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CULTURE REPORT

Progress Europe

Europe reads – Literature in Europe

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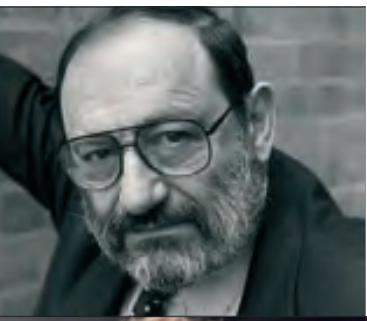
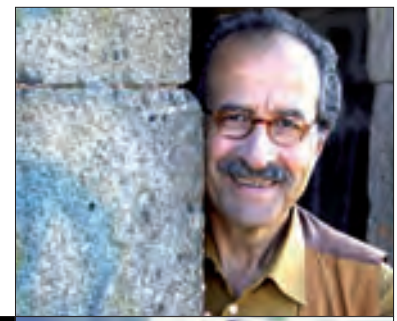
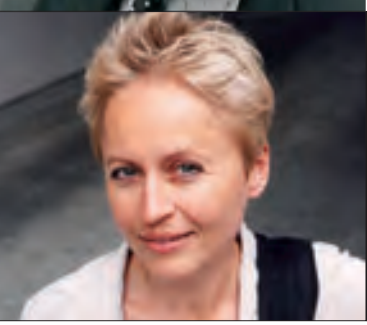


From a declaration of love to a sure path to fame

For some, it is an object of great desire; for others, a vehicle for professional success: each and every author has a very personal relationship with a book. Can literature strengthen a sense of European identity? What role does literature play in Europe?





Umberto Eco, Rafik Schami, Ulrike Draesner, Tim Parks, Andrea Grill: just five of the 33 authors from 18 countries who've contributed to this edition of the Culture Report. Their theme: literature in Europe and the state of the European book market. Their concerns: the love of a good book, reading habits in Europe, the future of the printed word and whether there is such a thing as a European literature. They are tasked with examining what advances have taken place in European cultural relations in recent years.

2. PROGRESS EUROPE?

How writers see the role of culture in Europe

Distinguished Europe

Ingrid Hamm, Executive Director of the Robert Bosch Foundation

Do you know Eeva Park, the successful Estonian author? Or Sigitas Parulskis, the *enfant terrible* of Latvian literature? Slavenka Drakulic, one of Croatia's best-known authors, whose novels and non-fiction works have been translated into many languages, is probably also unknown to a large proportion of the European public. Even the fame of the best-selling British author Tim Parks begins to dissipate beyond the British Isles. All four of these authors are among the 33 writers from 18 countries who've contributed to this third edition of the Culture Report "Progress Europe."

Can literature in Europe contribute to knowing more about neighbouring countries and to building bridges between people? Despite the fragmentation of the European book market, is literature capable of promoting intercultural understanding or even helping the continent to develop a still quite absent sense of identity? These are two key questions addressed in this edition of the Culture Report. The hurdles are quite high. A great proportion of work translated into other European languages is taken from English. With few exceptions writers from Central and Eastern Europe are still hardly known in the West. You won't get very far trying to find an Estonian novel in a Greek book shop. Translators of literary works from, say, Portuguese into Greek and visa versa do not exist. And if they did exist such people would be earning an income that is below the poverty line. One representative of this sorely affected profession registers his views in an article entitled "Why I still translate."

Even European literature that is actually translated into other languages does not necessarily promote mutual understanding. Rather, it often confirms the old clichés, for reasons of "the requirements of good sales figures," according to Adam Thorpe. And so we have "Scandinavian melancholy, Polish trauma and French sex." Thorpe reminds us that the time is long gone when we all had to learn Norwegian in order to understand Ibsen. In fact, reading for pleasure is on the decline in many European countries. Eight years ago, every third German regularly read a book; today, it's one in four. A British study shows that around a quarter of all Britons do not read books at all and a further seven percent only read a book when they're on holidays.

However, this is only one side of the coin. There are also positive developments. New literary festivals, author-in-residence programmes and Houses of Literature in various cities are changing the literary life of Europe. National cultural institutes send writers on reading tours. A number of European countries have established special translation scholarships and translation guidelines are being developed to expand literature beyond national borders. The HALMA network (HALMA is "leap" in Greek), funded by the Robert Bosch Foundation, develops connections between literature centres in Europe, organises intercultural meetings and allows those involved in literary life – authors, translators, cultural mediators – to experience the diversity of various cultures.

All of this allows language barriers to be overcome. In view of the emergence of new media the challenge in Europe is, above all, to inspire the younger generation to read. Whether this is done with a conventional book or with an e-book is a secondary concern.

I wish each and every reader of the Culture Report a stimulating read and an awakened curiosity for known and unknown writers. My thanks is extended to the authors and the translators, who reflect the diversity of literature in Europe.

The camels of Europe

Sebastian Körber, Deputy Secretary-General of the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations)

Whoever writes remains, is an age-old saying. Umberto Eco expresses his love of literature a little more forcefully in calling the book a form of "life insurance, a small anticipation of immortality." He defiantly confronts the enemies of the book – from bookworms and mould to censors and the disdain of libraries – as he defends the pleasure of reading. For the grand eminence of contemporary literature in Europe, reading is a sensual experience and literature is a passionate dialogue between author and reader.

This third edition of the Culture Report "Progress Europe" examines the role of literature and the state of the European book market. But it also examines how writers view the role of culture in Europe. How do they define European culture and what have been the advances and the setbacks in European cultural relations in recent years? The answers are quite varied. Specialists like the Oxford professor Angus Phillips analyses European reading habits and asks whether Google is making us dumber. Is someone who is used to using no more than 140 characters to write a Twitter text at all capable of or willing to read challenging books like Tolstoy's *War and Peace*? Rüdiger Wischenbart has no fear of digitalisation and staccato thinking. He detects less the demise of written cultural goods than the chance for attracting new target groups and new ways of distributing texts.

The writers themselves? Their reaction is also varied. Rafik Scharmi, who grew up in Damascus between Palestinians, Jews, Armenians, Afghans and Lebanese and is now a successful German-language author, sees himself as a mediator between worlds. For Scharmi, the role of the writer as a mediator provides a great chance for Europe. Tim Parks, on the other hand, who lives in Italy and whose books are printed in the millions in English, believes it's naïve to imagine that writers can promote a dialogue of cultures. He dismisses the idea that Europe could become a theme to inspire new writing, and he rejects the need for literature funding schemes at a European level. For Parks, the idea that the EU should decide which writers receive funding and which ones should be left to succeed on their own is more than unsettling.

And not to forget translators. Highly praised and badly paid, they are said to provide the much-needed bridge between otherwise isolated reading cultures and book markets in Europe. Here, literary translators explain their motivations. In fact, in this edition of the Culture Report translators play the central role in helping us to understand voices from Malta, Latvia and Portugal. It is thanks to their work that this edition can be published in five languages – even if, in the words of Rafik Schami, the task of writing requires the patience of a camel, the courage of a lion and the deep breath of a blue whale.

The Culture Report "Progress Europe" could never have been produced without our partners. In this respect, I would like to sincerely thank the Robert Bosch Foundation, the British Council, the Foundation for German-Polish Cooperation, the Swiss Cultural Foundation Pro Helvetia and Portuguese Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for their cooperation. I am pleased that this example of European cooperation has now established itself somewhat and will continue to grow in the future.

EUROPE READS

Only a small percentage of books from neighbouring European countries are available to us in translation. "We read books first and foremost from the United States and only afterwards from other European nations," says the Polish journalist Adam Krzeminski. Can one talk at all about a 'European' literature, when hardly any literature is read Europe-wide due to a lack of translation? What role does literature play in the formation of a European identity? Do we burden literature too much when we lumber it with the job of promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue?

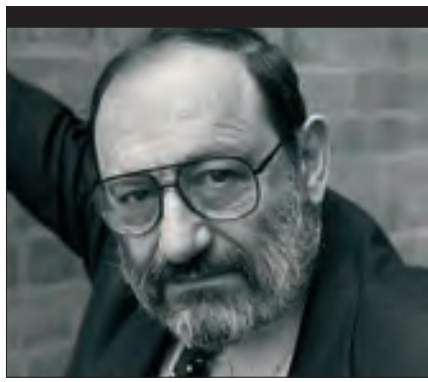
What sort of bonds

do books create?


OPEN

A declaration of love

A book is irreplaceable. The information within its pages can perhaps be imparted in other ways but every true reader knows that his or her favourite book only means something in the shape and form in which it exists on the bookshelf. Here, the musings of a lover of books. *By Umberto Eco*



There were books before the invention of the printing press even though they existed first in the form of rolls and only gradually became what they are today. In whatever form, the book allowed writing to become personalised. The book retains a portion of collective memory which, nevertheless, has been fashioned from a personal viewpoint. When we stand in front of obelisks, steles, boards or gravestones we try to decipher them. We have to know the particular alphabet and know what the essential information is that is meant to be passed on – this is where so-and-so is buried; this year, so-and-so many sheaves of grain were produced; king so-and-so conquered this and a number of other countries. We do not ask ourselves who might have carved or engraved it.

When we have a book in front of us though, we look for a person, an individual view of things. We not only try to decipher it but also to interpret the thoughts, the intentions. And if one searches for intention one inquires of a text; it can have a number of different readings.

The reading becomes a dialogue. But this is the paradox of the book: it is a dialogue with someone who is not present, someone who has been dead for centuries and is only present in words. There is one interpretation of books known as hermeneutics, and where there is hermeneutics there is also the cult of the book. The three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have developed as a permanent interpretation of a holy book. The book has become a symbol of truth to such a degree that the truth is protected and only reveals itself to those who know how to inquire of it. In order to end a discussion, to emphasise a point or to destroy an opponent one can simply say: "It is written here!"

Of course books can also be used to

make us believe in lies, although they still possess the virtue of contradicting one another, and they teach us to critically appraise the information they provide. Reading also helps us not to believe books. The illiterate who does not know where others are in the wrong is also unaware of his own rights.

The book is a form of life insurance, a small anticipation of immortality. It is a look back (unfortunately) and not ahead, but you can't have it all. We do not know whether we will remember our experiences after we are dead. But we do know that those of us living today remember the experiences of those who have lived before us, and that others who will come after us will remember our experiences. Even someone who is not Homer might remain in the memory of the future, for all that I know, as the protagonist of an accident that ended well on August 14 on the freeway from Milan to Rome. Granted, that's not much but it's better than nothing. In order to be remembered in the hereafter Herostratos set the temple of Artemis in Ephesus on fire. And the hereafter made him famous, unfortunately, in that it recalled his stupidity.

In anticipation of immortality

Some people claim that less is being read today, that young people do not read at all and that we have entered, as an American critic once said, the age of the Decline of Literacy. I don't know. Certainly a lot of time is spent in front of the television today, and there are risk freaks who do nothing other than watch television just as there are risk freaks who have fun injecting deadly substances into their veins. But it is also true that never before has so much been printed and never before have there been so many giant, flourishing bookshops, which appear like discotheques, full of young people, who perhaps don't buy much but flick through books for hours, observing and informing themselves.

The problem rather, and this applies also to books, is the abundance, the difficulty of choice, the danger of not being able to decide anymore. It is no wonder: the dissemination of the book carries with it all the defects of democracy, a form of rule in which everyone can speak, including dullards and even scoundrels.

The question is how one can be brought up to choose, because, admittedly, if one doesn't learn one is in danger of standing helpless before so many books like Funes with his limitless cognition. When everything seems memorable nothing remains valuable and one would rather forget everything.

How can one be brought up to choose? One could ask, for example, whether the book one is about to read will be thrown away after reading. You might argue that you're not able to know this before you read a book. However, if we find that after reading two or three books we no longer have any real wish to grab another one then we ought to reconsider how we select them. Throwing away a book after it's been read

The dissemination of the book carries with it all the defects of democracy, a form of rule in which everyone can speak, including dullards and even scoundrels.

is like not wanting to see someone again after just having had sex with them. In this case, it's all about fulfilling a bodily need and not love.

It should be possible however, to develop a love affair with the books of our lives. When this happens it means we are talking about books which offer an intensive inquiry, in which we discover that with every reading something new is revealed. It is indeed a love affair, for it is in the state of being in love within which lovers joyously discover that every time is just like the first time. If one discovers that every time is just like the second time, then it is time for a divorce or, with regard to books, time to throw them away.

When we talk about being able to throw away or to keep a book we are talking about an object which can not only be loved because of its content but also because of its form.

Bibliophiles are people who also collect books because of the beauty of their typographical composition, their paper and their bindings. Perverse bibliophiles become so overwhelmed by their love of these visual and tactile components that they do not read the books they collect and even, if the pages are still commercially uncut, do not cut them, in order for them not to lose value. However, every passion produces its own forms of fetishism. It is true, nevertheless, that the book lover may well wish to own three different editions of the same book, and sometimes the differences between each edition also influence the way we approach the reading of the book. A friend of mine, who happens to be a writer, and with whom I occasionally go in search of old editions of books by Italian poets, always says that it is a completely different feeling reading Dante in modern paperback format than reading the lovely pages of an *edizione aldina*. And many people who discover the very first edition of a modern classic feel a special emotion upon re-reading the prose or verse in the typographical form the first readers read it in. In addition to the memories that such a book yields through its text there is also the memory it discharges as a physical object, the scent of history which impregnates it.

Generally speaking bibliophilism is a costly passion. To be sure, someone who wants to purchase a copy of the first 42-lined edition of the Gutenberg Bible has to be in possession of at least five million dollars. I say "at least" because a few years ago one of the last available copies was sold (the others are found in public libraries where they are guarded like treasures) and if someone was willing to give up a copy today they might be able to demand double that price. However, one can also develop a love of collecting books even if one is not rich.

Worms and mould

Maybe not everyone knows that a number of books from the sixteenth century can be purchased today for the price of two visits to a restaurant or for two cartons of cigarettes. Books do not always become expensive with age. There are book lovers'

Throwing away a book after it's been read is like not wanting to see someone again after just having had sex with them.

editions that were printed just 20 years ago. However, for the price of a Timberland boot you can afford the simple pleasure of having a nice, old folio on your own bookshelf. You can touch the parchment binding, feel the texture of the paper, observe the passing of time and the impact of outside forces as evidenced by mould and moisture stains, by the work of worms which have sometimes burrowed long winding tunnels through hundreds of pages. Their shape and form can be extremely beautiful, similar to the beauty of a snow crystal. Even mutilated or damaged books can often tell us dramatic stories: the name of the publisher erased to escape the wrath of the censure; sections or whole pages cut out by prudish readers or librarians; brownish paper used because the book was printed underground with cheap material; signs of long periods of storage, possibly in the cellar of a monastery; signatures, comments and underlined words, bearing witness to various owners over hundreds of years.

Collecting books, even on a small scale, even if only in 'modern antiquity,' is increasingly becoming an act of pietas in the sense of ecological ministration, for it is not only the whale, the fur seal and the bear we have to rescue but also the book.

What do we need to rescue books from? Well, the old books from carelessness, from rotting away in damp, inaccessible cellars, from wind and rain. But new books have to be rescued as well from a malignant evil that nests in their cells.

Books become old. Some age well, others less so. This certainly depends on the conditions under which they're kept but also on the material they are made from. In any case, we know that a tragic phenomenon emerged around the middle of the nineteenth century. One stopped making paper from textile or fabric and began to make it from wood. As a visit to any library will show, paper made from textile keeps for centuries. There are books from the fifteenth century that appear as if they've just been printed. The paper is still white, fresh, and the pages rustle when turned. However, since the second half of the nineteenth century, the average life of a book has not been able to exceed 70 years. A number of books that are now more than a hundred years old, despite a premature yellowing of the pages, were clearly made out of valuable and robust material. But scientific works and novels from the 1950s, especially French books, are already falling apart well before they have reached the age of 70. They crumble like communion wafers when you pick them up. The fear is that a paperback produced today will only last for 20 to 30 years. We only need to go into a bookshop to look at paperbacks produced ten years ago to see how close they are to an early stage of senescence.

It is a horrifying drama: they are produced to provide witness, to offer a collection of memories, like model handwriting or architectural constructions that are meant to last for centuries. But books can no longer fulfil their task. Every author in the past, who wrote not only for money but out of a love for his or her own work, knew that a book could be trusted with a message that would be readable centuries later. Today, an author knows that a book will only just

outlive its creator. Of course, the message will be entrusted to a reprint. But reprints are produced according to the fashion of the times and don't always provide the best light in which to judge the value of a work.

If we are to say that fashion or prevailing tastes are so often wrong about the value of a book, then we also need to bring those who get it so wrong to account for their mistakes; specifically, the judgement of the critic. If we had listened to Saverio Bettinelli in the eighteenth century, Dante would have been reduced to pulp.

For the books of the future there are already canny processes in place. For example, many American university publishing houses are producing works on acid-free paper, which keeps deterioration at bay for longer. But leaving aside the fact that this technology will only be used for scientific works and hardly for the debut work of a young writer, what's going to happen to the millions of books that have been published from the late nineteenth century up until yesterday?

Books in libraries can be impregnated with certain chemical substances, page for page. This is possible but very expensive.

Of course, everything could be stored on microfilm. But we all know that microfilm is only really for very motivated readers, who must have very good eyes. You can't browse through old bookshelves anymore, spellbound by chance discoveries. With microfilm, you look for something you already know exists. Modern electronic technology allows texts to be scanned, saved in a computer and printed out. This is very good for years of newspapers, when you think that newspapers fall apart after ten years. But it's certainly no good for printing a forgotten 600-page novel. In any case, such technology is only useful for researchers, not for your normal, curious reader.

Nevertheless, the doting love of a book collector, who protects an old book from dust, light, heat, moisture, worms, smog and incidental decomposition, can also extend the life of a cheap edition of a book from the 1920s. At least until someone rediscovers it, revaluates it and initiates a reprint.

But books are not only dying out. Sometimes they are also destroyed. In the 1930s, books were burnt on pyres after they had been declared "degenerate" by the Nazis. Of course, this was a symbolic gesture; not even the Nazis wanted to destroy the entire heritage of books in their country. But symbolic gestures are those that count. Fear those who destroy, censor and ban books: they want to destroy or censor our memories. Whoever believes that books are too numerous and too uncontrollable, and that the vegetal memory remains a threat, destroys animalistic memories in the end, as well as brains and human bodies. It begins with books and ends with gas chambers.

By the way, someone has told me of a way to ward off book worms without having to kill them: you use a huge clock with an infernally loud tick, like the one our grandmother had in the kitchen. At night, when the worms prepare to come out of their holes, the clock makes the bookshelf on which it's placed tremble. The terrified worms remain in their holes. Not that this solution is all that ecologically friendly: if

the worms cannot come out of their holes anymore, they starve. But we've got no choice: it's either them or us.

There are other enemies of books, namely those people who conceal them. Books can be concealed in many different ways. Because they cost something, not having a comprehensive network of public libraries is enough to conceal books from those who can't buy them.

One also conceals books in leaving our great historical libraries to rack and ruin. Those who conceal books must be fought against, because they are just as dangerous as book worms.

It is often said that the new information media will kill off the book. It has also been claimed that the book already killed off older forms of information media. In Plato's Phaidros we read how the Pharaoh Thamus reacted when the god Theut, or Hermes, introduced his new invention, writing. "This invention will ensure forgetfulness in the souls of those who learn to use it, because they will no longer train their memories. By trusting in the text they will only remember by virtue of an external sign and no longer through internal effort."

Today we know that Thamus was wrong. Writing has not disposed of the need for memory, it has expanded its potential. A writing of memories and a memory of writings has come into being. Our memory is strengthened in that it reminds us of books and brings them into a dialogue with each other. A book is not a machine to block out thoughts it internalises for itself. It is a machine for the production of interpretations, for the spawning of new thoughts.

A huge clock with an infernally loud tick, like the one our grandmother had in the kitchen, holds book worms at bay. At night, when the worms prepare to come out of their holes, the clock makes the bookshelf on which it's placed tremble. The terrified worms remain in their holes.

Expanding the potential of memory

Victor Hugo, who saw lots of wretched architecture in the first half of the nineteenth century, said that architecture was condemned to ruin. It was withering, closing in on itself, becoming bleak; window panes were replacing the colourful church window. And all the while the printing of books was gaining in currency, increasing enormously, creating the biggest building of modern times, a swarm of intelligence proceeded to construct a building that would twist in endless spirals to the heavens. "That is the second tower of Babel of the human race."

