

Marcel Cornis-Pope & John Neubauer (eds.). *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Volume IV: Types and Stereotypes*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam & Philadelphia, 2010, 714 pp.

Writing a history of the 'literary cultures' of East-Central Europe is undoubtedly a daunting task not everyone would like to take on. This historically heterogeneous part of the continent can hardly be said to form a geographical whole: Bulgaria, for example, is certainly located in the south-east – but how central is it? It is obviously not part of what is rightly or wrongly labelled 'Central Europe'. The imperial Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman past of the countries in question accounts for economic, political and cultural differences rather than for common features – as the disintegration of Yugoslavia shows, which was not simply due to nationalism (as some of the contributors argue), but *also* to historical, economic and political discrepancies.

The editors and authors can nonetheless make their approach plausible and justify their project, especially in this fourth and last volume, the last part of which ('Epilogue') deals – somewhat cursorily – with 'East-Central European literature after 1989'. For the communist past is clearly a common denominator that still binds these countries together and even influences their future as member states of the European Union. However, this factor does not provide a common political and cultural past, especially since the editors define 'East-Central Europe' as a 'buffer zone' (p. 4) between Germany, Russia and the Ottoman Empire – thus evoking the large historical divides that actually caused the 'buffer zone's' heterogeneity...

In spite of these self-deconstructing elements, the fourth volume yields a lot of new insights, especially since the editors plead – in their 'General Introduction' – for a minimal use of period concepts such as 'Romanticism', 'Realism', 'Modernism' or 'Postmodernism', replacing them by 'National Awakening', 'Modernism' and 'Literature during the Soviet-controlled period' (p. 6). Although one may wonder whether this kind of conceptual change is a genuine terminological alternative to existing modes of classification, it certainly enhances the political orientation of the volume as a whole.

The titles of the different parts of the book underpin and illustrate this orientation: 'Figures of National Poets', 'Figurations of the Family', 'Figures of Female Identity', 'Figures of the Other', 'Figures of Outlaws', 'Figures of Trauma' and 'Figures of Mediation'. This is not a history of *literary evolution* (Tynianov), of aesthetic positions and styles, but of political ideologies in literature: of nationalism, feminism, Marxism-Leninism, and so on.

Such ideologies have always relied on individual and collective actors or protagonists. The literary actors of nineteenth-century nationalism in this European region are well known and discussed in great detail in the first part of the volume: Mickiewicz in Poland, Petöfi in Hungary, Mácha among the Czechs, Eminescu among the Romanians, Prešeren among the Slovenians, and so on.

The rise of these 'national icons' coincides with literary Romanticism in all of the cultures mentioned here, but both Roman Koropeckyj and John Neubauer, who comment on Mickiewicz and Petöfi, reveal the versatility of ideological discourse by showing that the great figures of Polish and Hungarian national Romanticism could be used or abused by all sorts of other ideologies, for instance, by socialism during the

communist era. John Neubauer shows how the mysterious disappearance of Petöfi kindled the nationalist ideology, especially after the revolution of 1848, which provoked the repressive reactions of the Habsburg monarchy.

Although Mácha's 'reburial in the Czech pantheon Vyšehrad' (p. 60) makes him undoubtedly one of the great national poets of the Czechs, it is not quite clear why Robert B. Pynsent chose Mácha and not Jaroslav Vrchlický. Mácha may be the most prominent Czech Romantic, but Vrchlický (mentioned only three times in the whole volume) is certainly more memorable as a protagonist of Czech national aspirations.

Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu's article on Mihai Eminescu ('Mihai Eminescu: The foundational truth of a dual lyre') is full of insights. It not only explains Eminescu's role within Romanian Romanticism and nationalism, but also reveals to what extent this belated Romanticism has a late modern or modernist slant to it: it absorbed elements of Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's philosophies.

Marjan Dovič's 'France Prešeren: A conquest of the Slovene Parnassus' will seem particularly enlightening to those who are interested in struggles within the 'literary field' (p. 105) in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu. The author shows how France Prešeren 'won' this literary struggle against his competitor Janez Vesel – who may not have been any worse as a poet...

A completely different kind of institutionalisation is analysed by Svetlana Slapšak in her article on Petar II Petrović Njegoš, 'sacral and secular ruler of Montenegro' (p. 110). She also describes the political role of Njegoš's epic poem *Gorski vijenac* (*The Mountain Wreath*), which, as an educational text, brought about a certain amount of solidarity among Montenegrins, Serbs and other southern Slav nations.

The second part of the volume – 'Figurations of the Family' – has a very particular merit: in it the literatures and societies of

the Baltic countries, which tend to be neglected in most literary histories, are given quite a prominent place. Tiina Kirss writes on 'Family trauma and domestic violence in twentieth-century Estonian literature', Sandra Meškova deals with 'Daughter figures in Latvian women's autobiographical writing in the 1990s' and Arturas Tereskinas analyses the impact of different ideologies under the title 'Gendering the body of the Lithuanian nation in Maironis' poetry'.

It is not quite clear why these texts, which give considerable prominence to the family, to gender and to women, are followed by a presentation of 'František Palacký, the father figure of Czech historiography and nation building'. After all, Palacký was a historian, not a writer, and although he may have been a 'father figure' illustrating the theme of the 'family', it is difficult to see how he can be related to women's autobiographical writing of the 1990s in Latvia...

