



Transcending the national: on worlding the peripheral literatures

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Abstract

The study is concerned with contemporary theoretical concepts of world literature (“literature of the world”, “worldliness of literature”, “world literary system”, “world literary republic”). Considering the results of the XXII International Congress ICLA/AICL in Macau 2019, it discusses how the concepts are reflected in the Slovenian scholar Marko Juvan’s monograph *Worlding a Peripheral Literature* (2019). The book analyses conditions under which small national texts (for example, Slavic) become world texts. According to Juvan, the space of world literature was historically originating in the mid-nineteenth century, in parallel with the genesis of national literatures. The decisive factors of this process included the importance of language and the significance of the country. On the one hand, Juvan’s idea of world literature admits that an acceptable consensus can be reached in the form of an epistemological and terminological basis defined by a set of concrete concepts and principles, on the other hand, the acceptance of inequality between the so-called big and small literatures as a way of thinking is a consequence of economic and mass media globalization. Overall, however, Juvan’s concept, inspired by Moretti’s theory of evolution and economic models, brings a fundamental theoretical contribution to current discussions on the forms, essence, and functions of world literature as a universal phenomenon.

Keywords National literature · World literature · Marko Juvan · Comparative literature

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If, nowadays, one were to search for a reason why to do research into world literature, one of the basic arguments would be a trivial fact that the contemporary world is getting more and more globalised and interconnected. What in the past was distant and foreign, it would be said, is now part of our everyday life. Getting closer geographically, what a paradox to its opposite—the sudden immediacy of “social distancing,” invites us to search for the closeness of cultures, for what connects us even at an interpersonal level. World literature implies the existence of a need for such interconnectedness, which, however, would not be possible without a contradictory movement, dialectically opposing the first one, that is, the efforts to preserve the right to be different, to be other. Various historical and political changes have brought various forms of otherness, reflecting not only the position of literature and culture in a given society, but also the position of a society (nation, region, etc.) in a global arrangement of the world.

One of the last extensive, as well as intensive, attempts to address the forms of otherness in world literature was the XXII International Congress of ICLA/AICL in Macau entitled *Literature of the World and the Future of Comparative Literature* (2019). The Congress confirmed that despite postmodern skepsis, world literature has its justification and a real research perspective (Zhang, 2018), and that its methodological discourse is not about one way or type of study, but, on the contrary, goes on in various languages and various power relations. The calling for new conceptions and prefigurations, emerging from the Congress’s agenda, accentuates the maxim that world literature can be theoretically reflected upon via concepts and terms which are semantically ambiguous, with their local connotations moving in a concrete epistemological framework. What we want to point out in this study, is how the theoretical reflection on world literature has been enriched by one of the last monographs in the field—Marko Juvan’s *Worlding a peripheral literature* (2019).

Historically, the concept of world literature was for the first time unmistakably tied to national literature by the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. He is also credited for having had world literature appear as a significant theoretical discourse in the early 19th century, at the time when Europe was beginning to slowly recover from Napoleonic wars. In the discussion with his secretary Eckermann, the poet declared that the significance of national literature is diminishing and instead of it comes world literature—Weltliteratur (Goethe, 2014). Since that time, the term has been regularly appearing in all essential works of literary theorists exploring those aspects of literature that transcend particularism of the national, regional, areal, or even the continental, and turn to a dimension that emphasises the universalism or global nature of literature. One of the first scholars who took up the study of world literature, as part of his efforts in the field of comparative literature, and maintained that there is an inseparable relation of world literature to national literature understood as a basis of all European nation states, was Hugo Meltzl. However, the national principle in his understanding was not sacred and untouchable, but rather “internationalised,” reflecting a true spirit of the multinational Austro–Hungarian Monarchy. Already in those times, Meltzl identified what has since become a haunting spirit of world literature—the language. Even though translations, in his opinion, “facilitate the international traffic or distribution of literary products immensely,”

they can “never replace the original,” and therefore have to be accompanied by what he calls the “principle of polyglottism” (2014, p. 36).

