Introduction: Theory and Practice

It is my honour to be a guest editor of a special issue on theory and practice, with gratitude to Jüri Talvet and Katre Talviste at *Interlitteraria*. The critical method and the craft of close reading or practical criticism, theory and practice, are ancient kinds of writing in Europe and elsewhere. From the 1950s, literary criticism and theory gained independence from literary studies and theorists like Northrop Frye, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva helped to make theory into something related to literature but not subservient to practical criticism or the creation of literature, something independent in some ways or valued in and of itself. Marshall McLuhan and Roland Barthes helped to develop theories of media and culture that may have grown out of literary studies but that branched out. Close interpretation never parted company with theory or method. Deconstructionists, such as J. Hillis Miller, and postcolonial critics, like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, also used close readings and translations although they were advancing theory. Cultural studies theorists, such as Raymond Williams, cultural materialists, like Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore, and new historicists, such as Stephen Greenblatt, widened the theory from the 1960s into new ways to examine the cultural and historical dimensions of literature. In time, some programmes stopped examining literature closely or reduced literature to theory. That is just part of the story.

Neither theory nor practice is so simple as to divide one from the other or to make straw men of each other. It does little good to separate literature from culture, media or history or even Europe or the West from the world. Theory is a way to see or a way in and practice tests theory. If inductive, theory grows out of literature or related fields and if deductive, theory provides a hypothesis that can be tested by the evidence or interpretation of reading. They both need each other whether an inductive or deductive method is used.

This special issue makes its own contribution in a comparative or world context. The contributors are from Europe, North America and Asia and bring different perspectives to theory and literary texts and media. The essays or articles explore theory and practice in ways that expand the field of enquiry. In "Contemporary International/World Novels' Transmissibility from Partial Connections to Hermeneutics of Situation (With References to Glissant, Volpi, Murakami, and Rushdie)," Jean Bessière argues that owing to the novel's formal and semantic flexibility, it is often associated with globalization. The novel is local and specific, transnational and global (worlding) and he interprets different kinds of novels to explore this paradox.

Shakespeare is a figure in this exploration of theory and practice, the comparative and the world. Jonathan Locke Hart's "Shakespeare in Theory and Practice" argues that while Shakespeare employed the word "practice," he never used the word "theory." Shakespeare also alludes to poetry and poets, philosophy and philosophers and the like. For I-Chun Wang, in "Geopolitics and Contesting Identities in Shakespeare's *The First Part of Henry VI,*" Shakespeare represents these elements as two intertwining motifs in this history play. the *First Part of Henry VI*. Shakespeare portrays the conquest of France by England and represents diplomatic relations and shifting identities through geography and spatial politics as related to nationhood. I-Chun Wang discusses the conflicts between France and England in terms of geopolitics and identities. In "Economic Obsession in Early Literary Imagination," Francis K. H. So examines consumption, fear of poverty and social justice/injustice in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and Thomas More's *Utopia*, which also represent positive and negative aspects of economy in terms of production, marketing, circulation and consumption. So argues that these works present micro and macro world views.

The next three articles look at imagination, speech acts and humour. Wong Hiu-Wai's "The Imagination of Criminals in Victorian London in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde,*" sees the split between West- and East-End London as being like Edward Said's Orientalism and also investigates this novel in term of Lombroso's *Criminal Man* (1876). These texts allow Wong to explore the cultural imagination of criminals in Victorian London. In "Literature as Conduct on Miller's Speech-act Theory and Its Application," Guo Rong says that Austin's speech-act theory has changed literary studies in the 1970s, including in the theory of Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, Derrida, de Man and J. Hillis Miller. Guo uses Miller to analyze *The Ninth Widow* by a Chinese overseas writer, Yan Geling. Christian Ylagan's "Who We Are Is What Makes Us Laugh: Humour as Discourse on Identity and Hegemony," maintains that humour has a sociocultural function geared to maintaining order through a subversion (or inversion) of the status quo. Ylagan also argues that humour is pragmatic and ontological and relates to group identity.

The next three articles examine cosmopolitanism, Orientalism and technology. Wang Ning's "Rethinking of the Crisis of Universalism: Toward a Pluralistic Orientation of Cosmopolitanism" says that modernity manifests itself in distinctive modes in various countries and nations and discusses how modernity was imported from the West into China. He also looks at the idea of cosmopolitanism through elements of ancient Chinese philosophy and offers of a new cosmopolitanism in the time of globalization. Jiang Yuqin's

"Orientalism and Re-Orientalism in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*," discusses how Martel employs paratexts such as the author's words and the author's interview with the protagonist. Besides postcolonial narration, Jiang sees in the departure of Richard Parker as the representation of Pi's final conformity to Western culture. In "Essence of Technology and Ecological Disaster: A Heideggerian Reading of Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*," Wu Lanxiang and Zhou Xiaolin use Martin Heidegger's critique of technology as a framework to conduct a textual analysis of Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and as an examination of the potential ecological disaster. Wu and Zhou also examine the poetic and the musical in the midst of this deterioration.

The final three articles discuss trauma, literary translation and narrative ethics. Wang Jinghui's "Virtue or Vice? Trauma Reflected in Mo Yan's *Frog*" suggests that the experience of the female character should be examined allegorically. Wang Jinghui says that this experience reveals the intricacy of human nature and the relation between the ideal and the actual. In "Omission and its Impact on Characterization Reshaping in Literary Translation: A Case Study of *Wolf Totem*," Wang Xiaoli explores, from a socio-cultural perspective, the use of omission in the English translation of a Chinese novel, *Wolf Totem*. She also looks at the shifts that occur in the characterization of the protagonist in the translated work. According to Zheng Shaomin's "Narrative Ethics of Post-Modern Visual Culture between Chinese 'Diors Series' and Western 'Loser Series' in Comparative Perspective" maintains that the characteristics of postmodern culture – from counterculture to irrationalism – tell us something significant about visual culture. Zheng makes a comparison of these two images in terms of narrative ethics and ethical values in postmodern visual culture.

These articles explore many aspects of theory and practice from scholars across the world. They examine a unique array of theories and practices in a variety of works and genres. The novel's formal and semantic flexibility in the milieu of globalization; Shakespeare in theory and practice; the comparative and the world; imagination, speech acts and humour in theory and practice; cosmopolitanism, Orientalism and technology; trauma, literary translation and narrative ethics are all part of this exploration of literature, media and culture in comparative and world contexts. Rather than say more, I turn readers to the articles themselves.

Jonathan Locke Hart