I believe that those who complain today about the deterioration of reading in the light of new visual media and a flood of electronic information will one day sound just as pathetic as Victor Hugo does in large part today. To be sure, the press will lose a number of functions it previously had. Already, newspapers are poised to become something other than the gazettes of yesteryear, as their main task – to disseminate the latest news – is fulfilled by television with a twelve-hour time advantage. Maybe we won't even need to print timetables

soon, which are hard to read anyway, but will be able to buy small electronic devices at a newspaper kiosk, into which we simply type two place names and can see all the connections for a preferred route at once.

On a computer screen, we can only read short texts for a short time. If it is short, we can also read a love letter on the computer screen. For it doesn't matter what medium we use to read, what matters is what is said and what frame of mind we read it in. But if the love letter is long, we have to print it out in order to read it in a secluded corner.

It is thousands of years ago that humanity got used to reading. The eye reads and the entire body participates. Reading also means finding the right position and incorporates using the neck, the spine and the muscles of the buttocks. And the form of the book, which has been studied for hundreds of years and has been ergonomically improved, is a form that this object has to have in order for it to be held in the hands and at the right distance from the eyes. Reading also has something to do with our physiology.

The rhythm of reading follows the rhythm of the body; the rhythm of the body follows the rhythm of reading. One does not only read with the head, one reads with the entire body. This is why we can laugh or cry over a book, and if we read something horrible it raises the hairs on the back of our necks. For even if it only appears to speak of ideas, a book always speaks of other feelings and of the experiences of other bodies. If it is not merely a pornographic book and it speaks of bodies, it provides us with ideas. And we are not immune to feeling in our fingertips when we touch a book; unpleasant experiences with book bindings or with plastic pages show us how the process of reading is also a tactile experience.

Bibliophiles are neither deterred by CD-ROMs nor by E-books. On the internet, a bibliophile can find antiquarian book catalogues; on CD-ROMs, whole works are stored that are difficult for anyone to keep at home, such as the 221 folios of the Patrologia Latina by Migne. In E-book form, a bibliophile can easily carry around selected bibliographies and catalogues, a priceless repertoire that is always at hand, especially during a visit to a trade fair for antiquarian books. In any case, a bibliophile can be sure of the fact that if all of the original books stored on an E-book were to disappear, the value of his or her own collection would double or even increase tenfold.

But the bibliophile also knows that the book has a long life, and this becomes clear upon surveying a prized book shelf with loving scrutiny. If all of this information, accumulated since the time of Guttenberg, had been stored on magnetic tape, would it have lasted 200 or 300 or 550 years? And would the contents of the works, along with the vestiges of page turning, hand-written comments and traces of dirty finger-marks from before our time, have been delivered to us? Can one really fall in love with a disc, the way one can fall in love with the crisp, white

The eye reads and the entire body participates. Reading also means finding the right position and incorporates using the neck, the spine and the muscles of the buttocks.

page of a book, which crackles and crinkles when touched, as if it had just been printed?

What a lovely and practical thing a book is! It allows itself to be held anywhere – in a bed, in a boat, even in places where there are no power sockets and no batteries. It endures being dog-eared and underlined and scribbled in. It can be dropped on the ground or left open on one's chest or knees if one is overcome by sleep. It fits in a coat pocket, it can be bumped and knocked, it registers the intensity, the persistence or the regularity of our reading, it reminds us (if it appears to be too new and untouched) that we haven't read it yet.

The format of the book is determined by our anatomy. There are very large books, although these mostly serve a documentary or decorative purpose. A standard book ought to be no smaller than a packet of cigarettes and no bigger than the size of a tabloid newspaper. Its size is dependent on the dimensions of our hands, and these have not changed – at least to date – despite Bill Gates.

I remember the first book fair in Turin at which a large section was set aside for antiquarian books (afterwards this lovely idea seemed to lose its appeal), and school children were at the trade fair and I saw some of them stuck to the vitrines, having discovered for the first time what a real book looked like: not some kind of booklet at a train station kiosk but a book with all of its attributes in the right places. They reminded me of the Barbarian at Borges, who, for the first time, sees a masterwork of human art, a city. He falls to his knees in front of Ravenna and becomes a Roman. It would satisfy me enough to know that the children of Turin at least went home with a feeling of being uplifted – or perhaps with memories of a benevolent worm hole.

Oh yes, I forgot, worm holes are also a passion of the bibliophile. Not every worm hole reduces the value of a book. If they have not ruined the text, some of the patterns made by worms resemble delicate lacework. OK, I admit it: I also love these patterns. Of course, I register my disapproval and abhorrence with the antiquarian who is selling me the book, in order to push down the price. But I openly admit, one is prepared to stoop to any kind of villainy for the love of a good book.

Translation: Geoff Rodoreda

Umberto Eco, born in 1932, is Professor for Semiotics at the University of Bologna. His writings range from ***History of Beauty*** to the novel ***The Name of the Rose***, which brought him worldwide fame. This article is taken from excerpts of his book ***La memoria vegetale***, published in 2006, and translated into German by Burkhart Kroeber as ***Die Kunst des Bücherliebens*** (Carl Hanser Verlag, 2009).

Beyond the politburo Literature allows us to see the world from another point of view. We immerse ourselves in a character in a book and are able to expand our ability to empathise with the other and perhaps develop more tolerance. What role do books play in questions of European identity? What sort of connections or bonds with the other can it create? *By Adam Thorpe*

Every year the Frankfurt Book Fair sees a ferment of international bargaining and buying, each immense hall rumbling to the chatter of editors, agents and salespeople, with the occasional sighting of a bewildered author. Something about the atmospheric conditions sends the participants slightly mad: what is known as the 'Frankfurt effect.' Mad enough, for instance, to think that even literary works are critically important to the running of modern society: beyond the Fair, however, life goes on as usual, with the mass of Europeans preferring moving images to the effortful parade of print. A glance at the relevant statistics is enough to send a glacial wind through those busy halls, or through the morale of any serious writer. Best to ignore them.

What cannot be ignored, however, is the fact that the Fair's frantic transnational interaction is something of an illusion; back in the bookshops of Europe, the majority of offerings are either national, or translated from English – especially American English. Where English is already the native language, things are worse, not better: apart from classics (Tolstoy, Mann, Balzac), the average bookshop in Britain has only a tiny scattering of contemporary foreign titles. Exceptions such as the success of, say, a certain Swedish detective thriller show what a wasted opportunity this is.

In France, where I have lived for the last twenty years, friends happily talk of an Italian or Spanish novel in the same breath as a French work but the authors are usually well known. The mass of European fiction never passes its own national borders.

Little-known ambassadors

It is expensive to hire a translator even though these unsung ambassadors are no-

toriously underpaid, and publishers need to know that the investment will pay off, even if only in the long term. Those brave publishers in Britain such as Serpent's Tail or Dedalus, who do take the plunge, with the help of small grants, find their books go entirely unreviewed in even the quality newspapers and periodicals – whose book pages (with the understandable exception of the *Times Literary Supplement*) seem to circle around the usual suspects, and rarely proffer any genuinely fresh horizons, European or otherwise.

Of course, a translation is always a compromise, an opaque glass colouring the pure light of the original – as I know from my own current struggle to translate Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Gone are the days when we learned Norwegian just to read Ibsen. The newly-sprung European Union Prize for Literature, which awards a prize to twelve writers from twelve selected countries, will only have a real effect if the winners are then translated into other European languages: given even the *Guardian* has not so far devoted a single line to the prize, it seems yet another EU initiative has once more struck the very low boredom threshold of its citizens.

Perhaps, when it comes to books, there is a suspicion of centralised directives that have nothing to do with the act of writing – which is a personal utterance in a shared tongue, not a shared continent. We remember the Soviet Union's interdiction on virtually anything but the literature of its Socialist Republics – although that comparison is not quite fair, as present-day European literature is theoretically free and uncensored (some would argue, of course, that the publisher's accountants impose their own form of censorship). Nevertheless, we have to be ever-vigilant about the centralising, 'Politburo' element of the EU – nowhere so evident as in the Common Agricultural Policy, which crushed any alternative to chemo-agribusiness and has left the continent's soils, water and wildlife in a dire state, to the vast profit of chemical companies like Bayer and ICI. The fact that there was never any Common Literature Policy must be to do with free speech, although why that argument should not have applied to the far more critical subject of farming, I have no idea.

Gone are the days
when we learned Norwegian
just to read Ibsen.

Inhabiting the other

The fact is, literature thrives on difference, not similarity. Its primary gift is to enable us to enter the being of those who are not ourselves, and who are even entirely other: which is why poetry, drama and fiction are always the first targets of any tyranny. Literature gives us the chance to see the world through significantly different eyes, to inhabit the other, and thus to broaden our human sympathies; perhaps even to increase our capacity for tolerance. That being said, the great modernist poet Fernando Pessoa has not only told me what it is to be Portuguese, but also what it means to be anonymous and human; perhaps the winning novel of the EUPL for Portugal, *Os Meus Sentimentos* by Dulce Maria

Cardoso, will do the same.

If European literature is a polylingual collection of differences, then the key question is whether the qualification 'European,' so important when it comes to a cup in football, has any unifying effect on those differences, or whether it is simply a phrase, a practical vessel to stop a multitude of variegated marbles rolling over the floor. Could the same ever be asked about 'Commonwealth' literature, the subject of many an anthology, critical study and prize? How could such a definition work for 'Hispanic' literature, which drives straight through any European border controls on the way to the Americas?

The accidental Cameroonian

The brand-new Prix Cévennes is a worthy attempt to encourage literary integration by awarding a prize to the best European novel of the year, but of course they have to be already published in French. Knowing how cautious most French publishers are, there might be few surprises. And what about all those non-European writers who live and are published in Europe and even write about it, but who happen to be American, or Cameroonian, or Chinese?

Come to think of it, America makes an interesting comparison. The differences between the states of the United States are as great as those between the nations of Europe (including the north-south and east-west 'divides'), but an American writer writes primarily out of America rather than, say, California or Maine, however deeply implicated the work might be in the particularity of an area. My good friend, the late Frederick Busch, was an American novelist, and although he loved coming 'to Europe' (back to his own roots), and was fully aware that I had dual British-French nationality (born in Paris to British parents, and living in France), I was not in his eyes a 'European' novelist, but an 'English' one.

America has forged its identity through the emotional and symbolic devices of a patria, the means by which its immigrant populations felt (and feel) a sense of belonging in a vast, freshly-conquered continent. This is every American writer's sounding-board, whether or not in opposition, support, or diffidence to it. Oddly, it is a young and somewhat shallow entity – artificial, even – yet immensely powerful.

If Europe ever acts as a sounding-board for its writers, it is as something deep and tragic rather than triumphant. It is the tragic, bass resonance of a long history of extraordinary achievements and catastrophic failures, of democratic refining and brute conquest.

The European Union arose out of the need to avoid a repetition of such failures, these being mostly in the form of wars and massacres, and the attendant pain, suffering and exhaustion. But for literature, human failure is more interesting than its avoidance – we writers all walk in the shadow of *The Oresteia*, just as we trace another root to the philosophical debates in the Athenian agora and the votes cast upon the pnyx.

Often, when I feel momentarily European, it is not just with a sense of comfortable belonging and even affection, but with the thrill and dread of a subliminal vertigo;

of pride mixed with appalling guilt. After all, as humanity faces the consequences of its heedless greed in catastrophic climate change, it is with the sense that its initial cause first slouched into being in Europe.

Europe's present political (rather than emotional) unity, it has to be admitted, is the quarrelsome, ever-compromising one of an extended family, but a somewhat dull family – the means being bureaucratic, a plethora of rules and regulations and the stale air of committees, in which the tender flower of literature withers.

This is unfortunate, because the differences mentioned above will go on having the potential for tragedy, as well as for delight; but for all their laudable and necessary efforts, neither Brussels nor Strasbourg have ever inspired so much as a single great line, even in derision – despite John Keats's belief (which I share) that "poetry makes everything interesting." It is probably up to local initiatives like the Vilecina International Literary Festival in Slovenia, which publishes the Vilecina Almanac (twenty-five authors, not all of them from Central Europe), to nibble away at parochialism – although I can't see that making the *Guardian*, either.

My own fiction has recently been consciously 'European.' This is more from my personal circumstances as much as a desire to shatter British post-imperial narrowness. For instance, my fifth novel *No Telling* (Cape, 2003) concerned a French schoolboy in a grim 1960s Paris suburb, and featured not a single English character. Taking advantage of my dual nationality, I intended it to be a window opening uncompromisingly onto another culture: it sold poorly, despite widespread and flattering reviews, but did slightly better in Dutch. My editor reckoned that if its setting had been Ireland and not France, the novel might have achieved bestseller status. British readers prefer their France to be quaint and paradisal, a holiday destination, a refuge.

We writers all walk in the shadow of The Oresteia, just as we trace another root to the philosophical debates in the Athenian agora and the votes cast upon the pnyx.

Rather the old cliches

Interestingly, *No Telling* has so far failed to find a French publisher. They tend to be drawn to British novels that strengthen or echo a received French opinion about Britain. Thus the literature of Europe that is translated does not necessarily break new ground – of mutual understanding or awareness – but solidifies, by dint of the need to sell, the old clichés: Scandinavian gloom, Polish trauma, French sex (Michel Houellebecq being the summum of contemporary French fiction to the average British reader).

I have German connections through my German nephews (sons of my half-Belgian half brother), and my father's experiences as a serviceman in the last world war. *The Rules of Perspective* (2005) is set in a bombarded German town in 1944, the action being divided between the staff cowering in its art museum and an American infantry officer stumbling through the ruins a day later, who finds the burned bodies of those we hear throughout the novel. During

its writing, I visited Berlin, and was ticked off by a young museum employee, furious that yet another Englishman was concentrating on the few years of Nazi rule and entirely ignoring the centuries of 'ordinary' German history.

It was a telling example of how dangerous it can be to stray over one's border; I replied that the importance of the Nazis had little to do with duration, and everything to do with effect: in my case, and devastatingly, on my own family as well as on my wife's Polish-Jewish relations. My passionate defence made him pause. I believe a minute piece of welding – or at least soldering – happened that evening. At the least, we both learned the importance of cross-cultural sensitivity.

Estonian modesty

Finally, *Between Each Breath* (2007) is explicitly about the meeting of the so-called 'Old Europe' with the 'New Europe' of the ex-communist bloc: a happily-married, middle-aged English composer falls in love with an Estonian student, and fails to take account of the repercussions. The differences here have disastrous, even tragic, consequences – partly through mutual incomprehension hidden under a sheen of well-meaning tolerance (I was also satirising the plump, self-satisfied Blair years).

This novel was translated into Estonian. Its Estonian readers were apparently intrigued to see their country through a foreigner's eyes; belonging to a small and modest nation, they were amazed that anyone would want to write about them at all, and I in turn was amazed at their modesty, given that Estonia is one of the oldest, proudest and most historically put-upon members of Europe. Thus I learned a great deal from this novel, not so much in the writing of it, but in the cross-cultural aftermath.

No one can deny that the frail consensus of the EU, given a tensile strength only by the sheer quantity and complexity of thread, is possibly all that separates us from the old nightmares. But it is the old nightmares that also define us as European, part of our shared legacy, our guilt. Europe may have no border controls in the old sense of customs and excise but the borders exist nevertheless – where literature is concerned, linguistic borders can be simply impassable. Try finding an Estonian novel in a Greek bookshop, or vice-versa, among the Dan Browns and J. K. Rowlings. Yet a nation is defined not just by how it sees itself but by how others see it, and in turn, by how it sees others. Thus I suggest that the real role of European literature within Europe (let alone without) is to illuminate difference, not to promote sameness – while at the deepest level showing how we are all, in the end, vulnerable human beings with similar neuroses, desires and preoccupations.

If the present political and bureaucratic unity is mostly irrelevant to a writer's deeper sense of 'Europeanness,' that same unifying body could do more to encourage

The literature of Europe that is translated solidifies, by dint of the need to sell, the old clichés: Scandinavian gloom, Polish trauma, French sex.

a truly European literature, without turning it into an exclusive club. I recently met an EU translator, driven to despair by the pointless, soporific minutiae of the endless papers, memoranda and reports she was paid to render from English into French: if a fraction of the vast sums at the EU's disposal were to be directed towards literature, in the form of generous publishing grants and serious bursaries for translation rather than yet more prizes in a crowded field, that Estonian novel might have an increased chance of being picked up in a Greek, Slovakian or Belgian bookshop (or even a British one), and difference celebrated as part of a shared adventure.

Adam Thorpe was born in Paris in 1956. He is a poet, novelist and dramatist. He grew up in India, Cameroon and England and now lives in France. After graduating from Oxford University in 1979, he founded a touring theatre and travelled to villages and schools. He has won numerous prizes. His most recent works include a short story volume, ***Is This the Way You Said***? (2006), ***Birds With a Broken Wing*** (2007), as well as the novels ***The Standing Pool*** (2008) and ***Hodd*** (2009).

How we love to fear downfall The printed page is giving way to digital media formats. Small publishing houses are struggling to stand their ground against major players. Yet to call this the beginning of the end for written culture is perhaps a little hasty. Here, a hopeful look at the future of the book. *By Rüdiger Wischenbart*

What is the position of the "book" in today's society? How important is copyright? What role do publishers and business play in current developments? Questions such as these almost inevitably start a pessimistic line of argument in any discussion of trends and progress in book culture.

There is talk of a threat to our culture through digitalisation and the undermining of copyright; of homogenisation and the crushing of diversity through powerfully competitive best-sellers written in English and the monopoly of a few English-speaking companies. For the best part of a decade, the end of an era has been predicted by those who like to call themselves the last remaining witnesses to a disappearing culture of books and reading. However this scenario is largely put forward without supporting empirical evidence.

The fact that our culture of books and reading is undergoing serious changes cannot be ignored. However, changes do not have to mean 'the end' or 'downfall.' With the help of some examples and empirical evidence, the following will describe the current situation and emerging trends within the book world.

What's in a book?

"A book is a non-periodical printed publication of at least 49 pages, exclusive of the cover pages, published in the country and made available to the public," says the UNESCO Standard Definition of November 19, 1964. The Meyers lexicon, in 15 volumes, views it similarly: "Many printed, hand-written or blank pages, bound together in a single volume." These definitions have been used since the 19th century with

few changes. The Grimm Brothers' dictionary states, "Many pages make a book; I have made a book in which I will write all entries; I will write that in a book so it can be remembered." The *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française* by Littré in 1869 defines the book as an "Assemblage d'un assez grand nombre de feuilles portant des signes destinés à être lus," while a century later, the 1969 edition of the popular *Petit Rober* read: "Reunion de plusieurs cahiers de pages manuscrites ou imprimées."

What these definitions highlight is not only the self-contained nature of the book but also that it must have both a minimum scale and a public aspect ("made available to the public"). Even authorship is sometimes, if not always, a point to consider.

There is, however, no mention of the cultural significance of the book as a format or of the diverse instruments used in many European countries to protect it – whether purely legal, such as copyright, or other forms such as fixed retail prices.

This is all the more remarkable when we consider that the authors of these definitions – whether from UNESCO or the dictionary editors – were aware of the arguments about the qualities of the format of the book. In addition, all these definitions could easily apply to digital books because the fact that until now books have existed on paper does not form an essential part of the definition. On the contrary, they are media-neutral and open to innovation.

Vital vessels of knowledge

For books, still perhaps the most important vessels of knowledge in an increasingly digital world, globalisation in the modern sense began over a decade ago. In the spring of 1998 the German company Bertelsmann announced it was taking over the largest US publisher, Random House. It was the vision of Thomas Middlehoff, a board member long since replaced, to organise a production of the Turandot opera in Beijing with an all-star cast. The music and TV production was to be marketed globally via the company's own media channels. A magnificent accompanying publication was to be sold in multiple languages while the company's glossy magazine featured a special report. All this was to be co-ordinated from Gütersloh in Westphalia. Yet the plan failed. And the publishing sector in Germany, and to a certain extent in France, is still propped up almost entirely by mid-sized companies.