The productivity of the tensions between the national and world literature, was, for example, also intuitively sensed by the world-renowned Czech writer Karel Čapek who in his drama *R.U.R.* for the first time used the word *robot*. When Čapek in his essay “Jak se dělá světová literatura” (1936) [How to do world literature] was reflecting on the misery of Czech criticism, over the fact that no world class novels, comparable with the English, French or Russian ones, are produced at home, he arrived at a conclusion that in a small national literature the world stature cannot be achieved by “catching up with” or “imitation of” the “great,” but through realising “what the world stature obtains and how it is achieved, in short, what one does to write world literature”¹ (p. 10). In the essay, Čapek defined four types of world-class texts: the first type includes the texts that enjoyed world success with their readers, but because of their goodliness and trendiness their “spiritual contribution” for literary criticism was just transient. The second type was understood conversely: as the books which due to their “non-conventionality” and “untried beauty” did not immediately become the reading of a wide public, but their aesthetic and ideological value was updated after some time. The third case of a world text was understood in the sense of “historical actuality” as socially committed texts, expressing general progressive ideas. For Čapek, the fourth type involved the most important and widespread understanding of world-stature, which may be achieved, paradoxically, only through the texts “*clearly and completely national*”:

“What made of Dickens, that most English of all English writers, a world acknowledged author? And what made such writers of Gogol and others, whose literature was so Russian as only something that can be Russian? And what about Hamsun, so absolutely Nordic, Sinclair Lewis, so American, so many others who were unintentionally or diligently expressing the soul and character, type and life of their land and nation? [...] That what we like about them most, is exactly what is non-transferable, what is only theirs, in local and empirical sense. The more English, the more Russian, the more Nordic the work is, the deeper and clearer is its claim for world acknowledgement [...] The most reliable way to becoming world acknowledged is to clearly show that also we with our land and our people are an interesting, real [...] a live piece of the world”² (p. 10).

According to Čapek, only in the fourth case freely circulating texts can become a permanent and universal property, a general cultural heritage based on the stories of

¹ „co to vlastně ta světovost je a čím se dosahuje, zkrátka, jak se to dělá, aby literatura byla světová.“

² „Čím se stal světovým autorem Dickens, tento nejangličtější ze spisovatelů Anglie? Čím Gogol a ostatní, kteří psali literaturu tak ruskou, jak jen co může být ruského? Čím Hamsun, tak naprosto nordický, čím Sinclair Lewis, tak stoprocentně americký, čím tolik jiných, kteří bezděčně nebo usilovně vyjadřovali duši a charakter, typy a život své země a svého národa? ... To, co na nich máme nejraději, je právě to nepřenositelné, to co je jenom jejich, ve smyslu lokálním a empirickým. Čím angličtější, čím ruštější, čím severtější je dílo, tím je hlubší, a jasnější je jeho nárok na světovost [...] Nejspolehlivější cesta k světovosti je ukázat názorně, že i my se svou zemí a svými lidmi jsme zajímavý, skutečný [...] živý kus světa“ (Ibid., p. 9–10).

people and their destinies: “[...] so far no one has managed to invent anything more worldly and general”³ (pp. 9–10).

Paradigmatic changes in humanities after WWII resulted in the deemphasising of the national and bringing other impulses into the world literature discourse. Damrosch, Moretti and Casanova,⁴ for example, managed to revive the debate on the symbolic space of the “literature of the world” and “world literature,” to which were added other frequented terms, such as the worldliness of literature, world literary system or world republic of letters. Irrespective of semantic and terminological connotations, these terms may be understood as referring to intertextual and transcultural “nets,” “grids” or “maps” executed in additional heterogeneous contexts through which a dialog or clash of cultures in various harmonic or asymmetrical relations are realised. Damrosch in his monograph *What is world literature?* embodies the vision of worldliness as a virtual net of works translated into English, that is, an elliptical refraction of national literatures, with world literature not having the nature of a fixed canon, but of a specific type of reading. Such an approach then would stress the processual character of reading and dynamism of values, acknowledging that by reading from a different culture one may lose certain depth, but, in return, acquire a broader scope, perspective.

