

Interplaying National and Transnational Perspectives in post-1989 Comparative Literary History

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The break-up of the bipolar world system in 1989 has removed the traditional ideological polarizations between East and West, "first" and "second" world, but has to some extent replaced them with nationalistic and ethnocentric perspectives that promote new cultural divisions. Under these circumstances, the input of a mediating consciousness is needed now more than ever. By comparing, translating and interfacing cultures, this type of consciousness can help us rediscover that middle ground between Eastern and Western, dominant and peripheral that we have neglected because of our polarized worldviews. Post-1989 comparative literary history can help us reconstruct that middle ground of intercultural coexistence, emphasizing "transference," "translation," and "cultural contact." The multifaceted landscape of East Central Europe, punctuated by multicultural and minority discourses, is an especially fertile ground for a transnational literary history that, while not neglecting the points of conflict, will foreground the conjunctions and crossings between cultures. I test these claims on examples taken from the *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, a multi-volume work I am currently co-editing with John Neubauer.

Comparative literary studies in the humanities is one of the few ways through which literary developments can be studied in a manner not restricted to or determined by a national frame. [Yet] comparative literary study ... will [need to] be stimulated and provoked to venture more comprehensive [examinations] of ... complex issues [such as] ... geographically intermingled [cultures] ... partitioned states ... romance-across-the-divide...the extraordinary dilemmas [of] ... nationalism [and]... "the borderless world" that contemporary globalization is supposedly bringing ...

Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State* 10-12

[L]iterature itself provides a mode of cultural contact and has done so for centuries In addition to offering direct figurations of otherness and cultural contact, literary texts actually deploy complex discursive strategies and aesthetic devices in

order to mediate these fictional cultural encounters for their readers. Thus they form part of the cultural politics toward otherness, including the cultural imaginary which they help continually to reshape.

Gabriele Schwab, *The Mirror and the Killer-Queen* 39

The events that have unfolded since the tearing down of the Berlin Wall have undermined traditional polarizations between Eastern and Western Europe, but have often replaced them with nationalistic and ethnocentric ideologies that promote no less violent divisions. Much of this new ethnic separatism has emerged in direct reaction to the pressure of the First World's "globalizing" ideologies that, far from being "de-imperialized," reinforce the "international division of labor and appropriation ... benefiting First World countries at the expense of Third World" (Ebert 286) and Second World postcommunist societies. The new tensions between global interdependency and ethnocentric separatism, First World centers and Third World peripheries, indicate a state of crisis at the level of the ideological frameworks that we use to relate to each other.

Under the circumstances, the input of a mediating consciousness is needed now more than ever. By comparing, translating and interfacing cultures, this type of consciousness can help us rediscover and consolidate the middle ground between Eastern and Western, dominant and peripheral that we have neglected because of our polarized worldviews. My claim is that comparative literature can now occupy that middle ground between local and global, national and transnational, challenging monologic concepts of culture and emphasizing "interference" and "translation" between systems.

As Gabriele Schwab has argued, most comprehensively in *The Mirror and the Killer-Queen: Otherness in Literary Language* (1996), literature's "imaginary ethnographies" mediate otherness for us through complex processes of "transference" and "translation." More specifically, literature provides a processing space for the "unthought known" ("Words and Moods" 109), enriching our cultural repertoire with unspoken emotions and alternative imaginings. The latter are most valuable when they occasion insights into the cultural imaginary of others. For these Gabriele Schwab reserves Gregory Bateson's concept of "cultural contact," which in her reinterpretation covers not only encounters between different cultural groups, but also the interaction between readers and texts. Comparative studies can focus on literary encounters between different cultures, acting as a corrective both to the ethnocentric/nationalistic concepts of culture, and to the counter-theories of globalism.

