dangereux. Un salaire élevé n'avait pas changé l'opinion de sa mère. Sa grand-mère elle-même n'avait pas fait attention aux conversations de Zara sur l'argent, mais elle avait exigé que, avec cet argent, Zara aille visiter l'Estonie. (2011: 03)

Mais le Prix du Livre Européen a surtout récompensé des retours postmémoriels sur l'histoire européenne, aux conséquences somme toute assez récentes. Rappelons que le concept de "postmémoire" définit, selon Marianne Hirsch:

(...) la relation que la "génération d'après" entretient avec le traumatisme personnel, collectif et culturel subi par ceux qui l'ont précédée, avec des expériences dont elle ne "se souvient" que par le biais d'histoires, d'images et de comportements au milieu desquels elle a grandi. Mais ces expériences lui ont été transmises si profondément et avec tant d'émotion qu'elles semblent constituer une mémoire en tant que telle. (2008: 114)

Si, bien souvent, ce rapport complexe au passé s'inscrit du côté des descendants des victimes, c'est-à-dire la troisième génération de la famille des déportés (Rubinstein 2002; Skowronek 2015), une fois la Shoah entrée dans le domaine public, la récompense en question a salué le même vécu du côté des descendants des bourreaux, des collaborateurs, ou tout simplement des "suiveurs" sympathisants. C'est le cas de deux récits plus ou moins fictionnels, écrits par deux auteurs, symptomatiquement produits sur l'axe franco-allemand, primés par le Prix du Livre Européen, respectivement *Histoire d'un Allemand de l'Est* de l'écrivain et journaliste Maxim Leo (2010), lequel fait contraster le sort de ses deux grands-pères, l'un communiste persécuté sous le national-socialisme et l'autre, admirateur du IIIe Reich, et la lauréate du Prix 2018, Géraldine Schwarz, pour *Les Amnésiques*, où sont implacablement abordés, à partir de l'histoire familiale de l'auteure, les thèmes de la confiscation des biens de propriétaires juifs, notamment les entreprises, au profit des Allemands (et notamment le grand-père de l'écrivaine), celui encore tabou de la collaboration passive (*mitläufer*), et partant, de la mauvaise conscience de bien des peuples européens sous le joug allemand:

Il est impossible que mes grands-parents aient ignoré la propagande antisémite qui inondait les ondes radiophoniques, les journaux et les pancartes dans les espaces pu-

blics. Eux qui étaient si entourés, n'avaient-ils jamais entendu raconter que tel médecin, avocat, fonctionnaire s'était retrouvé à la rue après des années de loyaux services? Ou comment une mère de famille avait vu soudain l'école de ses enfants chasser une partie de ses élèves, exclus parce que juifs? (Schwarz 2015: 195)

Par ailleurs, le Prix du Livre Européen a parfois mis en avant les aspects géographiquement liminaux de l'Europe en les accouplant d'une réflexion sur la mobilité intra-européenne, ainsi que sur les heurts et incompréhensions interculturels sentis par les Européens. C'est le cas de *Les Complémentaires* de l'écrivain danois Jens Christian Grøndahl ([2013], 2015), présélectionné en 2015, et qui renvoie à une certaine image du continent européen dans son rapport centre-liminalité (nordique) et à sa composition multiculturelle, parfois problématique, surtout dans les grandes métropoles, la "ville-monde" de Londres. En tous cas, la fiction grøndahlienne circule en Europe et thématise subtilement ce contient. Tout comme pour Oksanen, il n'est pas sans intérêt de relever que l'assignation liminale imaginaire nordique, qui impliquait souvent l'assimilation au cliché générique du polar scandinave, oblige désormais à des nuances, pour dégager un roman nordique non policier.⁵ Dans ce roman-ci par exemple, la mobilité Londres-Copenhague est productrice de confrontations et de difficile coexistence ou intégration dans un continent où le communautarisme commence à faire rage:

Il fut surpris de l'[sa belle-mère] entendre radoter ainsi sur les musulmans. Il était étonné car, durant toutes ces années, il l'avait soupçonnée de nourrir un petit peu d'antisémitisme, comme un animal de compagnie, tout au fond du sous-sol muet de sa personnalité. Et pourquoi sa phobie de l'Islam n'y aurait-elle pas fleuri elle aussi? Était-ce sa paranoïa latente à lui qui le faisait s'étonner du fait que, avec son antisémitisme caché, elle n'éprouvait pas le besoin de fêter les Arabes qui, eux, haïssent les Juifs de manière machinale? (Grøndahl 2015: 30)

Mais derrière le rituel de l'attribution d'un prix comme celui qui nous occupe ici, et dont nous ne nous penchons que sur certains aspects et par un échantillon assez limité, est engagé tout un circuit commercial, même si la récompense n'a certes pas l'impact d'autres trophées littéraires à l'étranger par le biais de la traduction, même décernés en France, tels les prix Goncourt ou Femina. C'est dire l'importance dont se revêt la traduction et le rôle incontournable du traducteur littéraire dans la médiation des ouvrages. D'autant plus que bien des romans et récits primés nous arrivent en français par la traduction directe, rarement indirecte, dont il nous est force de relever souvent la qualité, mais aussi moyennant la traduction indirecte, notamment de langue européenne minoritaire vers une autre langue de moindre circulation. C'est-à-dire que les textes connaissent parfois un circuit périphérie-centre-périphérie; une

pratique courante de circulation des textes fictionnels en Europe, mais qui met à nu le peu de relief donné au traducteur dans cette même circulation, lequel peut apparaître comme le grand oublié.

Ceci dit, et pour conclure, l'institution d'un prix littéraire tel que le Prix du Livre Européen, même si elle n'est pas en soi directement créatrice de liminalités linguistiques, géographiques, imaginaires ou fictionnels, n'en est pas moins promotrice et relayeuse de ces réalités européennes dans une logique qui produit la circulation des ouvrages, et ce faisant, des fictions. À cet égard, elle s'avère opportune. Les questions soulevées par la création littéraire rendent souvent l'Europe dans ses complexités, bien au-delà d'une vision purement "positive" de notre continent, si l'on confère à cette épithète le sens de "favorable" ou "promotionnel". En fait, les ouvrages primés ou sélectionnés véhiculent des images nuancées, et souvent complaisantes, de nos sociétés et de leurs histoires et conflits plus ou moins récents. En ce sens, cette récompense s'avère "positive" et peut sans doute contribuer à une relecture de nos identités composites au sein du projet européen en cours.

Notes

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² Son projet se décline comme suit sur le site de la base: "Quels dialogues la littérature, en elle-même et en rapport intertextuel avec d'autres arts, établit-elle avec l'Europe post-1945? De quelle façon l'écriture interroge-t-elle l'identité et les frontières d'un continent pluriel, simultanément très ancien et en constante réinvention, notamment ces 70 dernières années? Quelles aspirations, interrogations, protestations continuent de décrire et forcent à re-décrire, ouvrage à ouvrage, l'histoire et la confluence de civilisations, l'inclusion et l'exclusion de peuples? De quelle façon, enfin, la création artistique

- réinvente-t-elle l'Europe même en proposant de nouveaux modèles d'échange d'une expérience?". <http://aeuropafaceaeuropa.ilcml.com/fr/>
- ³ cf. <https://expresso.pt/cultura/2019-06-12-Autora-portuguesa-Ana-Pessoa-e-uma-das-28-artistas-escolhidas-para-repensar-o-futuro-da-Europa>
- ⁴ Notre échantillon prend surtout pour point de départ notre propre contribution (entrées) à la construction de la base de données L'Europe face à l'Europe. <http://aeuropafaceaeuropa.ilcml.com/fr/les-prosateurs-ecrivent-leurope/>
- ⁵ <https://observador.pt/especiais/sofi-oksanen-nao-existe-lugar-para-os-livros-nordicos-que-nao-sao-politicos/>

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Sitographie:

- <https://observador.pt/especiais/sofi-oksanen-nao-existe-lugar-para-os-livros-nordicos-que-nao-sao-policiais/> [disponible le 19/12/20]
- <http://aeuropafaceaeuropa.ilcml.com/fr/les-prosateurs-ecrivent-leurope/> [disponible le 19/12/20]
- <https://expresso.pt/cultura/2019-06-12-Autora-portuguesa-Ana-Pessoa-e-uma-das-28-artistas-escolhidas-para-repensar-o-futuro-da-Europa> [disponible le 19/12/20]

My Dream of Europe¹

Martin R. Dean

Abstract: How the Swiss see, classify and judge Europe depends on how they see themselves. The external image is a consequence of the self-image. Switzerland as a small but beautiful island. This self-description is deeply inscribed in the country's memory. In contrast, my writing is closely linked to a European invention: the big city, the old European cities in which the Enlightenment and liberal thought produced a culture of progress, liberality and tolerance. Paris and London, Lisbon and Berlin, Amsterdam and Vienna

Keywords: Europe, european cities

Zusammenfassung: Wie die Schweizer Europa sehen, einstufen und beurteilen, hängt davon ab, wie sie sich selbst sehen. Das Fremdbild ist eine Konsequenz des Selbstbildes. Die Schweiz als kleine, aber feine Insel. Diese Selbstbeschreibung ist tief in die Erinnerung des Landes eingeschrieben. Im Gegensatz dazu ist mein Schreiben eng verknüpft mit einer europäischen Erfindung: der Grossstadt, die alten europäischen Grossstädte, in denen die Aufklärung und die liberalen Gedanken eine Kultur des Fortschritts, der Liberalität und der Toleranz hervorgebracht haben. Paris und London, Lissabon und Berlin, Amsterdam und Wien.

Schlüsselwörter: Europa, europäischen Grossstädte

In 1997, when I wanted to write a typical Swiss scene for my novel “The Ballad of Billie and Joe” I went to Melide, a small town in Ticino, situated in the southern part of the country. Here you are encouraged to walk at hip height through a three dimensional small model of Switzerland. “Swiss Miniature” reduces Switzerland to its touristic sights.

Excerpts from my novel “La Ballade de Billie et Joe:

Mais Joe a une relation compliquée à la Suisse. Dans l’hôtel en forme de boîte, sur la haute falaise surplombant le lac, où ils sont descendus après avoir fui leur ville, Billie commençait déjà à rêver de cette Suisse miniature. De ce modèle réduit avec les reproductions des châteaux, des monuments et des curiosités de l’Helvétie. Avant d’avoir vraiment pris la fuite, elle voulait déjà rebrousser chemin pour venir ici. Il était debout à la fenêtre, les mains enfoncées dans les poches de son pantalon et regardait de l’autre côté, vers l’Italie. Que veux-tu que je fasse, demande-t-il à Billie, dans cette maison de poupée nationale. Encore un hommage à ton enfance, parce que tu ne peux vraiment dire adieu à rien ni à personne....

Le pays miniature est comme un jardin japonais. Le regard glisse par-dessus des toits qui lancent des reflets clairs et se faufile par de petites portes et fenêtres. Le bon Dieu rit au-dessus des petits pignons. Joe fume et ne sait pas où faire tomber sa cendre. Tout est sacrément trop étroit pour lui ici, trop tracé d’avance, mais Billie saute sans effort d’un petit château à l’autre. Elle se faufile dans chaque petite maison comme Alice au Pays des Merveilles et dit, imagine, imagine, Joe, nous sommes les propriétaires du château de Chillon, seuls pour des centaines d’années dans ces appartements silencieux, la brume, tu rêves, imagine Joe. Billie rêve toujours de petites choses dans lesquelles elle peut se faufile et se cacher. Des petites boîtes et des coquillages et des labyrinthes d’escargots qui l’avalent. Ah Billie, elle lui fait joyeusement signe de la main comme pour dire adieu à ce monde et disparaît. Elle redevient enfant, juste maintenant, où il est si fier de la voir courageuse, il est fier de partir avec une femme, peut-être pour toujours. Billie et son patriotisme de maison de poupée.'

It is striking that the all the surrounding European hinterland such as French Alsace, German South Baden, Italian Lombardy as well as Austria is missing. The “Swiss Miniature” model reveals all touristic clichés about Switzerland.

How the Swiss see, classify and judge Europe depends on how they see themselves. The historian Jakob Tanner describes the patriotic image of Switzerland as follows: Switzerland is seen as an independent island that has to defend itself against a hostile environment, namely the EU. This Switzerland overestimates itself as a role model for direct democracy. It is thought to possess an intact landscape and the Alps are portrayed as an extraordinary nature reserve. At the center of Swiss life

stand the farmers, whose values are expressed in sports through swinging, skiing, and horn playing and in cultural activities through yodelling, singing and hiking. Switzerland is a small but beautiful island. “This self- description”, writes Tanner, “is deeply inscribed in the culture of memory”.

Real Switzerland is different. “The Dörfli (villlage) mentality,” Tanner continues, “became a cloak of invisibility that turned the ‘secret empire’ (Lorenz Stucki) of Swiss capitalism invisible.

In real Switzerland the peasants are subject to merciless economic forces and are more than generously subsidized. Their share in the care of the landscape is modest. The groundwater is endangered due to over-fertilization of the soil. The paradigm of direct democracy forms a challenge for many citizens, whose decisions are often guided less by understanding but by resentment. This is fertile ground for the terrible simplifications of right-wing parties. Real Switzerland functions as operational base for many global corporations in the areas of asset management, commodity trading, pharmaceuticals and agribusiness. These same corporations are often criticized widely. Switzerland lives well with this false self-image as long as it does not interfere with business.

Switzerland is neither worse nor better than surrounding European countries. Were its self-image different, Switzerland would understand itself as part of Europe. With imports and exports to the EU, it would have every reason to do so. In addition, more people with a migration background live in Switzerland than in other countries. They constitute about 30% of the population and are largely well integrated. Thanks to its quadrilingualism, Switzerland is well prepared for the exchange with people from other countries and cultures. Also, no other people travel as much as the Swiss.

What does Europe mean to me?

As a German speaking writer, Europe provides me with a pool of stories, within which I can continue to write. Since hellenistic times the European tradition has collected discourses from Jewish, Arab and African sources.

My writing does not stem from a particular landscape. However, it is, closely linked to the metropolitan European tradition. By metropolitan I do not mean such cities as New York, Shanghai, or Rio de Janeiro, but am referring to the old European cities of Paris, London, Lisbon, Berlin, Amsterdam and Vienna, where the Enlightenment and liberal thought produced a progressive, liberal, and tolerant culture.

It is these cities with their public squares that are typically European for me. In the large and small squares, the agora, the public life of the polis is negotiated and the intellectual conversation continues in its cafés, bistros and coffee houses. The museums, concert halls, landscapes and gardens express the aesthetic of a society. Of course, my Europe is a product of the Enlightenment and my birth hall is the Room of Enlightenment in the British Museum. This European and anti-colonial Enlightenment

spans from the Marques de Pombal to Voltaire, from Diderot to Kant and the Swiss writer Rousseau. My favorite writers, as well, are characterized by typical European images of men and women, by utopias and distortions: Fernando Pessoa and Robert Walser, Franz Kafka and Hans Henny Jahnn, Thomas Mann and Marieluise Fleisser, Antonio Lobo Antunes and Annie Ernaux.

About London I wrote in my essay collection *Bowing Before Mirrors*:

Thanks to its history, London has remained a model for a multiethnic society. London, Paris or Amsterdam, the “mother cities” of former colonial empires, have experience in dealing with strangers, today they are - at least this may be one beneficial consequence of colonialism - mixing laboratories. They possess sufficient historical substance not to lose face in the erosive process of globalization.

And about Paris, where, beside my hometown Basel, I have spent most of my time:

In a dream that has accompanied me all my life, this city exists once again. Completely and completely, not a stone is missing. In this dream I am an inhabitant of this city, I am at home here. I always dream this dream when the longing for life is undermining me. When I dream that life could have been different.²

My Europe remains a dream. It is a project that, in spite of tourism and digitalization, we must try to continue to complete.

Notes

¹ Martin R. Dean (1997), *The Ballad of Billie and Joe*, Edition Circe, Strassbourg. (Deutsch, Hanser Verlag, München)

² Martin R. Dean (2015), *Bowing Before Mirrors: Essays about the Self and the Other*, Verlag Jung und Jung, Salzburg/Wien.