Even if we dare take a global perspective, it immediately becomes clear that the worldwide book industry is dominated by Europe. Competition in the USA comes from Bertelsmann, which has been buried deep inside the Random House group for ten years, and the Hachette group belonging to French company Lagardère. Both are family owned and run. The same goes for Mondadori, Bonnier and recently Planeta, currently preparing to take over the second biggest player in France, Editisx, to form a new European group and already openly targeting the international Spanish-speaking market.

Village story as global seller

One year before the Bertelsmann strike from across the Atlantic, an unlikely novel was mounting a significant global take-

over, *The God of Small Things* by an author from Kerala in South India, Arundathi Roy. Within a year, the gripping village story had made it onto best-seller lists everywhere from Germany to Argentina. Behind this worldwide and, above all, rapid success story which created completely new dimensions in global literature, were most importantly a London agency and the well-oiled wheels of international rights with shares on the London and Frankfurt stock markets.

For the year 2008, we have evaluated nine major international markets on the basis of top-ten best-seller lists (USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands and China) and we have found that only five authors made it to the top in four or more countries (Khaled Hosseneini, Stieg Larssen, Ken Follett and John Grisham).

In the 12 months from April 2008 to March 2009 we used the same system to compare 40 of the most successful novelists and discovered that only 13 write in English, among them Afghan-born Khaled Hosseini and Ireland's Ceceila Ahern as well as the Indian Man Booker prize winner Aravind Adiga. The 27 other authors write exclusively in the main European languages as well as Brazilian Portuguese (Paulo Coelho). Languages from outside Europe, central or eastern Europe, did not feature as original languages in the novels.

Taking a closer look at the publishing corporations showcasing these international success stories, we can draw two conclusions: these global corporations may boast heavyweights such as Ken Follett among their authors, whose international translation rights are passed properly and systematically through international branches with increasingly synchronised worldwide release dates.

However, publishers independent of large corporations have the upper hand when it comes to many leading authors. This has been true recently for Khaled Hosseini, who generated high revenues for British Harry Potter publishers Bloomsbury, and for Stieg Larsson, published in the south of France by Actes Sud. A further example of the importance of independent publishers can be seen through the European surprise success story of 2008, Muriel Barbery's scurrilous novel, *L'élégance du hérisson* published by Gallimard.

A long case history

The power of publishing corporations is a complex issue. Of course, the last decade has seen enormous upheavals, as staff at independent publishers Hanser or Suhrkamp in Germany, Gallimard or Actes Sud in France, or their colleagues in the smaller markets of Denmark, Slovenia, Sweden, or Austria can confirm from personal experience.

The risks that small to mid-sized publishers must take when it comes to deciding which titles to publish have risen enormously due to major, complex changes in the market. Time and again, a few genuine

Even if we dare take a global perspective, it immediately becomes clear that the worldwide book industry is dominated by Europe.

top titles – and their authors – are the deciding factor when it comes to success or failure, good times or bad, according to their reception by readers and the media. Bearing this in mind, the solid middle ground appears to be in danger. Average sales figures, which not long ago could reach 10,000 or 15,000 copies for a strong first novel, have generally decreased drastically to 3,000 or 5,000 – against the background of a constantly increasing number of new publications and unsold returns, books sent back by the retailer after a few months because they have not sold quickly enough. The large publishers, who produce far greater numbers, have a stronger position in an increasingly concentrated market, often due to a greater ability to offer discounts and gain prominent display areas in shops.

The big players

However, the major players are actually far smaller than their reputations. For a better perspective, it makes sense to take a detailed look at the 12 largest publishing groups in Germany. They generate combined revenues of around 3.1 billion euros (2008).

Exactly what percentage of the entire German market (around 9.5 billion euros) this accounts for can only be roughly estimated since we must also take into account the discounts which the publishers allow dealers, usually around the 50 percent mark. However, when it comes to science, education and textbooks there are completely different, variable distribution ratios which account for around half the revenues of the 12 largest publishing companies.

Only five of the top 12 publishers operate primarily in the general book market (novels, non-fiction, children's literature, travel books, etc.): Random House, companies belonging to Holtzbrink Gruppe, Weltbild, MairDumont and Bonnier Gruppe subsidiaries. These companies generate a billion euros revenue each year, in the sectors mentioned above, in the German-speaking region. Nevertheless, they are not a homogenous machine squeezing the diversity out of the publishing industry.

The diversity of books is best illustrated through the image of the library with its vast number of volumes. Each book appears to be complete in itself yet still connected to the others – not only through a systematic order of catalogued objects, but less obviously, via an invisible and intricate network of knowledge tied together by readers themselves.

This picture of the library will forever symbolise the homogenous, highly specialised sphere of books – and it is beginning to dissolve in front of our eyes. It is easy to put into words, as the initiators of the Heidelberg Appeal once did when they said, "our culture is in danger."

The digital book

The digitalisation not only of a text but, more significantly, the entire creation, distribution and criticism process is certainly an extremely powerful tool for change. Yet whether this will make it difficult for

authors in the future to produce their next novel, essay or poetry collection is doubtful.

What is certain, however, is that the printed book has ceased to be the only method of distributing complex knowledge. Under the influence of key international publishers over the last five years, three segments have become distinct: specialist nonfiction (including large parts of scientific journals), education (comprising not only teaching materials but primarily standardised texts), and the normal book trade – the items typically associated with publishing.

In just a few years, deep and far-reaching changes to the publishing industry have been caused by a number of factors: restructuring, relocation and outsourcing of large divisions, particularly in the area of education, as well as the often unsuccessful introduction of private equity funds in the generally lucrative area of specialist publications.

Moreover, in two of the areas – specialist publications and education – the integrated digital value chain has become the norm, and not only in niche markets. Companies such as Thompson advertise with investors so that more than 80 per cent of their revenues and profits come from digital products.

Changing reading habits

With the change from book to digital products comes an equally fundamental change to the business model, namely, introducing a subscription-style system – replacing the sale of single titles or series – guaranteeing a far more consistent and reliable source of income.

This development is only gradually reaching the much more conservative and starkly fragmented normal book trade. Publishers have found many ways to brace themselves against the rapid changes taking place. Nevertheless, pressure is intensifying. On the one hand readers' habits are changing. Across all areas of life, screens – from computers to mobile phones – are interfaces for exchanging information, entertainment and culture. On the other hand, cost pressures are increasing and the current economic crisis is becoming, as so many crises of the past, a powerful generator of change and upheaval.

However, a restriction in the range of publications available is not a necessary consequence of these developments. Rather it is changes in the traditional book trade which are causing significant shifts. Two basic trends are developing conversely: on the one hand, the gap is opening between the increasing number of new publications and the decreasing number of average sales each year. On the other hand, distribution channels, and discount developments for titles and publishing houses with limited power in the market – the main drivers of diversity – are creating consistently better conditions for market penetration.

Literary translations from less widely spoken languages, essays on culture and the arts, and documentation, local education and children's books, artistic works outside the mainstream are all increasingly being published. Even professional publishing

houses are venturing beyond the boundaries of a market-oriented cultural production. Many highly reputable publishers freely admit that they only include translations from less established, best-selling literature in their programmes if at least the translation costs are covered.

With few exceptions, authors in the area of the humanities write and publish without charging a fee. In many areas authors are even expected to create material for the production and distribution of their work. Authors make a profit mostly 'on the side,' by gaining a reputation, by raising their profiles and through self marketing. In these areas, book culture has become similar to music production, where for many musicians publishing a song is a means of gaining promotion rather gaining income.

Writing for "free"

However, what has changed little is the fact that books are being written and published – featuring a variety of content and, thanks to digitalisation, in a wide variety of media. The book as "the most universal and useful format for the exchange of ideas and complex knowledge" is likely to be effective and indispensable in the future. In the meantime, what's clearly taking place is a further fragmentation of the formerly homogenous library. After the fragmentation of traditional books from digital formats, there has been a further split, of best-sellers from less profitable works.

The development of this diversity – in terms of content and media – is perhaps the most important key to making books useful in the future under such complex and unclear circumstances. Therefore, the public outcry over Google's cataloguing monopoly and the legal protection of access and availability to the range of content is an issue we must address.

However, to portray Google as an ogre gobbling up the freedom of books and culture is nonsensical, providing there is an alternative model in the digital and fragmented book industry in which to organise access and perspective, order and circulation. This scaremongering serves only to create an unfounded fear, restricting opportunities for authors and their publishers.

A tried and trusted usefulness

At the same time it is becoming increasingly clear that existing and universal regulations, which cover authorship alone, are not enough. It is not the weakening of copyright, not piracy, monopolies or a predatory free-for-all mentality which are the drivers of current developments. Rather, it is a complex mix of production and distribution methods, changing cultural habits and an imbalance between extremely commercially successful authors and works which lead to success through various other means.

From the single homogenous library, another more open and complex space has opened in which the old homogenous buil-

This scaremongering serves only to create an unfounded fear, restricting opportunities for authors and their publishers.

ding is still important, but no longer the only point of orientation. The diversity of books is reflected in the diversity of readers and their different ways of using books. If we look back at the basic definitions of the book, freeing it from the weight of aggrandisement, its tried and trusted usefulness comes to the fore, and with it the positive shape of things to come.

Translation: Kathryn Wells

Rüdiger Wischenbart was born in 1956 in Graz and was owner of and advisor to Content and Consulting in Vienna and was responsible for international culture, media and books. He produced the annually updated Global Ranking of the Publishing Industry, evaluating international best-sellers for a network of specialist journals and he provided consulting services for international trade shows. He has recently published the ***Diversity Report 2008*** about trends and developments in translation in Europe. For further information: www.wischenbart.com or www.booklab.info

Mambo

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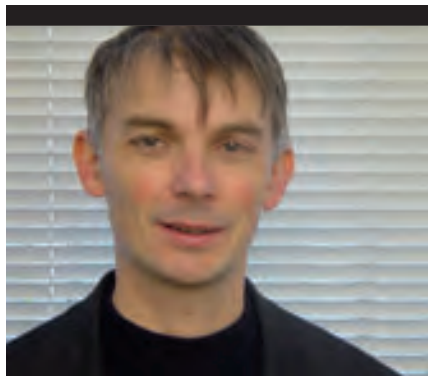
The pleasure and pain of reading

Eight years ago, every third German read a book regularly – now it's only one in four. In 2005, a British study found that 27 percent of Britons had never read a book and a further seven percent only ever read a book on holidays. How are reading habits changing across Europe?

By Angus Phillips



The co-founder of Apple, Steve Jobs, has said of books: "The fact is that people don't read anymore." Is this true? How are reading habits changing across Europe? Are there differences between the countries and regions of Europe? What could explain any differences? Are there also changes in what we read?

If surveys do suggest a decline in reading of books over time, this is hardly surprising given the competition the book faces from a variety of other media, from TV to computer games and the internet, and there has been a definite shift in the place of the book in society. TV and film offer relaxation to many. The internet is now the preferred source of factual information. There are also conflicting demands on people's time and the rhythm of life often denies the breathing space in which a book can be picked up and enjoyed.

In the novel *Saturday* by Ian McEwan, Henry Perowne, a successful neurosurgeon, finds reading fiction hard work: "His free time is always fragmented, not only by errands and family obligations and sports, but by the restlessness that comes with these weekly islands of freedom. He doesn't want to spend his days off lying, or even sitting, down … He doesn't seem to have the dedication to read many books all the way through. Only at work is he single-minded; at leisure, he's too impatient. He's surprised by what people say they achieve in their spare time, putting in four or five hours a day in front of the TV to keep the national averages up."

There have certainly been some alarming surveys into reading habits. A United Kingdom study in 2005 showed that 27 percent of Britons never read a book at all; a further seven percent would only ever read a book on holiday (BML, 2005). A 2008 study in Germany showed that 25 percent of the population never read a book (Stiftung Lesen, 2008). The trend in Germany

is for fewer books to be read each year, with an increase in those reading 1 to 5 books a year (44 percent compared to 38 percent in 2000) and a decrease in those reading 11 or more books a year (28 percent compared to 34 percent in 2000).

The statistics regarding reading habits have to be approached with some caution. For example, general questions regarding reading do not necessarily reveal the full picture. Polls taken in the Netherlands in 1975 and 2000 revealed the same percentage (54 percent) of people had read books for pleasure in the previous month. By contrast a diary study showed that the percentage reading for at least a quarter of an hour in the period of one week had fallen from 49 percent to 31 percent over the same period. (Knulst and van den Broeck, 2003)

An international time use study, with comparisons of data across five countries, confirmed that the time spent on reading in the Netherlands was indeed in decline but that there remained high levels of participation (90 percent). The study covered the reading of all printed material, not only books but also newspapers and magazines, and concentrated on reading as a primary activity (not for work or education). For both France and the United Kingdom, the results were different to the Netherlands. In both countries there was an increase in the time spent reading for all printed materials, and an increase in the participation rates for reading books. Overall, however, as in the Netherlands, participation in all forms of reading had declined: in France from 44 percent (1975) to 35 percent (1998); in the United Kingdom from 66 percent (1975) to 58 percent (2000). Focusing on reading books, the study concluded that the amount of time spent reading differed according to the level of education and by gender (women read more than men). In France, for example, single households read more than other households and those with young children read less.

National differences

Participation in reading varies across Europe by country and region. When examining reading books for reasons other than for work or study (Skaliotis, 2002), the overall average for the EU in 2001 was 45 per cent – the highest averages were found in Sweden (72 per cent), Finland (66 per cent) and the United Kingdom (63 per cent). By contrast the lowest averages were found in Portugal (15 per cent) and Belgium (23 per cent). Five out of the fifteen member states at that time had 50 percent or more of their population who did not read any books at all, whether for work, study or pleasure. The more recent Eurobarometer survey (2007) does not offer a direct comparison since a different form of question was asked, encompassing all forms of book reading. For those reading more than five books in the previous twelve months, the highest averages were found in Sweden (60 percent), Denmark (56 percent), and the United Kingdom (56 percent). The survey also produced figures for those reading no books in the previous year: the highest averages were found in Malta (54 percent), Portugal (49 percent), and Cyprus (43 percent). (Eurobarometer, 2007)

Reading fiction
is hard work.

Reading habits vary across Europe for a variety of reasons, which include reading culture, availability of books, library and educational resources, levels of education, the degree of urbanisation and national income. There are apparent differences in reading between Northern and Southern Europe, with lower levels in the Mediterranean countries. What factors can explain these differences?

The general way people organise their day and use their time is similar across countries, although some differences can be noted. Lunch breaks, for example, are longer in the Mediterranean countries, particularly in France, than elsewhere, with the result that the amount of leisure time is shorter. The Finnish have an hour more leisure time than the French and the Italians (Eurostat Pocketbook, page 149).

In Greece there are fairly low levels of both book and newspaper readership, owing to a variety of factors which include the Mediterranean climate, the relatively recent growth in higher education and the undeveloped library sector (Banou and Phillips, 2008). There are differences between Northern and Southern Europe in the level of education completed by their populations, and there does seem to be a strong link between book readership and the level of education.

How else can reading be measured? The sale of books is one other possible measure and the number of books bought per capita can be examined by country. But other factors must be borne in mind, including library usage, second-hand purchases, and the circulation of books (passed on to friends and family). Book purchasing broadly increases with age, income levels and the age at which a person leaves education. Lower book prices and the wider availability of paperbacks may be supply side influences to higher purchasing. But is the purchasing of books a good measure given that many of us have an array of unread books on our shelves? The 3-for-2 offers so common in the United Kingdom may be stimulating the number of unread books or the stock available in charity shops.

Book purchasing will vary between countries according to the pricing and availability of books. There are differences in the penetration of bookshops between countries and some have a greater range of cheap paperbacks available. Some countries, such as Germany and France, maintain fixed pricing for books; whilst others, notably, the United Kingdom, allow fierce price discounting. In the latter market discounted books are available not only in bookshops but also in supermarkets and from the internet.

High levels of participation in reading can be found in Scandinavia. Finland has high levels of new titles published per capita and books sold per capita. Schoolchildren in Finland are renowned for their reading attainment and Finland topped the league table in the 2000 PISA reading assessment. (OECD, 2002) Finland also has high levels of library borrowings: "Finns are the most prolific library users in Europe. In 2004,

Reading habits depend on reading culture, availability of books, library and educational resources, levels of education, the degree of urbanisation and national income.

109.8 million items were checked out, 79.5 million of which were books: this breaks down to 30 books for each borrower or 15 books each for every single person in Finland." (Stockmann et al., 2005, 35)

The bookworms of Europe

According to the Finnish National Board of Education, there are a variety of factors behind the strong reading habit there. These include the high esteem given to reading in Finnish culture (homes subscribe to newspapers, parents read to their children); the strong network of public libraries; the social status of mothers as an important role model for girls (women read more than men); the large number of foreign films on television, which have Finnish subtitles instead of dubbing (while watching television, children read); and net surfing and text messaging, which have increased reading and writing as a leisure habit of the young, although it has decreased the reading of books (FNBE, 2009).

The present decline in newspaper circulation in many countries is often blamed on increasing usage of the internet. Across the EU in 2007, 35 percent of those surveyed said that they accessed news and magazine articles online – 49 percent had home internet access (Eurostat Pocket Book, 2007, pages 142 and 144).

Evidence from the United Kingdom suggests that internet usage also impacts on other media including books: a 2007 study showed that around 26 percent of internet users said they watched less television and 17 percent said they spent less time reading books (Dutton and Helsper, 2007, page 65). If the reading of books is in decline, we must however be cautious about saying that reading is in decline. Some of our time online may be spent reading newspapers, blogs and other text. Quite what this is doing to our brains was the subject of Nicholas Carr's article, "Is Google making us stupid?" Carr cites a regular online user: "His thinking … has taken on a 'staccato' quality, reflecting the way he quickly scans short passages of text from many sources online. 'I can't read *War and Peace* anymore,' he admitted. 'I've lost the ability to do that. Even a blog post of more than three or four paragraphs is too much to absorb. I skim it.'" (Carr, 2008)

Are there common themes to reading in Europe? Do we have common tastes in what we read and the type of book? A recent trend has been the growth of book sales, and reading, in English outside the United Kingdom. It is cool to read books in English and necessary when the translations of some bestsellers take some months to reach the market. This is now putting pressure on publishers to publish translations earlier. Ann Steiner writes about Sweden: "Books in English are to a greater extent than before consumed in the original language. Translations from English, consequently, have difficulties in upholding their position as compared to 10 years ago. Swedish publishers are concerned about the sales of books in the original language. The fact that the English version of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005) already by September 2005 had sold 115,000 copies in Sweden, will have consequences for future translations of English books. (Steiner, 2006, page 140)

In Eastern Europe, as book markets have opened up, there has been a growth in the number of titles published and a growth in sales of foreign literature. In Estonia, for example, English has taken over from Russian as the dominant translated language, with half of all translations and most translated fiction titles (Järve, 2002).

Overall, however, there remain healthy differences between the bestseller lists across Europe. National tastes differ according to author, genre and even format (size, binding and production values). The bestseller lists in February 2009 showed some commonality – Stephenie Meyer in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom, Stieg Larrson in France and Spain, for example – but overall there was a wide range of authors (Wischenbart, 2009). An analysis of bestsellers in Europe in 2008 by Rüdiger Wischenbart and Miha Kovač revealed a diverse reading culture, what they described as "a stunning landscape of probably unrivalled inner cultural diversity." (Wischenbart and Kovač, 2009) The success of Swedish crime writers such as Larsson was now encouraging more translations from Swedish into other languages.

How to respond? Given the growth in other media, the busy lives led by many people, and the content now available online, it is hardly surprising if there has been a decline in the reading of books in Europe. This suggests a number of responses. Firstly, does this matter? Yes, for a variety of reasons, from the links between reading and educational attainment to the cultural health of a nation. The National Endowment of Arts in the USA puts forward evidence that readers are more likely than non-readers to undertake a range of other activities: "Literary readers are much more likely to be involved in cultural, sports and volunteer activities than are non-readers. For example, literary readers are nearly three times as likely to attend a performing arts event, almost four times as likely to visit an art museum, more than two-and-a-half times as likely to do volunteer or charity work, and over one-and-a-half times as likely to attend or participate in sports activities." (NEA, 2004)

A city reads a book

If we want to encourage the reading of books, the example of Finland shows that an emphasis on reading culture is vital. Attitudes, whether within families or society, must be influenced in support of reading, and negative perceptions of reading need to be confronted. In *The Shadow of the Wind*, by Carlos Ruiz Zafón, a visitor to the hero Daniel's bookshop in Barcelona, makes his opinion clear: "I say reading is for people who have a lot of time and nothing to do. Like women. Those of us who have to work don't have time for make-believe. We're too busy earning a living."

