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THE HORIZONS OF ROMANTICISM, TWO CENTURIES LATER

The story of the Romanticism sub-series of the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages illustrates the need for collaborative team efforts such as have actually been promoted by the International Comparative Literature Association to cope more adequately with the complexities of transnational cultural constellations over time. From its inception, the Romanticism sub-series has exhibited a spirit of pragmatic engagement, a will to proceed from concrete examples of literary works and cultural discourses, rather than to impose supposed norms based on pre-agreed paradigms or to privilege today's theorizing over the past. The cooperation among some 100 researchers from some two dozen countries has yielded an intellectually open picture of how a multifaceted heritage gathers momentum and is blended into the flow of a larger cultural poly-system.

1. AN INNOVATIVE PROGRAM IN LITERARY HISTORY

This reflection on the Romanticism sub-series of the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages (CHLEL) will use the story of the five volumes *Romantic Irony*, *Romantic Drama*, *Romantic Poetry*, *Nonfictional Romantic Prose*, and *Romantic Prose Fiction* as a touchstone in assessing how international Comparative Literature today tries to recuperate, explicate, and contextualize the ways in which Romantic writers looked at their world. The development of such an effort some two centuries after Romanticism attained distinct peaks in its major homelands deserves to be placed in its own right as a phenomenon within the flow of "our" own cultural moment, that is, fitted into the present scene at the start of the third millennium of the Common Era. A reminder of the rationale and framework of the super-series CHLEL is in order before we examine the imposing aggregate of some 140 chapters and introductions in the five volumes of the sub-series.

The desire to create a new kind of literary history untrammelled by national compartmentalization manifested itself powerfully not long after the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) had succeeded in maintaining its momentum over the course of its initial triennial congresses, starting at Venice in 1955,

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and continuing at Chapel Hill in 1958 and Utrecht in 1961. Jacques Voisine (Paris) led the initiative at the fourth congress at Fribourg in 1963, resulting in a broad survey carried out after Fribourg among ICLA members by means of a “Circulaire et questionnaire relatifs à une histoire de la littérature européenne à rédiger dans le cadre d’une coopération internationale”. György M. Vajda (Szeged) accomplished the herculean labors of digesting the results of this inquiry conducted by the Institute of Literary Studies (Budapest) of the Hungarian Academy of Science, which ICLA had asked to handle this difficult job, and he reported the findings at ICLA’s fifth congress held at Belgrade in 1967. His “Rapport relatif au projet d’une histoire de la littérature européenne”, published in the *Proceedings (Ve Congrès, 775–794)*, is the most important early document recording the launch of the CHLEL. The report’s detailed exposition of problems and prospects makes clear the felicitous mixture of daring ambition and realistic restraint with which a core group of scholars in the ranks of ICLA approached the challenge of creating a distinctly “comparativistic” literary history.

From its inception, ICLA attracted participants from Africa and Asia as well as from Europe and the Americas. But the pioneers were aware that, as of 1967, ICLA’s membership was primarily active in literatures of Europe and the New World, and that the expert research teams that could reasonably be organized in the immediate offing would ordinarily be overreaching their competence if they unguardedly attempted to extend their purview to world literature. They also concluded that the research should, whenever the specific topics warranted, encompass not just “Old World” cultures, but the literatures of territories where European languages dominated or played a significant role. This meant, principally, areas of the “New World” and farther-distant former colonies such as Australia. Right after Belgrade, in 1968 the Executive Council of ICLA formed a self-renewing Coordinating Committee to oversee the development of specific projects which would be undertaken by international teams of experts under the direction of independent research centers. (More on the Coordinating Committee below.) The plan to build-out a CHLEL series entailed that a lead editor operating through each approved center, usually his or her university, would recruit a team out of the Association’s worldwide membership according to the appropriate subject matters.

The initial studies to reach press were *Expressionism* (1979), edited by Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington), *Le tournant du siècle des Lumières* (1982), edited by Vajda, *The Symbolist Movement* (1984), edited by Anna Balakian (New York), and *Les Avant-gardes littéraires au XXe siècle*, in two volumes (1984), edited by Jean Weisgerber (Bruxelles). But in fact, as early as 1984, making it a bumper year, Albert Gérard (Liège) brought two impressive volumes on *European-language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* to completion. By 1995, in no small measure because ICLA had meanwhile steadily grown to include much more sizeable contingents of experts in the literatures of Asian and African regions, ICLA created a Committee on Intercultural Studies with the mission of fostering intra- and inter-regional research in areas not served by the CHLEL series, for example, the literary histories of East and South Asia, and of dealing with topics pertaining to “general literature” or “world lit-

erature". The work of the Committee on Intercultural Studies gained important momentum because of its dedicated founding leaders Earl Miner (Princeton) and Eugene Eoyang (Bloomington; Hong Kong). This widening of competence proceeded hand in hand with a marked increase in the frequency with which the ICLA held its triennial congresses at venues outside Europe and North America. Likewise, the ICLA Executive Council and the heads of its burgeoning set of research committees participated annually in international conferences sponsored by regional affiliates, and these took place more and more often outside the old homelands of CL.