Transnational Women Writers in Europe: the Italian case-study¹

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Abstract: My paper is divided in two parts: the first theoretical it is focused on the importance of Transnational Studies. Comparative Studies, Gender Studies and Translation Studies are in a transitory phase, a moment of great change implicit in a new perspective that wants to take into account a 'global' vision on the state of art in these three fields. The canonical division between literary/cultural studies and translation is not acceptable anymore, because translation is nowadays an hermeneutical category important to understand the complexity of the world. A research area that seems to unite this new notion of comparatism and translation is that of "Transnational literatures/cultures", where the term 'trans' outlines, not only the passage among cultures, literatures and languages, but also the overcoming of barriers and national borders. In the second part I analyse some Transnational Women Writers, who have chosen to write their fiction in Italian: Ornella Vorpsi (Albania), Lilia Bicec (Moldova), Geneviève Makaping (Cameroon), Christina de Caldes Brito (Brazil), Jarmila Ockayová (Slovakia) and finally, Jhumpa Lahiri (Bangladesh/USA). I analyse the reasons of their choice and the specificity of their contribution to Transnational Literatures/Cultures.

Keywords: Transnational Studies, Transnational Women Writers, Ornella Vorpsi (Albania), Lilia Bicec (Moldova), Geneviève Makaping (Cameroon), Christina de Caldes Brito (Brazil), Jarmila Ockayová (Slovakia), Jhumpa Lahiri (Bangladesh/USA).

Astratto: Il mio saggio é diviso in due parti: la prima teorica si incentra sull'importanza degli Studi Transnazionali. Gli Studi Comparati, gli Studi di Genere e quelli sulla Traduzione sono in una fase di transizione, in un momento di grande cambiamento che sottende una nuova prospettiva che mira a tenere presente una visione "globale" sullo stato dell'arte in questi tre settori di studio. La divisione canonica tra gli studi letterari/culturali e quelli della traduzione non è più accettabile, perché la traduzione oggi è diventata una categoria ermeneutica impor-

tante per capire la complessità del mondo. Un'area di ricerca che sembra unire questa nuova nozione di comparatismo e di traduzione è quella delle "Culture e Letterature transnazionali". Il termine "trans" sottolinea non solo il passaggio tra le culture, le letterature e le lingue, ma anche il superamento delle barriere e dei confini nazionali. Nella seconda parte analizzo le scrittrici transnazionali che hanno scelto di scrivere i loro romanzi nella lingua italiana. Igiaba Scego (Somalia), Ornella Vorpsi (Albania), Lilia Bicec (Moldavia), Geneviève Makaping (Cameron), Christina de Caldes Brito (Brasile), Jarmila Ockayová (Cecoslovacchia) and Jhumpa Lahiri (Bangladesh/USA). Indagherò inoltre le ragioni della loro scelta e la specificità del loro contributo all'interno delle Letterature e delle Culture transnazionali.

Parole chiave: studi transnazionali, scrittrici transnazionali, Ornella Vorpsi (Albania), Lilia Bicec (Moldova), Geneviève Makaping (Cameroon), Christina de Caldes Brito (Brazil), Jarmila Ockayová (Slovakia), Jhumpa Lahiri (Bangladesh/USA).

I- I would like to divide my paper in two parts: in the first theoretical I want to stress why according to my opinion Transnational Studies and Cosmopolitanism are important in our contemporary world, in the second part I analyse some transnational women writers who have chosen to write their fiction in Italian.¹

Comparative Studies, Gender Studies and Translation Studies are in a transitory phase, a moment of great change implicit in a new perspective that wants to take into account a 'global' vision on the state of art in these three fields. The canonical division between literary/cultural studies and translation is not acceptable anymore, because translation is nowadays an hermeneutical category important to understand the complexity of the world. A research area that seems to unite this new notion of comparatism and translation is that of "Transnational literatures/cultures", where the term 'trans' outlines, not only the passage among cultures, literatures and languages, but also the overcoming of barriers and national borders. Sociologists have pointed out that the nation state category needs to be reconceptualized in the era of globalization. According to William Robinson (1998: 565), the "Nation State" must be seen as a "specific social relation inserted into larger structures that may take different, and historically determined, institutional forms." In her book *The Sociology of Globalization* the Dutch sociologist Saskia Sassen (2007), studies the ways global institutions, such as the World Trade Organization, intersect with the set of processes that occur on the national and local levels, in such a way that the Nation State is modified. Sassen proposes an analysis through the theory of *re-scaling*: globalization crosses the various institutions established by the different "Nation

States". The various hierarchies do not disappear, but they intersect thanks to the presence of "new scales", which condition and change the old institutions (Benvenuti/ Ceserani 2012: 70-74).

From this perspective the term 'transnational' recuperates the possibility of exchanges with extra-European countries underlining people's movements and writings about new configurations of geographical and cultural spaces. The transnational perspective permits to re-analyze the global cultural/literary scene not only from an economic or sociological perspective but also a literary and cultural one. In one of my recent articles I have argued that Transnational literature and a revised concept of Cosmopolitanism are strictly connected.² Transnational Literature can help in acquiring a 'rooted cosmopolitanism' perspective against the contemporary rise of political nationalisms within the European and extra-European contexts. Cosmopolitanism in our contemporary time has become an important issue in order to accept the challenge of globalization and to contrast dangerous phenomena such as the crisis of democracies, racism and xenophobia, among others. Its strength consists in stressing essential universal values such as human dignity, freedom, religious tolerance, solidarity and the pursue of human happiness. Cosmopolitanism is not incompatible with local specificity (one's own roots) as suggested by the anthropologist Kwame Antony Appiah (1997) who stresses in his work the idea of "rooted cosmopolitanism" meaning that in the contemporary/globalized world everyone is a "rooted cosmopolitan". Cosmopolitanism values the variety of human forms of social and cultural life, contrasting any homogenized global culture.

The term "transnational" is difficult to define, because it does not just mean going beyond the concept of nation, but because it also implies a *transit*, a writer's passage from one language/culture to another, or, as happens in the contemporary world, characterised by continuous displacements, from one language/culture to several others. In this sense the term hyphenated-writer, which is closely linked to postcolonial processes and migrations, does not appear to be wholly appropriate to most of the European transnational writers. The definition "transnational literature", just like "world literature", is not fixed, but mobile, on the move, so to speak. For this reason, defining a female writer as "transnational" seems to be a complex operation. It implies keeping in mind a series of considerations: firstly, the biographical and existential reasons of each writer, and the intimately connected economic and political motivations of her exile. For a long time, the identity of a writer would pass through her choice of her so called "mother tongue": what we witness in transnational writers is an interesting phenomenon: their choice of writing novels in a different language from that of their homeland, i.e. that of their host country.

A central problem in transnational literatures written by women is that of identity, not considered as a monolithic entity but as fluid, an identity that overcome painful experiences, but that can be rebuilt through writing in a different language,

not the mother tongue. The issue of the mother tongue is central in Azade Seyhan's book (*Writing Outside the Nation*, 2001), since a central problem in transnational literature written by women is identity, considered as a fluid entity that overcomes painful experiences and that can be rebuilt through writing in a language other than the mother tongue. National identity seems not to be founded on the mother tongue anymore:

If language is the single most important determinant of national identity, as many have argued, and narratives (specifically, epics and novels) institute and support national myths and shape national consciousness (e.p. the Finnish epic Kalevala), what happens when the domain of national language is occupied by non-native writers, writers whose native, mother, home, or community language is not the one they write in? (Seyhan 2001: 8)

For this reason, in many of their novels or essays, the reasons for this choice are elucidated, being as they are closely connected to a complex identifying process: the passage from one language/culture to another involves a distancing process allowing them not only to observe their surrounding reality from an outsider, marginal point of view, but also to operate a sort of self-translation. The writers become translators of an in-between identity.

The richness of the different linguistic and cultural background of transnational writers makes generalising their specific characteristics very difficult, because they are, to put it mildly, an extremely varied typology. In this paper we will discuss writers who have chosen Italy as their abode and Italian as their language of expression. This phenomenon may be defined with the term used by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi, that is "minor transnationalism", since Italian language and literature have been considered "minor" players on the European stage, compared to English and French language and literature: two nations who also played a greater role in the colonial phenomenon and who conversely were more culturally influenced by it.

In the Introduction to the volume *Minor Transnationalism* (2005) Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih underline the fact that in order to study what has been defined as "minor transnationalism" it is necessary to abandon a vertical perspective where a group was hierarchically placed in a higher position and to find a transversal perspective. We should not think about binary oppositions or centre versus periphery but we need to underline the relationships among minor transnationalisms. Today it is important to discuss the relationship among different 'margins', different ethnic communities.

There is a clear lack of proliferation of relational discourses among different minority groups, a legacy from the colonial ideology of divide and conquer that has historically pitted different ethnic groups against each other. The minor appears always mediated

by the major in both its social and its psychic means of identification... The transnational... can be conceived as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without the necessary mediation by the centre". (Lionnet and Shih 2005: 2-8)

Studying these writers, one realises how little Italian colonialism has been studied, or even totally dismissed, together with its effects on our society: a hidden, repressed and hardly considered phenomenon. Now transnational writers, especially those originating from the Italian ex- colonies (especially Eritrea and Somalia) propose a serious reflection on Italian colonial history and are able to explain the prejudices and the sometime racist and xenophobe attitude towards different ethnicities and cultures.³

Another example to underline the complexity of defining a transnational writer arises from Eastern European or border country migration to Italy (for instance, from Moldavia or Albania). The latter reveal exactly how much the myth of a united Europe no longer corresponds to current reality, since the very definition of Europe is flexible and unstable. The contribution given by these writers and their richness is due not just to their showing us histories and cultures we have long ignored despite their geographical closeness, but also to their making us face a critical and ethical reflection of our own social reality. Moreover they have highlighted how important it is to imagine and construct a transnational encounter founded on an ethical relationship in the sense envisaged by Emmanuel Levinas (1969). They underline the importance of a dialogue that takes into consideration the history of colonization and imperialism and the political-social spaces where it takes place. Only in this way we can think about a transnational politics based on interaction, communication and representation. The importance on ethics on the behaviour we should assume towards "the other" can make women aware that one of the limits in this dialogue and exchange is to adopt monistic perspectival narrowness in scholarship (Stanford 2011: 24). Women propose a transversal and transpositional politics where to be ethical is able to shift position to those of "the other" and many others beyond the binary logic of Western hegemony and not Western one.

Our case studies consist of writers coming from different countries, but who all have chosen to write in Italian: choosing Italian is, a conscious and deliberate choice for these writers and it is in the first place, aimed at getting in touch or relating with the exterior, with "the other". These writers write in Italian because they want us to listen to them. Language in this sense becomes a place where to fight, because as Adrienne Rich, reminded her reader "this language smelling of my oppressors that's why I must use in order to speak to them". Why are they transnational writers? Because they experience the paradox of their condition (Sassen, 1999): on the one hand the global market tends to eliminate nation states in favour of global economic integration, on the other, there still remain immigration policies based on the old-fashioned conception of nations and borders.

2- Ornela Vorpsi (Albania), Lilia Bicec (Moldova), Geneviève Makaping (Cameroon), Christina de Caldes Brito (Brazil), Jarmila Ockayová (Slovakia) and finally Jhumpa Lahiri (Bangladesh/USA). They consequently belong to that vast group of writers who have created a new domain within Italian literature. These texts clearly highlight how migration is not just a social or ethnic concept, but an existential condition. Italian literary criticism, dominated by a conservative tendency, has, for many years, removed or even excluded their works, because they did not comply with predetermined literary canons. Thus, texts which have struggled to be accepted as literary works, because long consigned to only be read as records of a social phenomenon.

Defining themselves, on different occasions and for different reasons, “eccentric writers” (far from the centre), is symptomatic of a coincidence between their experiences as narrators and the most stimulating theoretical reflections emerging from feminism. The gaze of these authoresses is the gaze from the margin opening to observe the centre: being outside the centre means, for these women writers, being able to observe and understand the necessary detachment between life and literature, being called upon to operate individual choices that are not dictated by their subscribing to already established models.

Some thematic constants that may be retrieved from their novels: the impact with Italy, the generating disappointment, astonishment and nostalgia; this impact emerges in their fictions from the contrast between near/far, us/you. The theme of metaphoric and literal coldness: coldness indeed characterises a foreign and unwelcoming space, in which to feel disoriented, and which drives the search for a bit of human warmth.

As example of woman writer who belongs to a minor transnationalism we have chosen the Albanian writer Ornela Vorpsi born in Tirana in 1968 when the regime of Enver Hoxha became more and more harsh. She left Albania for political reasons and studied at the Academia di Brera and later in Paris, where she lives now.

Her writing can be defined as “a gift of migration” un [regalo della migrazione], the result of an inspiration strictly correlated to migration (interviewed in Ravenna, 2-12 May 2007). Ornella Vorpsi can be considered an “eccentric writer” in the etymological meaning of being and feeling to be outside the consolidate norm that see the Western world as the centre - both geographical and cultural - as regards the country of origins.

Her eccentricity is born from migration, from her continuous movement from one place to another and the consequent change in her point of view. Migration implies a detachment from the country of origin and the search for a new motherland/identity/personal balance that in many cases is forbidden.

Now I have become a perfect foreigner. When we become foreigners, we look at the world in a different way from someone who is inside. [...] It is like going to a family dinner with-

out participating in it; it is as if there is a cold window in between [...] They peer at you, they recognize you, they make you signs so that you can get in and join them, you also see them and reply with the same gestures, but the dinner is over, it is eaten like that. After a while they do not invite you anymore. (*The Hand you don't bite* [*La mano che non mordi*] 2007: 19)

[Ormai sono una perfetta straniera. Quando si è così stranieri, si guarda il tutto in modo diverso da uno che fa parte del dentro. [...] È come recarsi a una cena di famiglia e non poter partecipare ; si frappone una gelida finestra...: loro ti scrutano , ti riconoscono, ti fanno segni perché tu entri e li raggiunga, pure tu li vedi e rispondi con gli stessi gesti, ma la cena si consuma qui, si consuma così. Dopo poco tempo smettono di invitarti]

The detachment from the motherland permits to look from a critical perspective the country abandoned for political reasons. Through memories and a child's adolescent point of view Ornella Vorpsi remembers in *The country where you never die* [*Il paese dove non si muore mai*, 2005] the years of her childhood and adolescence in Albania, a sunny but also violent and hard to live in a country dominated by dictatorship's abuses of power. A macho Albania obsessed by sex. To be a woman in a male chauvinist country relegates her to a marginal position: she is not a man and therefore possesses less rights to be free, to live free. But she finds herself in the same position also when she goes abroad and where there is the same repetitive stereotype, which has become almost a rule: the Albanian woman as a prostitute.

The novel *Dear children, I write to you* [*Miei cari Figli, Vi scrivo*], that Lilia Bicec published in Italian have the form of letters that Lilia wrote to her children but she never sent to them. Letters she writes to try to find relief from the solitude she feels in Italy, without the children she had to leave behind. In these letters she describes her difficult painful experiences in Italy, when she arrived as an illegal immigrant. Her feeling alien in a country that at first is hostile, since she is there illegally, her difficulty in communicating with others because she cannot speak the language. Lilia is a woman that does not let her be overwhelmed, because she has decided to build another life for herself and her children. This is why, once a job has been found, she starts studying again, teaches herself Italian, and above all, reads in her free time. Distance has enabled her to understand how her relationship with her husband was not founded on mutual esteem and how, in her case, hard work has meant the possibility of reconstructing herself.

Geneviève Makaping from Cameroon has chosen to speak to us in our "own language", from our "own home". She has worked and studied in Italy, has achieved a teaching position within Italian academia, and has written a biographical and anthropological essay *Trajectories of gazes. If others were you* [*Traiettorie di sguardi. E se gli altri foste voi*, 2001] where she uses the method of "participating observation", but overturning the usual object of her discipline's gaze, which traditionally alights

on the “other”. Her biographical experience becomes a study on us, the white majority, revealing itself to be lazy and indifferent, when it is not violent and intolerant. While denouncing the injustices suffered, Makaping reveals our own otherness to us. The authoress thus deconstructs the commonplace image of Italians being “good fellas”, which has contributed so much to the historical negation and removal of the Italian colonial past in North and Oriental Africa, convincing us we were forever immune from intolerance, racism and xenophobia. Her discursive strategy consists in re-naming everything we ourselves have already branded, labelled and negatively judged: her commitment is aimed at the “deconstruction and re-construction of the meaning of certain concepts”.