Generic efforts to encourage reading continue to be seen as desirable in many countries, and involve schools, libraries and other institutions. These include book fairs, literary festivals, World Book Day and city reads. Grants, literary prizes and translation prizes encourage authorship and the cross-fertilisation of literature between

In Estonia English has taken over from Russian as the dominant translated language.

countries. In 2007 the Czech Republic launched an initiative, backed by former president Vaclav Havel, aimed at encouraging parents to read to their children for 20 minutes every day (Johnston, 2007).

The Frankfurt journalist, Eugen Emmerling, writes about reading in Germany: "Given the actual prevalence of reading in Germany, why do so many 'feel' there has been a decline in literacy? Probably because the empirical data include different kinds of reading, not just the 'literary' kind borne of what is usually an aesthetic interest. It's true that 'recreational' reading in Germany, as elsewhere, has by and large lost the social prestige bequeathed by the middle-class intellectual tradition of yesteryear. 'Operational' reading, on the other hand, has been gaining ground: i.e. the goal-oriented acquisition of knowledge to keep abreast of an ever faster-changing world." (Emmerling, 2006)

We would all like reading to encompass works of high literature alongside more banal forms of text. Some of us want to make sense of our lives through reading fiction or simply want to disappear into another world; others want to read the news online or browse the blogs; others will pick up non-fiction titles and, for example, the recent financial crisis has produced an appetite for books about economics.

Across the EU in 2007, 71 percent of those surveyed had read at least one book in the last 12 months, and 37 percent had read at least five – only 28 percent had read none (Eurobarometer, 2007). How do we make reading cool to each new generation? Some believe that this could happen with the advent of new electronic reading devices. Others believe that the printed book remains a desirable object in our home or in our briefcase for the daily commute. The success of reading groups in some countries reveals the social aspects of reading. Some triggers can bring people to books, from literary festivals, adaptations of books for film or TV, to recommendations from friends. With the right opportunities to discover them, it is the books themselves that will attract new readers.

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Kurt

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Why I still translate In most European countries the earnings of recognised, professional translators of literature are at or below the poverty line. Many translators continue to practise their professions out of sheer passion. Here, a look at the literature business from the perspective of a survival artist. *By Holger Fock*

Translating literature is, even though it is now taught at a few universities, not a secure profession with a solid career path. What counts more is that many roads lead to Rome. One might well ask why someone would want to translate literature under such difficult conditions, and above all, why as a full-time job? It's a question that can hardly be answered generally apart from the fact that since the 1960s the international literature market has demanded more and more professional literary translators.

I will try to offer a personal answer. Since I was in school I've felt a strong passion for French literature. Even while I was studying the occasional literary review led to the first translation. Even during my five years as an advertising copywriter I continued to practise my 'hobby.' The question of turning this hobby into a profession only arose when I was sure that I was good enough to subsist.

On the one hand literary translation, which includes translations from scientific and non-fiction books, is a quiet, withdrawn practice. But it does require dealing intensively with your own language, a lot of research and working often with unknown subject matter. It is very exciting work. Often, it is a great pleasure and when it is acknowledged, in relation to many other professions, it is extremely satisfying.

But I also see my work as a contribution to cultural dialogue and to German-French relations. I was born in Ludwigsburg and completed my schooling there – in other words, in south-west Germany, not all that far from the French border. But it was not until six years after the end of my studies and at the beginning of my freelance work that I learned about the speech that Charles de Gaulle made to German youth in September 1962. Without doubt it is one of the greatest speeches on the theme of reconciliation, rapprochement and Europe. It should be made a compulsory text for study in senior high school years. At the end of this speech de Gaulle emphasised (the Second World War was not even a generation past) that mutual respect, trust and friendship between Germans and the French was the foundation of unity in Europe. The best preconditions for this were knowing the other and each

other's history, and knowing the history of the cultural heritage, the characteristics and the mentality of the other. Getting to know the other in such a way is impossible without translation into one's own language. Translation becomes not an appropriation but a recognition of the other in the sense meant by French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas. Connected with this is another exciting task that I, as a translator, undertake: to let publishers become more familiar with writers I hold to be important, irregardless of their commercial potential. As astounding as it may sound, a quite considerable proportion of contemporary French literature has not been translated at all or has only partly been translated. I refer here to the work of authors like Pierre Bergounioux, Florence Delay, Pierre Michon or Régis Jauffret.

To this extent the enjoyment of working with the language, with nice texts and with good writers, together with the sense of being a bridge-builder between two cultures, is greater than the frustration with precarious material rewards. But in Germany at least social welfare is always an alternative, for a welfare cheque would pay the same as working for 10 to 12 hours each day as a translator.

A few years ago, Umberto Eco postulated that the language of Europe is translation. His point was that Pidgin English as the lingua franca of globalisation serves the purposes of rapprochement but not of understanding. What is needed is a cultural pervasion for which there is no bigger or more-suited field than the translation of literature. Nevertheless, no cultural sector receives less funding than literature, especially when it comes to translations – least of all within the framework of the EU.

The language of Europe is translation.

The literature of Europe is … the translation. Above all in small countries in southern, eastern and northern Europe the share of translations of total book production is between 30 and 60 percent. If one counts only novels, it is between 40 and 80 percent. It is only in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and Italy that a smaller proportion of books are translated. Great Britain has the lowest share of translated books; only three percent of new publications are translations (Survey Ceatl, p.10).

In terms of absolute numbers the picture is somewhat different. The large nations – Germany, France, Spain and Italy – are the leading translators. But the mythology of Germany as the world champion of literary translations, lauded as it is in Germany by arts journalists and publishers, is merely a pretence. In Spain, three times as many books are translated as in Germany, and in Italy it is twice as many. France is in the process of overtaking Germany in terms of numbers of books translated. Even in the tiny Czech Republic almost as many translations occur as in Germany. What is quite shocking is the tiny number of translations that occur in the United Kingdom (Survey Ceatl, p.9).

But despite variations in individual countries the volume of translated literature has increased substantially and continuously in Europe in recent decades. The structural differences are nevertheless enormous. In almost every country there is a huge preponderance of translations from English. In Germany, for many years it has been more than 70 percent. In east European countries such as Slovenia or the Czech Republic more than 80 percent of translations are from English (Diversity Report, p.5 and p.16). Literary translations from small countries and

from particularly small languages are a rarity.

The small number of literary translations in Great Britain contrasts with an over proportionally high percentage of translations from English into other languages. This is partly because high-quality, important literature is published in English – one can include here literature from the Commonwealth and North America. But it has more to do with the fact that a large volume of romance fiction, light entertainment, life stories etc., are translated, and with this type of literature the publishers do not concern themselves too much with the quality of the translation. In southern and eastern European countries in particular there are a great many stylistically and linguistically flawed translations on the market.

Popular romance in English

Apart from this, there is a dearth of professional literary translations from 'small' languages and the payment is inadequate to allow specialists (literary critics, philologists, trained translators) to work on literary translations and to earn a living or a part-time income from them. One major problem is that European book markets no longer turn over enough money to pay adequately for translations.

In short, literary translations in general and especially those from English into other languages prosper, while literary translations from small languages and into small languages are dying out. For translators of literature the situation is not good. In many countries there are practically no professional literary translators, either because it is impossible to earn a living on such low pay, such as in Greece, Portugal or eastern European countries, or because not enough literature is being translated, such as in Ireland, Britain or in Switzerland.

In a study by the European Council of Literary Translators' Associations (CEATL) the relative incomes of professional literary translators were calculated. The study compared not only the fees received for translations but also all other income earned, such as income from literary grants, scholarships, payments from trusts, authors' estates and other administrative bodies, royalties and so on. It should be pointed out here that in many countries there are none of these latter, 'extra' sources of income and nowhere does the income from such extra sources exceed five percent of a literary translator's average earnings.

In the study, the professional costs incurred by translators were deducted as well as health and social security contributions and taxes. In this way the average net and gross earnings of literary translators in 21 countries were calculated and compared (Survey Ceatl, p.61-66).

The results: in six countries, including Germany, the gross income of literary translators is 50 percent or less than average incomes in the manufacturing or service sectors. In six other countries gross earnings are less than two-thirds of average industry earnings. Only in three countries do literary translators earn 80 percent or more of average earnings.

A look at net earnings reveals an even worse picture. In comparison with per capita purchasing power figures in each country, literary translators in two countries do not even earn 30 percent of average purchasing power income (Czech Republic 19 percent, Greece 29 percent). In three more countries they achieve less than 40 percent of the purchasing power average (Slovakia 36, Italy 36, Finland 39), in seven more countries less than 50 percent (Spain 41, Slovenia 44, Austria 45, Portugal 46, Lithuania 47,

Germany 49 and the Netherlands 50), and in six countries between 50 and 60 percent (Denmark 52, Belgium 53, Norway 55, Croatia 57, Switzerland 57, Sweden 59). (Survey Ceatl, pp.61-66)

Leaving aside Ireland and Great Britain – the figures arrived at here are fictitious, given there are hardly any professional literary translators – France is the only country (with 66 percent) in which the average income of literary translators lies a little above the poverty line. This means that in most EU countries the incomes of recognised, professional translators of literature are at or under the respective poverty lines in each country.

Further distinctions can be made here. Professional literary translators in most countries, by working on a mix of easier and more challenging literature, complete an average of 1000 to 1200 manuscript pages (at 1800 characters per page) per year. There are two extreme exceptions: Spain and the Netherlands. Literary translators in Spain receive low fees in a country with a relatively high cost of living and therefore have to translate around 1800 pages per year in order to survive. (Many Spanish colleagues, especially those living in the big cities of Barcelona and Madrid, often translate 2500 pages per year for years on end.) Translators in the Netherlands, thanks to a state financed fund, work on 600 to 700 pages per year.

This discrepancy certainly has a big influence on the quality of the literary translation, especially in relation to more challenging literature. While the quality of translations in the Netherlands and in Scandinavian countries is generally described as quite high, there are many complaints about the quality of translations in eastern European countries but also in Spain. In other words, bad working conditions and low rates of pay increasingly impair the quality of literary translations and thereby the transfer of culture in Europe. What conclusions can be drawn from this?

In most EU countries the incomes of recognised, professional translators of literature are at or under the respective poverty lines in each country.

In most countries, the book market and general economic conditions would indeed allow room for better pay. However, the margins for improvements are narrow in a market in which the selling of books is characterised by overproduction and tough competition. If one wants to provide professional, recognised literary translators with the same kind of financial basis as, say, primary school teachers or master tradespeople, then their incomes will have to be doubled or tripled depending on what countries they live in. However, publishers cannot afford this; the book market would not allow it.

Nevertheless, publishers could list translators as creators rather than as service providers within their cost calculations for books and allow them to receive an appropriate share of the value of their work – although an "appropriate share" ought to be based on the degree of creativity applying to a translation. For challenging, difficult literature the translator ought actually to receive the same royalties as the author for the sale of the translated work. Ultimately, it is thanks to the translator that the author can be read at all in another language, and can earn royalties from the valorisation of the translation. This proposal is not aimed at undermining the economic position of the publishers but at a fair distribution of royalties.

This kind of additional income for translators can only be attained of course in well-populated countries. In smaller countries the numbers of printed copies of translated books are too small. But even in larger countries a different royalties system would not in itself lead to a fundamental improvement in the income of literary translators. In other words, an improvement will not occur without an effective funding system for translators, whether this is state backed or financed in other ways.

First, one must differentiate between funding for translations and funding for translators. Funding for translations is now offered in many countries. It is an established component of foreign cultural policy and is set up as such, aimed at promoting domestic literature abroad. This kind of funding model for literature has also been set up by the EU within the framework of the Culture 2007-2013 programme. As a rule, such models only benefit publishers and, to a small extent, authors, through the earning of royalties. It is mostly about economic subsidies for publishing houses.

Nevertheless, institutions such as the European Commission or the Dutch Literair Productie- en Vertalingenfonds maintain, almost in unison, that translators are also beneficiaries of their translation funding schemes. This is simply not the case in most countries. Only in Spain, Denmark, Finland, Great Britain, Switzerland and Austria do translators receive (although not always) an appreciable share of subsidies (50 percent) in addition to their normal market-set fees. In most countries the meagre per-page translation fee is not even augmented under the subsidy scheme. In fact CEATL is aware of a number of cases in various countries in which translators have been forced to sign sham contracts, which state they have received higher fees than they actually received from their publishers.

In order to head off this kind of fraud, the EU, in calculating the level of subsidies, has introduced flat rates based on the respective translation fees paid in each country. These flat rates have to date been based on figures from claims made by publishers in years past, claims which are sometimes far removed from reality. A revision based on figures in the CEATL study (Survey Ceatl, p.20, table 4) is urgently needed.

If literary translators are to profit from funding schemes for translation, the funding institutions, whether state based or private foundations, must make sure that translators receive a set share of subsidies, that this share is not calculated against the translator's normal fees and that the amount is paid directly to the translator.

Translators' funding is needed

However, what helps literary translators most is funding support for translators. In the Netherlands, a state financed fund for translators ensures that translators of challenging literature can, on average, double their respective base fee. For particularly difficult translations they can receive even more. In Sweden and Norway there are national scholarship systems, partly state financed and partly funded through library royalties and other sources, which involve comprehensive and sometimes year-long working grants

If literary translators are to profit from funding schemes for translation, the funding institutions must make sure that translators receive a set share of subsidies.

for professional literary translators. In Denmark and in particular in Finland, private foundations also provide for secure and carefree work. In Norway and Denmark literary translators also profit from relatively high library royalties. In Denmark, these are paid directly to the translator and can amount to up to 50 percent of his or her income.

Moves are being made towards setting up similar kinds of funding schemes in Germany, France, Austria, the Basque region and Slovenia, and in a very limited way in Lithuania, Slovakia and Great Britain. All countries are called upon to follow the examples of Norway and Sweden, and, in particular, of the Netherlands.

This kind of funding support for cultural exchange would not even result in exceptionally higher costs. In the Netherlands, a country with around 16 million people, the translators fund amounts to a little over two million euros annually. This is enough to double the base fees of around 200 to 250 professional translators. The German translators fund currently amounts to an annual sum of 400,000 euros. In order to support German literary translators anywhere near as well as is done in the Netherlands, at least ten million euros would be needed. That might appear to be a large sum but one might compare this amount with the much higher budgets for Berlin's three state-funded opera houses, for example, or with the budget for the Bayreuth festival – and that's to say nothing of the massive sums provided for subsidising film production!

The translation of literary works provides the basis for cultural exchange. In includes not only novels and science but also exhibition catalogues for museums, theatre plays and productions, subtitles and film scripts. Ultimately, a comparison between funding for translations and translators, and funding provided for art, music, film and media in each country, reveals how seriously one deals with cultural exchange. In most countries, in the first instance, cultural funding is set up to serve the purposes of a prestigious and good-image-making high culture. Cultural exchange is not the main priority. In this sense, a change of priorities is needed. Germany could provide a good example because although the state is cutting down on cultural funding at the moment, Germany's translation fund is profiting from increasing contributions each year. Only a few countries have set up translators funds but they have turned out to be extremely beneficial for translators as well as for literature. This is why a key goal of cultural policy at a national as well as a European level should be the establishment of translators funds. Apart from state funding, such funds could also be financed in other ways, such as, for example, through returns from a collecting society or through a surcharge of, say, one euro per translated book which would flow directly into the fund.

Within Europe cultural policy is a concern of national governments. The EU can only support institutions, initiatives and projects that are transnational, that serve a European ideal, and that strengthen the cultural identity of Europe. This is all well and good but the fact is that cultural support funding at the level of the EU functions no differently than at the national level. The budget for film funding in the EU's "Media 2007-2013" programme is around more than 30 percent more than the budget for all other cultural pursuits. And whereas the previous cultural programmes set aside at least 13 percent of the budget for literature and translation, the current programme sees these areas competing with all the rest of the arts for funding. It is no wonder that Euro-

pean translation centres, which more or less received regular funding until 2006, have since received nothing.

The application process is highly complicated, extremely bureaucratic and has not become more transparent with the setting up of the Executive Agency. It is so difficult that the Cultural Contact Point Germany (CCP) offers extra courses for potential applicants. It is not surprising then that it is mostly those projects and institutions that receive funding that have paid staff and cultural managers who have the time to concern themselves with the complicated application process.

However, the few projects and institutions that exist that are dedicated to literary translations function mostly on a voluntary basis – and this voluntary work is done by translators who often have to work more than 60 hours a week to eke out a living at the lowest of margins.

If the EU really wants to fund literature at a European level – and that means literature in translation – then it urgently needs to set up a budget line dedicated to literature, literary translation and literary translators. This budget provision should at least be a part of the next EU culture programme, 2014-20XX. Ideally, literature should have its own separate programme, just as film funding does.

Nothing is more useful to cultural exchange than the translation of literature. If the EU is serious about this then it has to commit itself to funding existing European translation centres, within which cultural exchange takes place on a daily basis. It should also support the foundation of other translation centres, especially in smaller countries and eastern European countries, and provide assistance in building up a network of these centres.

Most literary translators earn too little to travel regularly to the countries they are translating literature from or to participate in training seminars and colloquiums. But supporting such measures would also contribute to a cultural exchange in literature in an important way. This could also become an important task for the EU: to support and finance sojourn and travel grants for translators – either directly or through institutions – which involve tutorials, seminars, workshops and meetings with authors they are translating.

Just as at a national level, the setting up of translator funds at a European level could become an important, perhaps even a decisive instrument for an improvement in the lot of literary translators and the quality of literary translations. A European translators fund, financed and organised to promote the kind of cultural exchange discussed, would be of incalculable value. Individual countries and private foundations could also make a contribution to the financing of such funds.

Ultimately, the way that one deals with translators of literature reveals whether one is really serious about cultural exchange within the context of cultural policy or whether literary translation is simply something one continues to pay lip service to.

Translation: Geoff Rodoreda

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Information in this article is taken from a CEATL study: ***Compared Income of Literary Translators in Europe*** (2008).
http://www.ceatl.org/docs/surveyfr.pdf
http://www.ceatl.org/docs/surveyuk.pdf
Another source: ***The Diversity Report 2008***, compiled by Rüdiger Wischenbart. http://www.wischenbart.com/diversity/report/Diversity Prozent20Report_prel-final_02.pdf

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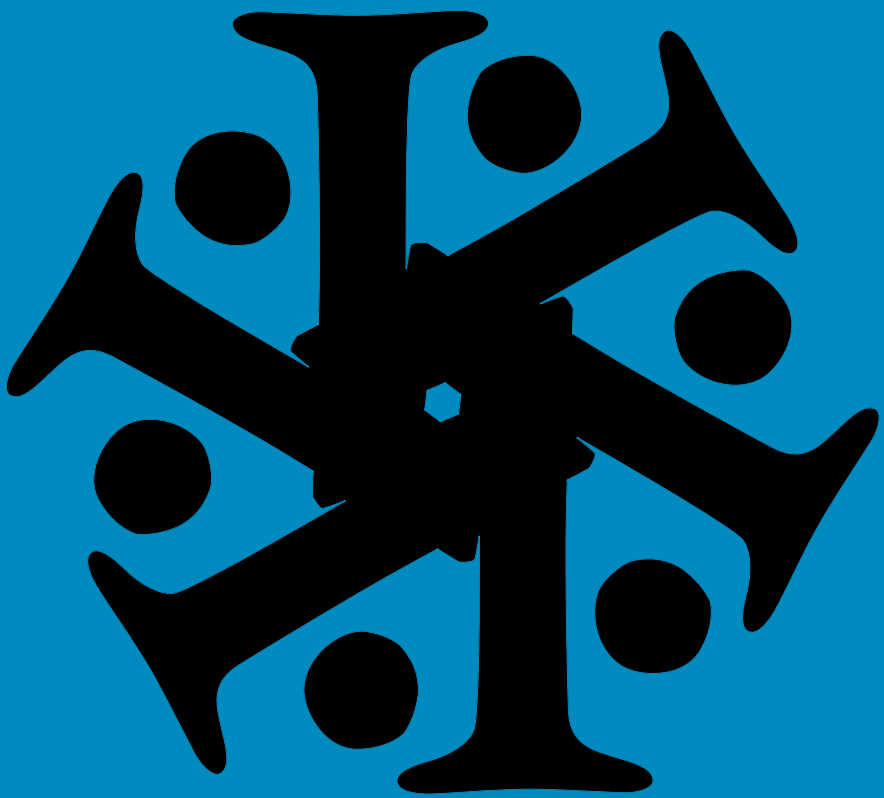

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To be translated or not be

Unless major East European authors publish their works in German, English or French, it is unlikely that any of their international neighbours will ever read them. We need a pan-European literary public and more translation, so that we can enjoy literature beyond our national and linguistic borders. *By Gabriella Gönczy*

Linguistic areas are currently undergoing a radical continental drift: those countries which speak English, the most important lingua franca of globalisation, are increasingly isolating themselves from the rest of the world. According to research by the renowned American linguist and translator Esther Allen, translated fiction makes up an ever-declining proportion of total published titles in the USA. America likes to think of itself as a cosmopolitan nation which is committed to cultural diversity but in fact more books are translated from other languages in the Arab world than in the USA.

