

Romanticism as a Literary-historiographical Project: Romantic Prose Fiction

Romantic Prose Fiction. Eds. Gerald Gillespie, Manfred Engel, Bernard Dieterle. (A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, Volume XXIII). Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 733 pp. ISBN 978–90–272–3456.

Romantic Prose Fiction volume is a part of the Romanticism sub-series, pertaining to the huge project “Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages”. The sub-series consists of five volumes: *Romantic Irony*, *Romantic Drama*, *Romantic Poetry*, *Non-fictional Romantic Prose: Expanding Borders*, and *Romantic Prose Fiction*.

The decision to devote to Romanticism more attention than to any other literary epoch or movement, treated in the CHLEL up till now (Expressionism, Symbolism, Avant-gardes, Enlightenment, Post-modernism, Modernism), seems to be well grounded in the fact that Romanticism is not only one of the most important artistic epochs so far (if we may allow for any hierarchies in this respect), which most efficiently succeeded to conceptualize the importance of art for an individual as well as for society; moreover, at the same time it also gave birth to the literary history and literary theory proper and is regarded in many respects as the most characteristic forerunner of our own epoch in the fields of societal life, sciences, ideas, philosophical concepts, and literary culture.¹ The division of the sub-

¹ How far-reaching this influence is can be demonstrated by many examples. Let me point to only one: “Most twentieth-century modes of literary criticism and history, our immediate heritage, exhibit deep Romantic

series on five volumes also seems to be justified. In so far as Romanticism has been extremely widespread and influential, and equally important in all genres and forms of literary expression, it seems perfectly adequate to treat prose fiction, drama and poetry in separate volumes. The fact that the Romanticism project starts with the *Romantic Irony* volume, is also more than reasonable. Romantic irony namely expresses in most condensed way the very nucleus of the Romantic self-consciousness (particularly in the cradle of Romanticism, in the work of German Romantic authors), the sense of unlimited subjectivity, which – in Schelling's, but also Hegel's philosophy, in fragments of Friedrich Schlegel, or in the skilful narrative manoeuvres in Hoffmann's *The Life And Opinions Of the Tomcat Murr* –, feeling itself as absolutely free, lifts itself in a total ironical distance from everything, even from itself. Finally, perfectly justifiable seems to be also the decision to devote a separate volume apart from Romantic prose fiction also to the nonfictional prose; one should not forget that the philosophical or theoretical writings of Schelling, Novalis, young Hölderlin, Chateaubriand, the Schlegel brothers, Schiller, Coleridge, Goethe etc. are extremely important part of the Romantic literary culture, often transgressing strict borders between theoretical and fictional discourses.

To devote in what follows the attention to the *RPF* volume (the last in the row), one may say that it distinguishes itself for its reasonable structuredness, characteristic of the Romanticism project as a whole. The volume has (besides the editors' Preface, displaying some editorial principles) an explanatory Introduction that presents the history and rationale of the Romanticism sub-series, and a summarizing Conclusion. It is divided into three major parts. Part One concentrates on the "Characteristic themes". The authors contributing to this section deal with the French Revolution, wertherism, idealisation of the artist, sister arts, music, nature and landscape, particularly mountain landscape, the "Wanderer", madness and dream, all kinds of duplicities, images of childhood, monsters, artificial life, Romantic brides, and, finally, also a chapter on

traces. Notable examples would be humanistic idealism, dialectical materialism, or linguistic structuralism ..." (Gillespie 2004: 18).

“Romantic gender and sexuality” is included. No important Romantic theme seems to be missing and the authors try to treat their topics as completely and extensively as possible and to explain them on the background of the Romantic *Weltanschauung*. (As a matter of fact, this holds true of the majority of contributions to this volume.) Part Two deals with the “Paradigms of Romantic fiction” and is further divided into two sections. “Generic types and representative texts” treat the most characteristic Romantic genres such as the Gothic novel, *Bildungsroman*, the “artist novel”, historical novel and historical romance, the fairy-tale and the fantastic tale, the detective story and novel, various types of short fiction, the literary idyll, while the section “Modes of discourse and narrative structures” discusses the address-relation-community complex as narrative sequence, the dialectics of homophony and polyphony, the fragment as structuring force, mirroring, abymization, potentiation, the distinction and relation between the novel and romance, the role of myth, the dialectics of historical narrative and fiction, and “the shaping of social discourse in Spanish America” (the latter being a quite informative article on Spanish American Romantic fiction and its social dimensions, but on the other hand seemingly loosely connected to the section’s title-theme). Part Three presents “Contributions of Romanticism to 19th and 20th century writing and thought” with articles on Spanish and Latin American novel in the 19th century, Romantic thought and style in 19th century realism and Naturalism, *fin-de-siècle* and the early 20th century, C. J. L. Almquist and Romantic irony, Romanticism, occultism and the fantastic in Spain and Latin America, Romantic prose fiction in modern Japan, ludic prose from Sterne to Fuentes, and screen adaptations of Romantic works. As we can see, the volume thus combines the “aesthetic” approach with the “contextual” one and tends to contextualize the Romantic prose fiction horizontally as well as vertically within the framework, indicated in the *Introduction*.² Particularly important

² The methodological framework here really is merely indicated and not really extensively elaborated, contrary to the framework, for instance, of the Literary Cultures sub-series, explained and reflected not only in extensive

in this regard seems to be Part III, which – in accordance with counter-essentialism, constructivism and, last, but not least, also the hermeneutic premises (the issue Gillespie in his work often deals with) that are all for some time now³ the indispensable part of literary-historical consciousness – quite instructively demonstrates the necessity to grasp the literary epoch as a dynamic process that is not only cross-cultural but in many respects also transcending firm historical limits and therefore inevitably demands the comparative and (to use Gadamer's or Iser's term) *Wirkungsgeschichte* approach.