Although the title of Damrosch’s book is identical with that of a monograph by Slovak literary comparatist Dionýz Ďurišin *Čo je svetová literatúra?* [What is world literature?] (1992), in the text itself Damrosch makes no reference to or quotation from it. It is unfortunate since Ďurišin himself was not a scholar who would pay only occasional attention to world literature, but a researcher who placed it into an elaborate and sophisticated context of literary and cultural interrelationships. His main contribution to the debate on world literature was the concept of *interliterariness* (*medziliterárnosť*), denoting the stage in which a text enters into various relationships along the axis on which at one end there is national literature, while at the other one world literature (Ďurišin, p. 11). According to him, the interliterary process is a dialectical relation between the individual and the general through which the national or specific is transcended towards the international, and, in the end, to the world or the global. Between the national and the world stages Ďurišin locates smaller geographical and cultural areas which he calls interliterary communities, as, for example, Slavic, German, or Mediterranean literatures. However, as Marián Gálik claims, he identifies them rather according to spatial, territorial, not ethnic principle. Ďurišin’s world literature is thus rather a stadial concept, representing, as mentioned above, the last stage on the hypothetical axis indicating the movement from the particular to the universal. It is neither the aggregation of all works, nor a static list of great works, but a live process consisting of mutually conditioning phenomena, relations and connections (Ďurišin, p. 41).

Ďurišin’s intuitive understanding of world literature as “literature of the world,” e.g. in the sense of an intertextual or transcultural “network” or “lattice” of ideas, poetics, genres, discourses and other heterogeneous contexts, also raises the question

³ „[...] nic svetovjšieho a obecnjšieho se dosud nikomu nepodařilo vymyslet“ (Ibid., p. 10).

⁴ Our discussion of Damrosch, Ďurišin and Casanova partly draws on Pokrivčák, 2013.

of research approaches to this phenomenon. From this point of view, as we believe on the basis of our previous considerations, we can define world literature in its ontological and epistemological meaning. In the first sense, world literature is a historically evolving form of literary works and their intertextual and transcultural relations. This concept is based on the morphological concept of world literature as a set of forms and structures of “supra-local” and timeless significance. In the second, epistemological, sense, world literature takes the form of a research orientation and acts as a specific aspect of the view of literary communication in which certain ideas are found. In Đurišin’s conception, world literature tends towards the second meaning, it has its consistently ideal dimension, while the degree of its worldliness also depends on the “additional incorporation” of finished works into the literary system. This implies the researcher’s belief that world literature both arises in the process of interpretation and exists in the form of a developmental historical structure that can be anticipated in every phenomenon of the literary process. In our opinion, Đurišin thus, in his understanding of world literature, completed the semiotic transformation of the historical structure on the level of communication into a code, into its constitution by the reception subject.

Damrosch’s concept of world literature has its opposite position in Moretti’s “distant reading,” i.e., understanding world literature not through the study, or the reading, of individual texts, but through the aggregation and analysis of “large data” representing the universal structures of literary phenomena and processes. Moretti therefore logically considers research into world literature, taking into account the plurality and complexity of the object of investigation, problematic and not necessarily solvable in the context of literary studies.

Still a different, quasi-ideological, approach to world literature, through a concept of the “world republic of letters,” that is, a virtual interliterary network without borders and value barriers was, in turn, taken by the French comparatist Pascale Casanova who criticised the concept of universal literature as a set corpus of texts transcending the national, political and linguistic horizons. She claims that literary space first draws on the political and the national, only to overcome them later and set its own mode of operation. “The key to understanding how this literary world operates lies in recognising that its boundaries, its capitals, its highways, and its forms of communication do not completely coincide with those of the political and economic world” (p. 11). The global literary space thus emerges as a result of the struggle between various claims for identity within the literary world in which writers and their works inhabit either the literary space of universal values independent of particular national or nationalist concerns or they serve the ideology of nation states and the economic and political worlds.

Into this theoretical discourse (by far not exhausted in our brief discussion) in which world literature is losing its status of a fixed category, and is becoming many things—a method, an investigative orientation, a specific aspect from the point of view of transnational literary communication—enters Marko Juvan’s monograph *Worlding a peripheral literature*, taking on this complicated phenomenon as a central concept not only of current comparative literature, but an entire literary studies as well. Although the monograph consists of the studies previously published in prestigious journals (*Arcadia*, *Neohelicon*, *Canadian Review of Comparative*

Literature, Comparative Literature and Culture, etc.), their editorial adaptations and essential textual complementation create an impression of compositional and thematic unity, emerging from the author's primary focus on the process through which a work of peripheral literature, in this case Slovenian, becomes a work of world literature.