My own interest is in mapping the "literary ethnographies" of East-

Central Europe, a region that at its best has functioned as a "transitional, transmittory and liminal" area between variously positioned cultures and influences (Schöpflin 19-20). The notion of a Central European region acting as a buffer between East and West goes back to the Middle Ages. During the 1848 revolutionary movements, the Czechs called for a federalization of the Habsburg monarchy rather than for its break up, considering that this Central European federation could withstand the expansionist German plans for a reconstruction of the Holy Roman Empire. At the turn of the century, Ady Endre described Hungary as Europe's "ferry-land" between East and West. Even after the disintegration of the Habsburg and Czarist Empires, the countries of East-Central Europe sought ways to cooperate politically and economically, establishing the "Little Entente" (1920) and other regional treaties to protect themselves against hegemonic threats from East and West. In 1942, Stanisław Vincenz, a native of multicultural Galicia, warned prophetically that,

[i]f Central Europe does not unite its forces into some kind of intellectual and cultural alliance - each one of its parts will by necessity become the dependency of a greater unit. Through rapprochement, however, each separate component can safeguard its individuality and can gather significant strength, moving in a direction different from the existing one. (qtd. in Kiss 130)

The idea of a multicultural Central Europe purged of nationalistic ambitions reemerged in the 1980s, as Communist Eastern Europe approached its demise, and discussions of European reconstruction began. However problematic some of the notions associated with it, this term suggested a search for a bridge/buffer alternative to both Soviet and Western hegemonomies that marked the lingering Cold War mentality of the 1980s. The idea of a transnational Central Europe was reinvented in order to define a cultural and political "in-between" the West and Russia, or as Czesław Miłosz put it, between "Rome and Byzantium" (*The Witness of Poetry* 4). As Miłosz, Milan Kundera and others have suggested, Europe can be better understood from the margin, where its identity is continually confronted with other identities. The role of Central Europe in this perspective is to defend and reinforce "Europeanness," acting as a kind of "early warning system" or "sensor" of potential problems that threaten this identity, but also as a porous cultural boundary, assimilating alternative imaginings and expanding Europe's cultural definition.

As Czesław Miłosz admits, "Central Europe is hardly a geographical notion"; yet even if it "is not easy to trace its boundaries on a map," one

can draw sufficiently clear "mental lines which seem to be more durable than the borders of the states" ("Central European Attitudes" 116-17). These mental lines connect Miłosz's "baroque Wilno" with the "differently baroque Prague or the medieval-Renaissance Dubrovnik;" they also foreground certain "ways of feeling and thinking," "a tone and a sensibility not to be found elsewhere" (116). It is clear that the features attributed by Czesław Miłosz to the Central European "sensibility" - an awareness of a time "associated with a danger threatening the existence of a national community" ("Central European Attitudes" 117); the cultivation of "irony" as a response to "self-pity" (118); a philosophic skepticism towards grand narratives (119); "dark visions of the future" but also "utopianism" (121-2) - apply equally well to Miłosz's native Lithuania, the Czechoslovakia of Soldier Šveik, or the Balkans. However shift its boundaries, this larger region has had a common historical destiny, cultural ethos, and representation in literary imagination.

The literature of this "intermediate region" (Kiss 127) has often interplayed, in an uncomfortable balance, ethnocentric ambitions and regional (transnational) aspirations. The Western-inspired concept of nationhood has played an ambivalent role in this process, infusing East-Central European countries "with a new sense of purposiveness and ... energizing them to construct more modern societies," but also giving rise to competitive forms of nationalism that emphasized "exclusivity and factors of divisiveness as a way of protecting the nation" (Schöpflin 26). Literature itself has operated both within and outside the national narrative, counterposing tradition and modernity, "national Self" and transnational "Other" (Cleary 54, 57). The concept of nation "regularly appeared [in literature] either as an all-encompassing value or as a total negative to be sacrificed at the altar of any and every alternative ideal" (Kiss 132). When the aspirations of nation-states were at its center, the literary discourse could take on certain defensive accents, responding to the uncertainties of identity and the awareness of outside threat by reinforcing an exclusionary notion of identity. However, by comparison to other discourses more liable to political and ethnic polarizations, literature has also had a certain degree of success reflecting the play of differences in the multiethnic space of East-Central Europe and proposing more flexible models of intercultural exchange.