There were three major questions which the CHLEL enterprise faced in starting up: (a) the optimal geo-cultural range of the series; (b) its desirable historical range; and (c) the feasibility of discriminating "currents" across disparate and sometimes discontinuous territories and eras. The first question clearly evoked responses in 1967 tinged by ideological as well as formalistic and genetic considerations. Some prominent Marxian critics objected there was no such thing as a "European" literature, but only "national" literatures on the local level, as against universal or world literature on the global level; and some West European critics argued that traits from European sources needed to be traced out into the wider world and that, reciprocally, the deep influence of Near Eastern and Eastern literatures on Europe (e.g., the Hebrew Old Testament) required attention. The aforementioned objection of some Marxists, as reflected in excerpts of opinions carried in the Belgrade report, seemed connected with a broader contest on both sides of the then very real Iron Curtain to define and delimit the methodological mandate of comparative studies. There was a palpable tension still obvious at Belgrade between an older view of "General Literature" (GL) and the newer pretensions of "Comparative Literature" (CL). It is clear in retrospect that the definition and sway of these two complexes has fluctuated over the past half century (see Gillespie 2003 and 2005).

Leading off under the title of one of the master themes of the Belgrade Congress, "Les courants littéraires en tant que phénomènes internationaux", Victor Girmounsky (Leningrad) expounded a more refined approach based on the standard Marxian supposition that scholars ultimately should seek to detect the social forces underlying literary evolution (*Ve Congrès*, 3–21). Girmounsky regards CL as limited to the practice of noting influences or borrowings, whereas for him a "universal" study of literature groups phenomena according to "un processus historique et littéraire général conditioné par les lois de l'évolution social", an objective which the Soviet Academy of Sciences was then pursuing through its project of a ten-volume *Histoire de la littérature universelle* (*Ve Congrès*, 20–21). In fact, Girmounsky stands closer to Paul Van Tieghem's view of a generation earlier, in wanting to overcome a narrower CL obsessed with binary resemblances, and he pleads explicitly for a GL which both will "overcome eurocentrism" ("surmonter l'eurocentrisme") and also will enlarge its scope to include the Middle Ages and antiquity in European studies and reach beyond Western Europe to neglected peripheries and regions (*Ve Congrès*, 18–19).

While ICLA would, in fact, in the coming years strive to expand its total research profile in the global direction that Girmounsky advocated (but without endorsing any particular explanatory ideology of historical development), the Association opted to

pursue a more feasible program in launching CHLEL during the 1970s. The essence of this program for the last third of the twentieth century was to focus on relatively tight temporal frameworks and to encompass geocultural terrains defined entirely by language, not by political boundaries. However, from the beginning, CHLEL was free to exercise any necessary flexibility as might be dictated by important features of the moments under scrutiny. The organizing principle was to shape volumes around conventional (albeit also vigorously disputed) concepts of cultural and/or stylistic periods, movements, or currents, such as the Renaissance, Baroque, (neo-)Classicism, Romanticism, and so forth. What older scholars like Girmounsky and Van Tieghem could scarcely have foreseen was that, in fact, powerful new kinds of comparison would find these initial parameters for a literary history to be a very congenial space of operation. The potential could already be glimpsed by reading Henry H. H. Remak's prophetic essay of 1961 (Remak 1971), mapping the ways the core discipline CL could relate to other disciplines in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

The gates to the heaven or hell of interdisciplinary research were gaping open when CHLEL was started; and as I will illustrate by reference to the Romanticism sub-series, many comparatists were eager to pursue interdisciplinary investigations in order to contribute to the elaboration of a larger semiotic web in which to situate literature. Looking back in 2002 in general, not specifically in regard to CHLEL, Remak feels somewhat like the magician's apprentice, dismayed over the accrued excesses committed in the name of interdisciplinarity. It exceeds the scope of our present discussion to rehearse the story, either of how, from the various fields which invaded the precincts of CL, newer waves of sociologically oriented criticism and theorizing derived, or of how new approaches gradually enriched the total critical vocabulary. The adherents of the invading approaches often promoted calls to displace CL, or to redefine it as Cultural Studies (CS), or to drive it in one or another faddist direction of the moment. (For a wider treatment of these phenomena, see Gillespie 2003 *passim*.) Here I limit myself to pointing to the fact that such displacement and cooptation happened across a broad front, and that one resultant main worry, as Remak says in 2002, was that this proliferation was widely accompanied by a flattening of deep competence in specific literary cultures and threatened the loss of a central focus on literature as the research object.

The work to create the CHLEL series has been going forward during the same decades which have witnessed the unceasing debate over and oscillation between the concepts of GL and CL, or in another variation, CS and CL. Not surprisingly, academic departments and societies have sometimes decided to combine these terms in their official name, or in their self-descriptions they may claim to cultivate both complexes as their own under whatever single heading. We observe this choice of combining realms in the title and contents of Daniel Pageaux's book *La littérature générale et comparée* (1994), and in the section "Littérature générale et comparée et sciences humaines" of his essays collected in *Littératures et cultures en dialogue* (2007). Pageaux is a very good historian who discriminates a rich repertory of modes

of, and subject matters for, research, traces the development of concepts and practices over most of the twentieth century, and sees clearly how views of CL and GL or CL and CS blur together in many instances, sharing numerous categories. He recognizes that, in effect, “une discipline polymorphe” has emerged and pursuing it today requires “un programme pluridisciplinaire” (Pageaux 1994, 23, 183). He concludes that the earlier insights of Remak and André Rousseau (Aix-en-Provence) about the interconnections of arts, discourses, and sciences with literature are obliging “le comparatiste à se métamorphoser en sémioticien” who must consider literature as a (poly)system (Pageaux 1994, 149, 135 ff).