Like previous theorists, also Juvan starts, naturally, from Goethe's *Weltliteratur*. In the methodologically conceived "Introduction" he points to disproportions between the process of acquiring "world stature" (worlding) by the work of the Slovenian author Vladimir Bartol and the work of the famous German romanticist Johann Wolfgang Goethe. While Bartol's novel *Alamut* became a world-famous work only through its adaptation into the genre of videogames (unlike its author who, in fact, remained forgotten, peripheral), Goethe entered the canon of world literature as one of the most acknowledged German authors. The entire monograph is then essentially an analysis of the phenomenon of peripherality vis a vis the centrality of European literary scene, which Juvan is trying to demonstrate on the Slovenian romantic poet France Prešeren.

Juvan understands Goethe as "a nation-representing author from a (semi-)periphery whose canonicity establishes a symbolic link between national and world literatures as interdependent entities" (p. 3). In addition to pointing to the existence of other literatures of the world, Goethe's aim was, above all, to put German literature on the map of European literary scene. The word "world" thus in the case of Goethe very often refers to "Europe," which is, in fact, a Eurocentric view of globality through a prism of national interest. The word "interest" is in this sense important since, in agreement with the principle of extra-literariness as a basic determinant of the production of meaning in comparative literature, Goethe's act is often explained, by Juvan as well, through the asymmetry of market and power relations. Although principally agreeing with Juvan, as regards Goethe, one should not forget here that there are also opposite opinions, such as, for example, René Etiemble's claim that "not one word of Goethe on *Weltliteratur* allows us to see in him a conscious or unconscious agent of imperialism. On the contrary, his elevated idea of world literature implicitly condemns German nationalism and along with it all nationalism" (p. 87). One can also add here that already in the 1980s the Spanish comparatist Claudio Guillén proposed Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* not to be translated strictly as "world literature," but more loosely as "literature of the world," or literature aspiring to worldliness. From this premise, Guillén deduced three groups of meanings of Goethean "literature of the world:" (1) accessibility of national literatures to all readers regardless of language limits, (2) texts circulating around the world as certain "bridges" between individual national literatures, e.g. through influences, translations, contacts (but without negative evaluative connotations), and (3) texts symbolizing certain, generally respected, ideas and feelings, concerning what is "the deepest, the common and the lasting in human existence" (Guillén, 2008, p. 48).

In the chapter "The canonicity of world literature and national poets," Juvan expresses his disagreement with the identification of world literature with what one could call global literature, since the original concept of world literature implies the historicity and specific spatiotemporal breadth, something that has been forgotten nowadays (p. 35). In romanticism and post-romanticism, national

poets are, according to Juvan, as if cultural saints who substituted Church saints, using “nationalism as a secularised and political form of religion in which language and culture take a leading role” (p. 40). These national poets could represent their culture on an international scene only if their authority were accepted by otherness, which in that time was represented by the originating world literature. In fact, such mechanisms are claimed to function across several European literatures, which Juvan is trying to prove through the comparison of two “cultural saints”—the Slovenian writer France Prešeren and Icelandic Jónas Hallgrímsson, maintaining that “Prešeren and Hallgrímsson were elevated to cultural sainthood because *they* were thought, in turn, to have elevated their national literatures to the level at which the national was becoming European” (p. 48). The canonisation of a poet at the national level then, in fact, makes of him/her a world poet, which is an interesting analogy with the previously mentioned Karel Čapek.