Yes, words sometimes are like stones. These words sometimes make me break out in a rash, I was saying, but I strongly resist allowing them to make a dent in my vital organs. What can I do? I deconstruct them. I don't give them another connotation, I limit myself to re-denoting them. [...] For a start... want to be the one to say what my name is. (2009: 31)

[Sì, le parole a volte sono pietre. Tali parole a volte mi fanno venire l'orticaria, dicevo, però rifiuto con forza che intacchino i miei organi vitali. Cosa fare? Le decostruisco. Non do loro un'altra connotazione, mi limito a ri-denotarle. [...] Per iniziare... Voglio essere una che dice che cosa è il mio nome.]

Christina de Caldas Brito, Brazilian, offers an example of a hybrid, variegated language in her stories: her heroines speak a language that is a cross between Portuguese and Italian. In *Ana de Jesus*, as in other stories of her collection *Amanda, Olinda, Azzurra e le altre* (1998), the reader is struck by the novelty of the linguistic solutions adopted by the writer: her “portulian” (a mix of the two languages), whose rhythms and sounds echo the language spoken by Italian immigrants to Brazil. It is a discursive strategy consisting in the invention of a new expressive code, taking its start from the parody of the “mistakes” typical of foreigners upon first coming into contact with the new language. Although this linguistic game calls for a firm mastery of Italian, the writer tackles it with lighthearted enjoyment, producing that skilful blend of expressive lightness and formal balance that characterise her very personal style.

Slovak writer Jarmila Ockayová refuses the mother-tongue ideal, since she considers herself a person moving between languages, whose condition of simultaneously belonging and non-belonging allows her to look at identities which have been fixed once and for all and at mother tongues with healthy scepticism, to resist the temptation “to settle in one single conception of sovereign and univocal identity”, and to face multiplicity without falling into the trap of relativism. Jarmila Ockayová uses a culinary metaphor to describe her linguistic position:

Speaking in one's mother tongue is like finding an already laid table, your food already prepared, brought in from the restaurant kitchen. Adopting a new language, instead, is like having to cook that same dish for oneself. One does the shopping, dirties the kitchen, and notices every single ingredient. Then, upon eating, one is more aware of what's on the table. (1997: 54)

[Parlare la lingua madre é come trovarsi la tavola già apparecchiata, il cibo bell'e pronto che ti portano dalla cucina di un ristorante. Adottare una lingua nuova è invece come doversi cucinare quella stessa pietanza da soli. Fai la spesa, imbratti la cucina, stai attento ad ogni ingrediente. Poi quando mangi, sei più consapevole di quello che hai sul piatto Ockayovà]

On a meta-narrative level, the author's choice of using Italian and the cooking metaphor she uses can be read as a way on incorporating in herself the represented by our language and literary tradition. Language is a privileged means for introspecting "the other" –especially if the writer does not adopts a mother tongue, foreign to her unconscious and to her upbringing: the foreign text then becomes a form of cannibalism, allowing the authoress to establish a distance between the subject of the enunciation and her linguistic expression, accentuating the awareness of its extraneousness and fragmentation. Azade Seyan affirms that the old terms of literary criticism are not adequate to describe a modified reality. Adjectives such as "exilic", "ethnic", "migrant" or "diasporic" are not sufficient to explain the complexity of linguistic processes, the nuances in writing that come out from geographies, stories and cultural practices by women who choose to write in a different language from their "mother tongue". It is thus important to be aware that we do not possess an adequate language for our task and that we are responsible for a reflection and problematization of the terms we use. Azade agrees with what Appadurai states: "No idiom has yet emerged to capture the collective interests of many groups in translocal solidarities, cross-border mobilizations, and post-national identities" (Appadurai 1996).

Thus, the contribution of Italian narrative written by transnational writers consists in the possibility of revealing the deceptive nature of language; in the potential offered by the detachment typical of people living in transit between languages and the ability

to break down a few human and literary stereotypes: because with their works they deconstruct the stereotyped and essentialist image of the "immigrant"; breaking the limits imposed on the speaking subjects by the institutions. But above all they remind us that human diversity, with its infinite range of possibilities, is literature's raw material, as well as its reason for being. (EAD, *Al di là della parola*: 2)

The second point I would like to analyse is the theme of nostalgia, closely linked to memory and remembrance. These writers' narratives draw from their autobiographical experiences. Indeed the writers pour into the protagonists of their novels and stories their re-worked life material. The fragments of their memories are not represented as if they were simple documents, but they are re-elaborated so as to give a "new version of the old ones", to make us move towards a new way of articulating them. The tension to remember is not just the instrument for a better knowledge of oneself, and of others: it expresses the need to recuperate, recover the past to hand back meaning to the heritage of pain and suffering. In this sense the act of remembering is different from escapist nostalgia (a kind of useless act consisting in wanting something to remain the way it always has been), and it becomes, instead, critical nostalgia, a "deeply subversive political act" for the chance of illuminating and successfully transforming present reality.

Saudade may result in closure and anger when, without substitute gratifications, there prevails in a person the feeling of loss. Yet it may lead to creativity, if it becomes the well whence to draw the deep, fresh waters the colour of the night. Isn't it saudade that drives every writer to transform their thirst into the joy of drinking? Isn't saudade by any chance the foundation of Plato's philosophy, or the energy that drove Dante to Paradise?

["La saudade può sfociare nella chiusura e nella rabbia quando, senza delle gratificazioni sostitutive, in una persona predomina il sentimento della perdita. Ma può portare alla creatività, se diventa il pozzo dal quale attingere l'acqua fresca e profonda che ha il colore della notte. Non è la saudade che spinge ogni scrittore a trasformare la propria sete in gioia di bere? Non è per caso la saudade il fondamento della filosofia di Platone o l'energia che ha spinto Dante in Paradiso? (de Caldas Brito, *Saudade*)

As a last example I would like to discuss Jhumpa Lahiri, who could have been considered a hyphenated identity between Bengali language and culture and English, and who now, after having published her latest volume in Italian *In Other Words* [*In altre parole*, 2015] winning the Premio Viareggio Versilia Prize and the following year published by Vintage with the title *In Other Words* - with parallel text in Italian)) can with good reason be considered a transnational writer choosing to write in Italian, a language acquired late in life, driven by her love of and passion for Italian culture and language.

I would like to foreground some points that I feel are very much on the same page as what I have tried to express so far. The *es ergo* Lahiri picks from Antonio Tabucchi's work is extremely significant because it summarises the entirety of the attitude Lahiri has towards Italian: "... I needed a different language: a language which was a place of love and reflection" [... avevo bisogno di una lingua differente:

una lingua che fosse un luogo di affetto e di riflessione. Lahiri 2015]. A language she has deeply loved from the very start, a language she fiercely wanted to learn and to which she devoted herself with passion and love for twenty full years. Her book, *In altre parole* narrates this love at first sight, this enamouring, and the subsequent battles Lahiri engaged to learn Italian. It is a kind of confession, where the writer reveals her motivations, even the existential ones, urging her to write it in Italian, a language she as yet does not speak perfectly, but this very imperfection drives her to attempt writing. Linguistic imperfection “inspires invention, imagination, creativity. It stimulates. The more I feel imperfect, The more I feel alive”, says the writer (Lahiri 2015: 113)

Writing in Italian is a challenge, an ongoing tension for the writer; this difficulty represents a strong creative stimulus for her. The passage from writing in English to Italian reflects, as she herself admits “a *radical transition*, a state of *total bewilderment*” [una transizione radicale, uno stato di smarrimento totale.] (Lahiri 2015: 52).

A bewilderment that, however, provokes a new origin for the writer: it is as if she rediscovered for the first time, as she states, the “reasons why I do write, the joy together with the necessity [of writing]” (*idem*:52). Writing in a foreign language has meant for her to reconstruct her own identity through an act of “transmigration from English into Italian”.

Her dominant language is English, which she had to learn in school, and which then became the language of her novels. We were discussing the previous writers being marginal, in Lahiri’s case even the position whence she writes is marginal

I write on the margins, and thus I have always been living on the margins of countries, of cultures. A peripheral area where it is not possible for me to feel rooted, but where by now I feel at ease. The only area I believe in a certain way, I belong to. (...) Since I was a girl I have only belonged to words. I don’t possess a definite Country, a definite culture. If I didn’t write, if I didn’t hammer away at words, I wouldn’t feel present on earth. (*idem*: 75) [Scrivo ai margini, così vivo da sempre ai margini dei Paesi, delle culture. Una zona periferica in cui non è possibile che io mi senta radicata, ma dove ormai mi trovo a mio agio. L’unica zona a cui credo, in qualche modo di appartenere. (...) Fin da ragazza appartengo soltanto alla parole. Non ho un Paese, una cultura precisa. Se non scrivessi, se non lavorassi alle parole, non mi sentirei presente sulla terra]

The writer feels as if she were “suspended” between several worlds, and cultures, with an imprecise identity and to describe her situation she resorts to the image of two-faced Janus.

Two faced Janus springs to mind. Two faces looking at past and future at the same time. The ancient god of the threshold, of beginnings and ends. He represents the moments of transition. He watches over gates, over doors. An exclusively Roman god, protecting the

city. A singular image I'm about to meet everywhere. c

[Mi viene in mente Giano bifronte. Due volti che guardano allo stesso tempo il passato e il futuro. L'antico dio della soglia, degli inizi e delle fini. Rappresenta i momenti di transizione. Veglia sui cancelli, sulle porte. Un dio solo romano, che protegge la città. Un'immagine singolare che sto per incontrare dovunque]

Jhumpa Lahiri interweaves her declarations of love to Italian language and culture with her own life: she juxtaposes her mother, a mother with whom she had a complex relationship, a mother characterised by a monolithic identity, who wouldn't change, obsessively faithful to the culture of her homeland, with her own constant striving to transform and change. This is the reason Lahiri has always deeply loved Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which she read when still at University. The passage describing Daphne's flight from Apollo and her metamorphosis in a laurel tree becomes emblematic to explain what writing in Italian has meant for her: "those moments of transition, when something transmutes, constitute the [true] backbone of us all" [quei momenti di transizione, in cui qualcosa si tramuta, costituiscono la spina dorsale di tutti noi] (Lahiri 2015: 125). Lahiri with her work in English and in Italian embodies the figure of a writer/translator/self-translator juggling between languages and cultures, divided selves, multiple voices and identities which as, she says, can 'illuminate' the world.

In conclusion we could hypothesize that writing in a foreign language means to reconstruct one's identity through the "transmigration" from one language/culture to another. Cultural transnationalism does not mean to erase one's roots of belonging but it is rather based on the idea that through the passage in more cultures one's identity can be strengthened and acquire a critical perspective for building up a new future.

Notes

* Vita Fortunati was Professor of English Literature at the University of Bologna. She has directed for many years The Interdepartmental Center on Utopian Studies in Bologna. Her main area of research are Modernism, utopian literature, women's writing, cultural memory, nostalgia, the representation of female body, aging between culture and medicine. Her most recent publications are: "The Rhetoric of Thomas More's Utopia: a Key to grasp its Political Message", *Utopia: 500 years*, ed. by Pablo Guerra, Ediciones Universidad Cooperativa de Columbia, Bogotá Columbia, 2016. "Mort" in *Dictionnaire critique de l'utopie aux temps des Lumières*, sous la direction de B. Baczko, M. Porret et F. Rosset, Geneve, Georg Editeur, 2016. A. Huxley, *Una società ecologica e pacifista*, Milano Jaca Book, 2017. Federici, Eleonora and Fortunati, Vita, "Theorizing Women's Translational Literatures: Shaping New Female Identities in Europe through Writing and Translation", in *Times of Mobility*, ed. by J. Lukic, and S. Forrester with B. Farag. Ceu Press, 2019, 47-78.

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² Fortunati, Vita, "Cosmopolitanism as a New Perspective in an updated Journey to Utopia" in *Travel and Cosmopolitanism from the Island to the World*, in Proceedings Madeira Conference (2019), Forthcoming.

³ See on this topic Sandra Ponzanesi - an expert in Italian Colonial History - Sandra Ponzanesi and Daniela Merolla (eds.), *Migrant Cartographies. New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Postcolonial Europe*. Lanham, MD, Lexington books, 2005, Daniele Comberiati, "Lo studio della Letteratura italiana della migrazione in Italia e all'estero in una panoramica critica e metodologica" in *Modernità letteraria*, 8-2015, 43-52; *Scrivere tra le lingue. Migrazione, bilinguismo e poetiche della frontiera nell'Italia contemporanea*, a cura di Daniele Comberiati e F. Pisanelli, 2017.

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Robert Menasse, *The Capital*. A satirical novel on the European Union

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Abstract: After a short introduction to Menasse's ideas about the European Union presented in different theoretical texts, the paper will concentrate on the novel *The Capital*, published in 2016. It will focus on the idea the reader will react with strangeness to the diminished narrative space taken in the text by topics like migrations, terrorism and islamofobia, which are generally accepted as the main issues affecting the EU today (Griffen 2019). Nonetheless, a more detailed analysis of three moments of the novel that critics tend to consider as subsidiary according to their place in the textual economy will show the importance of the aforementioned topics and their (possible) recognition as the new challenges that mark the EU.

Keywords: Robert Menasse, European Union, *The Capital*, migrations, terrorism

Resumo: Após uma breve introdução às ideias de Menasse sobre a União Europeia apresentadas em diferentes textos teóricos, o artigo concentra-se no romance *Die Hauptstadt* [*A Capital*], publicado em 2016. Parte-se da ideia de que o leitor reagirá com estranheza ao diminuto espaço narrativo ocupado no texto por tópicos como migrações, terrorismo e islamofobia, que são geralmente aceites como os principais problemas que afetam hoje a UE (Griffen 2019). No entanto, a análise mais detalhada de três momentos do romance que a crítica tende a considerar como subsidiários de acordo com o lugar que ocupam na economia textual mostrará a importância dos tópicos atrás referidos e o seu (eventual) reconhecimento como novos desafios que marcam a Europa.

Palavras-chave: Robert Menasse, União Europeia, *A Capital*, migrações, terrorismo

Among the many German-speaking writers, philosophers and intellectuals who dealt with the issue of Europe or more precisely of European Union after the fall of the Berlin Wall stand out the German Jürgen Habermas and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, the Swiss Adolf Muschg and the Austrian Robert Menasse. All of them seem to agree in the criticism of the supremacy of the economic in the European integration and Community policies (Lützel 2007: 47), but other critics arose, some of them with great repercussion,¹ among which one might highlight the opinions of the writer and essayist Robert Menasse.

Menasse was known for his successful novels as well as for his direct attacks on Austria's recent history and politics (remember his controversial essay *Das Land ohne Eigenschaften. Essays zur österreichischen Identität*² (1992) [The Country without Qualities. Essays on Austrian Identity]), when he started writing about globalization and Europe, after his poetic lectures at the University of Frankfurt in 2005. These lectures, published under the title *Die Zerstörung der Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* [The Destruction of the World as Will and Representation], present for the first time arguments that he will develop and reconsider over the following years: euro-sceptic and euro-critical, Menasse as many other German speaking intellectuals (f.i. Habermas and Enzensberger) consider the European Union a political artifact without democratic legitimation.

In 2010 Robert Menasse settled in Brussels for four years to observe on the spot and to rethink the procedures of the European Union, with the aim of writing the first great novel on the Union, an intention that bears fruit only in 2017, with the publication of *Die Hauptstadt* [The Capital]. The immediate result of his Brussels's experience is the long critical essay *Der europäische Landbote. Die Wut der Bürger und der Friede Europas oder Warum die geschenkte Demokratie einer erkämpften weichen muss* [Enraged Citizens. European Peace Must Become One We Fight For. The European Messenger] published 2012 (English translation 2016), that catapults Menasse into the forefront of the discussion on Europe. (One year later, he will publish "Manifesto for a European Republic" together with the German political thinker Ulrike Guérot, in which they call for the foundation of a European republic, based on a Europe of regions).