In global terms, the main languages after English are Spanish and Chinese. Although German is still a much-used language in Europe, at a global level it has become the "Ancient Greek of the present day," as the cultural journalist Thierry Chervel describes it in the last edition of the Culture Report. However, the majority of Europe's literary output is written in minority languages, and these works attract little attention outside their language borders. With just one or two exceptions, most authors from Central and Eastern Europe are largely unknown in the West.

One of the problems lies in the fact that there are fewer and fewer key communicators, journalists, publishers and translators who understand these neighbouring languages. So anyone born into one of the small linguistic areas of Central or Eastern Europe has to face two problems: firstly the lack of global recognition afforded one's fellow countrymen, and secondly the difficulty in getting to know the literature and culture of one's neighbours due to the onward march of globalisation.

In Hungary, for instance, people have to be fluent in English, German and French in order to compete in the job market. Nowadays there are hardly any Hungarian intellectuals who can speak Slovak, Ukrainian, Croatian or Romanian. By and large, the Hungarian literary scene appreciates the literature and culture of their neighbours

through the medium of the major Western European languages. If a Croatian, Czech or Ukrainian writer is successful in Germany or France, they are reviewed in the Hungarian arts pages and the publishing houses try out some initial translations. If an important East European author is for some reason not available in German, English or French, then it is possible he will never be read by his international neighbours.

For this reason, the publishing houses of Western Europe play a crucial role: they have the potential to discover unknown authors from Central and Eastern Europe, though of course they also have to accept the attendant risks. In this way they can bridge the gap between the linguistic and cultural areas of Eastern and Western Europe and make an important contribution to cross-European understanding. And there is always the possibility that they will act as a springboard into the global, English-speaking book world.

Unknown East Europeans

If Arundhati Roy had written her novel *The God of Small Things* in Malayalam, the language of Kerala, instead of in English, it would not have achieved such worldwide recognition. Imre Kertész wrote *Fateless* in Hungarian, and even in his native land he remained unknown for decades. It was only after his sudden success in Germany that the wider Hungarian public became aware of him. If *Fateless* had not had such great success in Germany, it would never have been translated into English and Kertész would never have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Ten years ago, hardly a single German publisher showed any interest in Hungarian authors. But since then not only Imre Kertész but most other major Hungarian authors have become popular in Germany. Various factors have led to Hungarian authors being discovered and translated into German: the invitation issued to more than twenty Hungarian writers to spend a year working in Berlin as part of the Berlin Artists-in-Residence programme organised by the German Academic Exchange Service; the featuring of Hungary as Guest Country at the 1999 Frankfurt Book Fair; and the Nobel Prize in Literature, which was awarded to Imre Kertész in 2002.

The renaissance of Hungarian literature began with classic works of the 1920s and 1930s by Sándor Márai, Dezső Kosztolányi und Antal Szerb. Most new translations coming out of Hungary have been met with rave reviews in the German arts pages and book sales have largely surpassed all expectations. Several major literary prizes have gone to Hungarian writers, including the Nobel Prize in Literature to Imre Kertész (2002), the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to Péter Esterházy (2004), the Franz Kafka Prize (2003) and the Leipzig Book Prize for European Understanding to Péter Nádas (1995).

The literary and cultural ties between Berlin and Budapest have been further strengthened by the fact that Hungarian writers held or still hold important positions within German cultural institutions. For

Nowadays there are hardly any Hungarian intellectuals who can speak Slovak, Ukrainian, Croatian or Romanian.

example, György Konrád was the long-time President of the Berlin Academy of the Arts, and Péter Esterházy is still a member, while Imre Kertész is a member of the German Academy for Language and Poetry. But it is not only Hungarians who have successfully broken into the German book market, other East European authors who have made their mark include Juri Andruchowytsch and Svetlana Alexievich from the Ukraine, Dubravka Ugresic from Croatia, Andrzej Stasiuk, Ryszard Kapuscinski, Pawel Huelle und Dorota Maslowska from Poland and Mircea Cartarescu from Romania.

There is a two-way traffic of intensive and lively literary exchanges between Germany and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. However, Eastern Europe's literary ties to the rest of Western Europe are much more one-sided. The countries on the periphery translate a lot of works coming out of the centre, and there is much more translation from majority languages into minority languages than the other way round. Is it a coincidence or are German publishers, translators, reviewers and readers more tuned in to the literature of their eastern neighbours?

In his essay *Warum gerade Berlin?* (Why Berlin?), Imre Kertész writes: "For Eastern European writers, the road usually leads via Berlin to other languages and then carries on into world literature." He emphasises how the city creates a bridge between Eastern and Western literature, and comments that other West European cultures such as the French or English prefer to be more self-sufficient.

Péter Esterházy attaches great importance to the Berlin Artists-in-Residence programme organised by the German Academic Exchange Service, and writes: "The year in Berlin not only changed our lives and our writing but also changed the whole of contemporary Hungarian literature." The close literary ties between Berlin and Budapest have also indirectly contributed to a more realistic and positive image of Germany among Hungarians. Berlin provides a main point of reference or location for many contemporary Hungarian novels, novellas and essays. Not so long ago, Berlin had a similar image to Helsinki or Oslo – nice, but a long way away and always raining. But today it is an attractive destination, particularly for well-educated, well-off Hungarians. Word has got around that Berlin is one of the world's most exciting and innovative cultural centres.

Creating a New Audience

How can literary exchanges be revived between large and small, and among the minority languages of Europe? Where are the roots of a new pan-European audience for European literature?

In early 2007, the internet magazine signandsight published a polemic by the French philosopher Pascal Bruckner on the topic of Islam in Europe. This triggered an immediate reaction from the Anglo-Dutch journalist and writer Ian Buruma and the British historian Timothy Garton Ash. Many of Europe's high-profile intellectuals joined the discussion and set in motion a media debate across the whole of Europe. The Suhrkamp Verlag considered the textual quality to be so good that they published the

Berlin provides a main point of reference or location for many contemporary Hungarian novels, novellas and essays.

whole debate in book form.

What do we need to do to make this example not an exception, but the rule? How can we link the literary lives of the various European nations and provide a forum for intellectual debate? Our requirements are few: the internet, the English language and a sponsor who is unbiased and process-oriented, such as Germany's federal cultural foundation, instigators of the signandsight project. The above-mentioned debate only became European and transnational because Pascal Bruckner published his article in English on the internet rather than in French in Le Monde.

Signandsight is just one example among many. Other platforms for debate and literary exchange in Europe include Eurozine, Eurotopics and Lyrikline. But one thing remains clear: a web project can never be a substitute for personal experiences of art and culture. It is still vital to retain the richness and variety of Europe's literary infrastructure, to expand on it and to create a trans-European network. Apart from adequate funding for translation work, this will depend on appropriate funding for various institutes and projects beyond the internet.

Even during the Enlightenment, scholars dreamed that literary works would be read throughout Europe, with ideas and thoughts sweeping away language barriers. At the beginning of the 21st century it may soon be possible to create a pan-European literary audience via the internet and to press forward with the Europeanisation of the existing "offline infrastructure." Perhaps we are now within a hairsbreadth of making that dream a reality.

Translation: Gill McKay

Gabriella Gönczy is a journalist and cultural manager from Hungary. She is co-editor of the anthology ***Berlin, meine Liebe. Schließen Sie bitte die Augen. Ungarische Autoren schreiben über Berlin.*** She is currently a member of the international jury of TWINS 2010, a European Capital of Culture project, and she is leader of the communication working group for the non-governmental initiative "A Soul for Europe."

Limits to an interface

Various measures used to create the European single market also affect the cultures of the member states. What does the market orientated philosophy of the EU mean for a strong and multifaceted cultural life in Europe? Can a European culture flourish at all without a European cultural policy?

By Steve Austen

The current discourse on the role of culture in Europe, the cultural component of the unification process and the cultural identity of Europe is full of pitfalls and misunderstandings. Arts and cultural policy, which to a decisive extent is a matter for the member states, can never become subject to the regulatory machinery of Brussels, thanks to the 1992 Maastricht Treaty.

One could therefore argue there will never be a 'European' cultural policy beyond the respective policies of the member states. On the other hand, measures aimed at homogenising the single market do influence quite implicitly the cultures of these member states. Does the market driven philosophy of the EU produce more and more negative conditions for cultural diversity? Or does it actually produce positive conditions? Apart from this, financial support for the arts from cities and regions, the business community and donors all have cross border influences. Can a flourishing European culture exist at all without a European cultural policy? Isn't this dependent on market conditions anyway?

Would there be a need for such questions if subsidies, grants, awards and commissions did not exist? I doubt it. Would there be art, literature for example, without public support? The answer is positive: yes, there would be art and art production for sure. But one could argue that our world would not be as rich, as diversified, as overloaded with cultural expression as it is now.

Under both former European ideologies, communism and capitalism, public spending on the arts was beyond discussion; a world without subsidies would have been an anomaly. Public spending finds its origin and justification in the modern notions of the national economic politics of a state.

To put it bluntly, a subsidy is a form of compensation for a lack of buying power on the demand side of the market. A simple ex-

ample can illustrate this. If the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra were to perform every day in the largest concert halls in Germany, and if all of these concerts were to be sold out, the single ticket price per seat, per concert might be around 600 euros. (I do not know this for sure. This is just an estimate for the sake of argument; it might well be 1150 euros.)

What does this example tell us? It shows us that, for one reason or another, the pricing mechanism, which is a decisive mechanism in modern liberal democracies, does not work in all cases. The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra has not yet invented a way to produce its concerts in a smaller series of units or in a form of mass production.

It is easy to see here that arts and cultural products cannot be thought of in the same way as other economic goods. They are not only unique items that differ from each other, from day to day and from act to act, they are also very labour intensive. Cost reduction through automation is not really possible.

Over the years, more and more politicians have forgotten about the origin of the rationale for subsidies and found themselves in a dead end street of rewarding audience preferences without even taking market realities into account. The consequence of this post-modern 'enlightened' subsidies policy is that public acceptance of state funding for the arts has been undermined.

One could easily identify those festivals, musicals and popular fiction that would be perfectly sustainable without state compensation. As long as enough consumers are willing to pay high prices, then those prices are not too high, one might argue.

The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra has not yet invented a way to produce its concerts in a smaller series of units or in a form of mass production.

The more languages, the more English

With regard to literature, the market for translations of books from, say, Portuguese into Greek may exist but is probably too small to remain sustainable, whatever idealistic market conditions you have. Demand can only be stimulated to a limited extent by compensating the pricing mechanism.

When it comes to translations from one language into another there are hardly any valid arguments for a structural subsidy of any kind. Book markets are very much local markets just like markets for drama and for film production.

The internationalisation of local literary products requires an interface, a system that opens up foreign markets to unknown work. This interface can only function if it is operated by as many local operators as possible. Again, this depends on market circumstances. But the more that local literary products seek international recognition, the more there will be a need for such an interface. The mobility of ideas, the spreading of cultural works will depend more and more on the working of this mechanism. As the Amsterdam essayist and sociologist Abram de Swaan puts it: "The more languages, the more English."

Some authors see this phenomenon as a threat to the flourishing richness of cultures. I would like to ask them this: how is the international cultural interaction between

citizens of various countries in Europe supposed to take place if we all stick to our own language and the language of some other (small) region in Europe? If this rather puritan attitude had prevailed in my country, no progress would have been made in science or the arts since the Middle Ages.

The European lingua franca – be it Latin, French or German – has opened up markets for intellectual, spiritual, literary and political development. In other words, European ideas and European political developments are to a large extent the result of an organic practice of market driven cultural exchange.

It cannot be denied though, that as English is the lingua franca of our time, Anglo-Saxon works and opinions have an advantage in penetrating the markets for books and other cultural and language related goods.

The expansion of the European Union from six to 27 members has led to 21 more identity debates. The success of the accreditation process, with monetary union, a single labour market, better living conditions and so on, has its unpleasant sides too. The more homogenisation there is, the more people want to distinguish themselves from each other. The only way to do so without violating your neighbours is to support, reinvent or engineer such a thing as 'national culture,' whatever it may be.

This tendency to reinvent national cultural policy is recognisable everywhere in Europe. At the same time, those who wish to keep foreign influences out of their own country's culture act in a contradictory way by supporting the distribution of their own culture abroad.

It is perfectly clear that a project as huge as the process of European unification can only be successful if the citizens of this geographical entity have equal rights, including cultural rights. And these rights cannot be restricted by their own nation's cultural policy.

The precondition for such a situation is the free flow of information, ideas, cultural expressions and products within the union's territory. The accompanying legal framework is that of the European Court of Human Rights. This court, through its decisions, is strengthening the freedom of the individual and supporting the European citizen in executing his or her cultural rights, even if these rights are hindered by national laws or regulations.

The Europe of the single currency, the free flow of labour and open markets have a parallel reality, that of cultural factors. One might even argue that the European process itself has to be considered, first and foremost, as a cultural process. Political, economic and monetary decision making cannot be sustained for long if acceptance by the citizens is not guaranteed.

EU integration as a cultural process

Hardly anyone would contradict the view that acceptance is a cultural condition. It is a condition that is closely linked to the level of active citizenship that has

The success of the accreditation process has its unpleasant sides too. The more homogenisation there is the more people want to distinguish themselves from each other.

been achieved in the respective member states. The promotion and development of European citizenship, culture and the arts can play a significant role. In fact, these factors already do play a role: the transnational dimension of arts and culture offers a binding component, a reference point for all those locals and nationals that through the interface of the English language and the dissemination capacity of the internet take part in each other's cultural capacity building, in each other's citizenship awareness

The possibilities of the latest means of communication and dissemination have hardly been explored yet. The success of social networks on the internet tells us that citizenship building is already underway. It also reveals a growing need to connect to platforms where other citizens can be found.

This is an area where arts and culture should be involved. Their audiences and readers are already there. A dialogue about the cultural component of Europe, the role of the citizen, the links with a local scene – it is all waiting to be included in the programmes of publishers, festival organisers, theatres and orchestras.

But of course these opportunities are only for those seeking a broader acceptance and recognition of their artistic and cultural endeavours – not for the true believers in a mono-cultural domestic market. These people should remain in their own splendid isolation, which is indeed their cultural right, guaranteed by the laws and treaties of the European Union. They can even apply for financial support, given that national pride seems to be becoming a cultural priority in more and more member states.

Steve Austen is a cultural manager, author and a founding member of the initiative "A Soul for Europe." He has been involved since 1966 in the cultural life of the Netherlands and of Europe in general. Since 1987 he has been the President of the Amsterdam-Maastricht Summer University and a visiting professor at various universities around Europe.

Out of the dark, into the limelight

Do book fairs in the age of the Internet still make sense? In what ways might they help promote European literature? How can an interest in the literature of our European neighbours be awoken? One thing is clear: the diplomat needs the book. *By Eleftherios Ikonomou*

If you have visited Germany's two largest book fairs to present a book or to sell the rights to a book, to socialise or to find out what colleagues or the competition are offering, you know: book fairs are the great book festivals of the calendar year. The two most important international book fairs take place in Frankfurt and in Leipzig. They are they best exhibition stages for the literature business in all its facets.

The book fairs in Germany are like Christmas for those whose occupations or interest is books. This is a German specialty because publishers present their programme to the public in the new year and in the autumn and book fairs are used to launch or strengthen the presentation of their products. It is quite different at home in Greece, where publishers bring a new book onto the market nearly every day and are not bound to specific dates.

It is quite a while ago, in 2001, that Greece featured as the 'guest country' at the Frankfurter Book Fair. Two years before there had been a big growth in interest in Greek literature. Around 50 books a year were translated from Greek into German. Some of these translations were done by small, relatively unknown publishers and did not gain extensive distribution into the press and publishing business networks. However, larger publishers in Germany, Austria and Switzerland also published a number of novels that had been successful in Greece. More than 50 authors from Greece travelled to the Frankfurt Book Fair and also undertook reading tours throughout Germany. The German press reported a lot on Greek literature – often positive, sometimes negative – and the press in Greece even got a little carried away. The German public always seemed to show up to Greek readings at the Fair so that one could speak of it as a success for Greek literature.

However, the reading public were not as impressed, at least according to the publishers; they were very hesitant about promoting further works by Greek authors. The only authors whose books were still translated into German after 2001 were Petros Markaris (crime), Ioanna Karystiani (novel), Nikos Panagiotopoulos (science fiction, sati-

re) and Soti Triantafillou (family chronicles).

One thing is clear: the euphoria that arose with the translation of a number of books due to the focus of the Frankfurt Book Fair did not hold out for long. However, this is the case for most countries that feature as guest countries at the Fair. Neither Korea, the Arab world, Catalonia or Turkey – and this short list could easily be lengthened – could not use the Fair as a means of creating greater, sustained interest among the German reading public.

In the case of Greece, it became clear that funds for translating literature slowly dwindled and now, with the financial crisis, interest has completely disappeared. It would be picky and narrow-minded however to leave the assessment there. The benefits of such an enormous promotional effort should not only be measured by the number breakthrough authors.

No springboard effect

Staying with the example of Greece, the Fair did change a lot. The following years brought changes for everyone involved in the literature business, authors, publishers, journalists, cultural managers and politicians. Authors were confronted with other perspectives that had nothing to do with the realities in Greece. The number of applications for grants and scholarships increased and authors' networks expanded. And, importantly, the media and those in politics saw that the book needs professional diplomatic representation, just as much as politics does. The Greek Cultural Foundation in Berlin committed itself to adjusting to new realities, and Germany's two book fairs play an important role in its activities.

Experience shows that there is very little interest on the part of the public, of editors and of agents in anything beyond national literature. Very few are interested in an international literary dialogue; very few read literature revealing something of the variety of the countries and regions of Europe. The points of contact, the experiences and the handling of conflicts in a postmodern, post-industrial, postcolonial world remains uninteresting. It should be a space within Europe in which not one culture dominates but in which the multicultural variety of European cultures is reflected.

However, this variety is mirrored at the Leipzig Book Fair. On the occasion of the Greek presidency of the Council of Europe in the first half of 2003, the Greek Cultural Foundation in Berlin initiated the project "Small Languages, Great Literature" at the Leipzig Book Fair. It has taken place annually since 2005 in Leipzig and has also become a part of the programme of Berlin's Literature Workshop.

The goal of the project is to boost the interest in literature from smaller language areas. Authors from countries in Europe whose languages and cultures are seen as exotic and whose literature markets are ignored as risky for a German reading public, are invited to take part in the initiative.

The first series of the "Small Languages, Great Literature" was titled New Europe – Old Identities. The idea was to examine a changing sense of European identity due to the process of European unification, and the implicit regional fears about a loss of traditional individual and collective identities.

Conflicts in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe were the focus of attention; conflicts between tradition on the one hand and modern, individual life-choices on the other. National interpretations of European history were also examined, as were insecurities that arose through political, social and

economic change following the collapse of communism. This initiative brought together authors from Greece along with authors from the new EU countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Cyprus.

Authors from other countries added to the mix in the years thereafter, and in 2008 this transnational literature project involved writers from Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland (Celtic), Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Poland, Rumania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain (Andalusian, Catalonian, Basque), the Czech Republic, Hungary and Cyprus.