Even though on the whole the writers of this region knew little of each other, "cast[ing] their glances towards Paris, from Warsaw and Prague, Belgrade and Bucharest" (Kiss 126), their work reflects a "shared world, with its own contradictions naturally, an odd mixture of pain and nostalgia, negative sentiments, affection and hate, gibes and national injuries" (Kiss 127). For example, the work of the Polish Wýspiński, the Hungarian Ady,

and the Croatian Krleža reveals a similar turn-of-the-century worldview characterized by "decadence, the literary expression of *Lebensphilosophie* and the radical reformulation of national mythologies" (Kiss 126). Even when they reflect highly individualized projects, such works reinforce certain regional patterns. Therefore the literatures of East-Central Europe represent an ideal object of study for a regional comparative history, freed from nationalistic agendas but also from a leveling notion of globalism.

A successful comparative literary history of East-Central Europe must transcend not only the bipolar structure of Europe inherited from the Cold War, but also divisions inside the former Eastern Europe, such as those between the lands associated with Western Christianity and those associated with Eastern Christianity and Islam. The term "East-Central Europe," adopted from Jenő Szűcs's 1983 article on the "The Three Historical Regions of Europe," which we offer in lieu of that of "Central Europe," allows us to retrieve the complex cultural shifts and exchanges in an area that stretches beyond the region traditionally associated with Central Europe, including the Baltic Countries, Bucovina, Moldavia, the Ukraine, Romania, and the Balkans. As an interface between heterogeneous cultural traditions, East-Central Europe offers an important case study in cultural "translatability" (pace Samuel P. Huntington), foregrounding what Huntington calls their intercivilizational "supplementation" (320) across traditional ethnic and religious divides.

The work of a regional comparative historian must begin by de-emphasizing monologic concepts of literary development (national traditions, unified periods and trends, organic histories). While not rejecting the national frameworks entirely, he/she will need to question the assumptions that "nationalism invariably leads to the establishment of states - each with a single homogeneous culture" and that "the creation of national cultures involves the imposition of a 'high' national culture where before a medley of 'low' folk-cultures had coexisted" (Cleary 52). We need a more refined understanding of cultural development that will account for the emergence of "multi-ethnic, multi-language, and multicultural states" (52) as well as for the continued coexistence and cross-fertilization of "high" and "low" forms of culture in East-Central Europe. As J. Hillis Miller also urges, we need to give up the "dream of a harmonious and unified culture ... rooted in one particular place" (55), understanding literary cultures as open to "potentially limitless [and provisional] mappings" (281). This conceptual refocusing can move us "beyond a [conflictive] dialectic of identity and difference" (Spariosu 155), allowing us to understand the culture of a particular area or

historical period as dialogic, a product of interethnic/intercultural cooperation.

The *Comparative History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* - a four-volume work sponsored by ICLA and coedited by John Neubauer and myself - proposes to do just this, retrieving those areas of intercultural convergence obfuscated by national treatments of literature. Without neglecting areas of conflict (the subtitle of this work is *Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Century*), our more than 100 contributors highlight those no less frequent moments of interactions among various local entities, as well as the dialogue across the larger provinces of Europe (Eastern and Western, Northern and Southern). If one of the chief characteristics of East-Central Europe is its "vocation of the 'in-between,' of the interval, of the state of geographic but also historical suspension" (Babeți 39), these shifting facets are best served by a nodal or prismatic approach to literary history.

The principles of this approach were outlined by Linda Hutcheon and Mario Valdés in *Rethinking Literary History - Comparatively* (ACLS Occasional Paper No. 27), and applied to the comparative literary history of Latin America by Linda Hutcheon, Djelal Kadir, and Mario J. Valdés (ACLS Occasional Paper No. 35), and to the comparative literary history of East-Central Europe by John Neubauer and myself (ACLS Occasional Paper No. 52). Like the Latin American volume, the ECE project emphasizes - in lieu of a causal, organicist and teleological plot - the interactive dynamic of *microhistories* (in Carlo Ginzburg's sense) across temporal, topographic, figural, and institutional structures or "nodes." Using a "nodal approach," our project highlights analogies, points of contact, exchanges, mediations, hybrid and marginal phenomena that traditional literary histories have either ignored or deliberately suppressed. Whether temporal, topographic, institutional, or figural, the "nodes" focus attention on the interfaces among various literatures, genres, and historical moments, offering a more flexible model for the discussion of literature in a continually shifting geo-political and cultural environment such as that of East-Central Europe.