Discussing the concept of perspectivising world literature through translation, Juvan points to a known thing—the importance of language and the country an artist comes from. If a literary work wants to become world-famous, it must come from an important country and be written in a world language. This naturally involves economic power, book market, use of intellectual labour, etc. He draws on the fact that world literature, either as a “network” or “canon,” constitutes a hierarchised system to which freely circulating texts enter through major literatures, most often written in English. We could say that such approach is, paradoxically, very close to Damrosch’s understanding of world literature as works that are “circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin” (p. 6). As a “great global narrative,” world literature thus becomes a research object associated mostly with English language. The subtext here betrays an apparent inspiration by a specific model of economic globalisation which creates a hypothetical universality of world literature whose “heart” or “core” is put to a linguistically monolithic “centre” of power, not on an insignificant periphery. According to Juvan, however, this is not the same as saying yes to inequality among individual literatures, but just an adequate reflection of the natural inclusion of small Central European and South Eastern literatures (e.g. the Slovenian one) into a newly created world literary system in the first half of the 19th century, at a time when national identity was being formed, and the space of world literature was originating in parallel with the emergence of national literatures which were building their identity in relation to the aesthetically “authoritative” world centres, as well as with respect to the development of close and related literary systems, the marginal and regional centres understood as mediating “subcentres” of power influence. These “small” and “undeveloped” Slavic literatures differed, according to Juvan, by their historical significance, linguistic maturity, geopolitical standing, all of which located them either into a more central or marginal position. Like in “central literatures,” the process of nationalisation was in their case also connected with canonisation, and, in fact, internationalisation, of their “cultural saints” through the use of the motifs of Parnassus, Elysium, Helicon, Olympus, i.e. the places where these national “gods” reside, for which, however, they required one more important device—the language as an important means of aesthetic sanctification.

In addition to the extreme positions of national and world literature, Juvan points to the fact that there are also other forms, stages, or positions on the axis of particularity or universality in which a work of art can be situated. The transnational comparative studies draws on the characterisation of the transnational not only as a result of the transfer of cultural, but also philosophical, economic as well as other factors and phenomena emerging at various levels of historically and politically constituted territorial formations within a common history of wider communities—regions, macro-regions, civilisations (p. 143).

In addition to Juvan's reflecting the political-economic concepts of world literature through technological and market mechanisms of the development of capitalistic system of production, so far playing a significant role in his thinking of the worldliness in the discussed monograph, or through national liberation movements in the periods of romanticism and post-romanticism, he also considers a philosophical-literary definition of worldliness as worlding, noting that instead of the prevailing conceptions which explain "globalism and transnationality of literature by the idea of circulation, Pheng Cheah's *What is world?* continues Hayot's quest for the theory of the world" (p. 219). What is articulated here is then not an extraliterary definition of world literature, but the ability of literature itself to create the world, which is called the literary "worlding." Although Juvan accepts this textual conception of worldliness, through which the mentioned authors criticise, for example, the conceptions of Casanova or Moretti, in the end he in his own way degrades them when he contests that the materialistic understanding of worldliness will, after all, prevail over various local utopias (p. 222).

Like in other places, the theoretical reflections are applied to the situation in Slovenian literature. Juvan shows how Slovenian poetry, thanks to Matija Čop and especially France Prešeren, found itself at the peak of interest: it penetrated the symbolic "background" of European classics and, through translations of the Czech pre-Romantic poet F. L. Čelakovský, underwent a Europeanization of values and gradually established itself in the German and European context. Thus, it signalled (made it clear) that the two-way inter-literary and intercultural interdependence within culturally, geographically and ethnically defined areas was less intense than the effect of unidirectional influences and transfers realised between "small," Eastern and more advanced Western literatures such as, for example, English, French, and German. The structure of world literary system understood historically and processually thus emerged via a value contradiction between a dominant "centre" and a dependent "periphery" into which the literatures of Central and South Eastern Europe could be included. They logically fell under the influence of stronger hegemonic centres of (colonial) political power in the West. Based on this premise, Juvan concludes that their integration into the world literary space was legitimised through the criteria derived from Western canon.

Ultimately and substantively, Juvan maintains that it is necessary to come to terms with this historically given "inequality," saying that its denying is wrong since in reality there is no other possibility but to respect the fact that the value and aesthetic paradigm of world literature must be accepted as a direct result of the economic and mass media globalisation. To discuss world literature means to accept this inequality as a certain epistemological framework and a way of presentation

reflecting the reality and natural contradiction between the “developed” and the “non-developed.” However, the Slovak comparatist Róbert Gáfrik considers Juvan’s understanding not only as being descriptive, but also normative, in the sense that his conceptual model of world literature describes the model under investigation as well as creates it (p. 122). Even though one may admit that at present literature is spread in a globalised world especially through the English language, and is connected with the manifestation of “power” and “dominance,” one should not forget about the necessity of searching for alternative models. The Romanian–American comparatist Mihai Spariosu speaks about intercultural interferential framework distinguishing the *globality* and *globalism* (p. 18). While globalism expresses the Western understanding of modernity and manifests a certain economic and cultural hierarchy, globality is made up of a layered intertextual and transcultural network of dynamically interconnected worlds, localities and contexts creating a non-violent dialogue of cultures.