The volume with its 733 pages is quite an impressive achievement and it would be of little use if one attempted to present and evaluate all of 38 contributions individually.⁴ The projects of such extensiveness and complexity evoke in the reader – with a good reason – *a priori* respect and admiration, and confront a reviewer, who wants to do justice to them, with unsolvable dilemmas. For instance, it would be too unpretentious to limit oneself to merely summarizing the contributions; on the other hand, however, it would be much too pretentious even just to try to evaluate critically every single one of them, since it is virtually impossible to be an expert in such a variety of issues as treated in this volume (and this is why such a project can best be accomplished as a team work); yet again, to point out just some of them would be unfair. In this way the reviewer is confronted with the alternatives, none of which is ideal. Every choice is (pace Derrida) a wrong choice, yet the choice has to be made. Therefore, my decision is to focus mainly on the articles, theses or conclusions that particularly provoked my response, which is to say, a (hopefully fruitful) discussion and not only passive registration.

introductions to each volume but also in previous publications, mostly by John Neubauer, but also by Mario Valdés.

³ At least since the birth of the Reception Aesthetics; however we should not forget the fact that similar ideas already appeared in the late Russian formalism (Tynyanov) and Prague Structuralism, yet without the “global” resonance at the time.

⁴ As a matter of fact, to certain extent this has already been done by Angela Esterhammer.

The volume contains several contributions that due to their excellence, analytical skilfulness, comparative approach, innovativeness, or opening of new horizons deserve a reader's close attention. Such are for example "Night-sides of existence: Madness, dream etc." by Monica Schmitz-Emans, or "Doubling, doubles, duplicity, bipolarity" by Ernst Grabovszki, which are both very persuasive articles that in the best comparative manner present two typical Romantic topics. The same holds true for Sabine Rossbach's "Mirroring, abymization, potentiation (involution)" with an extremely interesting exposure of the connection between Novalis' idea of the infinitely progressing novel and mathematics, or for Gerald Gillespie's "The detective story and novel", analytically disclosing the history and pre-history of crime in the (Romantic) literature. Further on, Manfred Engel's "Variants of the Romantic 'Bildungsroman' (with a short note on the 'artist novel')" deserves attention not only due to its clear structuredness, but also due to the fact that it is an extensive, analytical article, introducing a new, interesting thesis that "the Romantic *Bildungsroman* in its radical version – the transcendental novel or the *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode, as I have called it – is a result of the attempt to 'romanticise' the novel-form by turning it as completely as possible into a romance" (290). It seems particularly important that attention is paid also to "literatures in European languages" outside Europe and the United States, especially those of Latin America. Jüri Talvet in his very informative contribution on Spanish and Latin American novel during Romanticism rightly observes that "[t]he three epicentres of the Romantic 'explosion' – German, English, French culture – have subsequently been thoroughly described, their multiple characteristics delineated and their canon firmly established," while the "peripheral" areas of Romanticism [...] still look much more vague and unexplored" (559). One has to welcome the decision that there are two more articles dedicated to the Spanish/Latin American subject, one of them being José Ricardo Chaves' article on occultism and fantastic in Spain and Latin America. Here the author rightly argues for the difference between the magic realism and fantastic (the distinction most clearly revealed in A. B. Chanady's useful study *Magical Realism and the Fantastic. Resolved Versus Unresolved*

*Antinomy*⁵) and again rightly draws the conclusion that J. L. Borges is often wrongly regarded as a magic realist writer. Another valuable contribution is “The fragment as structuring force” by Remo Ceserani and Paolo Zanotti with a clear introductory philosophical-theoretical reflection on the dialectics of organic unity and fragmentation. Finally, the last contribution in the volume – with the exception of *Conclusion* –, Elaine Martin’s “Rewrites and remakes: Screen adaptations of Romantic works”, offers a very interesting and useful overview and rounds up the impressive image of the volume as a whole. In fact, it would hardly be an exaggeration to state that in general, all articles are valuable studies, written by distinguished researchers, bringing many new insights or at least offering useful overviews.

However, it would also be odd and even rather unproductive if such a volume had not provoked also a reader’s response, a desire to enter into a discussion here and there. After all, the dialogic nature of comparative literature – in other words, its “permanent crisis” – necessarily includes also an intradisciplinary dialogue. A comparatist work without such an effect ought to be viewed as unsuccessful. Therefore, in the following lines I will concentrate on some issues that attracted my critically, or better, dialogically-oriented attention.

To begin with, it seems to be disputable whether the French Revolution really plays such a distinguished and obvious role in Goethe’s *Novelle* as argued in the article of Gerhart Hoffmeister. All other works analyzed in this context do exhibit *explicit* allusions to the French revolution. In *Novelle*, however, the explicit connection is missing. It is established only *a posteriori*, due to the “allegorical” or better, “metaphorical” (18) interpretation, which is but only one of

⁵ Which would deserve to be mentioned in Chaves’ contribution, along with some other important authors, dealing with the same subject, such as Theo D’haen’s “Postmodernisms: From Fantastic to Magic realist” (in *International Postmodernism*, CHLEL series).

the possible interpretations, as a matter of fact not a very persuasive one.⁶ Goethe himself in his conversations with Eckermann, when discussing *Novelle*, drew attention to some other issues.

It goes without saying that Hoffmeister's interpretation is interesting, yet the theme of the French Revolution in the *Novelle* seems to be more his invention than Goethe's, and *Novelle*, in my view, would deserve treatment in some other respects. For instance, it would be probably better to pay it due attention in the interesting article by Dorothy Figueira, dealing among other also with the presence of supernatural in the Romantic prose, for *Novelle* presents the intrusion of what Goethe called *das Demonische* in our real world, i.e. of this *unheimlich* dimension, which Rudolf Otto (*The Holy*) and Karl Jaspers (*The Philosophical Faith*) precisely in connection with Goethe designated as the religious. Furthermore, this could be also applied to Guerrero-Strachan's contribution, attributing "the uncanny" in the short story merely to Tieck and Hoffmann, but not to Goethe. A detailed analysis of *Novelle* in his article, dealing with the Romantic terminology issues, would be justified also due to the fact that this was the text Goethe used – in his conversations with Eckermann – to launch and also demonstrate his definition of novella ("unerhörtes Ereignis").