Vol. 1 of our *History* (published in 2004) set the broad contours of this project, focusing in the General Introduction on the identity of the region and its different mappings. More specifically, we discussed the conflicting constructions of the region's identity, pointing out the limitations of the topographic macrostructures (national or imperial) that have been used to define it, each implying different borders and, above all, a different set of perspectives and connotations. Thus, the notion of a pan-Germanic *Mitteleuropa* eclipsed other ethnic traditions (Slavic, Romance, Hungarian, etc.),

the Soviet-inspired notion of Eastern Europe disconnected the region from its traditional interactions with Central and Western Europe, and the mostly utopian concept of "Central Europe" was revived periodically (most recently in the 1980s) to differentiate the region from the Eastern and Southern imperial powers, Czarist/Soviet and Ottoman. In opposition to these definitions, we have adopted - following Jenő Szűcs - the term "East-Central Europe" to designate the transitional space between the imperial powers in the west, east and south-east (German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman). In our view, East-Central Europe stretches from the Baltic countries in the north to the South Slavic countries and Albania in the south, and from the Czech Republic in the west to the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldavia in the east.

The rest of vol. 1 explores the literatures of this in-between region under temporal and genre categories. The temporal nodes (1776, 1848, 1867, 1918, 1944, 1956, 1968, and 1989) are "crossroads" at which various narrative strands come together, without forming an organic unit. The temporal nodes emerge as "nonhomogeneous" entities that connect cultures across national boundaries while allowing them to experience similar events with different rhythms and even directions of development. The second part of vol. 1 approaches literary periods and genres through a similarly non-totalizing perspective, offering paradigmatic studies in periods and genres that attempt to exemplify how traditional national categories may be reconsidered within transnational approaches to literary history. Instead of seeking the "core" of a national or regional genre (the "essence" of Polish lyric poetry or the Romanian novel) we focus on "boundary transgressions," highlighting the emergence of new (sub)genres like the reportage, the lyrical novel, the fictionalized autobiography, parody, and literary theory, or examining literature's transgression of its own boundaries in the subsection on the multimedia arts of opera and film.

Vol. 2 returns to the topographic focus of Vol. 1's General Introduction, but moves from a focus on the regional macrostructures to a microstructural focus on the literary cultures of specific geographical locations (multicultural cities, border areas, geocultural corridors). In doing so, this volume intends to put into practice a new type of comparative study. Traditional comparative literary studies establish transnational comparisons and contrasts, but thereby reconfirm, perhaps inadvertently, the very national borders they try to play down. This volume inverts the expansive momentum of comparative studies towards ever broader regional, European, and world literary histories, to some extent even in deviation from our overall project. While the theater of this volume is still the literary culture of East-Central Europe, we focus here

on pinpointed local traditions, on geographical nodal points. We believe that this approach is a powerful corrective to the limitations of national literary histories because it identifies the presence of "foreign" elements in centers of national cultures. By foregrounding these non-national or hybrid traditions we implicitly plead not so much for the practice of regional, continental, or global literary histories but for a diversification, pluralization, and, to certain extent, "de-nationalization" of the national and local ones. A genuine comparatist revival of literary history will involve, in our view, the recognition that "treading on native grounds" means actually treading on grounds cultivated by diverse people.

