

Introduction: Speaking About Small Literatures in Their Own Language

Relations between theory and practice are also very much the focus of the second section of this volume. “Speaking About Small Literatures in Their Own Language” was originally the title of a panel at the 21st congress of the International Comparative Literature Association held in Vienna in 2016. The panel was organized by Liina Lukas, Katre Talviste, Jeanne E. Glesener and Vanesa Matajc, and the call invited speakers to reflect upon the position of small literatures in the global literary space. The term ‘small literature’, in this context, designates a literary culture characterized by small number of authors and readers, limited international visibility and dissemination. The panel was intended to launch a discussion about the specificities of this type of literary culture and the search for ways of studying them independently of the categories and descriptive models originating from large and globally influential literatures. The independence can be only relative, since one characteristic of small literatures is an enhanced sensitivity to developments in central literatures of high visibility, diffusion and influence. This sensitivity has considerably influenced the self-description of small literatures but has also led to the realization that constructing objects of study on the example of differently structured and positioned literary cultures is often inadequate to account for key aspects of their own structure and functioning.

The panel’s goal was to look for possible new descriptive models that emerge from the comparison and modelling of the empirical cultural experiences of small literatures and for ways how these new models could contribute to the study of trans- and international literary relations and practices. Discussions were opened by Jeanne E. Glesener’s “How to speak about Small Literatures? Preliminary Reflections on Terminology and Discourse”. The following papers presented general and systemic observations (Vanesa Matajc’s “Mapping the world literary system and small literatures: the aspect of geo-politics and geo-political poetics”, Fabienne Gilbertz’s “Wer hierzulande schreibt, kennt sein Risiko” – Literatursoziologischer Blick auf das Luxemburger Literatursystem”, Liina Lukas’ “Die Weltliteratur als Bestandteil kleiner Literatur”) as well as case studies (Marie-Anne Hansen-Pauly’s “Moving centres and peripheries in the lives and works of L. Welch and P. Joris”, Madli Kütt’s “Small translations of a big text: fragmentary translations of Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* in Estonian”). Issues related to the cultural functions of literature (Anne-Marie Le Baillif’s “Le roman de fondation entre littérature politique et

symbolique”), specific development of genres (Ian De Toffoli’s “Le théâtre luxembourgeois: spécificités et problématiques d’un petit genre”) and literary pedagogy (Katre Talviste’s “0 to 100 in less than 10 Years. A Story of a History of 20th-Century Literature”) were raised. The role of language in the definition of a small literature, as well as the problematics of multilingual literary spaces were discussed (Andreas Leben’s “Contemporary Bilingual Literary Practice in Carinthia”, Anneli Kõvamees’ “Literature Defined by Language?”).

Two of these papers are now published in the second thematic section of this issue of *Interlitteraria*. The third that accompanies them has partly emerged from further work on the subject, partly from other forums and networks of cooperation, being based on papers originally prepared for the panel “The Romantic (Be)Longing and National Poets: Imagining a Nation in European 19th-Century Literatures” (organized by Marijan Dović) at the 2015 conference of the European Network for Comparative Literary Studies. The problematics of the position, interaction and structure of small and minor literatures are attracting increasing scholarly attention in Europe and worldwide. It is a field of largely unexplored practices and a potential source of new theoretical thought. With this issue’s thematic section, *Interlitteraria* provides its first, and hopefully not the last, contribution to the study of this topic.

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