Guerrero-Strachan's article calls for attention also due to some other reasons. For instance, an attentive reader might ask herself or himself how exactly to understand the claim that the "crucial generic term" novella (*Novelle*) in German-speaking countries "is first mentioned in Friedrich Schlegel's 'Nachricht von den poetischen Werken des Johannes Boccaccio' (Notice about Boccaccio's Poetic Works 1801)" (366). Namely, if we consult Friedrich Schlegel's work, the term "Novelle" is definitely "first mentioned" already in some earlier and also more important writings, such as *The critical fragments* (*Kritische Fragmente*, 1797) and the *Athenäum fragments* (1789), here at least twice: once in connection with Goethe's collection of short stories *Conversations of German Refugees* (*Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*, 1795), and one more time in the way that completely corresponds to the established contemporary

⁶ However, it attracts our attention due to its extensiveness.

definitions of the novella. Before 1801, Schlegel used the term or even extensively discussed novella in several other works, for instance in *On the Study of Greek Poetry* (*Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, 1797, written in 1795), or in *Dialogue on Poesy* (*Gespräch über die Poesie*, 1800).

In addition to this one could also discuss some terminological solutions offered by Guerrero-Strachan. He uses in his contribution the term “the modern short story”, and traces its beginnings as early as in the German Romanticism and in the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne. However, the extent and the range of the term “modern” in this context remain unclear and several possible objections arise. Regarding the fact that Guerrero-Strachan’s discussion is devoted among other to the terminological issues and that the term “short story” was launched by Poe, one asks oneself whether the short story before Poe can justifiably be called “modern”. Following Charles May, quoted also in Guerrero-Strachan’s article,⁷ the term “*modern* short story” applies to the short story after Chekhov and Joyce, who reformed the traditional short story with some revolutionary novelties, reflecting the sense of “modernity”. It is true, May’s definition, even if offering the most persuasive argumentation, is not the only one possible. There are also some others, and one of the reasons for the different uses of the term “modern short story”⁸ seems to be its broad English usage that in contrast to, for instance, the German usage,⁹ collects under its heading the entire short fiction, in any case

⁷ However, the subtitle of his book *The Short Story: The Reality of Artifice* is in Bibliography at the end of Guerrero-Strachan’s article wrongly quoted as “The Artifice of Reality” (381).

⁸ Let me quote Frank Myszor here, an author who didn’t regard it necessary to clear the dilemma, despite the fact that the title of his book is *The Modern Short Story*: “The phrase ‘the modern short story’ generally refers to works written after about 1849 to the present time, although there is some argument for choosing the later date of 1880” (Myszor 8).

⁹ Cf. for example seminal works of Ruth Kilchenmann and Erna Kritsch Neuse. English terminology exposes its shortcomings here. In Romanticism, on the field of short fiction appeared a new *formbildende* tendency, and consequently next to novella the short story evolved. Some national literary terminologies (like German, Croatian, Serbian, Slovene etc.) tend to

also novella. Thus Guerrero-Strachan cannot be reproached with his usage of the term “the modern short story” as illegitimate. However, his article would only gain in clarity if his terminological choice would be at least briefly commented upon.

Finally, our attention is attracted by one more author’s claim. Guerrero-Strachan correctly argues that at the end of the 19th century (according to May, the time of the rise of “the modern short story”), a structural change takes place in the form of the “lack of plot” (381). In addition, however, he surprisingly concludes that “forms such as the sketch [...] because of their lack of plot [...] lost their pre-eminence and, at the end of the nineteenth century, came to be considered as an outdated form” (381). Not only many examples from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century (Chekhov, Cankar, Joyce, Lawson, Saki, or a bit later Borges) deny such a statement. It would also be useful to confront this viewpoint with the findings of many researchers who maintain that the characteristic feature of “the modern short story” in the 20th century is exactly the turn from the outer into the inner world, and that consequently short story adopts the characteristic structure of the sketch, which in this way becomes one of the central genres in metafictional or minimalist fiction (for instance in Carver’s) of the last three decades, far from being “an outdated form”.

In many respects provocative and inspiring is also the article of Monica Spiridon “Torn halves: Romantic narrative fiction between homophony and polyphony”. According to her, “Bakhtin’s hypothesis that Dostoievskii founded the modern novel and deconstructed the monologue-oriented narrative (Bakhtin 1970)” is wrong, since polyphony can be detected already in many Romantic novels, “which demonstrate the interplay between homophony and polyphony”, (435) such as for example Romantic irony, viewed as “splitting of narrative voices and levels” (436). She concludes that Romantic authors already used polyphony since they “seem less interested in showing *what* happened than in *how* to communicate it to the reader. The dramatic split of the *narrative levels*, the ‘constructive irony’,

preserve the terminological differentiation, dismissed in English by the general term “short story”. Cf. Virk 2004.

the emphasis laid on the generic function of poetry, etc. end up by stimulating a *diegetic crisis* which expresses itself as a discursive polyphony” (450).

Spiridon’s article seems to be interesting at least in two respects. First, it is a good example of the approach that does not analyse the Romantic phenomena merely from the point of view of the Romantic episteme but reads Romantic prose fiction also in a transhistorical perspective. This, of course, makes possible new, even surprising insights. Spiridon’s claims, for example, that the typical Romantic “manœuvres end up by distracting the reader from the story, switching his interest towards the discourse itself” (443) or, that “Romantic fictional prose deliberately and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (446), do for instance read as the established and more or less accepted definitions of Postmodernist fiction. Spiridon’s article enables us to see the continuity between Romanticism and Postmodernism that more explicitly than in any other post-Romantic period displays itself in taking over the characteristic narrative techniques and devices. The question remains, however, whether the use of these techniques in the work of German Romanticists really can be interpreted as “postmodern” as in Spiridon’s reading. To avoid a detailed discussion here¹⁰ let us just mention that this would blur any clear distinction between Romanticism and Postmodernism – which, of course, is one of the possible views.