Enraged Citizens. European Peace Must Become One We Fight For. The European Messenger is controversial as are (almost) all Menasse's texts and projects, following the true tradition of the 'essay-genre' in Germany: exaggerated, irreverent, but therefore innovative and noteworthy (Büssgen 2013: 203). In line with its author's previous arguments, the target of *Enraged Citizens'* criticism is the present state of the European Union. However, after a period of observation in Brussels, the Austrian Writer changes his opinion, at least on the European Commission: concentrating on the triad of the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission, he points out the last one as a transparent, efficient and low-cost institution;

its officials, representatives of a highly fruitful cultural heterogeneity and bearers of a truly European spirit: “polyglots, highly qualified, enlightened, anchored in their native culture, but free from the irrationality of the so-called national identity” [(...) polyglott, hochqualifiziert, aufgeklärt, verwurzelt in der Kultur ihrer Herkunft, allerdings befreit von der Irrationalität einer sogenannten Nationalen Identität” (DEL, 23)]. Inversely, the European Council, reinforced by the Treaty of Lisbon, is accused of being the main bulwark of national interests that impedes the action of the Commission and Parliament, which are European-oriented institutions. Menasse considers the Council, as it is organized, also contrary not only to the principle of subsidiarity but also to the ideas of the Union’s founding fathers.

From a quick and surgical analysis of the last two centuries of European history, especially the history of Germany, the author concludes that nation-states necessarily lead to nationalism, and nationalism has led to multiple crimes and wars. The abolition of nation-states is therefor, in his view, inscribed in the founding spirit of the European Union.

As for the crisis in which the European Union plunged, Menasse argues that it too is rooted in nation-states, that replace the European ideals of a post-national or transnational democracy by the selfish defense of national interests, and was carried out by the representatives of the states sitting in the European Council and by the deputies elected by the national states. These are not only committed to a nationalist policy of their countries of origin: many of them assume to be anti-Europeanist. Selfishness and conflicts of interests between officials and between the Council and the Commission mirror the opposition between the member states and EU. Proposed solution: the return to the zero hour of the European construction, when, after the end of the 2nd World War, in visionary inspiration, a project was set to stop the forgetting and repeating of the atrocities of the Shoa.

The novel *The Capital* illustrates how this project has been distorted in the meantime.⁴ The action takes place in Brussels - with brief visits to Auschwitz and Vienna - probably in the first half of 2016, as the preparations for the European Commission’s 50th Jubilee is about to begin. This project, the Big Jubilee project, occupies the center of the plot, with other plotlines developing around it.

The preparations of the jubilee reveal the EU as an organization where personal and corporate interests are competing and fighting and where the commission (marked by a supranational and European perspective but also by the career obsessions of the officials) and the council (marked by national interests and lobbyists) antagonize each other, replicating the opposition between interests of the EU and those of member states that each of the bodies advocates for. Furthermore and following Menasse’s theses, the memory of the past threatens to disappear or be distorted - we will come to this motif later. However, the novel not only denounces what is wrong, it also presents a project for the future, in the solutions Prof. Erhart (in whom

the reader easily sees an alter ego of the author) presents to the economic think tank in the EU: The old professor from Vienna argues for a truly post-national economy and a new order for a federalist Europe that will be able to transform a collective of competing interests into a Europe of equal citizens, where nationalism is no longer the identity builder. Like Menasse, Erhart proposes to return to the memory of Europe, drawing the attention to the distortion applied on the initial project. Stressing the exploitation of Auschwitz as a business of memory and its crystallization in a 'lieu de memoir' à la Pierre Nora, Erhart suggests to make of the memory of the Shoah a "constructive /productive" memory. Like his compatriot Martin Susman, who wants to organize the jubilee project around the memory of Auschwitz, he proposes the creation of a new capital for the European Union in Auschwitz. According to the professor, it is there, where the idea that led to the construction of the European Union is very present, where "history is felt and visible" and where the categorial imperative "Never again Auschwitz" can be easily understood, that will be possible to build a multicultural, transnational, and truly democratic society beyond the nationalisms of nation-states.

As it was the case with *Enraged Citizens, European Peace Must Become One We Fight For. The European Messenger*, after its publication the novel *The Capital* received a widespread praise of the critics - 2017 Menasse was awarded with the German Book Prize, the most prestigious prize in German-speaking countries⁵ - but it also obtained severe critics, not only from the more conservative political ail but also from both moderate and radical sides of the left wing and from the literary field and memory studies. The critics go from ideological blindness and incapacity of transcending a certain left-wing ideology to the accusation that Menasse, closed in a centre European problematic, failed to comprehend Europe's ideological and political course (Moravcsik 2020), namely the real challenges it confronts in the XXI century: migrations, islamophobia, terrorism (Griffis 2019) (we will come to this later).

Specially compromising and embarrassing was the accusation Menasse twisted the historical truth to defend his thesis when he attributed to the first President of the European Comission Walter Hallstein a rage anti national states that is his and when describing the delivering of Hallstein's first speech in Auschwitz, which proved to be historical incorrect.⁶ Menasse will later acknowledge his mistake and vaguely apologize for it when criticism grew. Anyway and after heated discussions Menasse received 2019 the Carl Zuckmayer Medal, with a reference to the literary quality of the text.

Indeed *The Capital* is above all a literary text, as highlighted by the novel itself: Overloaded with references, motives and leitmotivs, well analysed and convincing figures and plotlines, that only gradually approach or intersect to form a central plot. A careful reading reveals the fictional dimension is often pointed out in the novel, not only through direct references to this feature but also through metatextual com-

ments, addressing issues ranging from mere ironical comments (f.i. the opening of the first chapter: “Did you invent mustard? This is not a really good start for a novel”) to the discussion of issues that are dear to Menasse (f.i. the ephemeral character of art or literature as a reflection on the historical time in which it is inserted and which it aims to influence), or to intertextuality and allusions (f.i. the palimpsestic presence of Robert Musil’s novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*). Less interesting is the trend to inner explanations that some readers will certainly find not only unnecessary, but real spoilers.⁷

The author himself classifies his text as a satire – in this regard, Menasse speaks about the contrasts between a destructive cynicism and a healthy and productive irony, that he claims characterise his text. In fact, the text is ingenious, fun, ironic and dripping with dark humour, easy and thrilling to read. The unusual episode that opens the novel and occupies the whole prologue stretches and introduces this satirical ductus: a pig runs through the streets of Brussels and is spotted by the figures who will turn to be the protagonists of the different plotlines, thus establishing a first and absurd relationship between them.

Scenes that go from comic or absurd to cruel cynicism (in spite of what Menasse says: recall the reference to the pig farmer swallowed by the mincing machine) rotate with truly hurtful and tragic stories and the tragic end: many of the figures that spot the pig in the epilogue find their dead in a bomb attack, that the reader recognizes as the terrorist attack in the Molenbeek station in Brussels on 22th March 2016.

This paper will focus on the idea the reader will react with strangeness to the diminished narrative space taken in the text by subjects like migrations, islamophobia and terrorism, which are generally accepted as the main issues affecting nowadays the EU (Griffen 2019). Nonetheless we believe and we hope that it will become clear these subject matters gain a higher importance in the text for the way they are handled, mainly in moments of more literary investment and when the provocative tune rises.

This analyses will focus on three moments of the novel, mostly treated by the critic as subsidiary according to the place they occupy in the economy of the narration, but whose importance for the image or situation of Europe construction will be pointed out. Two of these issues can be seen as direct illustrations of Menasse’s well known proposals and ideological position, the other one is a speaking literary device. They will be treated individually, in spite of their evident intersection.

First we will look at the plotline around the Polish catholic terrorist Ryszard or Mateusz Oswiecki, charged of liquidating hypothetical terrorists by a secret organization linked with the Vatican and NATO, who in the beginning of the novel commits a murder (the commissioned execution of a terrorist) in a hotel in centre Brussels. Oswiecki is son of a man tortured by the soviets, grandson of a man tortured by the nazis and is frequently dealing with the fantoms of his past. This character

introduces the theme of the memory of communist domination in east European countries, known to be a central issue in central and east European literature and in memory studies after the fall of the Soviet Bloc. One might recall, in this connection, contemporary opinions on the construction of Europe's memory according to which, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe's memory should be presented in the figure of an ellipse, organized around two vertices: Auschwitz and the past of the Eastern countries under Soviet rule. However, in Menasse's novel, the caricatural features of the Catholic murder figure, his background and his education, as well as the less attention paid to this line of action (some critics speak of an unconvincing tour à la Dan Brown) diminishes the traumatic experiences of these countries, which again suggests the author's closure in a left wing Western experience and his inability to understand the evolution of history from a truly global perspective. The same ideological option is at the origin of the parodic and provocative parallelism between the actions of the Catholic Church and of the National Socialist and Soviet regimes. If this plotline is understandably used by Menasse's critics as an example of his ideological blindness, the following scene seems to illustrate an opening to a polysemic reading of the text, truly inspiring a fruitful discussion.

This scene introduces a pressing theme for Europe, surprisingly almost absent of the novel, an important question treated in the mentioned text Menasse published together with the German political thinker Ulrike Guerot: the migrants and refugees' issue in Europe.⁸

Coming back to the expression "sharing the world" from Luce Irigaray, according to which equally born people have an equal right to live anywhere in the world, Menasse and Guérot sustain Human Rights should guarantee this freedom to everybody. so that in the future, "everyone must have the right to cross national borders, and settle where they want". It is not here the place to discuss the polemical proposals of Menasse and Guérot for the settlement of these migrants in closed communities where they can replicate their original cultures nor the inclusion of the new proposals in a Europe of regions.⁹ I want to draw attention to a short but impressive episode of the novel around the arrival of migrants to Europe.

Florian Susman - brother of the EU official Martin Susman - is the owner of the largest pig production company in Austria and president of the "European Pig Producers", provocatively called by its acronymous EPP. He came to Brussels as a lobbyist to discuss EU's agriculture economy on pork and was driving to Budapest when he was stopped on the highway by a refugee truck that is about to pass the border between Austria and Hungary, and while he was advised to stop, a taxi crashed into the back of his car and Florian gets seriously injured. He ends up having his life saved by a Muslim woman, who carefully takes him out of the car, and holds him in her lap. Through the media went the image of the veiled woman with the fainted man on her lap.

Through an ironical and ingenious inversion and deconstruction, the text anticipates and turns invalid hypothetical critics some readers might arise about the damages caused by migrant waves and the danger of their appropriation of the most sacred symbols of European culture. At the same time, criticisms on European behaviour are activated: it is not the invasion of the highway that origins the accident, but the taxi driver's greed, trying to make profit out of the migrants' difficult situation, as it is the cannibalization through the media that out of a help gesture creates the kitschy parallelism with a religious symbol of Christianity, promoting mistrust and resentment.

Truth is that the impressive image of the Muslim woman who arrives in Europe with her children and looks after the injured pig producer like a Pieta of modern times is a polysemic image, challenging critical imagination. If some readers feel shocked with the parody of a sacred scene of Christianity, which this image is as well, others will recognize the salvific because renovative capacities of these migrants (we will come to this later).

The third issue we would like to highlight concerns the recurring use of two partially interconnected literary motives. The first one, the theme of forgetting, is admittedly one of the central themes of the novel. The novel points out that forgetting Auschwitz is forgetting Europe's most intimate purposes and moral imperatives (which, according to Menasse, is the overcoming of national states, that prevents repeating the nazi crimes) leading necessarily to its end. Fact is that in the novel, forgetting seems to prevail memory. Fenia, head of communications for the Directorate-General for Education and Culture, an ambitious Cypriot who wants to move closer to the centre of decision and power and "away from culture" and Martin Susman, her subordinate, a sympathetic and melancholic bureaucrat, not only have great difficulty in finding out the names of the survivors of Auschwitz still alive but they also see their project, based on the imperative of keeping this memory alive, sabotaged by bureaucratic treachery from a tactful chef de cabinet. (Truth is, the Jubilee Project's first purpose was not getting Auschwitz memory preserved but in fact the consequence of Xeno's struggles to impress powerbrokers in the European Commission as a form of increasing her visibility). Forgetting arises also as a leitmotiv around David De Vriend, who recently moved to a rest home and turns out to be an Auschwitz survivor, with growing senility traces that steel his memory. Forgetting threatens spaces as well, even memory places, not only through the action of time (the mausoleum of unconditional love and other graves signalled as perpetual are in ruins), but through exploitation both political and economic, as points out the musealization of Auschwitz. The novel also treats forgetting in a metatextual level, with the discussion on the ephemeral character of art.

With the motif of forgetting intersects another motif which in its omnipresence seems to decisively mark the novel, premonitorily overshadowing the image of

Europe's future. It is the motif of death, presented in different variations from the beginning to the end of the text: murder, suicide, bombing, accident, disease, age, war, extermination, terrorist attacks. One might also remember, in a parenthesis, how the definitive character of death is emphasized by the absence of the drive for love that Freud opposed to the drive for death: the only love story lived in the novel is the mix between attraction and careerism that pushes Fenia into Fridsch's arms, and true love stories are but evocations of the past.

The novel ends under the sign of death, with the terrorist attack on Molenbeek station. Fenia, Susman, De Vriend loose their lives; the catholic terrorist gets killed in a train that violently stopped. Thus, the death of almost all figures that were introduced in the prologue contributes to stress the epilogue-character of the scene, suggesting not only the conclusion of the novel but the ending of the world they represent, which seems to fulfil the aims of the terrorist attacks: to hurt Europe in its deepest heart.

Thus, the novel does not end with the terrorist attack that cost life to many of its main characters. The epilogue comes back to the central motif of the introduction: challenged by a newspaper to choose a name for the pig that continued to haunt Brussels, the most voted name is Mohammed - the newspaper withdraw the contest, as a way to prevent problems (The reader thinks of Charlie Ebdó, that had just happened (January 2015)). Fact is that not only readers who have lived the terrorist attacks in Brussels will react with strangeness and disgust to this proposal to whiten and excuse Moelenbeek attacks.¹⁰ Many readers perceive it as an unacceptable provocation, as is also the parallelism between the fictional Catholic terrorist's murder and the real Islamic terrorist acts.

However, the words «à suivre» that concludes the novel (at the end of the epilogue) can be read as more than an ironical aftertaste: should the terrorist attack be seen as a zero hour for the construction of Europe or at least as a turning point in its path? Could the brief allusion to the migrants arriving at Europe be seen as a sign of its renewal and salvation?

Menasses comments on his proposal to change the capital of Europe to Auschwitz: "This is not a realistic or viable project: it is an ironic proposal that arouses discussion, an utopia to be discussed" and this proposal can and should be generalized to the whole novel.

The fate of Europe thrown between a European Union as a bound of personal and national egoisms, the forgetting of its funding origins and the fictional murders of the fictional catholic fundamentalism and the real (historical) terrorist attacks, does all this plunged in an atmosphere of ending and death configure a proposal of conciliation and a true utopia, as Menasse points out? Or is it after all a mere manifesto with a very critical but self-centred left-wing west European perspective, without considering new realities of history and politics and new evolutions of memory?

Fact is the novel proves to be more interesting in the questions it arises than in the answers it provides, and, in this sense, it accomplishes the aim that Menasse himself seeks for his literature. Although Menasse's political theses are clear in their orientation, the novel with its polysemic motives inviting the reader to a wider reading seems to overtake the author's ideology, as art often does. Despite some less successful twists, too indebted to a close ideological program, or because of them the challenging and provocative capacity of the text wins out.

Notes

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¹ This Antje Büssgens highlights how Enzensberger's accusation that European institutions lack democratic structures carried out through the media came to decisively influence public opinion (Büssgens, 2013: 196-7).

² Many titles of Menasse's works include intertextual references to canonical texts of some of the most outstanding German-speaking authors, which clearly shows the literary ambitions of the author.

³ Menasse also argues at the root of the crisis will be, beyond the nation-states, the lack of solidarity of rich countries with poor countries and the well-known North-South opposition. The target of his main attack are now Germany (he remembers, as Habermas often did, the historical debt of Germany to Greece) and Angela Merkel, who, due to her origin, he says, is incapable of understanding true European spirit. According to Menasse, the solution lies in a new form of post-national or transnational democracy, with Europe of nations replaced by Europe of the regions.

⁴ The well known specialist on European Integration Andrew Moravcsik writes about Robert Menasse and the EU critics, which, according to him, divide in two camps:

Both assert that the EU aims to replace nation-states, but the first group resists this goal, while the second applauds it. Resisters include Eurosceptics behind Brexit and their right-wing populist and nationalist allies in France, Hungary, Italy and Poland.(...) *The Capital*, completed before Brexit and concerns of Russian meddling in European democracy, largely ignores these views.