A particularly good example of the hybridity of "national" sites is offered by East-Central Europe's "marginocentric cities." These are multiethnic nodal cities like Vilnius/Wilno/Vilna, Cernăuți/Czernowitz, Königsberg/Kaliningrad, Danzig/Gdańsk, Lviv/Lwów/Lemberg, Sibiu/Hermanstadt, Timișoara/Temesvar/Temesburg, Ruschuk/Ruse, Shkodra/Iškodra/Skadar, Dubrovnik, and Trieste - to name only a few - that, at favorable historical conjunctions, have rewritten the national cultural paradigm from the margin, ascribing to it a dialogic dimension, both internally (a dialogue with other ethnic traditions) and externally (a dialogue with larger geocultural paradigms). Such cities encourage a de/reconstruction of national narratives, a hybridization of styles and genres, and alternative social and ethnic relations. They function as relays of cultural modernization and pluralization in the area, even if - as three of the essays submitted to vol. 2 of our History, Alexander Kiossev's on Plovdiv, Katarzyna Jerzak's on Gdańsk, and Tomas Venclova's on Vilnius, point out - their victories are temporary and contested, mixing the "myth of division" with the "myth of connection." As Cornel Ungureanu, founding member of the "Third Europe" research group in Timișoara, has argued elsewhere, provincial cities such as Cernăuți, Brașov, Oradea, Timișoara, Lugoj, Novi Sad, Zagreb, and Bratislava, have often resisted not only the nationalistic redefinition of boundaries after World War I, but also imperialistic, panGermanic definitions of *Mittleuropa*, opposing to them a more genuinely polycentric concept of culture (57). Even metropolitan centers like St. Petersburg, Bucharest, Budapest, or Prague (as the essays contributed by Brian Horowitz, Mihaly Szegedy-Maszák and John Neubauer, Monica Spiridon, and Veronica Ambrus suggest) have functioned at times as "liminal cities" and "magnetic fields" that interface Eastern and Western paradigms in a continuous though not necessarily equal dialogue (the Eastern or "oriental" input functioning often as the tolerated other).

The "marginocentric cities" represent a challenge not only to traditional models of linear and totalizable historiography, disrupting them with their

ex-centric evolutions, but also to literary representation itself. Anticipating the postcolonial/postmodern redefinition of the Western city as multifaceted and decentered as a result of immigration, East-Central European literary representations have often emphasized the heteroglossic potential of marginocentric cities, bringing together in odd juxtapositions periphery and center, nature and culture, tradition and innovation. The characteristic descriptions of these marginocentric cities foreground a margin in which

reverberate, with different intensities, the reflexes of the Center. The favorite *topoi* are the Main Street, the caft, the barracks, the high school, the theater, the hotel; the dominant figures - the functionary, the officer, the merchant, the artist; "great" but also "small" themes reiterated continually - cosmopolitanism, multiethnicity, plurilingualism, tolerance, the Jewish presence, trust in the values of civilization and culture, even if sometimes in the style of a "Central-European version of bad taste." (Babeți 9)

Equally important for facilitating a cross-cultural dialogue have been those larger topographic interfaces (crossroads, borderlands, multiethnic regions) that cut across national boundaries, rendering them permeable to the flow of transnational messages. Examples of this can be found along the corridor of the Danube - explored in our Comparative History by Roxana Verona and Nikola Petković - or in the large area between the Oder-Neiss, Poland, the old Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the Pale of Settlement in Czarist Russia, and Southern Romania associated with the Ashkenaz culture of the East-Central European Jewry studied by Seth Wolitz and Brian Horowitz.

They can also be found within areas that we usually associate with a national paradigm, such as the present territory of Albania that is for Robert Elsie the epitome of the "hybrid soil of the Balkans," allowing for a dialogic development of Albanian literature at the interface of Christianity and Islam, Latin-speaking West and Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire; or the Croatian cultural topography that in Vladimir Biti's description has always interplayed a geographic "up" and "down," which translates into an "up-universe" of utopia and a "down-universe" of realism and retrenchment. While highlighting the intercultural dialogue within these regions, these essays are careful not to idealize the transnational impetus: both Verona and Petković, for example, point out contradictions in the way the Danube corridor was perceived up-course and down-course, resulting in a hierarchical opposition between a "*Mitteleuropa*" Danube and an "other," more oriental Danube. Petković also discusses the different perceptions that people north and south

of the Danube had of the Habsburg Empire, as either a quasi-federalist or a totalitarian system, and Guido Snel emphasizes the contradictory nature of the literary cultivation of the Pannonian myth, which features both as an imaginary home and a space of homelessness.