It is evident that this view of world literature is close to the epistemological conception according to which world literature philosophically represents a value equivalent to general ideas of universalism and, at the same time, a highest form of the being of literary relations. The content of world literature thus includes a marked anthropological subtext: the history of world literature is the history of searching for the sense of human history. This typological distinction of world literature receives its internal structuring and natural heterogeneity, which it expresses, for example, in two semantic levels: world literature as a concept and as a conception. While the concept exists as a generally accepted and verbally expressed view of a phenomenon, the conception is a focused, pragmatic construct, i.e. a set of principles that model the structure of world literature. The concept concentrates in itself the “philosophy of a phenomenon,” conception in turn its composition and practical realization, e.g. in the form of an anthology of selected texts. World literature, which, in its epistemological bearing, draws on the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics, here loses the status of a fixed category, and acquires rather a historically changeable vision of “worldliness” as a process of the gradual constituting of topological field in which develops the consciousness of multiculturalism as well as of intercultural and inter-regional relations, such as meeting one another and communicating and transferring values and ideas. World literature, generated by a moment of receptive responsiveness and communicational interlapping of individual texts, passes into the aspect of worldliness as to a multileveled, gradual and complicated process of forming an axiologically equal “interliterary network.” This notion corresponds not to the term “world literature” but to the term “world literatures,” which was coined by analogy with the term “world languages.” These are those literatures which, in their historical development, have been able to “influence” others, either for a long time or for a limited period, and to provide them with a strong value or aesthetic impulse. Although the spread of a language, the size of a nation, the transmission of literary culture, the number of readers or belonging to a certain geographical area, etc., also affect this idea, the so-called minor literatures can be included here alongside the permanently “world” literatures such as French, English or German literature. We can, for example, mention Polish literature during the Romantic period, Scandinavian literature at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Italian literature during the

Renaissance, etc. However, as with other conceptions, there is a fundamental danger here. If the “worldliness” of these literatures arises as a result of subjective interpretative activity, as an ability of the text to positively absorb the reception impulse, it can also negatively refer to what is considered “trendy,” once it explicitly denotes the fact that a concrete text, “unchained” from its environment and historical time, is becoming a universally understandable verbal product spreading over the entire planet in the area of mass media communication, and is mechanically consumed irrespective of its aesthetic value.

Admittedly, one may raise an objection that world literature, which also implies the attitude to the “foreign” and “otherness,” cannot be reduced to a monocultural unity spread from one centre (and to read and write in English means to think and evaluate in a certain way) or postulated as a heterogeneous aggregate of disparate and incompatible individual national literatures. However, a vision of world literature semiotically based on metonymic interculturality, that is, on an equal communication of individual parts respecting natural heterogeneity is, so far, an unreachable ideal. Some literary theorists therefore instead of world literature rather speak about the “literature of the world,” since it seems to be a less elitist concept, less intensively implying a certain homogeneity and idea of a standardised canon of masterpieces, or as Di Leo has it, about “worlded literature,” that is, the literature affected by the world, interconnected through global networks, translations, migration, etc. (pp. 80–81). World literature thus gets sublimated into “global” or “globalised” literature, into a new type of canon in which the Goethean “masterpieces of all countries and times”⁵ (Corbineau-Hoffmannová, p. 30), as new common cultural heritage, is transformed into dictates of other political dominances and cultural heterogeneity.