The political and ideological orientation of the volume is again confirmed in the third part: 'Figures of Female Identity'. The section 'Gender and politics' in particular illustrates this tendency very clearly. While Jasmina Lukić comments on the anti-war engagement of feminist texts, Svetlana Slapšak deals with 'Women's memory and an alternative Kosovo myth' and analyses the development of mythical narrative 'and its use in constructing the collective ethnic and gendered memories' (p. 264).

The fourth and the fifth parts of the volume are also presentations of figures rather than of literary texts: figures of the Other and figures of outlaws. Characteristic titles are: 'How did the Golem get to Prague?' (John Neubauer) or 'Lasting legacies: Vlad Tepeş and Dracula in Romanian national discourse' (Nárcisz Fejes).

Literary portraits of 'outlaws' such as the Slovak Juraj Jánošík and the Bulgarian Haiduti are discussed in great detail by Ute Raßloff (Jánošík) and Elka Agoston-

Nikolova (Haiduti). As in the case of the Romantic poets, it appears that national outsiders such as Jánošík (a robber and a hero at the same time) can be used by different cultures and ideologies for different purposes.

Jánošík, who was a Polish 'regional hero', became later a 'symbol of Czech-Slovak affinities' (p. 442), but remains a 'Slovak Romantic folk hero' (p. 440) who was turned into a leading national figure in the partisans' war of liberation against the National-Socialist invaders. He was subsequently associated with the exploited classes and instrumentalised by the communist regime for quite different purposes.

In the sixth part of the volume entitled 'Figures of Trauma', the impact of wars and civil wars on literature is analysed by Nevena Daković ('Remembrances of the past and the present'), Lado Kralj ("Goli Otok" literature'), Jolanta Jastrzębska ('Traumas of World War II: Polish and Hungarian literature') and Jūra Aviziēnis ('Performing identity: Lithuanian memoirs of Siberian deportation and exile').

Although Jastrzębska comments on 'The Postmodernism of György Konrád and Imre Kertész' (p. 501), it does not really become clear why these two authors ought to be read within the *postmodernist problematic*. How can their poetics and their way of writing, of narrating, be related to such postmodernist novelists as Umberto Eco, John Barth, Christoph Ransmayr or Thomas Pynchon? This question remains unanswered because the author concentrates on political events and biographies and neglects the *literariness* (Jakobson) of literature.

A similar problem crops up in Péter Hajdu's 'On the ethnic border. Images of Slovaks in the writings of some Hungarian modernists'. Ethnic relations and 'ethnic hostility' (p. 535) are the main topics of the article – not the specificity of Hungarian Modernism in relation to that of T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf or Thomas Mann.

However, Hajdu's article does have the merit of addressing bilateral Hungarian-Slovak relations, thus contributing to the coherence of the volume – which is, after all, a history of East-Central European literature.

Pia Brînzeu's article 'Journeys to the other half of the continent: British and Irish accounts of the Carpatho-Danubian region' links East and West and describes the changes in West European perceptions and attitudes. She writes about British travellers: 'Their visits to Romania are no longer frightening trips to the country of Dracula, but journeys of discovery and initiation' (p. 553).

For the West European reader the last part of the book, 'East-Central European Literature after 1989' (by Marcel Cornis-Pope et al.), is one such 'journey of discovery'. What is discovered – among other things – is that post-communist Europe has a genuinely European past and hence also a European future, such that some of its countries 'can claim an important avant-garde legacy as well as a pre-1947 market economy' (p. 563).

The authors argue convincingly that some of the best literature in the region has challenged both the Marxist-Leninist *metanarrative* (Lyotard) and the re-emerging nationalist discourses. One of the most characteristic examples is probably Svetislav Basara's novel *Ukleta zemlja* (*The Accursed Land*, 1996), an allegorical reckoning with the Yugoslav and Balkan past.

Editors and authors deserve praise for dealing in some length with the post-communist and post-Soviet developments in the Baltic countries: 'Postcommunist and post-colonial motifs in the Baltic literatures of the 1990s and after'. Writers such as Antun Šoljan and Andra Nieburga are certainly worth discovering – along with the literatures and the cultures they represent.

The reader will be slightly surprised to find that the subtitle following the 'Baltic section' announces a *particular genre*:

'Theatre and drama at the turning point'. For this title raises a couple of questions concerning the global approach of the volume: why is *drama* part of the underlying classification while other, complementary genres – *novel*, *short story*, *poetry* – have been omitted from the taxonomy? Why has the development of the *genre system* not been linked to *literary periods* such as Romanticism, Realism, Modernism, Post-modernism, and so on? In a history of the East-Central European *literatures* these concepts could have in turn been related to *literary institutions* (publishers, groups of authors, journals and newspapers), which are instrumental in structuring the *literary field* in the sense of Bourdieu.

As it is, key literary figures such as Srečko Kosovel in Slovenia (mentioned once), Miroslav Krleža in Croatia (mentioned four times) and Jaroslav Hašek in Czechoslovakia (mentioned once) have been marginalised.

However, the works of these authors are crucial for our understanding of the *literary evolution* in this part of Europe: the Slovenian transition from Romanticism to the avant-garde, the Croatian development towards a Modernism comparable to that of Sartre or Moravia and the development of the Czech realist and neo-realist satire from Karel Havlíček Borovský to Hašek. Is it not the task of comparative literary history to describe and explain such developments within the social and intercultural context?

The authors might argue that their aim was more political and that – for this reason – they decided to focus on political events and ideologies. This is in fact one of the merits of the volume: it highlights the role of political ideologies (nationalism, feminism, Marxism-Leninism) in literature – but at the expense of the latter.

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