There is another pattern of tension, evident in the general picture which good comparatists like Pageaux discern, between the daunting imperative of navigating in a virtually boundless polysemous realm of CL and the desire to arrive at a relatively coherent, as well as reasonably accurate, sense of literary works, their production, their reception, their place in a cultural system. This desire finds expression repeatedly in the 1967 Belgrade report in the theme of “synthesis” as one of the paramount goals of a comparative history of literatures. In fact, at the time of the fifth congress of ICLA, there were two main polarities in thinking about synthesis (see especially *Congrès V*, 787 ff.). One camp wanted, first, “to compose an integrated historical synthesis” (“composer d’entrée la synthèse historique intégrale”) and only then to proceed, using this matrix, to structure particular volumes. Another larger camp wanted, first, to launch a series of volumes on actual details of European literatures, volumes which could eventually serve toward a grander, overarching synthesis (“quasiment comme préparatifs de la synthèse”), as well as towards a sounder, later study of “rapports, contacts, connexités de l’ensemble de ces littératures avec d’autres, antiques ou de langues non-européens”.

The outcome of these deliberations was significant in several respects. First and foremost, the series CHLEL began in a vibrant spirit of experimentation. Rather than spend a great deal of energy erecting a grandiose theory of all literary life and expect to impose the formulas of such a theoretical scaffolding on the research into the data of actual literatures, ICLA elected to embark on a more modestly circumscribed adventure of discovery in the realm of European literatures. The Coordinating Committee was not asked either to elaborate an all-encompassing theory or to treat all of world literature. As mentioned above, these challenges were assigned, in due course, to other international research committees which ICLA created – for example, committees for Theory, Translation Studies, Intercultural Studies, Gender Studies, and a cluster of special focus and regional projects. But neither was any impediment raised in the early days to the introduction of any productive methodologies into the work on European literatures which various CHLEL teams might undertake. The decision in favor of an open exploration of topics was inherently a rejection of the danger that a universalizing drive (as evident in many adherents of a GL or world literature orientation) might lead into interminable ideological squabbling and morph into deadening intellectual rigidity.

The benefit can scarcely be exaggerated which flowed from wide-open discussions about the series and from its subsequent implementation in specific volumes. CHLEL was among the key activities of ICLA which promoted vital conversation across the unfortunate divide which existed between Western and Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Scholars active in democracies and authoritarian states of the so-called West and scholars active under totalitarian regimes in the Soviet bloc found their joint research on literary history to offer a congenial means for maintaining collegial contact and intellectual exchange, despite occasional awkward and dangerous moments, well before most of the governmental barriers to freedom of discourse were swept away. Many persons had an important part in the skillful, humane approach to sharing across the once formidable Iron Curtain. We are particularly indebted to visionaries like Vajda and Remak, who understood why entities like the Institute for Literary Studies in Hungary could, as indeed it did, play a special role as an international honest broker. Vajda served as the diligent Secretary of the Coordinating Committee from 1967 until his election as ICLA President in 1982.

2. THE ORIGINS OF A TEAM EFFORT TO TREAT ROMANTIC LITERATURE

Nothing better illustrates the pattern of the super-series CHLEL as a whole than the experimental spirit and evolutionary character of the Romanticism sub-series. A large share of the credit for assembling the original nucleus of editors and contributors belongs to the late Milan V. Dimić who founded the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. A member of ICLA's Coordinating Committee and its Secretary following Vajda's election as ICLA President in 1982, Dimić hosted an "International Symposium on Romantic Irony" at Edmonton in April 1978 that brought together leading comparatists for several days of presentations and strategic planning.¹ Remak, a moving spirit in the establishment of the Comparative History and second President of the Coordinating Committee, helped steer both the public and the behind-the-scenes ("by invitation only") discussion which concerned both the specific volume in prospect, *Romantic Irony*, and the challenges of undertaking further volumes. Frederick Garber (Binghamton University) had volunteered to be the pioneer editor, and Remak recruited me to superintend the longer-term enterprise yet to be mapped out and unfold. Dimić and Garber took the lead in suggesting the ground-plan for a sub-series in a report entitled "The Place of Romanticism with the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages" in 1975. Dimić's Research Institute in Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta provided the original center for coordination of the Romanticism sub-series at large, and after the inaugural Edmonton symposium in April 1978, Binghamton University in upstate New York became the home for coordination of the first project, *Romantic Irony*.

¹ See description of the program and schedule in *Folio: The University of Alberta Staff Bulletin*, 14, no. 38 (30 March 1978): 1-2.

The next, even larger conference held at Edmonton in October 1981 was the “International Symposium on Romantic Drama: Genre Theory and Practice”.² Since I had volunteered to create the second volume, *Romantic Drama*, I served with Dimić as co-director of the academic program for our 1981 conference; and this proved highly successful because out of the score of invited speakers we attracted a half dozen experts who were to figure among eventual contributors to the second Romanticism volume. Virgil Nemoianu (Catholic University of America) joined the nucleus of Dimić, Garber, and Gillespie in the “by invitation only” discussion of editorial problems of the Romanticism volumes, which included our anticipating the challenges of dealing with Romantic prose writings. In addition, Elinor S. Shaffer (University of East Anglia) agreed to lay some of the groundwork for a volume on *Romantic Poetry*. One of the obvious questions waiting in the wings for us was how to manage the flow of commitments both of editors and of contributors. It was expected that many of us would potentially be involved in more than one volume, and that the publisher Akadémiai Kiadó (Budapest) could only accommodate a limited line-up in any one year. As it turned out, Akadémiai Kiadó stretched itself beyond all expectation in the *annus mirabilis* 1984 when four volumes of CHLEL reached print.