Instead, Menasse focuses on (...) those who complain that EU does not go far enough. Members of this group are generally left-wing in political orientation (...) [and] believe that Europe should move toward "ever-closer union" by enacting more generous pan-European fiscal and social policies, cushioning the harsh effects of globalization and liberalization, limiting environmental pollution and corporate prerogatives, defending human rights, and combating nationalism and right-wing populism. (Moravcsik 2020: 2)

⁵ Among the prizes Menasse received in the last years stands, besides Deutscher Literaturpreis for *The Capital: The European Book Prize* (2015) for *Enraged Citizens, European Peace Must Become One We a prize Fight For. The European Messenger*; Niederösterreichischer Kulturpreis (2015); Walter-Hasenclever-Literaturpreis (2018); Carl-Zuckmayer-Medaille (2019); Prix Littéraire des Lycées Français d'Europe (2019); China's annual foreign novel award (2020).

⁶ In several essays, speeches, interviews and in *The Capital*. Menasse marked as quotations from Hallstein several sentences supporting his arguments about overcoming nation states that couldn't be found in the speeches of the first President of CEE's commission. The historian Heinrich August Winkler first denounces these false quotes in an article of Spiegel in 2017; the discussion continued in December 2018 in "Die Welt" (Kostial 2021: 139).

⁷ A good example is the explanation about the polysemic significance of the pig (from a symbol of most antagonistic human emotions, clichés and devices to anti-semitic attacks or pork-barrel polit) (M 286).

⁸ Griffin considers that Menasse's "general disinterest in Islamophobia, migrants, and refugees (...) means that Menasse misses a crucial feature of European nationalisms today"(Griffin 2019: 5).

⁹ Guérot and Menasse question current EU refugee policy. According to them, refugees in Europe should be given a free land to reconstruct their old cities, where they wouldn't be bothered to assimilate to European ways of living and where they could live their otherness in peace, getting from Europe support to get started. 'In short: what is needed is a multi-coloured Europe, proximity with respect, an alliance

of alterity under the same European law, a creative network of diversity” (Menasse/Gérot, “Europe: the reconstruction of the free World”).

¹⁰ An Amazon customer writes in a review titled “Disappointing”: “(...) for someone that was in Brussels at the day of 2016 islamist terrorist attacks - it is not only disappointing as a plot device, but really almost feels insulting, given what we went through and the following days”, amazon.com (accessed 14.11.2020)

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“La vie est ailleurs”. Sur les mythes littéraires de l’Europe centrale

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Résumé: Dans mon intervention, j’essaierai d’explorer l’identité centre-européenne, et plus précisément les tentatives de définition la concernant, face à une expérience de la liminalité, de l’existence périphérique. Tout en se situant face aux positions périphériques et marginales, cette tentative d’auto-définition puise notamment dans l’expérience (et des avantages spécifiques) de l’expérience transfrontalière. Je chercherai à confronter de manière approximative deux œuvres littéraires (Claudio Magris: *Danube*; Péter Esterházy: *L’Œillade de la comtesse Hahn-Hahn - en descendant le Danube*) qui à leur propre façon écrivent le transfrontalier, créent et approchent de la construction imaginaire nommée Europe centrale.

Mots-clés: l’identité, Danube, le voyage, la littérature, Europe central, l’identité européenne, l’expérience transfrontalière

Abstract: The experience of “transfrontality”, in the concrete and figurative sense of the word, is always strongly dominant in a region where ethnic and national borders have always been separated, in an area where, throughout its history, but especially in the 20th century, in re- and re-emerging units, individual, community, or national identities had to be conceived according to new and new points of reference. The meaning of the concept of Central Europe is very variable, its use is diverse; there are several interpretations of the region based on geographical, political and cultural aspects. It is an indisputable fact that Central Europe today is a literary concept rather than an economic, political and spiritual reality, a concept that is kept alive by writers such as Milosz from Poland, Kundera from the Czech Republic, Miklós Mészöly from Hungary. In my study I compare two literary works, *Danubio (Danube)* by Claudio Magris and *Hahn-Hahn grófnő pillantása (The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn)* by Péter Esterházy that create and approach the imaginary construction called Central Europe in their own way. Both travel novels capture the trip on the Danube and the experience of transfrontality.

Keywords: transfrontality, Central Europe, imaginary construction, identities, Danube, travel, literature

*L'Europe centrale ne peut être comprise qu'à partir
d'Europe centrale, et être centre-européen veut avant
tout dire que l'on ne se comprend pas du tout.*

Péter Esterházy

Lorsque l'on tente, de manière ambitieuse, d'explorer ou du moins d'identifier la substance de l'Europe ou de l'identité européenne, l'un des points de vue qui s'imposent est, sans doute, le lieu, c'est-à-dire la place de la littérature, en d'autres termes le lieu à partir duquel cette tentative de définition se fait. Où sommes-nous, d'où venons-nous, dans quelle direction allons-nous? Dans notre cas concret: comment situons-nous notre littérature, notre identité culturelle? Quand je veux m'approcher du sujet de notre colloque intitulé *Europe: liminalités littéraires* de façon compétente, je me sens tout de suite obligée de dire d'où je me suis déplacée pour assister à ce colloque, et cette précision est d'autant plus inévitable que ce positionnement (inséparable d'une sorte d'autodétermination) est lui-même étroitement lié à la problématique de l'identité européenne.

Je n'ai nullement l'intention d'utiliser un langage codé. Mon pays natal, ainsi que les pays qui l'entourent (la Croatie, la Slovaquie, l'Ukraine, la Roumanie etc.), sont difficiles à localiser sur la carte géographique, politique et culturelle de l'Europe. Les traditions et les réflexes mentaux, ainsi que les pratiques et les frustrations collectives de la région se manifestent clairement par le fait que ses habitants le situent tantôt en Europe centrale, tantôt en Europe centrale et orientale, et tantôt, tout bonnement, en Europe de l'Est. Sans aucun doute c'est l'incertitude identitaire liée à l'identité européenne, à l'Europe même, qui se reflète à travers cette variabilité.

Les pays nommés plus haut (au même titre que mon pays natal, la Hongrie,) ont vécu, le plus souvent à cause des péripéties historiques et politiques du 20^e siècle, l'expérience d'être en position périphérique (ce à quoi se réfère le terme "est-européen"), pourtant y sont également présents la conscience ou du moins le désir d'appartenir à l'Europe centrale. Cela s'explique par le fait que les habitants desdits pays soulignent clairement et en bonne conscience leur appartenance à la culture occidentale lorsqu'ils sont invités à se définir (dont témoigne par ailleurs une bonne partie de notre héritage littéraire et artistique). En bref, toute cette région est tournée vers l'Occident, elle est désireuse d'appartenir à la communauté autrefois virtuelle, aujourd'hui

réelle des nations de l'Europe de l'Ouest, elle a néanmoins du mal à se débarrasser de ses particularités et de ses appartenances – caractérisant surtout ses structures de pouvoir et son administration – qui la lient à une civilisation de type plutôt oriental.

Dans ce qui suit, je vais essayer d'explorer l'identité centre-européenne, et plus précisément les tentatives de définition la concernant, face à une expérience de la *liminalité*, de l'existence périphérique. Tout en se situant face aux positions périphériques et marginales, cette tentative d'auto-définition puise notamment dans l'expérience (et des avantages spécifiques) de l'expérience transfrontalière. Voyons donc de plus près ce que cela veut dire au sens propre du terme!

L'expérience transfrontalière – au premier comme au second degré – reste fort caractéristique dans une région où les frontières ethniques et nationales avaient toujours été différentes, dans une région où – depuis le début de son histoire et en particulier au 20^e siècle – il a fallu à plusieurs reprises repenser l'identité individuelle, communautaire ou nationale selon des unités qui se reformaient et des points de référence qui se renouvelaient. Je parle de l'Europe centrale, du lieu dont j'arrive à cette conférence, d'une région particulièrement difficile à définir, d'un phénomène étrange, dont l'existence fait désormais l'objet d'une polémique à plusieurs volants – beaucoup la considèrent comme désuète ou comme n'ayant jamais existé.

Où est cette région d'Europe centrale, à l'Ouest ou à l'Est, où se situent ses “frontières”, a-t-elle des frontières? S'il est difficile de répondre à cette question, c'est parce que le concept d'Europe centrale est en permanente évolution, son usage est multiple ; la région connaît plusieurs interprétations selon des critères géographiques, politiques, culturels. Géographiquement et culturellement, le plus souvent, on appelle Europe centrale les pays situés à l'est de l'Elbe, mais appartenant à la culture occidentale, pour la plupart catholique, mais aussi à minorité protestante. (Certes, le critère géographique reste assez incertain, pointé par notre définition cocasse: “L'Europe centrale est la partie du continent qui est considérée comme l'Est en Europe Occidentale et comme l'Ouest en Europe Orientale”). Dans la plupart des définitions, on retrouve la vulnérabilité face aux rapports de force des grandes puissances ainsi que l'exposition de l'autoidentité des petites nations et de l'évolution culturelle interne à ces derniers. Cette région est tombée plus d'une fois sous la coupe et l'autorité des grandes puissances orientales, ce qui a généré par ces occasions une assez grande tension entre l'identité culturelle (occidentale à la base) et l'emplacement géopolitique, ce qui a influencé à terme l'évolution de la mentalité de ces peuples. L'autorité turque, puis soviétique et l'intégration échouée de la Monarchie des Habsbourg (pour n'en mentionner que les plus importantes) sont autant de raisons pour lesquelles cette région “mitoyenne” de l'Europe vit son propre sort historique entre deux grandes et traditionnelles civilisations, l'Ouest et l'Est, soit qu'une sorte de “dualité” s'empreint sur son visage politique et intellectuel. (Cette zone se partage elle-même en deux régions, Est et Ouest, le long de frontières visibles

et invisibles, géographiques naturelles et politiques: selon la typologie de l'histoire culturelle traditionnelle, l'Allemagne et l'Autriche (ainsi que le Nord de l'Italie pour certains) appartiennent aussi à la région Europe centrale, cependant, la partie d'une Europe centrale séparée par le rideau de fer qui s'est retrouvée dans la mouvance soviétique - s'étendant des pays baltes jusqu'à la Bulgarie - est distinguée de la partie occidentale de la région, qui a parcouru un chemin profondément différent, sous la désignation d'Europe médiane). Il ressort bien que cette région mitoyenne n'a pas des frontières et des traits aussi précis que ceux qui caractérisent plus ou moins bien l'Ouest ou la Russie. Puisque la place dans l'histoire de cette région est un espace de *fugacité*, si ses frontières externes et internes varient dans l'espace comme dans le temps, si elle se déplace entre Ouest et Est, la *relativité* n'est-elle pas justement son trait historique principal? L'Europe centrale ne peut être interprétée que par rapport à l'Ouest et à l'Est, dans le contexte du rapport entre ces deux. En effet, l'Europe centrale n'était pas un pont en pierres, mais - pour reprendre la très juste analogie du poète hongrois du 20^e siècle, Endre Ady - un ferry entre les deux rivages plus ou moins stables de l'Europe.

Ce n'est pas par hasard qu'après les cataclysmes et tournants historiques, tels que les première et seconde guerres mondiales et la chute de la sphère de pouvoir soviétique, à ces moments dits de changement de régime, l'interprétation des catégories régionales habituelles se renouvelait encore et encore. Cependant, chose importante de notre point de vue, l'idée récurrente comme quoi l'histoire des peuples danubiens ou de l'ancien territoire de la Monarchie - pour évoquer l'un des éléments géographiques et l'une des entités politiques symboliques de la région - fait apparaître une communauté intellectuelo-matérielle dans le souvenir culturel et qu'ainsi, il faudrait prendre le chemin d'une coopération mutuelle dans le cadre de l'intégration européenne, était représentée dans la pensée publique intellectuelle avant tout par la littérature. C'est un fait incontestable que l'Europe centrale est aujourd'hui un concept littéraire plutôt qu'une réalité économique, politique et intellectuelle, un concept maintenu en vie par des écrivains tels que le Polonais Milosz, le Tchèque Kundera ou le Hongrois Miklós Mészöly. (Je peux faire allusion - entre autres et parmi les œuvres des écrivains ci-dessus mentionnés - à l'essai de Kundera rédigé à l'occasion de son émigration en France, *Un Occident kidnappé, la tragédie de l'Europe centrale*, où il présente "la pensée d'Europe centrale" comme l'une des stratégies intellectuelles les plus importantes de la région). On pourrait dire que si l'Europe centrale est devenue connue, c'est avant tout grâce à sa transposition dans la culture, en particulier dans la littérature. C'est sous cette forme qu'elle a fait carrière et sous cette forme qu'elle avait attiré l'attention des intellectuels (voire des politiques) du monde entier. Ceci souligne le fait que son principal mode d'existence est l'intrigue et la métaphore au lieu de la méditation autour d'une carte géopolitique, car ce territoire n'a pas de frontières fermes et précises, mais la culture ne nécessite rien de tel.

Par la suite, je chercherai à confronter de manière approximative deux œuvres littéraires (nées autour de la chute du rideau de fer, soit des changements de régime d'Europe centrale, en 1989) qui à leur propre façon écrivent le transfrontalier, créent et approchent de la construction imaginaire nommée Europe centrale. Le plus important trait en commun des deux romans, *Danube* de Claudio Magris (écrit en 1985) et *L'Œilade de la comtesse Hahn-Hahn - en descendant le Danube* de Péter Eszterházy (de 1991), est le transfrontalier, étant donné que les deux livres immortalisent un voyage sur le Danube, appartenant ainsi au genre des récits de voyage.

Magris Claudio est un écrivain, publicitaire, germaniste, universitaire de renommée mondiale, qui, du fait de sa naissance à Trieste (ville italienne habitée par de nombreux autres groupes minoritaires au passé important), est particulièrement réceptif au multiculturalisme. Le titre du livre est Danube - sans article. Cette absence d'article définit le livre à un certain égard, qui ne parle pas - ou, en tout cas, pas exclusivement - du fleuve, de la géographie ou de l'histoire du fleuve. Je cite:

Le Danube est une métaphore: la métaphore d'une identité moderne complexe et à strates contradictoires, voire de toutes sortes d'identité, car le Danube ne peut pas être identifié à un seul peuple ou une seule culture, puisqu'il traverse de nombreux pays et relie de nombreux peuples, nations, cultures, langues, traditions, systèmes politiques et sociaux. (Magris 1990: 22)

Danube est un livre de voyage, le protagoniste du livre parcourt le fleuve de sa source jusqu'à sa bouche à la Mer Noire, un trajet qui comporte des traversées de frontières, et il ne faut pas seulement penser ici à des frontières nationales, sociales, psychologiques, mais aussi à des frontières existant en notre intérieur, aux frontières de notre propre diversité.

Le voyageur entreprend son trajet suivant le cours du Danube pour explorer l'inconnu, qui diffère de l'habituel. Le voyage, au cours duquel il parcourt les territoires traversés par le fleuve où s'étaient rencontrés, mélangés et combattus autant de peuples, peut être lu comme une sorte de *Bildungsroman*. Magris, professeur savant, nous fait connaître les habitants avec une spectaculaire richesse de connaissances, en particulier les faits historiques et culturels connus à leurs propos. Ainsi, il voyage aussi entre les textes, étendant et rendant universel le rapport étroit entre voyage et lecture. Il lutte contre l'oubli, il devient un philologue comique-nostalgique de la vie quotidienne, qui enregistre les détails avec une méticulosité passionnée: il s'intéresse dans d'égales mesures à toutes choses, que ce soit la cathédrale d'Ulm ou la somme d'argent - 6 schillings et 2 centimes - qu'un meunier, un dénommé Monsieur Wammes, a proposé pour la restauration de l'église, de l'argent reçu en contrepartie de son pantalon vendu. (En parlant de Budapest, alors qu'il analyse en détail le rapport du philosophe communiste mondialement connu, György Lukács, avec

l'Europe de l'Ouest et l'euroanéité en général, il ne manque de présenter en termes laudatifs la célèbre pâtisserie de Budapest, Gerbeaud).