The second interesting aspect of Spiridon’s article is her re-interpretation of Bakhtin’s polyphony in terms of semiotics, discourse theory, and narratology. In any case Spiridon deals with a very important issue here, reflecting the Romantic novel in terms of Bakhtin’s theory. Bakhtin’s understanding of the novel as a protean

¹⁰ Just in short: It seems to me that “the relationship between fiction and reality” in Romanticism is connected with the belief that art is a synthesis of life, therefore the Romantic writers – also with the help of the narrative techniques, correctly analyzed by Spiridon – tend to bring the art into life as the highest truth that as such remains unproblematized. Not so in Postmodernism: every truth here is absent. Literature is merely fiction, also reality is just fiction.

genre, transgressing all limits, posed by traditional canons, being in a constant development, exhibiting syncretism of all kinds, is extremely close to the Romantic conceptualizations of the novel as unlimited, absolute form, embracing all other literary forms, such as defined in Friedrich Schlegel's famous fragment. There can be no doubt that such an understanding adequately reflected also in the Romantic novels themselves. The question, however, is whether the "discursive polyphony" Spiridon involves here really is what Bakhtin had in mind discussing polyphony in the novels of Dostoevskii. Spiridon does not actually closely analyze Bakhtin's views, and consequently it remains unclear in what way exactly she understands them. Does she, for instance, by "polyphony" refers to what Bakhtin calls "dialogism" and what, also in his view, emerged long before Dostoevskii? Or has she really in mind the very specific feature Bakhtin discovers only as late as in the work of the great Russian classic? To be sure, more precise illumination of Bakhtin's view would in no regard change or supplement this excellent treatise on narrative techniques of Romantic fiction; it would, however, help to clarify whether the term "polyphony" is really used in Bakhtinian sense, which would then better justify the critique of the Russian theorist.

Such a carefully prepared project with a wide variety of themes studied could hardly be accused of neglecting some particular, possibly interesting topics. The three editors in their *Conclusion* rightly remark, that there are principally no limits to the research of Romanticism and that of course also many other points of interest could be included in the volume; if this is not so, it is, one can infer, mostly due to the practical reasons – sooner or later, the project has to be concluded. Therefore it does not make much sense to discuss the eventual omissions of the project. In this regard, as already pointed above, it deserves all praise, since Romanticism in all five volumes together, as well as separately the Romantic fiction in the last volume, are elaborated quite extensively. Let me only add that an article dealing with the Romantic legacy in Postmodernism would perfectly well fit into the Third part of the *RPF*, since this legacy has been extremely rich, particularly in prose fiction. It is traceable not only in the works of Italo Calvino or Vladimir Nabokov, as

parenthetically mentioned in the Joel Black's contribution (p. 596), or in Fuentes' fiction, as one could infer from Aldridge's article, but in short stories and novels of many other postmodernists as well. Patrick Süskind, for example, imitates in his novel *Perfume* the typical Romantic form of the artist-novel; the same can be claimed for Robert Schneider's novel *Schlafesbruder*. Also Andrei Bitov in his novel *Pushkin house*, or Umberto Eco in *The Name of the Rose*, inspired among other by the tradition of the gothic romance, disclose the close connection to Romanticism. Many other authors could be enumerated here; let us only add instead that the Romantic irony is clearly the most important predecessor of the characteristic post-modernist narrative devices such as metafiction and intertextuality, as follows also from the above discussed contribution of Spiridon.

If my attention so far has been focused more or less on the separate contributions to the *RPF* volume, in what follows it will extend not only beneath its borders, or beneath the borders of the Romanticism sub-series, but it will embrace also the series CHLEL as a whole and to some extent even the issues regarding literary historiography in general. Let me begin this discussion with the question that nowadays seems to have become obsolete – terminology.

It seems to be important for a literary historical project that according to some general idea should aim at a relatively consensual, integral, transnationally coordinated presentation of certain periods and epochs in the history of literatures in European languages, to operate within a relatively confirmed, established literary-historical terminology.¹¹ In *RPF*, however, sometimes more specific terminological uses appear, which seem to be taken for granted, even if they are not. This can lead to unnecessary confusions and ambiguities. Let me give two examples.

¹¹ After all the coordinated terminology as a minimal common framework seems to be a *conditio sine qua non* for a project like this one to be a team work rather than just a collection of various contributions to the same theme.

My first example regards the use of the term Realism. In his article, Markus Bernauer treats the novels of Sir Walter Scott as predominantly realist. His main reference in this respect is Lukács. Such a treatment is of course possible and also legitimate. Yet without additional terminological explanation it is nevertheless misleading. It employs without warning, within the framework of a periodization project that *per definitionem* ought to treat Romanticism as a historical entity, an ahistorical, typological concept of Realism as a distinct “approach toward reality”. The author’s conclusion therefore is as follows: “Romanticism and Realism can no longer be understood as successive epochs of the history of literature as still proclaimed in the textbooks. Rather, they are poetic approaches toward reality that turn in phases in the 19th century” (305). Applying the term “realism” in such manner is, of course, nothing new. It is, as a matter of fact, quite common, for instance in typological approaches discussing “Realism”, for instance, in the ancient Rome (Petronius), Renaissance (*Lazarillo de Tormes*), Enlightenment etc., actually, as demonstrated in Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, in many epochs of Western literature. Such an application is not only possible, it can also give good results. However, it might be questionable in the clearly historically oriented periodization project, particularly if not reflected upon, and if it differs from the (historical) use of the term in the majority of volume’s contributions.¹² At this point, one would expect the editor’s intervention, coordinating or at least explaining various levels of application of periodization terms. It seems, however, that the omission of such an intervention is deliberate. It is reasonable to believe that the editorial standpoint is expressed in the editor’s (Gillespie’s) *Introduction*, explaining that the “contributors [...] sought to avoid replicating any rigid concept of a single-minded stylistic period or dominant intellectual coding” (xiv) – a standpoint to which we shall return later.