An important decision reached at the Edmonton meeting in 1981 was to stagger the Romanticism volumes by keeping the starting times of each apart by at least a couple of years. The most consequential decision reached at the Third International Symposium on Romanticism at Edmonton in 1984 was to divide the vast realm of prose into two projects. One volume would treat prose narratives according to more traditional concepts of “fiction”; the other would cover a generic medley of discursive statements in prose (e.g., literary theory, key sciences, philosophy, etc.) and of public and private forms (e.g., newspapers, autobiography, etc.).

Romantic Irony was delayed more than expected because, after the banner year 1984, Akadémiai Kiadó developed internal problems with its operation, as part of a more general tightening of finances in Hungary in the eighties. The four later Romanticism volumes were, in fact, all destined to appear with John Benjamins Publishing Company (Amsterdam and Philadelphia), which assumed the commitment to publish further volumes of the Comparative History for ICLA and to distribute the already extant volumes produced by Akadémiai Kiadó. Weisgerber, as new President of the Coordinating Committee, played a key role in negotiating the transfer of press operations from Budapest to Amsterdam. In practice, the actual center of coordination for each of our volumes proved for practical considerations to be the home institution of its lead or sole editor. Hence after his invaluable contributions in fostering the Romanticism series, Dimić deferred to the relocation of the specific blocks of the larger enterprise to wherever they needed to move. With the advent of electronic communication it also became possible to share aspects of editing over very long distances among co-editors.

² Full program listed in an occasional publication of the Department of Comparative Literature, University of Alberta, Edmonton (October 1981).

The general readiness of the Romanticism group to be flexible prevented breakdown of the several independent parts of this collaborative undertaking. Shaffer, who had meanwhile become founder-editor of the new major journal *Comparative Criticism* in Britain, decided to concentrate her efforts on its development and asked not to assume the implementation of the upcoming project on *Romantic Poetry*. Angela Esterhammer (University of Western Ontario/Universität Zürich) was recruited to shape it in her place. By the earlier nineties Nemoianu and I were fortunate to have Steven Sondrup (Brigham Young University) step in as lead co-editor of the *Nonfictional Romantic Prose* volume and push it to completion with considerable energies. This allowed me to concentrate my efforts on developing *Romantic Prose Fiction*, about which more below.

First, it is instructive to examine how the design of the volume *Romantic Irony* established the experimental ethos of Romanticism sub-series as a whole. That is more apparent if, by way of illustration, we compare and contrast several typical kinds of volumes which deal with “transcultural” literary history and/or Romanticism broadly. A census of books published worldwide in the second half of the twentieth century would yield a surprising number which have pretensions of dealing with Romantic literature beyond the national level or beyond a single language stream. This group remains considerable even after we subtract broader studies by single authors and look just at studies by sets of collaborating authors. In most instances the collective efforts prove to be loose gatherings on geoculturally and intellectually limited topics; carefully coordinated comprehensive projects by organized teams are relatively rare. During the decades of work on the CHLEL series (the 1970s to 2000s), it is striking how often, within a loose collection, it is a member of one of the ICLA Romanticism teams who writes an intellectually more adventurous contribution on broader ways to look at Romanticism. In addition, it is notable how frequently, across the above-mentioned categories of studies by single or multiple authors or inside the covers of one book, we encounter recurrences of the old tension of the mid-twentieth century between the willingness to concentrate on the specifics of a delimited body of texts, on the one hand, and the urge to erect grand universalizing theories, on the other.

A few examples must suffice here in illustration. The collective volume *Romanticism in National Context* (1988) duly performs what its title promises, running through separate chapters on Wales, England (which cavalierly subsumes the Scots), Greece, Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia (bundling the whole region, without Finland), The Netherlands, Hungary, France, Spain, Russia, and Poland. The contributors organize their respective chapters each differently and variously around political or intellectual history, stylistic currents, major figures, and/or relationships among the arts. Many interesting, clearly pertinent topics are treated, but no attempt is made to correlate the phenomena across boundaries. The book *Studying Transcultural Literary History* (2006) remains stuck, for the most part, in the kind of debates which animated the ICLA four decades earlier, but the editor seems unaware of the fact that ICLA teams have already been producing actual transnational, translingual, cross-cultural literary histories and studies – and not just for European and Euro-American areas, but also for Asian, Pacific, and African –, as well as theorizing about

the grounds of such undertakings. The thirty-some chapters of *Studying Transcultural Literary History* mainly speculate on grand models for bringing the literary evolution of the whole world under one roof and these conjectures are often constricted in the straitjacket of (blatantly Eurocentric) Marxian theory. One of the happy exceptions, Remo Ceserani's essay, "Drawing a Map of a Literary History of Europe" (*Transcultural*, 168–179), because of its open-minded, flexible, multidimensional, dynamic view, with diachronic depth, is distinctly in the spirit of the ICLA Romanticism project. Not surprising is that Ceserani (Bologna) was simultaneously a contributor to the CHLEL project *Romantic Prose Fiction* (2008).