Dans *Danube*, tout texte et auteur mentionné est élevé au niveau canonique: ces textes sont reliés par un contexte particulier, celui de la "danubianité", qui deviennent pour de bon des annexes idéologiques souples. Le voyageur est donc un archéologue de la réalité, qui cherche à exposer les différentes couches de la réalité qui l'entoure, tous les récits qui avaient laissé des traces en cette contrée, à l'image de l'histoire d'une personne qui se reflète dans les traits de son visage. Ce travail d'exposition, par contre, se fait par sa nature sur des plans temporels distincts, ce qui donne à Magris - par rapport au démêlage des fils du récit de type focal - bien plus de latitude. Et il en profite bien : il transpose les récits de précédents auteurs sur sa propre expérience, il les compare en transcendant époques, lieux et peuples, en racontant récits et histoire, ce qui fait sentir sa présence par une réflexion constante et encode au moment de la création du roman - le milieu des années 80 - notre présent, alors futur.

L'intellect de l'espace historique d'Europe centrale se dessine justement par le fait qu'alors que le livre ne contient pas de récit continu unique, les histoires culturelles apparemment distinctes des peuples le long du fleuve se définissent mutuellement dans leur essence. *Danube*, qui se concentre avant tout sur la culture de la région, en sait long sur tout ce qui est plus beau, plus éthéré que nous le sommes nous-mêmes. En dépassant l'expérience du quotidien, il dessine les contours intellectuels que nous ne voyons même plus la plupart du temps.

Le voyageur, en descendant lentement vers son delta, se regarde dans le miroir du paysage - dans le paysage historique, naturel, artistique, psychologique, qui signifie aussi forêts, monts et vallées, mais aussi forteresses et villes ainsi que des gouffres psychiques et des tourbillons d'inconscience. Ce paysage, le reflet de son existence, contient aussi des fossiles de sa petite vie et de la grande histoire, la dépouille d'un ADN enfoui en quelque sorte, mais toujours prêt à être cloné, à reprendre vie. (*idem*: 152)

Le roman de Péter Esterházy, sous-titré "En descendant le Danube", suit également la géographie du cours du Danube, en adjoignant les plans spatiaux et temporels de la fiction. Alors que le narrateur de Magris compile les couches du passé en évoquant l'histoire culturelle de différentes communes et villes, celui d'Esterházy - en projetant les uns sur les autres les différents plans spatiaux et temporels sans les identifier - les presse ensemble pour qu'ils ne fassent qu'un. (Le voyageur se retrouve sur le même bateau que Grillparzer et Lady Montagu, et la dame anglaise ne cesse de lire Joseph Conrad).

Départ des conventions de genre: il manque les outils littéraires du voyage, les descriptions de paysage, la relation détaillée des changements d'espace et de lieu et contrairement à un Magris encyclopédiste, le romancier hongrois glane parmi les objets de l'héritage intellectuel et de la tradition historique et d'histoire culturelle danubiens en les réécrivant, déformant, réévaluant et réfutant ludiquement. Au sujet de la fondation de Budapest, nous apprenons que d'après les objets archéologiques, ce sont les Celtes Eravisques (Celtes Eraviscus) qui ont établi les premiers campements à l'emplacement de la ville actuelle de Budapest. Une nuit, ces Celtes Eravisques ont tous partagé un même rêve: une femme nue aux cheveux longs, qui court la nuit dans une ville inconnue, leur tournant le dos, et ils se sont donc lancés à sa poursuite. Une fois réveillés de leur rêve, ils sont partis à la recherche de cette ville; ils ne l'ont pas trouvée, mais ils ont décidé d'en construire une qui soit comme celle du rêve. Ce récit, et ce n'est évident que pour les lecteurs hongrois, n'est nul autre qu'un renversement de notre mythe d'origine, comme quoi les ancêtres des Hongrois avaient retrouvé la patrie en poursuivant un cerf magique. (Sur les pages de ce livre apparaît d'ailleurs Claudio Magris lui-même, ou plutôt sa double féminine sous le nom Klaudia Mágris, qui, selon la fiction, "est une couleur intéressante sur la palette de l'univers hongrois, c'est une célèbre femme émancipée du tournant du dix-huitième siècle, c'est une femme merveilleusement belle, aux yeux de génisse" (Esterházy 1999: 155) et qui avait des ambitions littéraires, envisageant d'écrire un roman sur le Danube, qui, certes, ne fut pas créé, mais – quel bonheur – notre protagoniste a pu faire usage de ces notes en composant son récit de voyage).

"Il n'y a pas d'évolution. Pas d'histoire. Mais il y a le destin." (*idem*: 43) – lit-on à un moment. Dans un exemple typique de l'ironie et de la relativisation postmodernes, le narrateur renverse les grands symboles d'Europe centrale interprétant l'existence tout comme les acceptions traditionnelles de la métaphore du Danube:

Il alla donc à contre-courant de cette emphase qui entourait le Danube, sans l'ignorer cependant ni feindre qu'il n'était pas au courant, d'autant moins qu'il dut reconnaître, embrasser, que, dans ce galimatias, dans cette pédanterie outrée, dans ce flot de paroles à la mode, il y avait tout de même quelque chose. Le Danube comme mémoire. Redécouverte de la solidarité. Route reliant les peuples. Danube et Olt parlent d'une commune voix. Le Danube comme le sine qua non de l'Europe. Le code fluide de cette bigarrure culturelle. L'artère du continent. Fleuve d'histoire. Fleuve de temps. Fleuve de culture. Fleuve d'amour. Entrave reliant les peuples. Menottes de liberté. Tout cela lui coûtait énormément. (*idem*: 68)

Alors que Magris entreprend la reconstruction nostalgique d'un temps inexistant, reconstruit un paysage littéraire, projette un modèle d'Europe inexistant sur le Danube, Esterházy choisit le chemin de la déception, de la parodie, de la déconstruction.

Ainsi, le narrateur, le voyageur - contrairement au sens traditionnel du voyage - parcourt à la fois un chemin de connaissance et de contre-connaissance: il démantèle les certitudes et ironise sans cesse sur les concepts. Ainsi, le Danube n'est pas une reconnaissance, n'est pas une désignation de quelque chose, la répétition tautologique du nom fait ressentir l'impossibilité de le définir. "Le Danube est le Danube est le Danube". (*idem*: 70) (Phrase qui, vous l'aurez reconnue, est une transcription du fameux "The rose is a rose is a rose", de Gertrud Stein.) Le narrateur n'est pas capable de voir la partie centrale de l'Europe comme une unité. Il s'intéresse à l'esprit du lieu, mais considère que c'est une distorsion embellissante de présumer autre chose que du désordre dans la partie du continent dont s'étaient retirées les troupes soviétiques. Une chiquenaude envers une bibliothèque d'œuvres littéraires d'Europe centrale: "A mon avis, l'Europe centrale n'est autre qu'une bille de verre, belle parmi les plus belles, inventée par Kundera dans sa triste solitude parisienne" (*idem*: 155).

Comme vous voyez, on peut facilement pointer les traits des approches *manifestement* contraires des deux œuvres, cependant, je crois que c'est justement l'objet de ma présentation, la réalité complexe et contradictoire d'Europe centrale, qui ne permet pas que ces deux œuvres soient lues comme de simples œuvres d'avant et d'après le changement de régime, d'avant et d'après le post-modernisme.

La forme épique des récits de voyage - même si ce n'est qu'une occasion pour créer une fiction épique - soulève toujours la question de la validité des affirmations de l'œuvre. En général, la prose postmoderne ne se refuse pas à ouvrir les limites de la création d'œuvres, donnant l'impression que les limites du texte et de la réalité dépendent de la volonté libre du narrateur ou du destinataire. En parlant du Danube, c'est l'intention du narrateur d'Esterházy de démanteler, de déconstruire la mythologie historisante des métaphores du Danube qui est mise en avant. L'autodéfinition tautologique citée tout à l'heure - "le Danube est le Danube est le Danube" - suggère que ces acceptions s'entre-éteignent et que la place de l'exclusivité doit être occupée par une interprétation particulière, "post-historique" - non au sens de Fukuyama. Or, tout complexe que soit la structure formelle de l'œuvre, de nombreux signes font penser que l'objet est incompatible avec sa chaotité (sans parler du fait que l'auto-réflexivité de ce texte s'étend à une ironisation sur ses propres traits postmodernes.) (P. ex. lorsque le Voyageur contracte une infection gastrique à bord du bateau, il se sert de la description de son état pour se moquer des mots d'ordre postmodernes: "M'étant retiré dans le petit coin de ma cabine, je réalisai immédiatement les efforts de l'attitude postmoderne déployés en faveur de la désintégration: le fait qu'elle ne reconnaît que des systèmes contingents, décentrés et divergents. Je divergeai donc" (*idem*: 170).

La diversité qui ne peut être comprise comme une unité de l'Europe centrale est confrontée ici à un mode d'écriture qui s'appuie dans une grande mesure sur les procédés d'intégration du récit. En effet, la linéarité assure à travers les interruptions

une continuité, certains composants du roman d'apprentissage sont facilement reconnaissables dans le cours épique de l'œuvre, il y a même une histoire de famille qui sous-tend le récit. L'acception du fleuve symbolisant cette région est reliée par Esterházy principalement à l'acception de la famille aristocratique étroitement liée à la Monarchie des Habsbourg, soit que l'Europe centrale est garnie de contours au titre d'une histoire de famille. Le souvenir de la Monarchie, lui, apparaît comme un faible reflet de la continuité représentée par la famille. Le vide et le désordre surgis à sa place témoignent de son absence.

La Monarchie figurait également parmi les sujets préférés de Claudio Magris. Dans ses traités - comme dans son ouvrage intitulé *Le mythe habsbourgeois dans la littérature autrichienne* - il s'intéresse avant tout à ce qui se trouvait derrière la monarchie en tant que forme étatique et ce qu'il en restait. Il est interpellé par les méthodes qui permettaient, au-delà du rôle cohésif de la langue allemande, de maintenir l'unité, qu'il pleuve ou qu'il vente, de cet archipel d'Europe centrale. Au-delà du mythe habsbourgeois - qui, pour lui, fonctionne si on peut le résister, si, comme à l'ère des Lumières, on peut le démonter, démolir - il s'intéresse aussi à la validité et viabilité du concept de *Mitteleuropa*, un concept qui, nous le savons bien, est d'origine principalement allemande. (Une Europe centrale plus vaste, occupant la moitié du continent, s'étendant de l'Allemagne aux Mers Adriatique et Noire, était un projet de conception allemande: une publicité de l'hégémonie économique. Sa variante la plus connue est l'oeuvre de Friedrich Naumann parue durant la première guerre mondiale, le projet *Mitteleuropa*. C'est l'ouvrage qui a développé les avantages d'une "économie de grand espace" menée par les Allemands, qui a ensuite été réalisée - et discrédité avec l'idée même - par l'Empire hitlérien).

Lui, germaniste italien, connaît précisément le rôle civilisationnel des colons et peuples germanophones dans la région du Danube, qui a pu être maintenu avec la prudence habsbourgeoise, mais il est également conscient du fait que la catastrophe de la barbarie du national-socialisme a emporté avec elle l'importance de la culture allemande. Ses efforts de regrouper (ne fût-ce que provisoirement) sous un dénominateur commun les peuples qui s'étaient autrefois établis au bord du Danube donne l'impression qu'il veut exprimer l'idée paradoxale que la culture d'Europe centrale est profondément différente de la culture allemande qui avait mis au jour ces grands régimes totalitaires. C'est-à-dire que Magris, dans la "déconstruction" des mythologies héritées des aspirations impériales allemandes et germanophones, se montre bien plus réceptif à une résistance à l'idéologisation qu'Esterházy.

Je cite son étude "Mitteleuropa. Realität und Mythos - Faszination des Begriffs" (Magris 1989: 18).

La culture de l'Europe centrale, semble-t-il, est privilégiée par le radicalisme qui a dissipé les grandes synthèses totalitaires, et a remis en question par là l'idée des progrès his-

toriques. Cela explique pourquoi c'est justement vers la fin des années soixante qu'a surgi un engouement pour l'Europe centrale, alors que les grands systèmes philosophiques et les porteurs de la foi en le progrès – le libéralisme classique et le marxisme – se sont retrouvés dans une crise.

Et ce n'est pas loin de ce que Magris met en avant dans la postface de son livre, de l'expérience et du vécu postmodernes. Pour reprendre l'auteur, "L'Europe centrale est un laboratoire du nihilisme contemporain". Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire exactement? Il semble que l'Europe centrale représente aujourd'hui surtout le nihilisme et à la fois la résistance à celui-ci, car l'hétérogénéité disparate de sa composition nous rend conscients du fait que dans chaque réalité en apparence uniforme, il y a une pluralité d'éléments en conflit.

En résumé, nous pouvons dire que la dialectique de l'évident et du dissimulé, tout comme les questions des frontières et du transfrontalier, restent un fil permanent des polémiques entourant l'Europe centrale. Cette conscience d'une crise liée aux régimes totalitaires dans la culture de l'ère moderne a peut-être attiré et attire l'attention sur l'identité des peuples vivant dans cette région et au mythe d'Europe centrale comme tissu historico-culturel, qui est incontournable, mais qui ne peut jamais être entièrement décodé. A ce phénomène particulier, dans le contexte duquel le milieu littéraire – comme nous avons vu l'exemple avec ces deux romans – considère une approche basée sur la préservation des valeurs collective tout aussi valable qu'une approche analytique personnelle, rendant ainsi possible la réconciliation des deux attitudes.

Note

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Under Western Eyes, or Can Polish Literature just be European Literature?

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Abstract: While being a European literature in its own eyes, Polish literature is usually described by outsiders as being one of the Eastern European (East-Central European) or Slavonic literatures. Such umbrella terms not only deprive it of its individual features but also of the Western European and transatlantic connections which have always been important for its development. In this article I scrutinize some of such umbrella terms on the one hand, whereas on the other I present the manners in which Polish authors functioning in the world used to define themselves. Finally, I discuss two examples of recent Polish poetry presented in an English-language poetry anthology in order to ask about a need of discussing European literature under outdated political concepts.

Keywords: Comparative Literature, Literary History Concepts, East European Literature, Slavic Literature, Polish Literature

Streszczenie: Będąc we własnych oczach literaturą europejską, literatura polska jest zwykle opisywana z zewnątrz jako należąca do literatur wschodnioeuropejskich (wschodnio-środkoeuropejskich) lub słowiańskich. Takie pojęcia pozbawiają ją nie tylko indywidualnych cech, ale także powiązań zachodnioeuropejskich i transatlantyckich, które zawsze były ważne dla jej rozwoju. W tym artykule z jednej strony przyglądam się niektórym z takich zbiorczych pojęć, z drugiej zaś przedstawiam sposoby autoprezentacji polskich autorów funkcjonujących w świecie. Na koniec omawiam dwa przykłady najnowszej polskiej poezji zamieszczone w anglojęzycznej antologii poezji, aby zapytać o potrzebę dyskusji o literaturze europejskiej w ramach przestarzałych pojęć politycznych.

Keywords: Literatura porównawcza, Koncepcje historycznoliterackie, Literatura wschodnioeuropejska, Literatura słowiańska, Literatura polska

By alluding to the title of Joseph Conrad's famous novel, I am going to draw attention to two phenomena connected with international perception of Polish literature: vague concepts applied to it from outside, and external functioning of Polish authors who, like Conrad, entered the English-language world and created their own idiosyncratic voice there.

I shall begin with concepts applied to Polish literature that I find particularly problematic, obscuring its image rather than clarifying it.¹ The conceptual framework offered by the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) in their *History of the Literary Cultures of East Central-Europe* (2004) is one of them. What most struck me on my first reading of the general introduction to the third volume of the "history" was the strong declaration on the first page:

We describe and analyse common historical mechanisms that operated in the literatures of the region. Thus, the national awakenings that we describe below shared some common frameworks and a common historical mechanism. They followed a common pattern.... (Neubauer 2004: 1)

After this statement, the different names of the allegedly simultaneous and con-substantial "national awakenings" are given in Estonian, Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Romanian, and Hungarian. There is no name in Polish, and such a name could not have been given, quite simply because there was no "awakening" in the Polish culture of the nineteenth century. In order to think of Polish literature in terms of an "awakening," one has to go back to the Renaissance and the first writers who switched to Polish from Latin. The application of the dictum about a nineteenth century pattern to cultures where it obviously does not fit has various unfortunate consequences. When the History speaks of Polish universities, for instance, Warsaw University, established in 1812, is mentioned first, since that date is compatible with the pattern of the nineteenth century "awakening." Jagiellonian University, established in 1364, is mentioned after that, in an enigmatic remark about the "ancient" Cracow University whose "Polonization" became possible in 1879 within the Austro-Hungarian Empire (*idem*: 6). Yet this late nineteenth century "Polonization," which would apparently corroborate the desired pattern of "awakenings," was nothing more than a politically motivated revival of the old university's rights and independence. The Cracow (Jagiellonian) University had its real "awakening" in the second half of the eighteenth century, when Polish replaced Latin as the language of instruction.