Juvan’s reflections on world literature also open an empirical question, that is, what should the ideal history of national literature at the world background look like, or, what should be the form of the history of world literature that would logically take into account the functions and development of individual national wholes and regions? From this point of view, it is evident that the world literary history oscillating between the “story” and “hypertext” should have the form of hypertextually open literary archives, a kind of palimpsestic literary “map” that would be consciously transcultural and hybrid and would be able to combine various approaches and interpretations. It would, at the same time, also preserve the “textualisation of the context” and the “contextuality of the text,” i.e. an adequate balance between the “extrinsic” and “intrinsic” moments on the horizons of cultural and textual frames. Therefore, world literary history should not create a fictitious reality generated by words and meanings, but rather act as a live “synergic” and dynamically pulsating organism able to self-regulate the processes of its evolution. Individual chapters of the monograph are connected by a conviction of the necessity to radically reconstruct the Euromerican view of the texts aspiring to “worldliness.” There are differences in theoretical thinking on comparative literature not only between Europe and America, but such other subjects like Latin America, India, China, Japan, as well as small countries of Central and Southeastern Europe logically enforce different

⁵ “velká díla všech zemí a časů”.

concepts of worldliness and world literature for which it is evident that terminological equivalents with changing semantic content do not necessarily have to be the value equivalents. Juvan had already hinted at this notion in his monograph *Literary studies in reconstruction* (2011), where, paradoxically, he placed more emphasis on the plurality of world literature and the intensive equivalence of literatures regardless of their size and economic power (Zelenka, 2008, p. 41). In his last book, however, he emphasized inequality (perhaps it would be better to use the term incommensurability) as a historically variable and subjectively influential fact that must not be glossed over in the name of the ideal of equality but must be explained as a cultural consequence of inequality in the international political and economic system. Juvan reaches this conclusion by interpreting the concept of world literature through the historical context (the advance of industrial capitalism, the emergence of the international cultural market, the period of restoration after the Napoleonic Wars) in which ideologies and cultural nationalism clashed.

To sum up, Juvan's method may be characterised as sensibly "conservative," reconstructionist in the sense of allowing to objectively diagnose the crisis of literary studies and reach generally acceptable consensus in the form of epistemological and terminological basis defined by a set of concrete principles and concepts. The conviction of the "self-referential activity" of the literary theoretical, and thus also comparative, thinking, determined especially by the academic institutionalisation and legitimisation of research as certain instruments of power (in a Foucauldian sense), can, however, overcome the decline of moral and social prestige of the field in the public eye, when meta-theories living their own lives quickly succeed one another as abstract proclamations. Juvan consistently applies the systemic approach to world literature in which he relevantly sees a kind of comparative superstructure of his own reflections on the Slovenian writing. The idea of "world literary system" as a "unity in multiplicity" created by an unrestricted circulation of literary values was inspired by Moretti's theory of evolution and economic models. It is no coincidence that Juvan was most inspired by the notion of a "world literary system" among contemporary concepts. Unlike Moretti, however, he emphasized more the importance of the periphery for the existence and especially for the reproduction of the "world literary system." This allowed Slovenian writing, which was "on the margin" of this world literary system, to open itself to a wider comparative perspective. In general, Juvan's monograph brings an essential theoretical insight into contemporary discussions on the forms, essence, and functions of world literature, which is created also by the so-called small Slavic literatures. At the same time, the book unequivocally shows that despite postmodern skepticism research into world literature has its justification and a real scholarly perspective, irrespective of the fact that its methodological discourse does not draw on just one way of type or study, but, on the contrary, is carried out in various languages and under heterogeneous power relations. The variability and "endlessness" of the world's verbal production, however, cannot prevent world literature to be developed as a certain research vision that, paradoxically, and even in the period of methodological chaos and a babel of individual -isms, would form a new branch of literary studies concerned with the history and theory of world literature. The reflections on world literature could

then formulate a new idea of literary theory treated as a “universal language” through which literature transcends its national boundaries. Nevertheless, some researchers are sceptic of contemporary concepts of world literature (considering the abstract community of great works, emerging from various contexts of mass media, genres, ways of reception, or ideology, a speculative construction), since it is not possible to convincingly depict their mechanisms of origin and structural transfers. Such scepticism seems to be an expression of doubts about the predominance of context over the text. However, despite the doubts, as well as many “blank spaces,” reflections on world literature must remain an ambitious project capable of opening new perspectives of intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

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