The individual writers were selected by cultural institutions in the various countries and were paired with other authors for public readings and podium discussions based on the criteria of genre and writing content. The purpose of this now institutionalised event is to awaken the interest of publishers, the press and the public in lesser known European literatures, to draw attention away from the centre – from German, Anglo and Romanic language texts – and towards the periphery, in order to deal with questions of cultural identity in Europe in a fuller and more just way.

A further goal of the initiative is to encourage the emergence of a network of smaller-language authors and translators. There will no doubt be a positive effect on the perception of Europe as a continent of variety and multilingualism, if smaller-language areas become better networked and smaller-language literature is read in those countries rather than only literary translations from the dominant cultural areas.

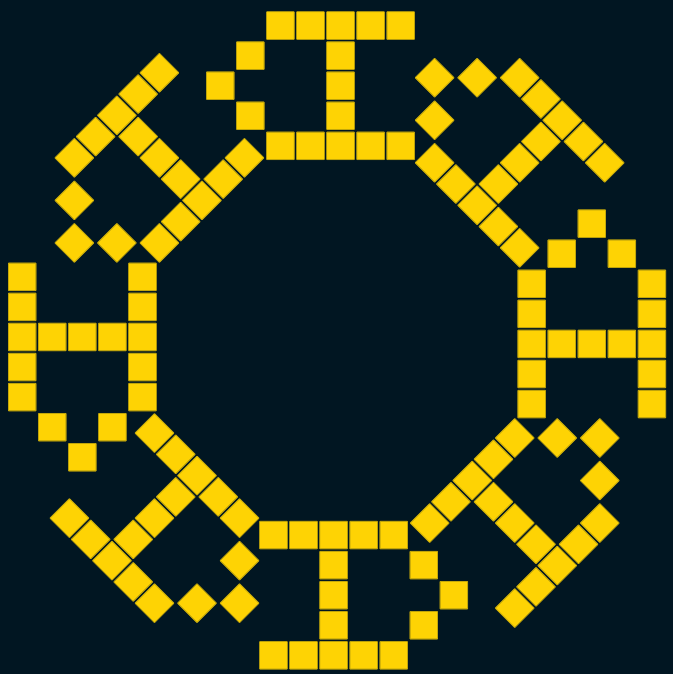
There are also plans to expand the programme of international translation seminars, such as that run in collaboration with the Literary Colloquium Berlin, which has developed experience in this field and an impressive translation databank, albeit only for translators of German literature into other world languages.

Support for translation work is the first important point. The distribution and marketing of literary works are further important factors. What needs to be considered is the establishment of an EU-wide system of support that would make a concerted effort at at least partly funding the important element of distribution of a truly European literature.

Translation: Chris Robertson

Eleftherios Ikonomou is director of the Greek Cultural Foundation in Berlin.

Marix



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The price of beauty Audiences no longer expect authors to provide explanations about the world or to aid ethnic development. A new generation of young authors has committed itself passionately to the free market. Is the literature industry becoming a branch of the lifestyle industry? What role does literary criticism play in this? Should it merely function as a guide among an excess of products? Where will these developments lead?
By Hubert Winkels

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Germany imports a large amount of beautiful English-language literature. The volume of German literature exported to English speaking countries is practically nothing. Exchanges of translated literature between Germany and other European states are erratic and dependent on historical and cultural relationships or trends. In Germany, interest in literature from Eastern Europe has increased not only for obvious geopolitical reasons, but also because it is steeped in history, new awakenings and wild genius – or so the Germans believe. However, the situation here is asymmetrical from top to bottom: we import more than we export. The use of such economic language appears to be inappropriate, as indeed it is. Yet quite simply, economic factors are exerting a strong effect on the literature industry. This holds true as well for literary criticism, in the press, television and radio. This is a field that I have been active in for over thirty years.

I will firstly consider literary criticism in its traditional and, let us say with corresponding historical pathos, its pure form. In my opinion, it is not threatened by the diversification of the media in itself but rather by the loss of an educated, middle-class reading public and the form of cultural critique it engendered in debate and argument.

This development has been caused by the combination of two tendencies: the sales imperative which the culture of criticism (and with it cultural criticism) creates; and second, our understanding of entertainment as an emphatic part of a cultural event; gone is a critical pervasion. One thing is clear: we are dealing with a historical-social problem, a far broader social and cultural change.

I will begin with a thesis which is not particularly original but one which is being viewed with increasing suspicion: literary criticism, including the literary essay, is the premier discipline within cultural journalism. There are two good reasons for this and some evidence to show that this is a fact.

First, criticism is linguistically the densest form of journalism because of its connection to the density of its subject matter. Literary critique is based on an extremely complex, predominantly historical referen-

cing system and therefore creates an extraordinarily broad connection between history and the present.

Second, it is through literary criticism that important social and political-historic debates take place, which contribute to societal self understanding. The impetus for these debates often comes from the literary work, and literary critique becomes a promoter, a catalyst and a forum for controversies.

The great debates initiated by Günter Grass or Salman Rushdie, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn or Christa Wolf, by Max Frisch, Harold Pinter, Botho Strauß, Peter Handke, Martin Walser or W.G. Sebald – and even those debates provoked by the ranks of the new pop-stars of literature – have always required an aesthetic-political culture of argumentation. If arguments are reduced to purely historical or social-political statements the importance of the form in which they're presented is lost. It is not only in the literary text but also in the discussion that unfolds about the text that the performative style is very much linked to the statement itself.

Literary criticism is important for journalistic practice in general. The largest, most intellectually demanding newspapers in Germany have their own relatively independent literary editorial departments in addition to or as a part of their general arts pages.

Literary magazines and newspapers, such as those found in the USA, Great Britain and France, hardly play a role in Germany. More needs to be done here to increase their importance. This was highlighted at an international conference on literary criticism at the House of Literature in Munich in 2008, and the first attempts are now being made to orientate ourselves in Germany towards journalistic standards elsewhere in the West. Although the irony is that some want to move into an area in which others are already under threat of being removed from.

Literary criticism is not threatened by the diversification of the media in itself but rather by the loss of an educated, middle-class public.

Testing intellectual reflexes

What does modern criticism look like in practice? What shifts are underway? The most successful modern literary critics are guided by the actions of their readership or audiences. The reader is given top priority when good critics plot the coordinates of their work. Their main job is to make a reader interested in a book. Of course, they are deeply convinced that writing and reading good literature has a moral and civilising function. They see their role here as providing a bridge between the literary work and its readers. They work, as other critics do, selectively, analytically, introspectively, judiciously according to accepted rules and their own tastes.

Nevertheless, for the critics, the entertainment value of their work is just as important as the successful effect on their readers. They see themselves as advocates for their readers; if it must be, as advocates for their readers' better self. And in this role there is an experiment going on: the critic's own intellectual reflexes and educated emotions firstly test the artistic product in question. The protagonists of an audience-oriented criticism tend to focus on the largest audience, the still very large group of educated and above all media-literate participants in culture and entertainment.

In this way German critics avoid beco-

ming too close to the discourse within the text and also to the innovative demands of the artistic work. That is exactly what happens in Great Britain where most critics are university professors or other writers. However, in Germany as well, there is a tendency towards emphatic, above all emphatically positive verdicts of literary works. The obvious question is why one would go to the trouble of analysing an unsuccessful work.

Such a critic, whether he or she comes across as gruff or charming, is valuable to the reader. The critic provides a reader with entertainment, education and – something which is becoming increasingly important – with orientation in an aesthetic field that is becoming more strongly differentiated, in an increasingly complex book market. To call a critic who is close to his readers successful sounds somewhat tautological, if fame and its associated influence on book sales is the measuring stick.

A contrast to this audience-focussed approach is an approach centring on the work itself. Here, one can differentiate once again between critics who see themselves as being in a discourse with literary authors and those who are interested in developing their own autonomous understanding of the art.

In Germany, since the early 1990s, the latter group has been increasingly criticised for operating within a kind of aesthetic secret society. They are accused of promoting a social separation of high art, of banishing it to a quasi-religious private sphere with its own balance of power.

Such accusations are often linked to a scepticism of innovative developments in form, the sort of innovations practiced, in particular, by Austrian authors. Conversely, the avant-garde used to accuse the conservatives of having a limited realistic perception of literature and often dismissed social realism as a politically frowned-upon model and nineteenth century literature as anachronistic. But this strong difference of opinion has since largely dissolved. The development of a postmodern understanding of art has given all art forms equal status and enabled them to be used and combined diversely. In addition, political depolarisation in Europe has single-handedly brought about liberalisation in our social environment and in literature itself. As a result, conventional narrative has gained new opportunities for self irony and has experienced a revival.

The tendency to play with form, even if the results were seen as the weaker part of a beautiful whole, has been shed of its militant stridency and become more appealing. A move towards the playful, jovial and intriguing is now increasingly visible and, furthermore, even enjoyable.

Attack of the entertainment defenders

In literary criticism too, the polarisation that peaked in the early 1990s with an attack by the defenders of entertainment has also eased off. Yet here the adherence to the requirements of the literary market is indirectly effective. There is no audience co-efficient. Conforming to requirements is not directly related to the number of media users. Moreover, it is difficult to measure how well this approach is received. But criticism of literary developments is so coordinated that its own problems later become

The most successful modern literary critics give their readers top priority in the coordinates of their work.

literature's problems too.

Those critics who gear their work towards writing for the authors themselves differ slightly from those who want to develop an autonomous understanding of art. Hypothetically, both are working from the same intellectual and imaginative input. But the former emphasise the ingenious creativity of the author. And even if they are not looking for biographical closeness, they share the writer's fundamental aesthetic, philosophical and, quite often, political assumptions.

This is often, though not always, due to a sense of solidarity with one's own generation. Conscious identification with one's generation has, incidentally, only become prevalent in Europe since the extensive undoing of political ideologies. Such a pronounced withdrawal from ideology could be compensated for by a feeling of togetherness. In Germany, this phenomenon had already been observed for some time, stemming from the younger generation's desire to dissociate itself from the country's National Socialist past.

The generation paradigm is intensified by the unusual closeness we see today between authors, critics and other stakeholders in the literary process. This is particularly apparent in the German speaking world where frequent public readings are held at literature institutes and book shops, at festivals and as part of reading competitions – even if Europe's largest literary festival is in Hay on Wye in the UK, and not, as is often claimed, at the Lit-Cologne event in Germany.

The historical events between 1989 and 1991 can be considered key factors in the breakdown of the strict polarity of literature and the resulting tendency towards formal, traditional narrative; in particular, the fall of the Iron Curtain that had split Europe in two, and the end of the ideological self stylisation of two political systems, quite independently of one another.

Of course, such political-aesthetic comparisons can be precarious, especially since the events are not that far in the past. But overcoming a tough and fierce emphasis on progress in socio-political questions fits only too well with the question of postmodern plurality in aesthetics.

Even if there is no causal link, there are deeply structural similarities that cannot be ignored. This development brought with it a decline in normative pressure: liberation from the socialist poetics of the East and also from the burden of having to radically distance oneself from this. In the West, the rejection of force and pressure, whether political or moral correctness or emancipated avant-gardism, was already well underway. This rejection, together with political elements, led to a kind of direction crisis.

But in a capitalist world, crises are a driving force. The tentative movement was predominantly viewed as a liberation from a confusing situation, even if the artist's message or work did not seem to have the same significance as before. Anything was possible now, one could redefine and reorganise oneself and the critic could develop new distinctions and views during the process.

This differentiation within the field also brought with it the experience of marginalisation: so many wonderful works of art, so many expert opinions and society did not even take a proper look! This is a description of the sporadic self observation of literary art not its actual condition. One felt pushed away from the centre, but in actual fact one was simply a part of the general decentralisation, or to express it in common sociological terms, it was the differentiation of all social levels.

The result was two developments that, at

first glance, appeared entirely contradictory. First, there was increased authorial intervention in the political historical space as if they were trying to reclaim lost ground. And second, we saw a dramatic increase in the significance of the book market for the entire literary field.

In an apparent contrast to the theory that literary culture was changing in line with market demands, one noticed just how much authors were expected to respond to the new historical situation. Literary critics were eagerly expecting a reunification novel in Germany. But as ridiculous as these expectations were, as if one was making legitimate demands of a pupil, they did set something in motion – even if it was not exactly the desired effect.

After reunification, Günter Grass, for example, played a larger role in debates on contemporary history than he had in the previous two decades. His epic novels *The Flounder* and *The Rat* with their ecological and feminist undertones had not yielded the results he wanted, namely to cause a stir aesthetically and politically. However, the vehement rejection of German reunification by Günter Grass, and his criticism of its legal enforcement, his representation of the entire historical process of the forming of Germany in his novel *A Broad Field*, and his references to the suffering of German refugees at the end of World War II in his novella *Crabwalk*, enabled him to achieve his aim.

Literary criticism remained largely sober and sceptical. It was also faced with the difficult task of coming to terms with the separation of the political and aesthetic spheres but, on the whole, it remained focussed on the relative autonomy of aesthetics.

This finding was followed by another contrasting one: literature had become a product to be consumed, just like other cultural offerings. Books, even the beautiful and the commendable ones, were primarily goods. Protecting them because of their cultural value was more of a secondary consideration. These arguments, which stem from the merging of large publishing houses and major national bookstore chains, bring us back to the question of the typology of the critics. We will now consider their role as agents in the market.

In an economically-driven environment comprising producer, sales team and customers, the literary critic's principal role would be that of a sales agent whose task is to influence public taste and opinions; he or she functions as a kind of product tester. Only the players on the outer realms of the literary sphere would welcome or even call for this move. Such pious timidity is also related to the erstwhile function of the literary audience as a forerunner for the general public, including political figures in Germany.

And for a long time, until well into the nineteenth century, philosophy and literature bore the main burden of the people's quest for emancipation, at least in Western Europe. However, the significance of the market was also growing for the critics.

This economic focus on the literary market leads to a diffusion in the entire realm of literary criticism. In this case, we're dealing with critics who are familiar with the standards of literary criticism but who allow themselves to be influenced by the predicted success of a work. They understand how book publishers calculate costs and research

So many wonderful works of art, so many expert opinions and society did not even take a proper look!

how translated books have faired in other countries. They find out how much literary agents and publishers are receiving as advance payments and uncover how much effort the publishing house is putting into marketing the book.

Uncovering wisdom

It is most likely that this type of critic will not receive the attention of publishers and neither will he or she expect any attention. Instead, critics allow themselves to be carried along on a wave of success, which means that a large number of people share their verdict, their feelings of euphoria, their insights or the wisdom they detected or teased out of a literary work. The market's heroes – the authors – and their protagonists are also the critic's heroes, just slightly before everyone else learns about them.

So isn't some of the popularity of the author due to the critic? Can the critic not take some of the credit for the collective exhilaration that an entertaining bestseller triggers? And is he or she not actually closer to the readers than that meticulously hard-working colleague, the author? Has the critic not understood more – if not of the art of literature itself then at least of the social environment?

From this internal focus of the critic, the question arises as to whether or not the market, as some people claim, does in fact support and create the closeness to the masses that is so often lamented by intellectuals. Or does it create a new type of business-driven public opinion that replaces the democratic operative cultural practice of analytical criticism?

This theory of literary criticism may still seem a long way removed from the question of how the exchange of national literature will develop in Europe. But this much is clear: aesthetic and literary discourse, with its pertinence and individual logic, provides a form of navigation through different cultures, making it independent of the logic of the market success of a work.

Thanks to literary criticism, books written in little-known languages, produced by little-known publishers or literature which is difficult to translate is given a chance. And this is vital in terms of breathing new life into the entire field of literature. Even central market agents are being forced to take an interest in this literary culture – aesthetic, critical, independent, but nonetheless closely connected to the community.

Translation: Anna Gentle

Hubert Winkels, born in 1955, is a literary editor at Deutschlandfunk and a regular literary critic for the weekly newspaper ***Die Zeit***. In 1988 Rowohlt Verlag published his anthology ***Ausnahmezustand***. He has worked as a guest professor in Literature and Media in Essen (1998) and as a guest professor in Literary Criticism at the University of Göttingen (1999/2000). In 2007, Winkels was awarded the Alfred Kerr prize for literary criticism.


Sherlock's Missing Bone
LITTLE OWL BOOKS
THE LION KING
WINNIE THE POOH AND TIGGER TOO
DREFWEN
MICHAEL BOND
FIREMAN SAM'S ABC
HEINEMANN
TODDLER TAMING
Baby and Child Health Care


Musical Families
Quartet Game
READ ALONG
CHILDREN'S FAVOURITES
Annie

Forging connections

HALMA is a network of European literary institutions. It connects the literary centres of Europe, organises cultural exchanges and enables the protagonists of literary life – authors, translators and promoters – to experience the variety offered by different cultures. *By Sigrid Bousset*

The European literary scene has changed radically over the last decade. The book market has become much more commercialised and all parts of Europe have seen an increase in the numbers of literary promoters, who in turn have become increasingly professional in their approaches. Literature houses, residency centres, literary agencies and festivals provide structures which focus in various ways on the relationship of literature to the reader and the relationship of the author to the public and to other authors and translators. The availability of literary grants has spread across Europe, helping to support authors and their writing. In many countries, writers and translators are assisted during the creative process, translation guidelines have been developed in order to promote literature across borders, and efforts have been made to publish literary works both at home and abroad.

In every corner of Europe, literary festivals, writers-in-residence schemes, literature houses and literary events are springing up like mushrooms. They attest to the ever-growing interest in cultural and literary exchanges at an international level. International literary mediators are increasingly using book fairs and festivals to cross the barrier of their own language and make contacts, forge agreements, arrange exchanges and discuss joint programmes.

In 2004 the Brussels literary organisation Het Beschrijf set up the Passa Porta International Literature Centre and embarked on an ambitious residency programme for international authors. Passa Porta's mission in Brussels, the capital of Europe, is to open doors between different languages, literatures and cultures. With the hybrid, polyglot, internationally-oriented city of Brussels acting as a biotope and working sphere, we soon felt the need to make contact with other literature houses abroad. We had already started some discussions when, via the Literary Colloquium Berlin, we heard about the new HALMA project, which is building a network of European literature institutions to help link the European cultural and literary scenes. Conceived as a platform for exchanges between European writers, trans-

lators and literary promoters, it seemed to have become principally anchored in Eastern Europe. We thought it was important to expand this excellent project into Western and Southern Europe, to turn it into a pan-European exchange for information, ideas, authors and translators.

My first meeting with members of the HALMA network took place in spring 2007 in the small Serbian town of Sremski Karlovci. I spent three days with representatives of large and small literature centres from places which were quite new to me: Russe, Novo Mesto, the island of Sylt, Krakow and Cetate on the Danube. I listened in as the writer Laszlo Vegal bemoaned the disappearance of multi-lingualism and multi-culturalism in Novi Sad; I visited a publisher of top-notch international literature in both Cyrillic and Roman text; and I learned more about the problem of identity in ex-Yugoslavian literature. I listened as HALMA president Krzysztof Czyzewski shared his years of experience and talked of his Borderland House on the borders of Poland, Lithuania and Belarus. And I learned from other colleagues who, despite difficult circumstances, all share a common goal: to work on a daily basis towards bringing together literature from all over Europe, towards developing a kind of European citizenship which is nourished by European writing and narrative.

From this day on I never missed another meeting. I was gripped by what we call the "HALMA spirit." The HALMA network has expanded and attracted new partners, mainly from Western Europe, and it has taken on a more concrete form: 26 literature centres meet twice a year to implement joint initiatives. The process itself is almost as important as the product. We are developing a willingness to listen, we uncover similarities and differences in our working methods and approaches, and in the cultural and political integration of our projects. Above all, we have an insatiable appetite for new literature and for finding a reciprocal way of working together that transcends borders.

The concrete basis for the co-operation between the various authors and literature houses is a writers-in-residence programme which promotes mobility among contemporary authors and opens up possibilities for the translation of their work. All too often, writers find themselves limited to their own language area and have few opportunities to broaden their horizons, gain fresh momentum through a change of surroundings or stimulate their creative processes by having contact with another language, literature and culture. This residency programme is set to expand in 2010: thanks to a European grant, HALMA can offer more than 20 writers a HALMA scholarship. Each HALMA house nominates an author who has the chance to spend one month in each of two HALMA houses in two different countries. These HALMA houses act as both hosts and intermediaries: they establish contacts between the writers and the local literary scene and between the writers and the public. They also initiate collaboration with translators and open the door to potential publishers.