My second terminological remark regards the issue of pre-Romanticism (in substantive or adjective form), a term, used in several articles in *RPF* (for instance Gillespie’s [significantly in

¹² Yet not in all of them; one of the exceptions in this regard is for instance Guerrero-Strachan’s article.

quotation marks], Dieterle's, Lorant's, Kümmerling-Meibauer's, van Gorp's, Bernauer's, Steigerwald's), but without the necessary explanation remaining somehow unclear. It seems to be quite obvious that the term, perhaps first introduced in 1909 by Daniel Mornet, yet more powerfully engaged in the writings of Paul Van Tieghem some decade later, for comparative literature still presents a difficulty, and that in some national literary critical traditions is more established than in others.¹³ To be sure, the CHLEL series devoted two separate volumes to the epoch, regarded by some as pre-Romanticism, yet under the neutral heading "Le tournant du siècle des Lumières 1760–1820: Les genres en vers des Lumières au Romantisme" or "Die Wende von der Aufklärung zur Romantik 1760–1820)", indicating the avoidance regarding the use of the term pre-Romanticism as the confirmed, well established literary historical designation. The reason for this could lie in the circumstance that "pre-Romanticism is predominantly characteristic of smaller European literatures"¹⁴ and not of the "central" ones. Yet the fact remains that the term pre-Romanticism for several decades inflamed comparativist debates, and since it is also used by several contributors in the *RPF*, the reader has a good reason to expect to find at least a brief comment explaining the relation between the terms pre-Romanticism and Romanticism in the Introduction.

Unfortunately this is not the case; moreover, even at least a brief sketch of which concept of Romanticism is taken as the starting point seems to be missing. (In this regard, *RPF* continues the practice of preceding volumes in the Romanticism sub-series.) There is of course a fine editor's introduction – or, looking back to *Nonfictional Romantic Prose* volume, a surveying introductory essay of Virgil Nemoianu, but both of them avoid giving definite borders of Romanticism.

To be sure, expecting or even demanding a firm terminological definitions nowadays looks old-fashioned and outdated. It seems to be generally accepted – and in accordance with the contemporary epistemologies – that nobody is authorized to do such authoritative

¹³ To some extent this is also evident in *RPF*.

¹⁴ Kos 33; here Kos refers to the study of Karl Křejčí.

definitions. Not only is Romanticism, as often referred to, a border-crossing phenomenon; also our methodologies, cultural backgrounds etc. are different, and consequently there is no single, unanimous, definite concept of Romanticism. There are only (this consequence has been, if I remember correctly, carried out in *International Postmodernism*) Romanticisms. Besides, when we attempt to define a certain phenomenon, like a literary period or epoch, for instance, we are always involved in a hermeneutic circle. If we define in advance, what our research object is, we already determine the outcome of the research, etc. – All these are objections that the main editor Gillespie is very well aware of. In his *Introduction*, he even mentions some of them in favour of the decision that the *RPF* volume, as well as the Romantic project as a whole, deliberately refuses to offer an integral image of Romanticism.

Yet such epistemological attitude – which is admittedly difficult to avoid nowadays – brings also some deficiencies with it. It goes without saying that the reader, consulting the *RPF* volume, expects to get some information about various understandings of Romanticism. But at the same time, he or she also expects its “non-pluralist” conceptualization, in the same way as he or she expects from a dictionary or encyclopaedia entry a short and clear definition. In short, the reader nevertheless expects such volume to be a part of a synthesis, of a relatively clear concept, despite the above mentioned risks involved. A volume with pretensions to be *representative* – and all volumes of CHLEL are of this kind – simply has to take such a risk. After all, an “idiomatic”, uncoordinated conception of Romanticism is no more credible and reliable than the compromised “coordinated” one. When we replace one incomplete understanding of Romanticism with many of them, we gain nothing; on the contrary, we lose the heuristic advantage of the “coordinated” one. Besides, it would be difficult to find good arguments for claiming such “idiomatic” understandings as representative. And representative they should be, else why would they – and not any arbitrary other – be included in a *representative* volume on Romanticism? And if *RPF* does not want to be representative, what then is the *differentia specifica* of volumes in the CHLEL series? How does *RPF* then differs from many other volumes on Romanticism that also want to

illuminate it from different points of view and in different perspectives?

When Henry H. H. Remak wrote the “General preface to all volumes published as a part of the ‘comparative history’”, he maintained that such a history “coordinates related or comparable phenomena from an international point of view” and that it aims at “truly international syntheses” (Remak 5). To me, such an idea still sounds reasonable. It is certainly not impossible to imagine that, for instance, the Romanticism project would collect information on all Romanticisms in literatures in European languages, discuss some major theories of Romanticism, try to coordinate and correct them according to the new information obtained, and in this way offer a “truly international synthesis” along with the varieties and deviations that resist a coordination and prefer to remain idiomatic.¹⁵ Such a “synthesis”, simultaneously involving also resistances, would in my view be the optimal reference and starting point for any comparativist research in Romanticism. After all, I can imagine no authority being more competent to do this job than ICLA/AILC with the CHLEL.

But regarding the prosperity of the initial concept of CHLEL, something obviously went wrong. It is indicative that Remak’s thoughts prefaced only few volumes and then vanished. In the last decades, many methodological shifts happened, also in the field of literary historiography. The traditional literary historical model, which seemed reasonable at the time when the series started, became problematic. New methodological models appeared that were only loosely connected to the original conception, until such revolutionary new concept emerged that a new sub-series had to be launched, the *Literary Cultures* sub-series.