The wish to integrate all the literary cultures involved within the frame of a common "awakening" also leads to various exclusions. For instance, attention is paid to Samuel Gottlieb Linde as the "compiler of the first great six-volume Polish dictionary" between 1807 and 1814 (*idem*: 10), even though from a Polish perspective the "first" important philological achievement in Poland was Jan Mączyński's *Lexicon*

Latino-Polonorum (Latin-Polish Dictionary) of 1564, which was followed by many others, including the *Gramatyka dla szkół narodowych* (*Grammar for National Schools*) published by Onufry Kopczyński in 1778, preparing the ground for Linde's big dictionary. While the ICLA History scrupulously lists many other East Central European nineteenth-century national grammars (*idem*: 10–11), Kopczyński's grammar is simply not mentioned. Nor is anything said about Polish in the subchapter "(Re)constructing the Vernacular," for the obvious reason that there was no need to reconstruct Polish in the nineteenth century. Having referred to the supposedly common "language reform" in the East-Central Europe of the nineteenth century, the *History* then focuses on this in the next subchapter, "Vernacular Literatures and Cultures," beginning with the example of a Hungarian poet who championed poetry in Hungarian "as early as the 1770s" (*idem*: 13). Then the *History* discusses the literary situation in Hungary, where Latin was abandoned only in the nineteenth century, as well as other examples of literary reconstructions. As a result, Polish literature, which did not have to rebuild anything, which can boast a poet who championed writing in Polish as early as the mid-sixteenth century (Mikołaj Rej, known as the "Polish Breughel" because of his love of detailed descriptions), disappears from view. Such are the dangers of discussing a large and differentiated literary area in terms of "common mechanisms."

In the *History*'s subchapter on Modernism in East Central Europe, the term "awakening mechanism" is replaced by a distinctly appreciative consideration of "the first serious break with romantic nationalism", said to have been brought about by Polish positivists who "embraced Western ideas on modernization". Yet this is much too simplistic. For one thing, it in effect completely overlooks the role of patriotism in the country which had to fight for its independence for more than a century. For another, the "ideas on modernization" were actually not only of Western origin. And the same subchapter also tells us that the Polish novel was East Central-Europe's strongest representative of Realism, and that "the novels of Orzeszkowa, Świętochowski and, above all, Prus belong to the best achievements of the European realist novel. Prus's *Lalka* is actually said to go "beyond doctrines" (*idem*: 49). Imperceptibly, then, the focus shifts from the literature of the region to the literature of Europe.

No matter how much I am flattered by the high opinion of my native literature and the affirmation that it transcends the limits of "the region", I must still contend that Świętochowski was never a great novelist (though a great journalist). The writer of the *History* could actually have brought in Sienkiewicz at this point. Perhaps it is the work's regional perspective which has made him pour superlatives on a few average novels by Świętochowski, whose harsh criticism of Prus's *Lalka* long since proved his incomprehension of the modern novel. Anyway, mistakes or misinterpretations are pretty frequent in this part of the *History*. In the very next sentence we are told that new genres "like Świętochowski's chronicles" were invented by positivist writers, whereas in fact the inventor of those masterly chronicles (*Kroniki*) was

Bolesław Prus. Then again, the “greatness of Polish realism” did not come out of nowhere, but drew on several centuries of national and European literary experience. To try and understand it without that background is very reductive.

In the *History* the historical narrative is also obscured by being presented in reverse order. The historical “nodes” structuring the history of the literatures of “East-Central Europe” go from 1989 to 1776, which creates a strangely uprooted and mechanically restricted perspective. What the *History* claims as an important element in the modern manner of writing literary history (*idem*: 16–18) is really way of wriggling out of the obligation to justify the presentation of the literatures of East-Central Europe as an “entity” about which one can generalize.

As far as I know, there is no history about the literatures of Western Europe, and it surely is difficult to imagine anyone dreaming up such a project. Would the “history of the literary cultures of Western Europe” seem a natural construction to German, French, Spanish, Dutch, Danish, English, Portuguese, or Italian literary scholars and readers? Two *prima facie* examples of such a history, Auerbach’s *Mimesis* (1946) and Curtius’s *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948), were in fact based on completely different premises. Had it not been for the comparatively limited geographical spread of the Polish language, Polish literature might easily have been included in both these seminal works; in Polish literature down the ages, the concept of mimesis and the functioning of ancient *topoi* are well represented. Or perhaps the real obstacle lay in Polish literature itself, in that it was not as well known as “major” European literatures.

As a specialist in one of the “minor” literatures, I am also struck by the *History*’s paternalistic tone:

Today, one of the important cultural and political questions of East-Central Europe is whether it can overcome its cultural provincialism, whether, after its various awakenings, it can regain in some new form the cultural and literary diversity it once possessed – a diversity of which its past culture still offers some evidence. (*idem*: 3)

Instead of commenting in detail on this remark – which sounds like a modern example of the Western Enlightenment narrative of a backward Eastern Europe in constant need of improvement from the outside (Wolff 1994: 26–27) – I will quote the preface published in the first volume of the same *History*, written by Mario J. Valdés, general editor of the Literary History Project:

We must not forget that this [East-Central Europe] is the literary culture of Mickiewicz, Kafka, Kundera, Lukacs, Wiesel, Ionesco, Miłosz, Mroźek, Szymborska, and Gombrowicz, to name but a few of the many world authors from East-Central Europe. (Valdés 2004: xv)

Five of the ten authors mentioned here are Polish writers: Adam Mickiewicz, the only one from “the past”, Czesław Miłosz, Sławomir Mrożek, Wisława Szymborska, and Witold Gombrowicz all writing in Polish (and most of them poets). This leaves me with not the slightest fear that I belong to a provincial literary culture which needs to regain some diversity.

As much as I do appreciate the *History*'s many insightful essays on particular literatures or problems, I still find its impressively comprehensive volumes unsatisfactory in their general overviews. Facts which do not fit the favoured pattern are too often distorted or simply omitted. With respect to some epochs and some genres, Polish literature is described, rightly or wrongly, as a “major” literature in the region. In other contexts, however, the chosen general perspective does not even make Polish literature “minor”, but simply lets it disappear.

I have far more reservations about describing the literatures of East-Central Europe as a kind of entity than about describing Slavic literatures as an entity. After all, Slavic literatures had common linguistic roots, sometimes shared important ideas such as Romantic “Pan-Slavism”, and experienced periods of close cultural relationship. Even if there are huge historical differences between Polish and Bulgarian literature, or between Czech and Russian literature, in some periods the relationships between them were very close indeed, which was never true of relationships between Albanian and Polish literature or Czech and Estonian literature, all of which find a place, somewhat artificially, under the umbrella of the “East-Central European literatures.”

It was Dmitrij Čiževskij, a Ukrainian scholar educated in Tsarist Russia and after 1921 connected with German and American universities, who argued strongly for the importance of Slavic literatures in his *Comparative History of Slavic Literatures* (1971). One of his obvious aims was to demonstrate the value and European relevance of a literary tradition that was undeservedly neglected in the culture of the West. In Čiževskij's view, “the Slavic literatures stand largely within the broader community of European intellectual and literary development” (Čiževskij 1971: 198).

Another of Čiževskij's aims was to oppose the Soviet interpretation of Slavic literatures, which usually described Russian literature as the “major” literature, and which was distorted, neglecting or hiding many important facts. I shall not discuss such travesties in depth, but must at least mention that the Soviet perspective on Slavic literatures has left a bitter aftertaste. Even today, the notion “Slavic literatures” has a somewhat ideological and imperial undertone, which is perhaps one of the reasons for its relative lack of popularity. Partly as a result of this, I believe, the Slavic methodology of comparative literature invented by Dionýzy Ďurišin, with its concept of “interliterary communities”, used to function much better in Marxist-structuralist theory than in literary-historical practice. It was applied to Russian and Slovak literatures by Ďurišin himself, but not to any other Slavic literatures,

despite the fact that it attracted some attention in certain other parts of the world (Janaszek-Ivaničková 2007: 16-17, 70-81).

Because Čiževskij, in his eager advocacy of all Slavic literatures, did not dwell on differences between the particular literatures in that grouping, so making some of his commentary seem rather self-contradictory, I need to spell out the basic reasons why an account of Slavic literatures as a separate literary area is problematic. Paradoxically, Čiževskij's book can serve as a rich source of knowledge here. Despite its generalizing approach, it still enables us to perceive some important differences between different Slavic literatures.

First of all, Slavonic cultures are underpinned by two different religious traditions: those of the Western Christian Church and of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. This division resulted not only in the adoption of two different alphabets, the Latin and the Cyrillic, a difference which still exists, but also in the development of different approaches to culture and literature. Czechs, Slovaks, Croatians, Slovenians and Poles became part of the western community of the European Christian world, and for a long time they used Latin in their Church and in their writings. Bulgarians, Serbs, and Russians were connected with eastern Christendom and for centuries experienced the profound impact of Byzantine culture. One of the striking examples of the cultural and literary differences between Western and Eastern Slavs was that in the western cultures of the Czechs, Croats and Poles there arose a flourishing Renaissance literature that was closely connected with the Renaissance literature of Italy, France and the Low Countries, whereas in Russia there was no Renaissance at all. Čiževskij himself comments on the pre-Ottoman Bulgarian influence on Russian literature, referred to as the "Russian pre-Renaissance," but only to emphasize that it was not in fact followed by any Renaissance, "at least not in the field of literature" (Čiževskij 1971: 59).

The foundational West/East differentiation was further deepened by the political history of particular Slavic countries. Roman Catholic Slavs never experienced any long-term domination by Asian and non-Christian powers, whereas Russia was under Mongol rule for about 200 years from the thirteenth century onwards, and Serbs and Bulgarians were under Turkish domination for almost half a millennium. Roman Catholic Slavs, on the other hand, were conquered by Europeans, and the cultural consequences of such political distinctions can hardly be overemphasized. Whereas Czechs almost lost their language under German domination (it had to be artificially rebuilt), the language and literature of Poland positively flourished during the time of German-Russian-Austrian rule - many jewels of Polish literature date from that epoch, with romanticism becoming a touchstone for Polish poetry. In Bulgaria the Turkish invasion confined literary life to monasteries, in which mostly religious literature in Latin was produced, and Bulgarians did not experience a literary revival until the nineteenth century, as did the Serbs as well, and to a different extent

the Croatians, who were dominated by Germans and Hungarians. Russia was able to liberate itself from its Mongol overlords in the fifteenth century and, after a period of civil wars, slowly began to modernize both its state and its literature. The process gained momentum in the eighteenth century, with Peter I and his secularization of the language, and so did Russian imperialism. From the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, Polish culture was dominant in relation to western Russian culture; would-be Byelorussia and Ukraine remained part of the Polish-Lithuanian *Res Publica* until the Russian partitions of the *Res Publica of Two Nations* between 1772 and 1795. But from the end of the eighteenth century till the end of the First World War, more than a third of all Poles, and of all the eastern Slavs, were subjects of the Russian czar. After that, and through the second half of the twentieth century (albeit with some differences in political and cultural circumstances from one state to another), all the Slavic countries were dominated by Communist Russia both politically and culturally, with the exception of Tito's Yugoslavia.

If one takes into account these basic historical and cultural differences, how can the concept of Slavic literatures have any real substance? It is true that one can trace important similarities in the origins and development of different Slavic literatures, and down the ages there are also crucial cross-cultural influences, such as: the influence of the earliest Czech writings on Russian literature in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and then later on Polish literature; the powerful response to Russian realism in most Slavic countries; and the dominance of Socialist Realism from the late 1940s onwards, effected by Soviet communism and the elevation of Russian to the status of an international language, compulsory in all schools within the Soviet sphere of influence. But even so, the various Slavic literatures all have their own complexities, which need to be examined in relation to all the literatures of Europe. Čiževskij, too, knew this, but unfortunately did not mention it until the end of his book:

It must be admitted that research in literary history, and indeed Slavic research as well as West European, has devoted less attention than might be desired to the problems of connections between Slavic East and the European and American West. (*idem*: 198)

Particularly the literatures that were seen as a tool of national liberation, as was the case with Polish literature, have had more in common with Italian, English, American, French, Dutch, German, Spanish, Swedish, and Danish literature than with other Slavic literatures, which were seldom in a similar situation at the same time. This is very clearly demonstrated in the brief essays on particular literatures brought together in the *Reader's Encyclopedia of Eastern European Literature* (Pynsent and Kanikova 1993). The author of the essay on Polish literature is Stanisław Barańczak, a Polish scholar, poet, translator, an émigré from People's Poland, and a professor at

Harvard University. What he emphasizes is the continuous rich tradition of Polish literature from the early sixteenth century onward, a continuity which is more or less unparalleled in other Slavic literatures.

Thus why not drop groupings such as “Slavic literatures” or “East-Central European literatures” altogether and simply talk about these literatures as European literatures? The strongest advocate for understanding Polish literature against a European background is Andrzej Borowski, a modern Polish and comparatist from Jagiellonian University. He points to the long tradition of European literature sharing the same Graeco-Latin and Biblical roots, displaying much the same set of genres and motifs, using a common literary language (Latin) for a considerable period of time, and exhibiting many cross-cultural contacts over the ages. His conclusion is that all these literatures should not be separated into two artificially created literary areas, but should be compared one with another (Borowski 1999: 7-22).

Polish romantics cannot be understood without their background in classical literature, or without reference to Lithuanian or Ukrainian folk tradition on the one hand, and to French and English literature on the other. An outstanding example of this is Juliusz Słowacki, one of Poland’s most imaginative poets and playwrights, who, partly owing to his sophisticated and deeply metaphorical use of Polish, still unfortunately remains just a “Polish” author, as Georg Brandes put it more than a century ago in his famous essay *Weltliteratur* (2009 [1899]: 63).

Perhaps it is time to overcome such obstacles which, it seems to me, are hardly caused by translation problems alone – after all, even James Joyce’s works were translated into Polish – several times! Nor do I believe that modern Polish writers and poets should be seen as standing primarily in the East-Central European tradition and be pressured to live up to some ideal of a once lost diversity. I am not nostalgically waiting for them to regain “in some new form the cultural and literary diversity it [East-Central Europe] once possessed” (Neubauer 2004: 3). My hope would be that they can join the world literary community on equal terms, neither handicapped nor privileged.

Even if Polish literature were to be elevated to the status of a “major” literature both in the Slavic and the East-Central European context – in the latter case becoming artificially and counterproductively free of its “major” Slavic “rival”, Russian literature – I do not think that the future lies in dividing Europe into smaller literary areas, especially when such division is undertaken for mainly political reasons. There used to be a scarcity of information about the literatures of Eastern Europe (and perhaps there still is), but things have certainly changed since the fall of communism in 1989. It would be sad and ironic if the division into Western and Eastern (Central) Europe were re-established, even if it were to occur in a very attractive, almost mythically alluring form, as in a charming essay by Caryl Emerson entitled “Answering for Central and Eastern Europe” and published, ironically enough, at a time when perhaps only

one Eastern European culture, the Byelorussian, could not freely speak for itself, a fact which tells us much about the real presence of “minor” East-Central European literatures in the world debates on literature. Emerson paints the picture of a “patchwork of small nations”. This makes me wonder why Poland, with a population of nearly forty million, belongs in that group. And there are more such questions, as I can signal in square brackets:

All those small peoples who name their streets and public squares, not after generals [?] (for their military victories are few), but after poets ... Central and East Europeans go on growing up with three or four [languages] [?] ... And thus the fertile meta-capacities of the Central European mind: cosmopolitan [?], restless, homeless, a natural translator and hub ... They've had a good look at our Western victories as well as at our patterns of protest and are indifferently impressed [?]. We could begin learning from them. (Emerson 2006: 203-210)

No matter how alluring and flattering the picture may be - even a bit mystical, with its evocation of some hidden “potentiality” in East Central Europe (*idem*: 209-210) - it is not likely to improve the handicapped position of these literatures. Perhaps we (and I use the pronoun “we” with the “taste of special irony” Emerson ascribes to Central and East Europeans) are more like the students whom Emerson describes, expecting that “history or hearsay should be made real”? “We” - I dare to paraphrase Emerson - do “have to be made real.” But that is not going to happen through transforming the area once “frozen into the fake homogeneity of the Warsaw Pact” (*idem*: 204) into the beautifully frozen heterogeneity of Central and East Europe, a region expected to deliver wonders such as a mythical redemption of the past. It will happen when “we” start to be perceived as old, yet perhaps hitherto oddly absent citizens of the literary republic of Europe.