The just-mentioned collective volumes may also stand for the two extreme polarities – nationalistic compartmentalization and over-generalized abstraction – which CHLEL seeks to avoid in favor of concretely based syntheses. While there is a plethora of volumes published in recent decades that merely gather scattered fragments toward a comprehensive history of Romantic writing, sometimes a single author achieves a reasonable, though compact synthesis. One example would be Maurice Cranston's *The Romantic Movement* (1994) which in only 169 dense pages tracks cultural currents, starting from pre-Romantic trends in Western Europe, over the German, English, French, Italian, and Spanish attainments of respective "high" Romantic phases, before closing with a survey of late Romantic phenomena, and taking some brief note of the New World, Scandinavia, and Russia. But it is disappointing that he omits the considerable American corpus of Romantic poetry and fiction. Esteban Tollinchi covers all of Cranston's terrain and more, on a far grander scale and with a bounteous yield of more finely discriminated points in the two-volume *Romanticismo y modernidad* (1989). Tollinchi has the additional virtue of organizing his work around a host of major topics of importance in Romanticism and of crossing nimbly from one to another cultural stream and citing specific writers, artists, thinkers, and political leaders in illustration. Moreover, he conducts us through a series of later reactions to and rekindlings of interest in Romantic modes and ideas, so that we can more clearly discern the many criss-crossing pathways by which features of the twentieth century in Europe and the Americas remain in certain important ways linked to Romanticism or exhibit veerings from it. In the impressive sweep of over two thousand pages, Tollinchi represents the rare instance when an individual researcher sets himself a goal that bears resemblance to what the several Romanticism teams together (a hundred plus collaborators) have striven to accomplish for CHLEL!

From this small selection of works several propositions can be extrapolated which the ICLA editorial team for Romanticism considered independently in their earliest meetings. For example, in 2006, although his purpose is to move toward a "hypertext" model as a means of coping with the disparateness of so-called world literature, Leon de Kock arrives at a formulation that strikingly echoes the key working supposition of the Romanticism group from the start:

"Literary historiography, particularly in a cross-cultural frame, cannot be conceived as an act that can be completed, or even provisionally completed. It is a serial act, a necessarily self-revising cascade of analogical windows which, in an important

sense, recreate the field cognitively – and *recreate* feelings about the field – over and over again” (*Transcultural*, 22).

Garber and his fellow editors already accepted three decades earlier that no single contemporary “national tradition”, “critical school”, or “theoretical model” would be adequate or should be permitted to furnish the ruling point of view for the volume *Romantic Irony* or any later volumes. Nor should its contributors unconsciously credit as explanatory any positions which particular Romantics held regarding literature, the arts, human nature, or other subject matters. Rather, the attitudes of Romantics in their own specific milieux, and likewise the attitudes of later receptors of Romanticism and of yet more recent critics and theoreticians in the CHLEL research team’s own world, should all be regarded as provisional moments or readings in an on-flowing cultural history. Economy of space, it was agreed, would generally constrain us to practice shorthand formulas to allude to important contexts, but contributors were deemed to have the obligation not to endorse any point of view passively, whether it originated from our principal research objects, that is, from Romantic artists and thinkers, or from later cultural participants. Above all, it was stipulated that the contributors we recruited should be cautioned not to employ any recent critical methodology as if it were a valid means to assert a truth-claim in literary history, unless they themselves were prepared to set forth quite explicitly (at least in abbreviation) why they regarded the methodology fit for that end.

We imposed on ourselves the challenge of a steady re-positioning of details because of shifts of world views in a virtual “time-tunnel” leading down to “our” own contemporaneous moment. Why, then, did the Romantic editorial team go the extra trouble and choose a thorny concept like “Irony” as the organizing focal point for their first volume, when they and so many fellow comparatists in correspondence with them believed that the tendencies associated with Romantic irony were immediately ancestral to a range of “modern” habits and uses of irony? Specific issues were raised that kept the project leaders from evading this acute question. For example, several discussants at the Edmonton colloquia pondered whether it would be legitimate to “apply” some of the approaches of deconstructive analysis (for example, the brands popularized by Paul DeMan and Jacques Derrida) to Romantic utterances. A consensus emerged that no approach should be barred, even if it bore genetic hallmarks of Romantic tendencies, despite the danger of tumbling into a kind of systemic time-warp or circularity. However, it was agreed that the collaborator “applying” such an approach would be under the obligation of situating it as accurately as possible within the flow of other historically datable approaches since Romanticism; or indeed, in cases of a collaborator holding true conviction in a specific approach, the collaborator should openly don the mantle of a philosopher of culture and (at least in abbreviation) honestly state the superior merits of the approach, before applying it. No theoretical model prominently identified with “our” latter-day moment of retrospection around the most recently passed *fin de siècle* was deemed to be privileged over any other, with the exception that “open” kinds of empirical systemic inquiry would not require more elaborate avowals. For example, so long as the collaborator did not seek to disguise ideological aspects of processes of selectivity, approaches such as ge-

netic or formalistic scrutiny of texts, the history of ideas, discourse analysis, reception aesthetics, general systems theory, and other highly descriptive directions would be acceptable as working tools at face value.

In short, all participants signing up for *Romantic Irony* were expected: (a) to be aware of the general heritage of Romanticism, (b) yet, as conscious heirs, stubbornly to reserve their own scholarly independence from our research objects (including all post-Romantic views of Romanticism), (c) but, in cases of “true believers”, to tell our readers of their philosophic allegiance.