On the basis of these and other essays in our History, we can argue that regionalism functioned (however briefly) as an alternative to the national centralization of East-Central European cultures both in the nineteenth century, when these cultures went through a process of nation-building, and again after the World War I. In what Virgil Nemoianu has called the "Biedermeier" phase of post-romanticism and early realism, the beginning of a "collaborative" model can be discovered in the multi-ethnic areas of East-Central Europe. Under the impact of cultural regionalism, various ethnic groups developed an interest in each others' local cultures that led, if not to sustained collaboration, at least to a respectful coexistence (see Nemoianu, "Biedermeier"). A similar example can be found in the multiethnic region of the Banat. Beginning in the eighteenth century, this region, inhabited by Romanians, Serbs, Germans, Hungarians, Jews, Slovaks, Turks, and Armenians, developed a genuine "transethnic" East European civilization (see Neumann, *Identități*). As the great "turning plate" between Vienna and Constantinople, the Banat area redefined Europe itself as an intercrossing of multiple traditions, rather than a homogeneous cultural space. As Victor Neumann puts it: "if not entirely a *Mitteleuropa*, [the Banat was] in any case a *Kleineuropa*, synthesizing the civilizations of the East and West" (*Tentația* 225).

Regionalism continued to play a lingering centrifugal role through the first half of the twentieth century in the areas of Bessarabia, the Ukraine, Transylvania, Banat, Bosnia, and Slovakia, resisting the program of national centralization coming from Moscow, Bucharest, Belgrade or Prague. The process of nation building in these regions involved a negotiation of tensions between nationalism and regionalism, central politics and local patriotism. Regionalism often worked as a corrective, turning potentially chauvinistic projects into intercultural ones. A good example is provided by John Neubauer's essay on Bela Bartók's search for the ethnic roots of Hungarian culture, which - once Bartók realized that most of the Hungarian peasant music was formed by means of constant interaction with the music of other peoples in the region - was turned into a campaign to collect and study Slovak, Romanian, Serbian, Ruthenian, and even Turkish and Arab folk songs. Unfortunately, under the homogenizing pressures of successive right wing and left wing dictatorships, the regionalist impulse in East-Central Europe was seriously eroded during and after World War II, becoming a

negligible counterforce in most areas of the communist bloc. Regional experiments such as the proclamation of an Autonomous Hungarian Region in Eastern Transylvania failed because their role was not to reinvigorate the local ethnic cultures but rather to provide the Soviet power with enclaves easier to control. The collapse of communism in 1989 has released certain regional aspirations, reviving interest in the East-Central European area rendered invisible by the Cold War polarization. But it has also brought to the surface ethnocentric resentments that had lain dormant for several decades under the "internationalist" pressures from Moscow.

In the current context of new interethnic conflicts and lingering divisions in East-Central Europe, the work undertaken in the *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* will, hopefully, foreground alternative ways of identity making in the area, which emphasize local, regional and transnational possibilities. The two remaining volumes of this *History* will amplify this dialectic: Vol. 3 deals with theoretical and literary texts that contest the essentializing practices on which nation-states and their institutions have been built, while vol. 4, focused on literary figures (historical and imaginary), acknowledges the simultaneity of the local and global positionings of self and other. The institutional nodes described in vol. 3 are not shared institutions but region-wide analogous institutional processes (national awakening, modernist opening, communist regimentation, canonization and censorship) that were asynchronous and different in specifics. The literary figures (national icons, figures of male and female identity, figures of the other) considered in vol. 4 are not static entities but shifting subjects who enter literary history through canonization or suppression. Given the plural nature of their regional positioning, they represent dynamic, even "nomadic" subjects, i.e., subjects who have experienced various forms of territorial and cultural displacement/repositioning, have historically been challenged by hegemonic groups (national minorities in general), or have been excluded from any existing territorial hierarchy through an arbitrary process of othering (the Romany).