Tellingly, Polish poets functioning in the world have never developed an Eastern European perspective, their “native realm”, to use the title of Miłosz’s autobiographical essays, was simple Europe. To them, as to other members of literary cultures of “Eastearn Europe” with its shifting borders, “Eastern European literature” was a purely political concept. As a Hungarian poet and academic George Gömöri put it in 1967:

It is debatable whether there has ever been such a thing as “East European Literature”. Perhaps one should regard it as a vague definition at best, something like the literature of “the Soviet people”. There is still no such thing as the Soviet people Whatever uses the term “East European” may have, it gained wide currency only after the Second World War, when Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, countries which for a long time thought about themselves as being “central” to Europe, forming a “bridge between East and West” or an outpost against “the Eastern hordes”, suddenly found themselves firmly implanted in Eastern Europe. (Gömöri 1967: 9)

Thus “Central” was perceived by Gömöri not as a supplement of “East” as it functions in the concept of “literary cultures of East Central-Europe” but as its contradistinction. One belongs to “Central Europe” or to “Eastern Europe”, with poignant mental consequences. The political dimension of “East European literature” was brought about to paradoxes by Emery George. Not only did he include GDR authors to his anthology of “East European Poetry” (for some reason East German authors have been rarely discussed under the concept of “East-Central-European literature”) but also made a significant remark: “if Goethe and Schiller were alive today they would be East German writers” (Emery 1993: 153). To Adam Zagajewski, a Polish poet and literature professor at the University of Chicago, the East-West division of Europe was not only political but also inferior to the real cultural difference:

you must remind yourself that Europe comprises both the Latin South and the Barbaric North and that this division predates Yalta and other such treacherous treaties, and the North is also divided, and I too am divided. (Zagajewski 2002: 186)

However, it does not mean that Zagajewski simply wished to re-establish pre-Enlightenment cultural imaginary from before the times when the cultural East was invented by the Enlightenment minds and which - as Wolff presented it clearly - prevails up to these days in the common knowledge on Eastern Europe. Instead he, as many other “East European” poets and writers, tried to express the tension of those who struggle with their cultural affiliation to the West and their geographical belonging to the East. On defying Zbigniew Herbert’s unique poetic voice, Barańczak described this tension as: “a fundamental contradiction between his attachment to the values of Western cultural “heritage” and his awareness of the Eastern European’s irreversible state of “disinheritance”” (Barańczak 1987: 1).

Quite characteristically, Eastern European literature did not exist for the most prominent nineteenth century example of Polish poets lecturing on literature in the West - Adam Mickiewicz, a professor at the Collège de France in Paris. During his Paris lectures delivered in French in 1841-1844, Mickiewicz attempted to present Slavonic literary world to the Western audience, both in its historical development and through its similarities and differences. His main point was to contradict more spiritual culture of the Slaves, as he saw it, to more material culture of the West. His deepest insight was into Polish literature (unfortunately, he excluded himself almost completely due to his modesty as a lecturer) but he also made various interesting comparisons both among Slavonic authors and literatures themselves, and their connections with other European literatures. The poet in the role of a professor also introduced new philosophical perspectives, most originally Ralph Waldo Emerson’s ideas. Certainly, his aim was not to describe Slavonic literature but to connect it, even if by contrast sometimes, with the whole European and transatlantic writing and thinking.

Miłosz, while beginning his career at the American university (Berkeley, California), partly out of didactic needs conceived a handbook on Polish literature in English (*The History of Polish Literature*, 1969). He paid much attention to historical and political contexts, idiosyncrasies and worldliness of Polish poets and writers but also elaborated issues that interested him personally, such as a theological culture. Eastern European category was not a point of reference to him until the post-war times, and even then he preferred to use terms such as “Soviet models” which were imposed on Polish literature in the first decade after the WWII. Already what happened after 1956 was to Miłosz a true revival:

A multitude of writers came to the fore whose debuts had been delayed because of their refusal to bow to ideological exigencies during the preceding period... Polish poetry, now freely profiting from experiments of two prewar decades and from its precursor, Cyprian Norwid, was one of the most vigorous in Europe through its intellectual and existential grasp of tragic political choices. (Miłosz 1969: 458)

Later not only Miłosz co-translated and edited an anthology of Polish poetry in English as well as volumes of particular Polish poets whom he appreciated most (Zbigniew Hebert, Aleksander Wat, Anna Świerszczyńska (Swir)) but also included Polish poets into his international anthology of poetry (*A Book of Luminous Things*, 1996). His wish was to unite poets of the world who created “poetry loyal toward reality and attempting to describe it as concisely as possible” (Miłosz 1996: xv). Nowhere in the anthology the factor of Miłosz’s choices was an East/West distinction (and East would have to mean something much different regarding a considerable amount of classical Chinese poems included in the anthology) but a unique poetic ability to reach the state of epiphany, an illumination through poetic description of objects or scenes:

Epiphany thus interrupts the everyday flow of time and enters as one privileged moment when we intuitively grasp a deeper, more essential reality hidden in things or persons. A poem-epiphany tells us about one moment-event and this imposes a certain form. (Miłosz 1996: 3)

Particularly interesting persona in presenting Polish literature in the English-language world was Jerzy Pietrkiewicz (Peterkiewicz), a poet and writer himself, and a professor of the University of London. In his main academic achievement *Polish Literature in its European Context* (1962) he attempted to investigate existing literary connections and draw interesting parallels between Polish and European literature. The need to place Polish poets against the most relevant European background, which to Pietrkiewicz hardly ever was Eastern European context, is clearly seen also

in his anthology *Five Centuries of Polish Poetry 1450-1950* (1960). When describing the most original Polish romantic Cyprian Norwid, Pietrkiewicz placed him close to G. M. Hopkins, Laforgue or Ezra Pound, and when discussing Polish idyll, known as a national specialty under the name *sielanka*, he referred to the pastoral convention of Theocritus and Virgil in the first place.

There were other Polish poets, active as translators, essayist and literature teachers in the 20th century English-speaking world: Barańczak and Zagajewski quoted above, Bogdan Czaykowski and Andrzej Busza (both from the University of British Columbia) or Adam Czerniawski connected with many British schools. Being poets, they all paid particular attention to Polish poetry and its function both in its native and world context. Not surprisingly, East Europeanness appeared in their reflections mostly as a political term, applied to the communistic period. Especially Barańczak, who immigrated to the US in 1981 that is in the last convulsive and tragic period of the communistic Poland, played with the label both in his poems and in his collection of essays on Polish literature and culture (*Breathing under Water and Other East European Essays*, 1992). For instance, an Eastern-European as a subject of Barańczak's poems written in the US could not come to terms with the conventional stand-up party small talks. They not only seemed meaningless to him but also inhuman (tellingly, entitled "Small talk" the Barańczak's poem was originally written in Polish). As a subject of his essays an Eastern-European, allusively abbreviated as an E.E., gave an account of his historical and cultural experience as follows:

As an Eastern European born in a totalitarian country, I was well trained for two things, and by two very different coaches. The Immovable History of my nation taught me that in my part of the world nothing ever changes, and that it's safer not to harbor any hope. The Recalcitrant Literature of my nation taught me that having no hope does not preclude demanding change... (Barańczak 1992: 6)

Since that self-definition was noted when he "did not know that he lived at the end of a historic era", Barańczak recognized his own words as "outdated" already in 1992.

From outside, however, modern Polish poetry, even the most recent young poets, have long been presented as belonging to a group of East-European literary culture, marked by a heavy historical experience. A good example of such a long-lasting attitude can be a quote from Vaclav Havel (a writer himself, and the first president of the post-communist Czechoslovakia) placed in *A Fine Line*, a volume containing "new poetry from Eastern & Central Europe":

The anthology of poetry you are holding in your hands represents a window into the minds and souls of nations who have in recent history been denied the freedom to make decisions about themselves. Readers who have grown up in liberal conditions are thus

given the opportunity to glimpse the inner worlds of those who were not so lucky, and to do so through poetry which - if honest - frees us all together from the bonds of ephemeral life. Vaclav Havel. (Boase-Beier *et alii* 2004: 11)

Fortunately, a note from the back cover of the same book makes the picture much more varied. Neal Ascherson, a Scottish journalist and writer, points out to young age of the authors, whose historical experience is much different than that of their grandparents and parents (about whom Havel seemed to speak):

Their poise and their self-possession are starting; they seldom lament and have no interest in preaching. The encounter with the Western abundance gives them fresh imaginary, but also grounds for amusement and irony. From their part of Europe, they bring a special joy in the natural and physical world, and also glittering metaphysical brilliance. This is a poetry of wit and complexity, never raw but always glowing with human feelings. (Boase-Beier *et alii* 2004, back cover).

“Wit and complexity” seem particularly fitting concepts when Agnieszka Kuciak, the first of two Polish poets presented in the anthology, is concerned. Born in 1970 (which is more or less my generation) the academic and translator debuted as a poet in 2001 with an outstanding poetry collection *Retardacja (Retardation)*, and soon published her second book of poetry *Dalekie kraje. Antologia poetów nieistniejących (Distant Lands. An Anthology of Poets who Don't Exist)*, 2005). It would be difficult to match her with any East-European pattern, perhaps indeed only her ironic and parodistic talents, compared in the anthology’s short bio-note to Szymborska’s skills, would fit in. Yet Kuciak’s irony goes much farther than Szymborska’s, and embraces both Polish and world poets. One of her few poems presented in the anthology - “Wagary w święto,” (“Playing Truant on Sunday” in Antonia Lloyd-Jones’s translation, or more literary: “Truancy on a Holy Day”) - depicts kids playing hooky from God “who can be possessed by devils from time to time, as every kid knows.” Thus children escape to the lake, but still keep bowing down when swimming:

Pozornie lekko musowała w wodzie
- jak rozpuszczona oranżada - nasza
Nioletnia dusza. Rozpuszczone dzieci!
Zasłużyliśmy na porządne lanie:
Apokalipsę, gorejący krzew.

Our under-age souls seemed to fizz
In the water gently - like dissoluble
orangeade. What dissolute children we were!

We deserved a good, sound thrashing:
And apocalypse, or a burning bush. (Antonia Lloyd-Jones)

This example of how Polish poetry can sound nowadays² is also a good example of what the world reader might miss. Kuciak's poem was republished in the anthology without the ironic entry on the author of the poem accompanying the original Polish edition. According to the entry, the author was a certain "N. Miłosz" described in the dictionary attached to Kuciak's second poetic book as "a poet of amiable faith, known as "<the bishop of poetry>" who "has lyrically consecrated countless lakes and landscapes," and who believes "in the sacrament of poetry readings, the poem as penance, and the grace that comes from literary prizes. He writes, however, only about God" (Kuciak 2013: 17). The poet's family name cannot be alien even to foreign readers of Polish poetry, although the ironic description of his artistic *emploi* may be fully readable only to Poles familiar with poetic discussions in which a strong position of Miłosz (Cz. Miłosz!) has been gradually undermined over last decades. On the other hand, the reader also finds in Kucińska's second poetic book a poetess named Sylwia, depicted as "a poet of resentments", "shallow as a pond of tears", who authors a self-referential poem entitled "Depressia," (an obvious allusion to Sylvia Plath). Another poet invented by Kucińska and simply called Nobody, opens the volume with a poem on rain who is "a Zen master" and keeps raining "like on that big night,/ when the street vendor tried to sell us roses/ but we didn't want any roses,/ we wanted life itself" (Kovacek). In the figure of Nobody Kucińska's irony and wit are driven to the extremes since Nobody is the most obvious *alter ego* of the poet herself, famous for believing that "she doesn't exist, has never existed, and will not exist in the future, a fact that has driven countless literary critics to distraction" (Kuciak 2013: 17).

The second representative of "new" Polish poetry in the anthology, Edward Pasewicz (born in 1971), is presented as the author of poetry collection "entitled *Lower Wilda*, which appeared in 2002 to critical acclaim". The international reader is also informed that the collection "introduces openly gay themes into young poetry in Polish literature" (Boase-Beier *et alii* 2004: 104). Grzegorz Musiał, a poet of the former generation (born in 1952) who in fact was the introducer of openly gay themes into "new" Polish poetry (and a devoted translator of Allen Ginsberg) must have felt offended. Particularly since his gay poetry figured prominently in English language books of poetry, not least in the big anthologies such as Walter Cummins's *Shifting Borders. East European Poetries of the Eighties* (1989), or Donald Pirie's *Young Poets of a New Poland* (1993). Paradoxically enough, not the famous "open gay poetry" is presented in *A Fine Line* but metaphoric, reflective and ambiguous Pasewicz's poems, which were made a bit more equivocal by translator's choices. In the below quoted poem Polish *pragnienie* (longing, yearning) is changed into much more sensual desire (which would be *pożądanie* in Polish), and a metaphoric verb *przyłapać* denoting "catching

somebody in an act of doing something” (catch out) is transformed into the physical act of catching. Thus the English speaker of Pasewicz’s poem seen at peeling off potatoes becomes more an object of “a seizure” than a receiver of a tender gesture offered in a hostile world.

Pierwszy plan - ciemne ujęcie

.....
 Pragnienie to tylko karuzela, kurczak
 To tajemnica ciała. I przyłapujesz mnie czule
 Z nożykiem zawieszonym nad wiadrem,
 Czasami potrafię płakać. Monstra chodzą
 Obok naszego domu i zaciskają szczęki.

Plan A - Dark Seizure

.....
 Desire is merely a merry-go-round, a chicken
 The secret of the body. And you catch me tenderly,
 With my knife dangling over the pail.
 At times I manage to cry. Monsters walk
 Alongside the house, clenching their jaws.³ (W. Martin)

Also a thriller-like effect disappeared from the translation since the title “seizure” replaced the original *ujęcie* (shot) corresponding with another original movie term: *pierwszy plan* (the foreground).

The need to present “the first” voices from still unknown and sometimes almost legendary parts of Europe seems to neglect the fact that we talk about poetry of about eight ages, where even the newest and the freshest voices have their roots and their intertextual connections, both with Polish and with world poets (and artists, and philosophers). Nothing comes out of nowhere, and not everything is limited to East European charms or curses. Neither separating “new voices” from their significant literary heritage nor ascribing them to “East(Central) Europe” literary culture is particularly helpful in understanding what European literature once was and what it is now.

Notes

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¹ I wrote more about it in Skwara (2015).

² Original free lines are curbed in almost regular 11-syllable line pattern, with classical devices like enjambement and alliterations still playing important roles. While the alliteration was kept in translation (dissoluble/dissolute), the enjambement plays a much weaker role – originally the “under-age soul”, the subject of the first sentences, was placed only at the beginning of the third line.

³ These clinching is “womanly” and their walk “dancing”, as we read in the next two lines concluding the poem.

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The political and linguistic diversity of the European continent - which challenges the uniqueness of a global language - induces a multifocal and multilingual approach in literary creation concerning the European issue.

Moreover, the current conjuncture of the Old Continent is confronted with dangerous populist drifts and the temptation of a nationalist closure. The fictional concern of writers focusses on this complex problematic to be addressed by, on the one hand, the still significant sequels of the conflictual History inherited from the 19th and 20th centuries and, on the other hand, the prospective idea of an institutional construction. This idea is essentially focused on the economy and finance, which Europe cannot be reduced to.

The tension between these two perspectives - which raises many questions and debates, as the attempt to write a European “constitution” has revealed - appears nevertheless to be the focus of a discussion about Europe, below and beyond the European Union. In fact, it often takes the form of a subtle narrativization and fictionalisation of our continent as a topic, a theme, a concern, and even an obsession in many European authors’ work.

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