A creative catalyst

We have seen time and again that residency programmes act as a catalyst for writers' creativity. The writers often return home with a quantity of material that exceeds their wildest expectations. They bring with them impressions of their time abroad and offer a peek into their inner world: what it's like to write when far from home and their feelings of isolation, combined with the excitement

of discovering new things. This also means exploring, roaming around, unashamedly uncovering the secrets of a new place, revising one's prejudices or seeing them confirmed. Many authors travel and write in a foreign location in order to rediscover something which has been lost. And the local literary and cultural scene is greatly enriched by the intellectual and artistic potential of the foreign authors in their midst.

As a 'payment' to their hosts, the resident authors often act as unofficial promoters. They read the literature of their host country and then use this knowledge when they return home to help set up contacts with literary mediators such as literary podiums, magazines and publishers.

In April 2009 the translator's house in the Hungarian town of Balatonfüred hosted the HALMA meeting under the banner of "Translating Europe." In September 2009 the HALMA partners met in Novo Mesto in Slovenia to debate the question, "What's new in Europe?" In Hungary the focus was on providing selected HALMA authors with the best possible opportunities for the translation and publication of their literary works. As a result, HALMA travel scholarships will also be offered to translators in the future.

Over time, HALMA aims to create a truly multilingual HALMA library under the slogan "What's new in European literature?" It goes without saying that the works selected for this library will be different from those which are largely offered to the European reading public by the market-oriented world of publishing. The HALMA network is not looking to follow market trends, rather it seeks to offer an alternative in a European literary sphere where decisions about the translation of literature are all too often made by literary agents and publishers who are more interested in the bottom line, commercial prize nominations and ease of consumption than in innovation, literary boldness and high quality.

HALMA seeks to focus on the work of writers who have been encouraged to move around Europe and who have taken the opportunity to cross their own linguistic and cultural borders. It is interested in authors who have thought about what it means to be a writer in Europe and who reflect this in their work.

HALMA facilitates movement across borders through its programme of scholarships for writers and translators and its promotion of these authors through events and translations. This transnational movement creates new opportunities for European literature. Thanks to HALMA, there is now a structure which enables this kind of transnational co-operation. With the consistent support of the Robert Bosch Foundation, the partners are able to meet twice a year and learn more about each other's limitations and possibilities. This solid structure provides a framework for the creation and development of new initiatives.

We are working towards a future where it is quite normal for European authors to be part of a wider international context, where they can have a presence in both large and small language areas, in both existing and new international literary forums. This brings us to the core mission of all the houses in the HALMA network: opening doors between languages, literatures and cultures.

Translation: Gill McKay

Sigrid Bousset is head of the literary organisation Het Beschrijf in Brussels.

Leaving home, to find creative inspiration

Many writers travel, away from home, to write in another place , in order to rediscover something wonderful. Many writers use the scholarship in residence programme to write about the impressions of their stay in another place, to unveil their inner thoughts, to describe the combination of isolation and their thirst for something new.

It also involves discovering and revealing the secrets of a new place, a reassessment of prejudices or a confirmation of them.

Above: Literary Colloquium, Berlin
Below: Passa Porta guest house in Brussels

Writing in a foreign language

In addition to transforming European society, migration has also left its mark on contemporary European literature as well. What difference does so called migrant literature make? What role does intercultural literature play today?

By Carmine Chiellino

They are no longer as rare as they might once have been: writers deciding not to write in the language of their country or of the family they were born in but, instead, living out their creativity through a language of their own choosing. By choosing Florentine instead of Latin for his "Divine Comedy," Dante Alighieri instigated the birth of Italian literature and moreover did so with a level of aesthetic accomplishment not matched since, not even by today's Italian literature.

As for the 20th century, a quick look at classic works by Franz Kafka, Italo Svevo, Elias Canetti and Samuel Beckett show that they also chose the language of their trade quite voluntarily and free of economic or political reservations.

The last century witnessed invasions but also peaceful immigration and emigration. European armies invaded colonies in Asia and African while the movement of national armies during two World Wars illustrates the most aggressive form of foreign language culture invasion there is, and the worst possible kind of historical disruptions for the countries involved.

Fascism and Stalinism targeted political opponents, dissidents and religious minorities. They also took action against 'foreign' language and culture organisations within their own borders, such as South Tyrolean in Italy or the various ethnic-cultural minorities in the Soviet Union. Political refugees, repatriated prisoners of both World Wars and returning German emigrants to the former Soviet Union (post World War II), still testified, at the end of the 20th century, to Europe's legacy of violence.

Bilateral agreements resulted in peaceful immigration from southern and eastern Europe, Turkey and North Africa into northern European countries. Immigrants also came from the former colonies of Asia and Africa into Great Britain, France, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands.

There can be no doubt that economic, political and social upheaval breathes life into art and literature. It benefits a reader to have an understanding of the author's world and of the context of his or her work; themes such as emigration and immigration,

political exile, colonial violence, post-colonialism and repatriation. Yet authors don't in any way choose a particular language just because they've ended up in the middle of given historical circumstances. Not that this can't happen. But it isn't a decisive factor.

Any author writing in a language other than their mother tongue will have their own unique experiences and personal reasons for choosing their literary language. Many writers were not able to make up their own minds if they grew up with the foreign language at school. This applies to Albert Memmi, for example, the French-language author who was born in a Jewish-Arab family in Tunis. Salman Rushdie grew up with two languages in Bombay. The German-language poet Zehra Çırak also grew up with two languages; she was born in Istanbul and was only two years old when her parents emigrated to Germany.

Language appeal

Describing how they came to their language decisions, intercultural authors very often mention specific reasons. Joseph Conrad, in his book, *A Personal Record: Some Reminiscences* (1912), tells the reader: "If I had not written in English I would not have written at all."

Other authors say that changing to the majority language was an inevitable necessity for living and being creative in a foreign country. Conrad, on the other hand, who was born in Poland, seems to have been "seduced" by the foreign English language, despite all the risks involved for a non-native speaker. Having said that, there are just as many European migrants, if not more, who write in their mother tongue in their new homelands.

While intercultural European literature hasn't been studied in detail, we can safely say that the works of a core group of authors are somewhat known. Tschingis Aitmatow writes novels in Russian about Kyrgyzstan, the country he was born in; the German refugee Fred Uhlman wrote short autobiographical novels in English, set in the times of National Socialism in Germany; the above-mentioned Albert Memmi is a writer of autobiographical novels and might even be described as the founding father of French-language intellectual literature; the Nobel Prize winner V.S. Naipaul, from the Caribbean, wrote English-language books on life and society in Great Britain and the countries of Africa and Asia. There is Jorge Semprún from Spain, with his French-language writing about his involvement in resistance to the Franco dictatorship and about his deportation to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Héctor Bianciotti, born in Argentina to immigrants from Piedmont, left Argentina and emigrated to France to write autobiographical novels in French. François Cheng writes in French about 20th century China. Salman Rushdie opted to write in English and his novels mainly take up the themes of Asian immigrants in London. There are also the novelists Agota Kristof, who switched from Hungarian to French; Fleur Jaeggy, with her French-language novels about the Switzerland of her childhood and life in a boarding school; Tahar Ben Jelloun with his opus in French about life in Morocco; Swedish-language author Theodor Kallifatides from Greece, who writes about life as a political exile in Sweden and his time in Greece during an especially brutal dictatorship; Agustín Gómez Arcos, who dropped Spanish for French to save his own writing from Spanish censorship; Andreï Makine, with his French-language novels about Russia and Russians in France; Moses Isegawa

from Uganda, who writes English-language novels in the Netherlands; and Gëzim Hajdari with his bilingual collections of poems in Albanian and Italian.

French and English clearly appeal the most to those who switch languages (instead of say, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian). The reasons are obvious. These are official languages in Canada, the United States and Australia and were the colonial languages of Africa and Asia. The popularity of English and French also has something to do with their position in the world market of literature.

What also counts when it comes to switching languages is how foreigners are received by national literary and cultural organisations. That is to say, whether foreign authors writing in the official language are generally accepted and whether there are successful role models. This is where France and Great Britain are more open and interested in intercultural authors than other European countries. This can be seen in the number of immigrant authors who have been welcomed into the most important national institutes of literature and how often intercultural authors have received significant awards.

Whatever the differences from country to country, novels, poems, stories and plays bring out common stylistic features and story-telling techniques, and these go beyond the language or culture in which they are written and in which they take place.

The trait they most have in common is the organisation of a system connecting written language, protagonists and readers. This is because the resulting piece of work can only connect with the reader through one common language. Authors themselves therefore have to use just one language in a book even though sections of their protagonists' lives might take place in different languages.

Generally speaking, writers of national literature usually create protagonists with life stories that develop within the borders of the cultural-historical memory accompanying the written language. However, intercultural authors start off with a different frame of mind. Their protagonists are given life stories that criss-cross various languages and cultural-historical memories.

This is the fundamental point that sums up the stylistic foundation of intercultural creativity, since intercultural writing is all about protagonists' life stories coming together via and beyond language, culture, landscapes and generations. In this way, intercultural creativity is protected from being lost due to possible concerns about belonging to this or that nationality.

A protagonist's self-imposed integration through a single language is undoubtedly easier to grasp for readers who know their way around the languages and cultures their protagonist's life story is set in. This negotiation is not as easy for monolingual readers, but the plot will lead them towards becoming inter-lingual, intercultural readers.

Within such writings, readers come across sections that allow them to work out how a protagonist's languages fit together. Languages can interact with each other in dialogue even before they're mentioned or written about.

Let's turn to Germany. Germany didn't contribute to European intercultural literature until quite recently – still, better late than never. This is due to the fact that post-war immigration in Germany did not develop in the same way as immigration did in former European colonies during the same period. It was regulated by national, bilateral treaties and, above all, set up within a time

schedule. Because of this, intercultural literature in Germany is strongly tied to worker migration and the influence of heavy, quite political literature that arose in the 1960s.

In the spirit of the times, any such writing was immediately labelled as minority literature and was branded with wanting to push an agenda. Hot on the heels of worker or feminist literature, intercultural literature was all too quickly labelled as guest-worker or foreign literature.

Indeed, debut writings by authors such as Ören, Franco Biondi, Güney Dal, Luisa Costa Hölzl, Zvonko Plepelić, Aysel Özakin, Eleni Torossi, Yüksel Pazarkaya, Lisa Mazzi-Spiegelberg, Şinasi Dikmen, Emine Sevgi Özdamar were, among many others, based on aspects of life in and around the ever-growing immigrant communities.

Issues of concern to migrant workers were at the heart of their novels, tales, poems, short prose and children's stories. They explored what life was like in German companies during the 1950s and 60s. These writings typically related the difficulties faced by immigrants getting used to a new social system as well as insecurities about the future in a country that claimed not to be a country of immigration.

Such pieces of work did not fail to describe moments when immigrants and locals first came into contact with each other, in the form of love stories or in stories about teaming up to resist difficult working conditions. They also describe how solidarity, through participating in trade unions or in political life in Germany, is a path through which immigrants can become emancipated as true citizens instead of remaining purely labourers.

Hot on the heels of worker or feminist literature, intercultural literature was all too quickly labelled as guest worker or foreign literature.

In hindsight, it's clear that pioneers of intercultural literature in Germany stuck closely to themes of minority literature in order to get their bearings. However, in doing so, they risked ending up, thematically and stylistically, at a dead end.

Only at the end of the 1980s were the themes and styles of so-called guest worker authors more in tune with the rest of European intercultural literature. The transition from minority to intercultural literature was boosted through contact with the work of other intercultural authors in Europe and through the growing recognition that the complexities of society and culture in the immigration process were about much more than day-to-day life in a factory job or the struggle for equality as a citizen.

What is also clear is how the typology of intercultural authors in Germany came to include quite different groups during the 1980s and 90s as a result of more relaxed immigration laws. These authors chose to write literature in German because they were political exiles, among them, Cyrus Atabay and Said (Iran), Adel Karasholi (Syria), Ota Filip and Libuše Moníková (the former Czechoslovakia) and György Dalos (Hungary).

Personal reasons and goals were decisive factors for other authors, such as Galsan Tschinag of the Tuvan people of Mongolia, the Japanese writer Yoko Tawada, the Ethiopian Asfa-Wossen Asserate and Eleonora Hummel from Kazakhstan.

Writers of a new generation who were born elsewhere but grew up with the German language were also letting their voices

be heard around this time. To name but a few: Zafer Şenocak and Feridun Zaimoglu from Turkey, Ilija Trojanow from Bulgaria, Terézia Mora from Hungary, Sudabeh Mohafez from Iran, Que Du Luu, from Vietnam (although of Chinese parents) and Luo Lingyuan from China.

More than just a photocopy

Some authors from this new generation of writers had immigrant parents but grew up in Germany and distinguished themselves early on, such as José F.A. Oliver, Natascha Wodin and Selim Özdogan.

As for so-called 'Italian' authors, the majority of them are native speakers. To name but a few: Salvatore A. Sanna, Giuseppe Giambusso, Franco Sepe, Marcella Continanza, Cristina Alziati, Marisa Fenoglio, Silvia di Natale and Cesare de Marchi. Others, who write in German, include: the novelist and poet Franco Biondi, prose author and poet Lisa Mazzi-Spiegelberg and entertainer and poet Fruttuoso Piccolo. I also write poems and essays in German under the name of Gino Chiellino.

Intercultural literature in Germany saw the light of day because authors-to-be only decided to become writers after they arrived in Germany as immigrants or refugees. Contrary to intercultural literature in English or French, intercultural literature written in the German language could not be traced back to colonial language policies.

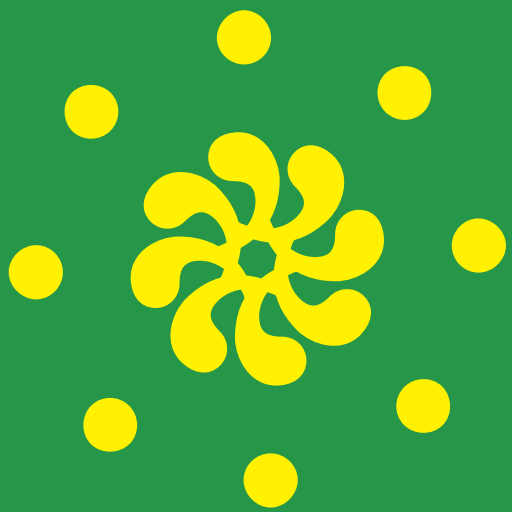
Intercultural literature in Germany is a different story entirely. It doesn't toil under the weight of left-over guilt from colonial or German history. Instead, it is forward looking. It's goal is to see Germany's intercultural future become an integral part of the European Union's intercultural future.

Of course, you won't find this goal spelt out on any programme for intercultural literature in Germany. But whoever writes prose, plays or poems with intercultural protagonists is creating life stories and plots that have to carry themselves beyond the barriers of language or culture. This is why intercultural authors have to see that the plots of their stories stretch beyond issues of nationality as well. Unless of course they simply can't resist the allure of monoculturalism and thereby turn themselves into photocopies of the country's most successful authors.

Translation: Lee Schäfer

Carmine Chiellino, born in Carlopoli, Italy, in 1946, is a German-language poet and literature expert. After studying Italian and sociology in Rome, he came to Germany in 1970. He has received awards for his poetry, including the Adalbert von Chamisso Prize in 1987. He is the editor of the book ***Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland. Ein Handbuch.*** (Metzler Verlag, 2000). Since 2003, he has been the Chamisso Poetry lecturer at Dresden University of Technology.

Sabon



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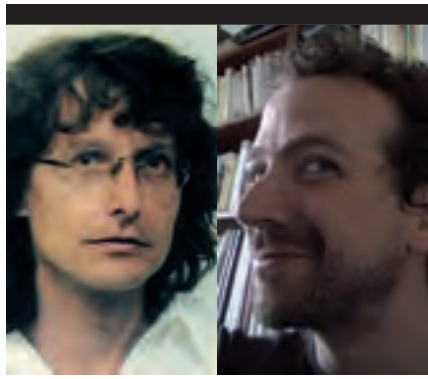
Learning from the Swiss

A tiny land with many languages: Switzerland demonstrates how a common culture does not have to be held back by language boundaries. What is the best way to promote multilingual literature?

By Beat Mazenauer and Francesco Biamonte



In today's media society, attention is a very valuable commodity. In an era of information overload there is a limit to how much people can truly absorb and process, and the dynamics of this "attention economy" mean that it is often crude sensationalism and simplistic messages which attract the most attention. This is also true of literature: the more demanding works tend to find themselves stranded by their own complexity. Literature prefers to avoid overly-simplistic messages but at the same time its recognition and popularity is restricted by multilingualism. Literary works still carry a certain symbolic prestige which has been conferred on them over the years by the cultural elite. But now this special status only provides a limited benefit, as books increasingly find themselves in competition with a whole range of cultural offerings which meet today's high expectations.

As a result, publishers and all those in the cultural sector are looking for new strategies. They are promoting audio books, developing new festival formats and setting up literature houses. They are trying to bring literature to as large an audience as possible by inviting both domestic and international authors and by promoting books in a variety of languages. Those wishing to export literary works find themselves faced with two possible avenues, namely multilingual promotion and the internet as a medium for achieving this.

It is very difficult to promote literature across linguistic boundaries, as it is fundamentally tied to a language which is distinct from other languages in its everyday and artistic usage. The example of multilingual Switzerland provides a look at how these mechanisms play out, but also of how the obstacles can be overcome.

The European Union today comprises 27 member states which are connected by an institutional framework and a commu-

nal budget. But in cultural terms, Europe is still a fragmented structure which has found no common identity. The 23 official languages are basically used to carry out legislative and administrative functions.

Switzerland as a laboratory

Switzerland only has four official languages, but the country is characterised by the fact that multilingualism forms a core element of the Swiss "cultural nation." What has held the country together if not the will to form a multilingual bond? Switzerland shares three of its four languages with its larger neighbours: Germany, France and Italy. The Swiss author and literary scholar Adolf Muschg wrote in 1990 that this fact allows all Swiss citizens to have "dual citizenship", which "constitutes their 'unique character.'" The Swiss are relatively willing to switch languages when necessary. The internal language barriers are high but not insurmountable, and there is a basic consensus in this respect, as shown in the results of recent cantonal referenda on the subject of language learning in schools. Even where it was least expected, the population once again confirmed their wish to see the national languages given priority over English.

The identity of multilingual Switzerland may be strengthened in this way but of course the use of different languages causes many practical problems. In terms of literature, the national languages stand side-by-side, each aligned with their external centre in Paris, Milan or Berlin. But despite this, there is still a sense of a unifying cultural policy within the field of literature. National institutions such as Pro Helvetia, along with various private foundations and associations, have set themselves the specific goal of spanning the linguistic gulf. They translate books, stage joint readings and organise festivals. The Swiss Literature Institute in Biel runs its courses in both German and French, and there are many other literary projects which deal with the issue of multilingualism.

The Swiss are characterised by the fact that multilingualism forms a core element of the Swiss 'cultural nation.'

In this sense, Switzerland can be viewed as a kind of European laboratory where a common culture is not held back by linguistic boundaries. Performance poetry brings literature to life on the stage. Literature festivals foster direct personal contacts. But above all, the internet has become the most mobile, efficient and cost-effective method of promoting literature. While music is a universal language requiring no translation, the spread of literature around the world is restricted by language. This is why the worldwide web contains very few literature websites which encompass more than two or three different languages. However, the huge potential of the internet makes it ideally suited to promoting literature: it can be accessed all over the world, it is flexible, subject matter can be directly linked, and it allows the use of different media (text, audio and video). This means that literary works can be presented in a multitude of ways which can still be closely combined.

But the question of translation still sparks virulent debate. It makes sense to summarise the content and then translate this into other

languages, so that a minimum of information can be provided. Longer texts would remain in the original language in order to encourage "foreign-language" reading.

One could argue that a book review is of little use if the corresponding book is not available in translation. In order to refute this argument, two target groups should be distinguished. On the one side are the publishers and promoters of literary events who use the internet to provide high-quality information. Quite apart from the international bestsellers, this kind of service can greatly expand the informal network which is already in existence. But on the other hand how is it possible to awaken the reading public's interest in a book which, up to now, they have not been able to read? In this situation a good, penetrative book review can provide the means of access. None other than Jorge Luis Borges wrote in his *Stories* that instead of writing a 500-page book, without knowing whether or not it was good, he would rather write a review of it straight away. This also brings to mind experiments such as those carried out by the French weekly magazine *Courrier Internationale*, which published book reviews from all over the world, not so much in order to encourage reading of the book but more to highlight regional linguistic characteristics.