It became obvious – even if this remained unadmitted – that the CHLEL project had been in many respects too optimistically projected. Regarding the methodological issues, the original conception of this huge, long-term project obviously did not consider enough the possibility, that the idea of the team work in a traditional sense of the

¹⁵ *International Postmodernism* proves that such idea is realisable.

word¹⁶ – i. e. the idea of a group of people, each of them researching one part of vast material, sharing their methodological points of departure and aiming at a common, unified, coordinated result with the help of harmonized, coordinated research tools – would not be acceptable any more two or three decades later. At the same time, the idea of historiography became problematic, observing in the history (of literature) mere continuities that can be linked together in a convincing historical Grand narrative. In short, CHLEL experienced a constant methodological crisis and each volume tried to overcome it in its own way. The unity, implied in the series' title, dissolved.

Yet CHLEL is not burdened only with the methodological problems. From the very beginning it has also been subject to some practical and organizational troubles that sometimes might even prove as (latent) ideological. When Remak wrote his “General preface to all volumes published as part of the ‘comparative history’”, of all disturbing centrisms he was most aware of Eurocentrism. Therefore he correctly predicted that CHLEL would try to avoid it.¹⁷ Yet it seems to remain unnoticed – or at least not deconstructed enough – “Eurocentrism within Eurocentrism”, namely Westerneurocentrism,¹⁸ displaying itself in several ways. First, all contributions to the entire series are written in three “big” west-European languages, English, German and French (but not in some others just as big, like,

¹⁶ One could also say: team work as characteristic in natural sciences.

¹⁷ Many efforts have been undertaken in this respect so far: two volumes on Sub-Saharan Africa, three volumes on literature in Carribean, and also other volumes devote some of their attention to the non-European literatures. *International Postmodernism* is probably the best example here since it deals in separate articles with Postmodernism in the majority of world literatures. *RPF* also devotes enough attention to the Romanticism and its resonances in non-European literatures, even in Japanese literature, which is, of course, not a “literature in European language”.

¹⁸ It is worth mentioning that already Markiewicz, Zhirmunskij, and Etienneble recognized Eurocentrism as Westerneurocentrism (cf. Juvan 2004: 138).

for instance, Spanish or Russian), in *RPF* even only in English. To be sure, there are pragmatical reasons for such a decision that must not be underestimated, and I am not able to offer a good alternative here. Yet the problem is that one centrism seems to lead automatically and imperceptibly to another. For instance, the opinion obviously still prevails that everything important and valuable in the literary field happened exclusively in some west-European – and perhaps sometimes also in Russian – literatures. With the exception of the *International Postmodernism* volume¹⁹ this holds true for all volumes in the series that, aiming at “truly international syntheses”, treat a particular epoch, such as the Romanticism sub-series. The large majority of articles in *RPF* treat mainly the literary activities in German, French, and English literatures, some of them including also Russian, Italian, Spanish, and Latin-American literature, all other literatures, however, as a rule remain more or less unnoticed as if they never existed. To be honest, there are few exceptions to this rule, for instance in the articles of Dieterle, Klinkert, Kümmerling-Meibauer, Isbell, and Bernauer,²⁰ and in few contributions by the authors who do not come from the “core” literary cultures and who devote (quite often unproportionally a lot of) attention to their own national literatures. Szegedy-Maszák extensively treats Hungarian authors, Guerrero-Strachan Spanish, Halse Scandinavian (or, inspecting the previous volume in the sub-series, *Nonfictional Romantic Prose*, co-edited by the Romanian scholar:²¹ Nemoianu, Angheliescu, Spiridon Romanian, Angheliescu also Polish and Russian authors).

As long as ICLA/AILC does not change the title of the series to, for instance, “A Comparative History of Literatures in *some major* European Languages”, there is absolutely no excuse for ignoring such a large number of “marginal” European literatures, for which in

¹⁹ And, of course, volumes devoted to particular geographical areas.

²⁰ However, even here there is no equal treatment of these other literatures; usually they are so to say mentioned in passing.

²¹ Quite obviously, this was the only way for valuable scholars from the “margin” to be included as collaborators in one of the CHLEL volumes. It is namely quite indicative that as many as four contributors to this volume are Romanians.

many cases Romanticism has even been the most important period in their literary histories. The editors of the *RPF* seemed to be very well aware of this fact, since they drew attention to it already in their Introduction, and returned to it later in the *Conclusion* as follows: “As explained in the Introduction, in general our volume has ceded any more extensive work on the literatures of East and Southeast Europe to a separate project in the CHLEL series” (697). Yet this explanation cannot serve as a very good argument. First, we are obviously not dealing with a consistent, coordinated, controlled principle, since, as already mentioned above, some articles in *RPF* nevertheless touch upon these literary regions. Secondly, this “separate project” due to its “revolutionary” methodology cannot adequately – at least not coordinated with the *RPF* volume – capture the Romanticism subject.²² And thirdly, Neubauer’s and Cornis-Pope’s project does reveal the same deficiencies in this regard as all other CHLEL volumes.²³ – The logical conclusion – at least for the observer from the “margin” – is that also to the editors of the Romanticism project, whether they admit it or not, European Romanticism above all means the literatures of “the golden triangle” – and occasionally some other literatures, the rest is but not really worth mentioning.

This extremely unfortunate condition is partly due to another centrism already touched upon earlier, namely the obvious conviction that good comparatists can be found first of all at the West-European or North-American universities, and consequently a large majority of contributors, with the telling exception of two, were recruited from these universities.²⁴ Here I do not want to lament this

²² Besides, there was no such “explanation” in the preceding three volumes, although the omission was the same.

²³ For a criticism of HLCECE from the Slovene point of view cf. Dović 2008, Koron 2008.