All that did not solve the crucial problem of how, pragmatically, the first and each subsequent Romanticism volume should be constructed in order to speak honestly about the bumpy and often zigzagging historical continua (as against any unitary continuum), and to do some justice to the both intertwined and disjunctive cultural phases, variegated geocultural terrains, and constantly shifting grounds of reception. Garber and his main counselors chose “Irony”, a multifaceted tendency and/or mode in art and thought, and a subject matter fraught with its own considerable critical tradition, in order to affirm an inner experimental principle in the sub-series. The hope was that such a subject matter would promote a sense of comparative literary history as a *discovery* process and that this sense would then be carried over from *Romantic Irony* onto subsequent volumes, although they would be organized for purely practical considerations around more traditional concepts of genre. Volumes constructed around text types seemed more likely than volumes organized around themes to serve as relatively “neutral” vehicles for treating a wide range of genetic, formal, and final matters. But to go directly to such studies, we feared, might bog us down in rehashing repeatedly why we felt ourselves to stand simultaneously in critical neutrality toward the Romantics, distant from older positivistic modes of historicism, and independent of brands of theorizing of the ending twentieth century.

We concluded it was not our task to represent a smorgasbord of approaches to Romanticism that happened to be in fashion at the most recent turn-of-the-century. The more derogatory voices expressed disdain at the idea, which seemed exemplified in too many real contemporary instances, that the function of a collective volume was to be a welfare service, a facility to allow “representatives” of critical methods or their recent students to place articles demonstrating mastery of the method. This tallied with the more positive voices who agreed our purpose was not to serve like a supermarket as an outlet for a variety of critical theories or partisan Eurocentric world views, but to push toward a transnational, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary practice of literary history, one directed at a very tangled, not-so-distant past. A project on “irony” seemed well-suited for establishing the kind of channel we wanted. This turning away from the virtual theory craze of the ending twentieth century was all the more important because, as a group, the editorial team shared the conviction that our sub-series ought to admit the huge role of incongruities, mixtures, disjunctures, blanks, inconsistencies in any fuller picture, and that we should do our best collectively to avoid the impulse to force any “unified field” theory on the messy reality of a complex polycentric Europe and its former colonies, the immigrant nations of the Americas.

A book like Morton Gurewitch's *The Comedy of Romantic Irony* (2002) can serve to illustrate just how bristling with controversy – hence implicitly how very productive in the decades after World War II – was the subject matter that the Romanticism team dared to touch and why “irony” was legitimately perceived as a stimulating hot spot. *Comedy* offers a wealth of valuable points and stakes out a generous portion of the literary terrain and historical range which *Romantic Irony* (1988) covers, and in so doing engages in a running debate with a host of the critics, especially, the Anglo-American, about the motley phenomena from the earliest or pre-Romantic instances through the later nineteenth century. In many respects *Comedy* constitutes a gigantic *état présent* or research report citing and ranking critical attempts to define Romantic irony and, secondarily, to describe how Romantic irony functions mainly in drama and narrative. It pursues many meritorious diachronic excursions, such as in the appendix on Byron's *Don Juan*. It makes a lot of excellent observations, such as that many authors in Britain and elsewhere were employing modes of Romantic irony without the benefit of being instructed by prominent theoreticians. But since *Comedy* is the product of a single author, it quite naturally reflects Gurewitch's own intelligent and nuanced thesis about the essence of this kind of irony. He argues for and against particular elements in the views not only of “secondary” commentators beyond late Romanticism, but also for and against the elements perceived by “primary” writers and critics of the Romantic age.

In contrast, the CHLEL volume simply accepts all of the contested elements in their own right as data. Because its multiple contributors formulate how these elements fit into the cultural flow from about 1750 to the present, *Romantic Irony* avoids the temptation to erect any monothematic explanatory theory. Gurewitch's habit of “correcting” the synthesizing efforts of others not only suffers from the understandable limits imposed by his own interests and expertise; it amounts to second-guessing cultural experience and dictating to, or “correcting”, history. Hence although aware of the CHLEL volume that has preceded his by some fourteen years, he only comments on it to quarrel as a rival with its editor's higher estimation of German contributions and with nuances in Garber's opinion of Byron (e.g., *Comedy*, 76, 78, 224–227). Gurewitch misunderstands the volume *Romantic Irony* as being an effort to create a binding theory, rather than as a collective experiment in literary history. Although he never states so flatly, he aspires to the lofty status of a philosopher of culture, not to that of a literary historian – we are not dealing here with a literary historian who admits a priori to being only a partial comparatist. It is thus not surprising that he never describes the actual contents of the CHLEL volume *Romantic Irony* or considers its range of subject matter. He ignores 95% of the contents, perhaps because he finds the containing framework a bit baffling for its non-judgmental approach combined with a richness of topics executed by a team of experts, none of whom pretends to a total, final grasp.

3. HOW A SUB-SERIES DEVELOPS IN REAL TIME AND ENDS-UP SUBJECT TO TIME

It is helpful to consider two books, both published after *Romantic Irony* (1988) – henceforth *RI* –, which exhibit a number of affinities to the concept of the CHLEL Romanticism sub-series at its beginning. *European Romanticism: Literary Cross-currents, Modes, and Models* (1990) – henceforth *ER* – exhibits some of the essentials in its subtitle. *A Companion to European Romanticism* (2006) – henceforth *CER* – gives no explicit pointer in its title, and hints at being a reference work, although it is not that by any means. Not surprisingly, the editor of *ER* and 40% of its authors are contributors to one or more of the CHLEL volumes, as against a tally of only 10% in *CER*. Both books offer a diverse mixture of types of chapters. Studies of prominent themes and genres in *ER* more frequently cast a wide net, whereas studies focused on a single nation or indeed on one author predominate in *CER*. Nonetheless, many topics in both books turn up scattered across the five CHLEL volumes. In effect, the aggregate of the heterogeneous gatherings of topics in both books suggests the possibility of creating a fuller treatment and a widening out of subject matter as this has been accomplished in the Romanticism sub-series. For example, the volume *RI* can be regarded as a geocultural, interdisciplinary, and intermedic expansion upon the sole chapter on “Romantic Irony” carried in *ER* and *CER*.