The good news is that our work does not take place in a vacuum: similar efforts to provide non-nationalistic mappings are being undertaken in East-Central Europe by several groups of scholars, some of which (e.g., those associated with the University of Sofia, the Slovenian Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, the Bucharest "New Europe Institute," the Timișoara "Third Europe" group, or the Central European University in Budapest) are represented or discussed also in our *History*. Their common interest is to retrieve the idea of a multicultural "Third Europe" as a buffer between countries with hegemonic ambitions and as a response to local ethnocentrism. For

these scholars, East-Central Europe at its best is not a fault line but a "region of convergences" (Neumann, *Tentația* 223), a *forma mentis* structured around a "phenomenology of the middle way" and a "transregionalism purged of mistrust in specificity" (Spiridon 31-32).

This somewhat idealized notion of a "Third Europe" echoes the concept of "third space" articulated by postcolonial/postmodern theorists like Homi Bhabha and Edward Soja. As a version of radical liminality interposed between defensive localism and leveling globalism, the notion of a "Third Europe" foregrounds complex negotiation between East and West, central and peripheral, global and local. It can, therefore, offer a better response to the new geopolitical polarizations that sprung up after 1989 than the concepts proposed by the theorists of globalism. In spite of their effort to renegotiate the dichotomous world order of the Cold War, the latter perpetuate stereotypical divisions between a civilized West and a culturally backward East. For example, in his 1993 essay, "Culture, Community, Nation," Stuart Hall has difficulty dealing with the social movements (politico-religious and ethnic) that emerged in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia at the end of the twentieth century. While noting the parallel development of nationalist movements in post-Cold War Western Europe and the non-Western world, Hall carefully divides nationalisms into big and small (or "good" and "bad"). He regards the emerging nationalisms of small countries (as a result of the National Liberation Movements or, more recently, of the collapse of the Soviet Empire) as failed imitations of the big nation-building strategies. Like Huntington, Hall laments the absolutism of the Orthodox and Muslim world but seems to overlook the "othering" violence perpetrated by Western Catholic and Protestant states in their imperial expansion. As Václav Havel put it in his keynote address at the Conference on Europe's New Democracies (July 13-19, 2001), the Euroamerican West

has exported to the rest of the world, in addition to numerous remarkable values ... also rather problematic ones: from the principle of the forced eradication of other cultures and the repression of other religions to the cult of permanent economic expansion, without concern for its qualitative effects. (12)

Therefore, we need to move away from the stereotypical divisions between a civilized West and a retrograde East, regarding them as coequal regions in a "multicultural and multipolar world." (12) In Havel's view, the new world order should encourage the development of regional groupings, emphasizing simultaneously "decentralization and integration." Participation in a "supra-national region" does not diminish the individual countries' sense of cultural identity; on the contrary, it "eases their access to a vaster and more

complex geopolitical horizon and assists in external recognition of their individuality" (Carter, Jordan and Rey vii). In similar ways, regions themselves should maintain their identity, contributing their specific features to a multicentered Europe. In order to be successful, cooperation must take place between "clearly delineated regions and historically grounded entities" (Havel 13).

The various contributors to our *History* subscribe to this concept of dynamic regionalism, treating East-Central Europe both as a [multi]center and an "interface" between two other major regions in Europe (Carter, Jordan, and Rey vii). They conceive of the region's literatures as interrelated components rather than as competing entities, emphasizing the flow of cultural products across borders, physical and otherwise. The literary mappings they offer have their lines of demarcation continually crossed, blurred, and (re)mapped. Still, both the individual literatures that participate in this interaction and the larger regional entities maintain their identity, contributing to a dynamic form of transculturality that maintains creative differences. Each essay acknowledges the simultaneity of the local and regional positionings of authors, texts, and their representations. Authors, texts and the figures they represent are not static but moving entities that enter various relationships within and across the national boundaries. Their dynamic identity questions traditional definitions of particular literary cultures, redefining them as dialogic, products of transnational interaction.

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