²⁴ It is quite interesting to observe how the perception of this is subject to ideological overdeterminance even if at first sight it looks as a matter of neutral objective statistics. My (critical) view is a view from the “margin”; an (apologetic) view from the “centre” looks quite different. For instance, regarding the “statistics” in question, Angela Esterhammer in her review of the *RPF* observes: “While roughly a third of the contributors are based in

state of affairs, also not call the attention to the important achievements of Eastern literary scholars, to the detriment of literary studies “discovered” (by the West, of course) only decades later. I only want to demonstrate some consequences that are not in favour of the project. The editors and contributors wanted to be correct; therefore in several cases they tried at least to some extent to alleviate the Westerneurocentrism, by including some information about the “minor” literatures, which they probably gained from the secondary sources.²⁵ Let me give only one example, particularly unheard-of for a Slovene reader,²⁶ taken from the otherwise very interesting, convincing, cleverly written and in many respects also “politically correct” Isbell’s article on “Romantic novel and verse romance”. It seems a bit odd to read in the same paragraph within the same line of argument that, for instance, “Estonia has Kreutzwald’s folk epic *Kalevipoeg* [...], Greece’s Solomos is mainly a lyric poet [...] Ukraine has Shevchenko’s nationalistic Cossack verse. Serbo-Croatian has at least two folk epics [...]” (510), “Czech has Ján Kollár’s expanding sonnet cycle *Slávy dcera* [...], narrating love and national sentiments [...] and Karel Hynek Mácha’s *Máj* [...], a Byronic verse romance [...] Hungarian has folk epics” (511) – on the other hand, however, “Latvia and Lithuania, Rumania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Macedonia and Albania have national stirrings in the period but no romances” (510). I do not intend to go into a detailed demonstration of all “curiosities” included in this paragraph. Rather, I shall limit myself to what disturbs the most a reader appertaining to my own,

the United States and another third in German-speaking Europe, the team as a whole is thoroughly international» (51). From my point of view this is not at all such a good score. Let me just mention that the entire Eastern Europe (from Russia to the Balkans, thus the region that “contributed” to our discipline such distinguished scholars as – and schools as – the Russian Formalism, Prague Structuralism, Ingarden, Bakhtin, Lotman, Konstantinovič, Đurišin, Zhirmunskij, Lukács, even Wellek, to mention just some classics) is represented by only two (sic!) contributors located in this area!

²⁵ My following examples demonstrate the limits of Moretti’s proposal to study world literature on the basis of secondary sources.

²⁶ And I’m quite positive that readers, coming from other “minor” literary cultures, could find similar objections.

Slovene literary culture. Namely, why do all the above mentioned national literatures have either “folk epic” or “verse romance” or “sonnet cycle” or “nationalistic verse” or authors that are “lyric poets”, while Slovenia (and other nations cited in the same line, sharing their marginality) only has “national stirrings [...] but no romances”, and, obviously, nothing else – even though Slovene literature, for instance, in the epoch of Romanticism that is of crucial importance in Slovene literary history, also had “a lyrical poet, a sonnet cycle, a folk epic or verse romance”, all this not in some marginal appearance but in the person of the most important national poet France Prešern, who did not deserve even to be mentioned, let alone to be treated in any of the five volumes of the *Romantic project*, although, of course, entries on him can be found in every decent (English, German, French, Italian etc.) reference book (including an extensive article on easily accessible Wikipedia), and although it goes without saying that, regarding his verse epic *Krst pri Savici*, “... Prešeren, dem größten Dichter der Slowenen und Schöpfer der slowenischen Literatursprache, ist mit dieser formvollendeten Verserzählung der Anschluss an die europäische romantische Literatur gelungen” (Kindlers Literaturlexikon IV 803).

I must admit that I am not adherent of these radical “postmodern” interventions in literary historiography²⁷ that tend to minimize or completely annihilate each difference between the “centre” and the “margin”. There can be no doubt about the fact that in some literatures, Romanticism appeared earlier, while in some others (much) later, and that (whether this seems to us justly or not) the “central” literatures most often exhibited immediate influence on the “marginal” ones. Therefore I do accept as a necessary evil that in accordance with this, the “major” literatures have the lion’s share in a volume, aimed at a presentation of the Romanticism within the frame of the CHLEL. Yet at the same time we should not forget that “smaller” literatures are in the same extent the irremovable part of the phenomenon called Romanticism as the “bigger” ones and that in

²⁷ Here, I believe, I share my views with Gillespie who in this context in one of his brilliant essays discusses the “postmodern revisionists” (Gillespie 2004: 56).

the literary histories of the former, Romanticism sometimes played an even more decisive role than in the literary histories of the latter. Even more, very often “smaller” literatures developed authentic versions of Romanticism that enriched and extended its merely “western” image. In other words: Romanticism is Romanticism of the “central” as well as “peripheral” literatures.²⁸ Without the later, its image is incomplete, especially if we understand literary history in terms of *intertextuality* and *interliterarity*, and not as colonialism. And it seems to be quite reasonable to expect that such a literary history would be the most important aim of CHLEL. Yet somehow these expectations do not fulfil.

Of course, it is easy to imagine that many of deficiencies mentioned above are due to pragmatic or organizational problems. I shall return to this a bit later. Right now I want to stress that I am quite aware of the fact that from the viewpoint of the “centre” such observations look exaggerated and unnecessary. But exactly this is the point I am trying to make here: from the perspective of the “margin”, the things look different,²⁹ yet this different perspective is

²⁸ After all, if the editors found interesting the resonance of Romanticism in Japan, why did they not find it even more interesting to explore the Romanticism in “smaller” European literatures; namely, the volume I review here is entitled “Romantic Prose Fiction”, without the additional subtitle (for instance: “in great” or “Western” or both “literatures”), and, as already mentioned, is a part of the series “Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages”, and not “in Great European” or “in West-European Languages”.

²⁹ For instance – to give one more example, admittedly not taken from the *RPF*, but tightly connected to it, which I use here for the sake of its demonstrative clarity – Angela Esterhammer in her review of *RPF* observes that “dozens of national literatures are represented in the volume” (51), which in itself sounds quite reasonable and not subject to any doubt, while in reality is simply an overstatement, unfortunately disclosing the still prevailing westerneurocentrism. “Latvia and Lithuania, Rumania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Macedonia and Albania have national stirrings in the period but no romances” (510) – the only passage in the volume where most of these literatures appear – can hardly be called a “representation”; at the utmost one could say that “dozens of national literatures are *mentioned* in the volume”; the only ones “represented” are English, German, French, Latin American, Spanish, to some extend also Italian, Russian, Hungarian, Romanian.

completely absent in the entire project “Romanticism”. There exists only the perspective of “centre”. One simply has to agree with Marijan Dović, who in his review of Neubauer’s project states that there is a “tradition of European comparative literature that is only seemingly supra-national, while in reality its latent motive is tracing the circles of influence of big cultures and drawing the lines of their expansions, only passively recorded by the smaller cultures, which with greater or smaller delay join to it” (Dović 167).