The inaugural volume, *RI*, so the editorial team reasoned in Edmonton, would in some measure be compelled to reflect the actual capacity of CL lingering from the 1970s in regard to “coverage” of territories, authors, and works. The problem of as yet inadequate cross-cultural capacity seemed more acute in the 1970s when facing the far northern Baltic and Scandinavian areas, as well as Eastern and Southeastern Europe, in contrast to being able to rely on an extant larger contingent of researchers dealing with Western Europe. The participants reached the conclusion that it would be better to compromise on the goal of “inclusiveness” and to accept chapters built around one cultural stream, rather than totally omit attention to it, so long as the contributor could contextualize the phenomena. Hence the decision was reached to recruit separate chapters by comparatists on the German, French, Portuguese, English, Dutch, Scandinavian, Hungarian, Polish, Russian, South Slavic, and American literary streams to fit under the heading “National Manifestations”. This bulkiest part of the volume fitted between a smaller opening section of genetic studies, a chapter each on the heritage from Cervantes and Sterne under the heading “Tradition and Background”, and a larger closing section titled “Syntheses”. This last set of chapters treated generic, discursive, and interdisciplinary topics across borders, encompassing features of narrative stance, musical forms, the grotesque in several arts, anti-theater, and the Romantic to modern history of the critical concept of irony. In effect, examples of comparative treatments of questions of genre, mode, discourse, and art medium were created within the volume *RI*.

The divisions of the volume *Romantic Drama* (1994) – henceforth *RD* – reveal how both the more ambitious aims and the felt limits of capacity carried over into our second project. There was wide agreement that dramatic literature (as distinct from theater) and poetry were especially tied to the language stream and the particular pub-

lic, so that we would be justified in looking at some traditions in separate chapters, rather than simply by-passing them. Thus division 3 (“Affinity, Dissemination, Reception”) of *RD* brings ten contextualized chapters on Italian, Iberian, Polish, Russian, Czech, Hungarian, Scandinavian, English-Canadian, American, and Hispanic-American drama. Division 4 (“The Romantic Legacy”) somewhat resembles the section “Syntheses” in *RI* by dealing comprehensively with the impact of Romantic innovations in drama, often first flourishing in Modernism, and lasting down to the present. The five chapters of division 1 (“Renewal and Innovation”) of *RD*, more or less like the slimmer first section of *RI*, are genetic studies of the foundations of Romantic drama from the late Renaissance onward. Division 2 of *RD* (seven chapters under the heading “Themes, Styles, Structures”) is robustly cross-cultural and interdisciplinary. It established the final bridging to the volume *Romantic Prose Fiction* (2008) – henceforth *RPF* – in which chapters focused on a single literary stream have virtually disappeared. More on this development below.

The volume *Romantic Poetry* (2002) – henceforth *RP* – shares with *RPF* insofar as it boasts a large proportion of cross-cultural studies, especially on genetic and generic questions, but *RP* also shares much with *RD* insofar as it, too, pays special attention to the close relationship between language stream and cultural identity. The four divisions of *RP* are titled “The Evolution of Sensibility and Representation”, “The Evolution of Genre”, “Romantic Poetry and National Projects”, and “Interpretations, Re-creations, and Performances of Romantic Poetry”. Eight of the ten chapters in division 3 revolve around one principal cultural stream, and four of the six chapters in division 4 are devoted to one major poet. In relative terms, the attention to questions of discourse, while present across all these divisions, is not as intense as the emphasis on generic and formal questions. What is particularly interesting about the volume *Nonfictional Romantic Prose* (2004) – henceforth *NfRP* – is that it brings together a host of discursive statements from all fields and aspects of culture as well as forms of private and public utterance. It is this enormously broader mission that distinguishes *NfRP* from a volume entirely focused on literary criticism such as that edited by Marshall Brown (1989).

Why did the editorial team of the Romanticism sub-series decide to pull apart text types that were heavily discursive and those that were manifestly or preponderantly works of fiction? We knew that one realm easily blended into the other, so that we would consciously be acting in an arbitrary manner in assigning certain pieces of prose to one or the other “container”. Moreover, by virtue of our having earlier integrated the discussion of discourse(s) within not only the volume *RI* but also the volumes based on genre (*RD* and *RP*), and by now extensively separating discourse out in the case of prose works, we were once again altering the direction of our experiment. An additional complication was that there were so many junctures where prose fiction morphed into drama, or the reverse, or similarly, prose and poetry crossed and mingled in Romantic writing. In the final analysis, the same principle prevailed as in our original reflections governing the creation of the volume *RI*. There was no single generic core in that project, and indeed Romantic discursive impulses, as we implemented the project, were discovered to be almost freely mobile, able to take various

forms in literature and in other arts. And, besides, the editors were unwilling either to kowtow to Romantic views on irony and its closest kin or to act as absolutist arbiters, ourselves rendering an ultimate verdict about the “correct” definition of generic or discursive boundaries. That was something we, collectively, were glad to leave to bolder spirits who felt in possession of the golden key of theory. We fully anticipated that some scholar like Gurewitch (his name stands here only representatively) would inevitably object to details in any practical sorting out of the tangle not to his or her liking. We were only interested in reasonable lines of demarcation. The rule was simple: The editors would negotiate among themselves step by step to decide, on a purely pragmatic basis of allocation of labor and the critical ingenuity of particular proposals of chapters, whether, for example, to treat the prose-poem or the long narrative poem in *RP* or *RPF*, whether to assign diaries written in prose to *RPF* or *NjRP*, and so forth.

It has turned out that these “arbitrary” decisions have acquired an ancillary function, because talking about them in prefaces or introductions prompts renewed awareness of the magnificent complexity of actual creative moments for readers. Cross-referencing among the volumes of the sub-series and internally within volumes, too, has naturally grown in importance as the parade has been passing. Unburdening the volume *RPF* by “offloading” a prominent subject matter in *NjRP* as part of the discourse of the age did not mean that this key subject matter could be ignored elsewhere. For example, under division 7 of *NjRP* (“Intersections: Scientific and Artistic Discourses in the Romantic Age”), there are two chapters on concepts of the brain, consciousness, and the unconscious. But interest in psychology, disturbed states of mind, puzzles of identity, sentimental maturation, and more is so prominent in Romantic literature that *RPF* carries a number of correlative chapters on these matters, centered however on works of fiction under thematic, generic, and discursive captions; and of course, the editorial guidance of the volume *RPF* (“Introduction”, “Conclusion”, plus cross-references inserted in chapters) draws attention to the natural facts of the necessary overlapping of topics.

There are several obvious exercises which recommend themselves in taking up the Romanticism sub-series. The fifth volume, *RPF*, carries the complete tables of contents of *RI*, *RD*, *RP*, and *NjRP* in an appendix. Combining these with the table of contents of *RPF* itself, a reader can skim over the flow of chapter titles and gain a more comprehensive appreciation of what I shall call the “Romantic literary universe”. This survey can then be complemented by browsing in the indexes of the actual volumes. It will quickly be apparent that one can read the volumes in several different ways. It is quite feasible to follow a particular theme across several volumes, winding in and out of a wealth of genres and media (e.g., painting and opera, and, in following the reception story, even film in some instances). It is similarly possible to concentrate on the subject of how Romantic cultural moments are still resonating or are fading over time. The editors of *RPF* wanted to frame the huge realm of story-telling in prose in such a way that the final division of the volume (“Contributions of Romanticism to 19th and 20th century writing and thought”) would re-confirm the principle of the “time tunnel” which was articulated early on. That is, the chapters expounding the ways in which later generations responded to the Romantics are meant to strengthen

the sense of where we stand today, just after the recent fin-de-siècle, as heirs to a cumulative heritage.

In addition to the strong diachronic spine evident in the sub-series, there are a number of junctures where a chapter is deliberately dedicated to a great author or world-historical work that demonstrates how myriad lines of tradition merge and how the kind of insights produced radiate with powerful energies across the relatively synchronous plane of nominally separate cultures which, in effect, become linked by an “epiphany” of sharing. The many re-receptions of Shakespeare and Cervantes treated in several volumes instance this kind of potential in the Romantic age, as does the case of the enormous immediate impact of *Faust* in *RD* as a revolutionary work inspiring new concepts of epic and cosmic drama. A special contribution to *RPF* is a chapter on the fortunes of Romanticism when crossing the frontiers into a non-European world, penetrating into Japanese literature, where it was co-received with a bundle of different phases of European writing and played some part in the conflict among tendencies in the host country during the intense Meiji period of modernization. This kind of chapter offers a case study onto which better informed comparative investigations can attach of the success of the European novel in non-European territories in the twentieth century.

But as ICLA has learned since World War II, as its ranks were enriched by the entrance progressively of more and more colleagues from extra-European areas, a project devoted to the global sweep of the novel requires the breadth of expertise that the Committee on Intercultural Studies has been tasked to mobilize. Investigation of the efficacy or acceptance of elements of European Romanticism in various extra-European cultures is severely limited if it only amounts to the activity of Western scholars (as against scholars of any provenance but possessing deep knowledge of non-European streams). Of course, members of the various CHLEL projects and sub-series can be helpful in advising colleagues on the crucial matter of who may be reading Eurocentric paradigms – including such “universalizing” critical doctrines as Freudian psychology, Marxian sociology, deconstructive analysis, etc. – onto the literary phenomena. Naturally, when such paradigms are real factors because they have indeed influenced the non-European authors in question, that needs to be discriminated in its own right.

In summary, the effort to discriminate a European and Eurocentric Romantic literature of many parts is not intended to cut the realm of European languages off from the world at large or to deny the significance of active contact nodules and zones where European production spills over into other cultural terrains or it is receptive to “outside” impulses. The point is to discriminate carefully, and not to endorse or reject any part of the heritage, but rather to sharpen awareness that this heritage is something that has been shaped over time, is likely to go through further major modifications, and may possibly have today as yet unknowable impacts. Something the volumes make clearer is that the Romantics themselves in their own milieux and generations were receivers of a heritage and were often active participants in the shaping and re-shaping of culture. Their debates encompassed such topics as whether the crisis of the Revolutionary age betokened a profound rupture, whether older values could be recu-

perated, how should community be defined, and the like. Thus, insofar as there is something like a conversation over the centuries, the Romanticism sub-series is a contribution to the deeper enjoyment of having conversation partners of other times, an option that sometimes may have liberating potential.

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