Such a statement does not imply that we should simply invert such a condition. It does not intend to violently equalize the “central” and “marginal” literatures in the sense of value levelling. According to Ivo Pospíšil, the “idea of a priori equality of all national literatures, represented by their best works” (141), is wrong. Yet on the other hand, one also “has to simultaneously reject the desire to unify the value system of the literary field in the way that one model is favoured as a sample, worth of imitation“ (141). This centralist perspective, this out-of-date and incorrect tradition is, unfortunately, still persistent, and even the newest projects of CHLEL are not completely immune against it.

I am aware of the fact that it is much easier to criticise than to be constructive, and that, when the battle is over, everyone is a general. It is therefore right to show a more constructive attitude in the conclusion. Despite the above mentioned deficiencies I still believe that *RPF* is a valuable, in many respects quite informative, carefully conceived and serious monograph that – despite the objections raised – importantly enriches our image of Romanticism. The majority of my objections actually derive from the fact that the volume is a part of a larger whole, consequently put into a particular context, the concept of CHLEL, which in many respects proved to be problematic. In my view the difficulties connected to this huge project are mainly on two levels: on the conceptual and on the “executional”, “organizational” one. None of these difficulties is irremediable.

There is not much to say about the organizational-executional deficiencies. Particularly the criticism, coming from non-Western

scholars, points to the circumstance that many of these problems are actually due to the (not yet overcome) westerneurocentrism, still prevalent in the results of this important project. Once this will change, it should not be too difficult to organize a competent, internationally more balanced teams of collaborators, or, if this is not possible, at least an international system of reviewers, who would check, each for its own geographical or cultural region, the proposed contributions.³⁰ In this way the editors (“the centre”) would hopefully get rid of their obvious mistrust of collaborators from the “periphery”, which would result in broadening the circle of potential collaborators as well as the areas of research involved.

The consolidation of the conceptual problems seems to present much more difficulties. The fact that the CHLEL volumes for some time now lack the general editorial foreword probably denotes that the initial unitary concept gradually evaporated. Here, comparative literary historiography pays the tribute to never-ending process of fast paradigm shifts that present huge problems for long-term projects (particularly for the team-work). Comparative literature has to continue to take part in the ongoing debates on literary-historiographic methodology and to propose new approaches, which would help us to understand literary cultures, literature’s textuality and contextuality better than we do now. In short, the pluralism in the field of literary historiography is a necessity nowadays. Yet such pluralism does not exclude traditional literary-historical syntheses as planned by the pioneers of the CHLEL series. They are as much irreplaceable as the emerging alternative literary histories. In fact, they ought to be – they ought to take the burden and responsibility for being – this central reference that instead of incompatibilities would seek for a consensus and thus create a point of reference for every discussion, also, of course, for an alternative or critical one. The consolidation of terminological discrepancies would not be an unimportant task of such literary history. This sort of project would

³⁰ Despite some hesitations, in the age of the Internet this really should not present too big a problem. Examples of a very well coordinated international cooperation already exist, for instance the series “Reception of British Authors in Europe”.

indeed be subject to various policies of power, but so are even the recent critical revisionist proposals. One of the most unpleasant objections to the treatment I propose would be that such a concept is out-of-date, which, of course, is not very difficult to argue. Yet as already mentioned, moderate conservativeness would do no harm at least to the long-term projects and to projects aimed at “truly international synthesis”. The question, however, is, whether there is enough courage for such an enterprise in contemporary comparative literary historiography.

Compared to the “Literary Cultures” sub-series, which in my view fulfils some other, no less important mission, the *RPF* can be understood as a moderate move into this direction, a step that I certainly welcome.

References

- Dovič, M. 2008. Slovenska literarna kultura v okviru Vzhodne Srednje Evrope: post-nacionalna perspektiva. – *Primerjalna književnost* 31, 2, 159–169.
- Esterhammer, A. 2009. Romantic Prose Fiction. – *Literary Research* 25, 51–57.
- Gillespie, G. 2004. *By way of comparison. Reflections on the theory and practice of comparative literature*. – Honoré Champion éditeur, Paris.
- Juvan, M. 2004. Slavistika, komparativistika, Slovani in Srednja Evropa. – *Primerjalna književnost* 27, 2, 131–138.
- Kindlers Literaturlexikon IV* 1986. Zürich: Kindler Verlag.
- Koron, A. 2008. O topografskih vidikih *Zgodovine literarnih kultur Vzhodne Srednje Evrope*. – *Primerjalna književnost* 31, 2, 170–177.
- Kos, J. 1987. *Predromantika*. Ljubljana: DZS. (Literarni leksikon; 31)
- Myszor, F. 2001. *The Modern Short Story*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Contexts in Literature)
- Nonfictional Romantic Prose* 2004. (Steven P. Sondrup, Virgil Nemoianu (eds.), in collaboration with Gerald Gillespie. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. (Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages XVIII))
- Pospišil, I. 2008. Primerjalna književnost, srednjeevropski kulturni prostor in teorija literarne zgodovine. – *Primerjalna književnost* 31, 2, 137–148.

Remak, H. H. H. 1988. General preface to all volumes published as part of the "Comparative history" – *Romantic Irony*. Ed. by Frederic Garber. Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó. (Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages VIII); 5–6.

Romantic Prose Fiction 2007. Gerald Gillespie, Manfred Engel, Bernard Dieterle (eds.). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. (Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages XXIII)

Virk, T. 2004. Problem vrstnega razlikovanja v kratki prozi. – *Slavistična revija* 52, 3, 279–293.