Everyone reads

One thing is sure: quality and choice are essential ingredients for the successful crossover of foreign-language literature. But anyone who wants to attract new consumers needs to find ways of appealing to the senses in a fun, hands-on way, using pictures, audio samples and videos. In addition, it is important to create flexible, intelligent links so that the user can not only carry out structured searches but can also enjoy stumbling upon interesting discoveries. Serendipity makes browsing much more fun. In this way the internet can be more stimulating than books, which lend themselves to quiet reading.

Literature is neither the preserve of the elite nor the stomping-ground of the layman. Everyone reads, therefore everyone should be able to actively contribute to a literary website, whether as a reviewer or by joining a discussion forum. The main problem is how to control access so that it is open to everyone but still maintains a minimum standard of quality. Nowadays, many international literature websites are sponsored by publishers and booksellers in order to generate plaudits for their own products. But a good-quality literature website needs to be neutral and cater for everyone who is interested in literature. And perhaps young people who have been turned off books by being forced to read in school would react more positively if they were given a different way of approaching literary texts. Nowadays many young people would feel much more at home downloading poetry to their i-phones.

Times – and readers – are changing. Literature should not be left behind, indeed it wants to move with the times. Spoken word performances, slam poetry, the internet – all these things can ignite a linguistic spark which knows no language boundaries. No European culture has managed to achieve this, although the idea of 'European culture' is becoming more deeply embedded in

people's consciousness. There are two key factors: first, digital media and personal contacts need to complement each other constantly; and second, an element of enjoyment should also be an artistic requirement. New perspectives can only really be opened up by a combination of these two.

Translation: Gill McKay

Beat Mazenauer is editor-in-chief of Readme.cc.
Francesco Biamonte is editor-in-chief of Culturactif.ch.

www.readme.cc
Readme.cc is a European literary platform designed to stimulate communication about books. Readers photograph themselves with their favourite book, comment on it and create a personal online bookshelf. Readme.cc is a space for inspiring and often surprising literary encounters. Book tips are regularly translated into many languages, and the site provides access to literary documents. Readme.cc was set up in 2005 and currently operates in ten languages (German, English, French, Italian, Danish, Slovenian, Czech, Hungarian, Arabic and Hebrew). The site receives funding from the EU's Culture Programme. Its editors are well-placed within the European literary network.

www.culturactif.ch
Culturactif.ch is a website dedicated to contemporary Swiss literature. It was created in 1997 and since 2002 has been funded by the Service de Press Suisse, an association which aims to encourage exchanges across language boundaries. It now has around 2,500 html pages and has developed into an outstanding resource for contemporary Swiss literature. The multilingual (French, Italian, German) editorial committee ensures that the mainly French site also includes regular contributions in German and Italian, to cover the whole gamut of Swiss literature. Many pages have summaries in all three languages. Every month Culturactif.ch publishes reviews, information and previously unpublished works.

A language superpower English is a lingua franca in Europe. British writers have a language bonus. But why do Britons read so little of other European authors?

By Emma House

English is the second most widely spoken language in the world and the most widely used as a second language. In 1999, David Graddol noted that since 1990, English-language competence on the European continent had risen, to the point that over 100 million people, almost a third of the European Union's population, were speaking it as a second language. Looking at the dominance of English from a literature perspective, this was influenced by a growing availability of English in radio, television and film. This has contributed to the high degree of English spoken globally.

Any literature published in English, be it original language or translated into English, would therefore automatically have a global audience. This can be seen firstly by the number of books exported from the UK alone to European countries. In 2008 a total value of over £799 million of books were exported to the 27 EU countries from the UK (BERR Export statistics).

Breaking exports down by the most popular countries, the Irish Republic leads the way, with Germany, the Netherlands and France, closely following. Spain and Italy occupy positions 7 and 9 in the global rankings for the export of UK books and Sweden, Greece, Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Switzerland all feature in the Top 20 markets. Whilst the larger publishing houses will verify these statistics, agreeing that Germany is their biggest market, values can be slightly misleading with the growing importance of Germany as hub for supplying the rest of Europe, France and Eastern Europe in particular.

Complementing the dominance of the English language, Europe has a big advantage in that many countries have specialised book stores for English language books and it is much more common to have books in other languages, but especially English, alongside local language books. Sadly, the UK is an exception to this rule, where books in languages other than English are very hard to come by.

The English language monopolises the translation lists of European Houses. In his "Diversity Report 2008" study, Rüdiger Wischenbart found that: "English is the clearly predominant original (or source) language for translations whose share grew from 40 to over

60 percent on average within 15 years until hitting apparently a ceiling by the late 1990s." In 2007 in Germany, 6160 rights and licenses were acquired and the Anglo-American world is by far the leader here, with a share of 67 percent.

Alongside English, French also permanently ranks ahead among the most important languages of translation, followed by Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish and Russian in varying order. Two other Scandinavian languages were among the 10 most important in 2007: Norwegian (ranking 8th) and Danish (10th). This pattern can be seen among many of the European countries, where German also features as a literature of choice to translate from, but consumer demand in Europe for English and American writers remains large compared to writers from other countries.

Statistics are lean when it comes to looking at translations across European languages. However it is known that such cross-European language exchange is much lower than perhaps it should be. Reasons for this vary depending on the language, certainly a lack of translators is one reason. One example: in Slovakia, during the 1970s and 80s, there was a very prolific translator from Turkish who produced dozens of translations. However, no one succeeded her after she retired and the last novels by Orhan Pamuk, for instance, were translated from English into Slovak.

Tides can change however and have a small impact with the emergence of passionate, dedicated individuals, such as Nermin Molloaglu who as a new Turkish literary agent now has 58 Turkish writers on her books and is enjoying success selling translation rights to their titles. Indeed it is not uncommon that a book translated into English from a European language, particularly a minority language, will be done purely to help it find its way into translation into other European languages, rather than be published in English for commercial purposes. Work being done by organisations such as Literature Across Frontiers and Next Page Foundation to train translators and promote minority-language literature is extremely important and will continue to keep an exchange alive.

However, high profile exceptions to a lack of translations across European languages do occur. In the past 30 years popular literature has been more widely translated and is sold in huge quantities: the Swedish author Henning Mankell has sold a million copies of each of his books in Germany and, more recently, Stieg Larsson has sold nearly 13 million copies of his books worldwide.

English rules

Literature in translation continues to make up a small minority of books published in the UK. Certainly there is a huge amount of excellent English-language material available to choose from, given the global dominance of the English language, and it could be said a degree of linguistic chauvinism exists within the USA and the UK. For a UK publishing house, the costs involved in publishing a title in translation are considered to be much riskier than publishing a title in original English. This is a risk that is not built in to a British publishers' business model, unlike those of other big European publishing houses. The risks are taken more often by smaller, niche houses, which subsequently do not have the resources of a larger house for promotions. The UK has, however, come a long way in its publication of works in translation over the past 25 years.

A huge amount of effort and funding often goes into promoting a European country's home grown talent, as well as subsidising the translation costs. Norla (Norway) and The

Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature are only a couple of the active organisations dedicated to supporting national literature.

Trends have a major effect on which books make the cut when it comes to translations. Bill Swainson, Editorial Director at Bloomsbury UK, notes that: "Nebulous things like the rediscovery of 'Eastern Europe' in the UK created and galvanized a market for international fiction, from which Harvill, Faber, Bloomsbury, etc all benefited in the 80s, 90s, and the first half of the 00s. Other recent examples of success are Zafon's *The Shadow of the Wind* (Orion) and Bolaño's *2666* (Picador): the first was a commercial novel that caught the popular imagination; the second is a literary novel that engaged more adventurous readers in a way that few literary novels do – it was a bestseller at the beginning of 2009 in the UK."

Dedicated newsletters such as the bi-annual New Books in German, a publication for the UK market designed to highlight literature from Germany, Austria and Switzerland, have also had an impact on translations. "The statistics held by Germany's publishers' and booksellers' association, state that the number of rights sold to the UK for English translation have increased from 103 in 2000 to 160 in 2008. It is important to highlight that these figures not only include literary titles but also children's and non-fiction titles." (Jamie Searle, published in the BCLT's journal *In Other Words*, Summer 2009 edition.)

What the UK can be proud of however is the time, energy and funding (of which there is never enough) that goes into promoting literature in translation. The Arts Council England subsidises British publishers for translating foreign literature into English. Prizes exist for literature in translation, including the Independent Foreign Fiction prize, for which the prize winners and shortlisted books see a huge increase in sales. English Pen also funds the promotion of literature in translation. Literary festivals are also showcases for writers from overseas, thanks to the passion of, and influence over festival organizers by, individuals like Rebecca Morrison of the Goethe Institute and Svetlana Adjoubei of Academia Rossica, a foundation dedicated to the promotion of Russian Literature in the UK. Publishers are also making an effort to market the books they translate; Bloomsbury will shortly be publishing a bookshelf within Bloomsbury Library Online which will be called "International Fiction" and contain a lot of translations. As Swainson also notes: "The challenge for the publishers is to escape what is otherwise a ghetto of their own making and present the books they choose to publish in translation from other languages with as much energy as they would bring to a top English-language novel."

So will the gap ever close between English-into-European translations and European-into-English? In the UK it will almost certainly never be equal, given the growing power of English as a global language. However with the passion and drive of many individuals and organizations, and the rise of successful mass market European novelists such as Stieg Larsson and Carlos Ruiz Zafón, and a wider variety of routes to market electronically, maybe we will see more European-authored titles being brought into the UK market. Although without continued (and increased) funding, better support from retailers and stronger exposure to the UK public, this will be a long uphill struggle.

Emma House is the Director of the International Division of the British Publishers Association.

When reading becomes communication

The role of the British Council in enhancing cultural relations in Europe through literature

The British Council's purpose is to build engagement and trust for the UK through the exchange of knowledge and ideas between people worldwide. We believe passionately in the importance of this mission as a counterweight to many of the global challenges of our time. Literature and writers have a great contribution to make to this work and the British Council has a long and illustrious history of employing these potent forces to further our cultural relations mission.

Literature, of all the art forms, presents the most densely effective way of conveying meaning and describing alternative realities. And yet, more than simply being a vehicle for ideas, the act of reading or listening to literature from other cultures is in itself an act of international exchange, in the purest and simplest form.

Great writers have always profited from sojourns in other countries and engaging with other cultures. Just to take examples of writers from the British Isles, it's no secret that a significant proportion of Shakespeare's subject matter borrows heavily from European originals. The power of the collective oeuvre of the English Romantic poets cannot be divorced from their experiences of 18th Century Europe, the French Revolution preying on the minds of Wordsworth and Shelley, or the cultural backdrop of Byron's and Keats' sensual meanderings through Switzerland, Portugal, Italy, Greece.

Moving into the 20th Century, the previous generation's enthusiasm for the 'Grand Tour' feeds into the literary ferment of Twenties Paris and its role as the cultural hub of English speaking writers (most famously, it has to be said, in terms of the Americans); and it continues to reverberate loudly in British writing of the Thirties – just witness Orwell, Spender et al's intellectual and physical engagement with the Spanish Civil War. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the emergence of writers such as Doris Lessing, Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, to name just three, stamped the British literary scene with an indelible post-colonial pedigree.

These examples are part of the apocrypha of canonical literature in English, and serve as a reminder of the essentially international footing of so much great art.

At the British Council we are keen that our reach should extend beyond our grasp: the impact of work in cultural relations is necessarily diffuse, and our aims are long-term and wide-ranging. In terms of literature work, we are interested above all in the rich interplay that arises when writers engage creatively, personally and culturally with readers and writers in other counties. As a happy by-product, we seek to capitalise on the fruits of this engagement – the new work and creativity that arises from the relationships forged between authors and translators, publishers and intellectuals, readers and creative entrepreneurs.

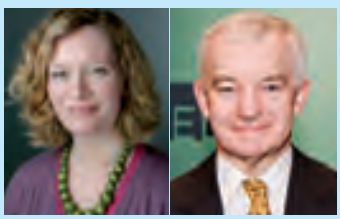
In Europe the British Council has a rich and varied experience of bringing readers from all over the continent into fruitful contact with the best of the UK's writers. One long-running and highly successful mainstay of our literature programme is the annual Walberberg Seminar on Contemporary Literature, which is attended by approximately 45 participants from across Europe, representing a broad mix of academic critics, professors of English (with many from the younger generation), publishers, journalists and translators. Founded in 1986 by the late, seminal author Malcolm Bradbury, the Seminar has over the years introduced a large number of contemporary British writers to a key European audience; Walberberg Chairs have included A S Byatt, Andrew Motion, Paul Muldoon and Marina Warner. The 2009 Walberberg seminar was held at Akademie Schmockwitz in Berlin on the theme 'Changing Literary Climates.' Chaired by Patricia Duncker, it featured David Edgar, James Meek, Michael Symmons Roberts, Rachel Seiffert and Simonetta Wenkert.

At the more youth-orientated end of the spectrum, in recent years we have worked with our teaching colleagues to develop Britlit, a project which utilises the cultural framework of contemporary British writing to teach English. A key element of this highly successful pedagogy involves bringing British authors into classrooms across Europe; school children in Portugal and Italy have had their eyes opened to 'live' literature by writers such as Romesh Gunesekera and the inimitable former UK Children's Laureate Michael Rosen to enable these students to experience the power of great storytelling, and unlock the pregnant possibilities of creative texts.

Between these two major programmes of work, we are engaged in a host of other activity across the continent. As the popularity of literary festivals grows, we are working to harness the rich possibilities these diverse platforms for literary debate present. One current example of this is the participation of four Scottish writers in the Lviv Literature Festival in Ukraine, part of a British Council partnership with the Edinburgh Book Festival. Another is our continued work with the Hay Festival, which from its roots in Wales is targeting ever-expanding international audiences, radiating out from its original forays into the European readership with festivals in Segovia and Granada, Spain.

Running alongside these more established means of debate and exchange are highly innovative projects such as Words Converge, which links poetry to cutting edge technology for art in public spaces. The project is developing ways of displaying and manipulating poetry across a variety of platforms including video screens, buildings and mobile phones. Leading young poets and visual artists from Romania, Israel, Greece, Georgia and the UK will use these platforms to create innovative text-based installation art.

These are just a few examples of the range of our activities with readers and writers. However, our work in literature could not reach its full potential without engaging with the trade that nurtures, supports and disseminates it. The great European trade fairs for the publishing industry are the fora at which book deals are struck, rights to translate bought and sold, and where literary history – and occasionally fortunes – are made. Through our work with the international publishing community we enhance the cultural relations possibilities latent in the business context; the programmes we curate in honour of the Market Focus Country at London's Book Fair each April foster lasting and fertile relationships between nations through this most enduringly powerful media – the written word.



Tanya Andrews is the Acting Director for Literature at the British Council. **Patrick Hart i**s the Deputy Director of the British Council in Germany.

Nations of translations – midgets alongside giants

The Catalan language looks back at more than a thousand years of history. Catalonia – and its capital city of Barcelona – is the most important centre of publishing in the Spanish-speaking world today. The percentage of translations into Catalan, which is, after all, spoken by eight million people in four regions, is high.

By Josep Bargalló

The richness of medieval Romanesque culture experienced a breakthrough between the 13th and 14th centuries thanks to the philosopher Ramon Llull. Writing in Catalan, alongside Latin, he led the way for the use of the new language: in the dissemination of philosophy, theology and scientific publications.

Literary production was being set up in Catalonia during these years alongside other Romance literature as well. Poets such as Ausiàs March and prose writers such as Joanot Martorell, whose book *Tirant lo Blanc* was the only one Don Quixote saved from the flames, made their mark on the culture of literature in the Catalan language and meant that Catalonian enjoyed a privileged position in Europe.

The dissemination of Catalan, thanks to the comings and goings of European history, especially in and around the Mediterranean, has resulted in about eight million people speaking the language today. This means that in numbers Catalan surpasses the average for official European Union languages. For four years now, Catalan has also been recognised as a working language and language of data input in some European Institutions – and this is despite it not being an official language of any of the member states.

Catalan literature was the star of the 2004 book fair in Guadalajara (Mexico), the most important Latin American fair. The main theme of the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2007 was Catalan culture. In the same year, the World Voices Festival in New York was opened by the Catalan poet Narcís Comadira and Catalan poetry was part of the 2009 Marché de la Poésie poetry programme in Paris.

World greats

Universally-read authors have followed on the heels of Ramon Llull. Harold Bloom, one of America's most famous critics of literature, wrote about Llull in his *The Western Canon* collection (1994), and named six Catalonian writers of the twentieth century in his work: Carles Riba, J. V. Foix, Mercè Rodoreda, Salvador Espriu, Joan Perucho and Pere Gimferrer.

Equally notable are the German translations of novels by Jaume Cabré (*Les veus del Pamano*) and by Maria Barbal (*Pedra de Tartera*), which were best sellers at the 2007 Frankfurt Book Fair, and the considerable number of languages into which other contemporary Catalan authors have been translated, for example, the recently deceased Baltasar Porcel, Quim Monzó and Albert Sánchez Piñol.

Catalonia, and its capital city of Barcelona, is the most important centre of publishing in the Spanish speaking world. Catalonian publishers sell their books in all corners of Spain but also export to all Latin American countries where they either have their own branches or local participating businesses. In 2006, in Catalonia alone, 30,709 books were published, 10,861 of them in Catalan. This is quite a noteworthy figure as the market for books in Catalan is much more limited than for books in Spanish.

Total number of translations published in Catalan

	2002	2003	2004
Spanish	628	756	854
English	493	492	456
French	201	197	164
German	99	95	95
Other	158	67	137
Total	1,579	1,607	1,706

Of course, the majority of these books aren't works of literature but comprise all sorts of genres. A look at Catalan government subsidies provided for adult prose, theatre and poetry translations shows the range of languages of origin. Although English is at the top of the list, translations were made from Hungarian, Portuguese, Japanese, Arabic and Hebrew, among other languages. It is worth noting that most Catalonian publishers organise the majority of their translations without any state funding whatsoever.

Catalan abroad

It is important for Catalonia to be open and welcoming to world cultures in their own languages. But it is even more important to be able to project itself to the outside world. That is why a cultural and educational policy has been developed to support the translation of works written in Catalan. Most of the work in this regard is done by the Institute Ramon Llull, an organisation made up of the Catalonian government and the Balearic Islands government. The Institute's aim is to promote the Catalan language and Catalan culture abroad, by funding translations exclusively from Catalan into other languages. This funding is channelled directly to publishers in various countries.

The number of translation promotions from Catalan into other languages

	2008
French	16
Spanish	14
Italian	13
Portuguese	10
German	7
English	4
Greek	3
Hungarian	3
Dutch	3
Polish	2
Romanian	2
Chinese	2
Croatian	1
Russian	1
Serbian	1
Total	82

Translations have increased in recent years. The reasons are varied, but the spot-

light on Catalan at the 2007 Frankfurt Book Fair produced results. There was a marked jump in translation figures, especially into the German language. On the other hand, translations into English are comparatively few.

However, this fact also holds for all other languages. A study of the state of international literary translations, published in 2007 as *Ser traduït o no ser* (To Be Translated or Not to Be) by the Institute Ramon Llull and the American Pen Club, reveals one of the biggest problems of cultural globalisation: the leading language, English, resists the reception of other languages and instead of being a bridge between languages becomes a dyke.

From bridge to dyke

Umberto Eco once said, when asked which global language could be called Europe's, that translation was the language of Europe. Even if this sounds ironic or was a way of avoiding a tricky question, it really is quite true. The only language any European or world citizen understands is their own language. Even if English is becoming more widespread, it remains clear that most people in the world don't understand the language let alone know it sufficiently enough to be receptive to its literature.

In this sense, it doesn't really matter to an author how many people speak the language in which they write their work. What is important is the quality of their writing and how this is received in the reader's language once translated.

If a culture ignores other forms of literature it will never wholly understand the world. And a culture that is not able to extend itself to other cultures will not become existentially complete until it has been acknowledged by others. Europe must take this into account more than it does.

Translation: Lee Schäfer

Josep Bargalló is the director of the Institute Ramon Llull in Barcelona.

Party

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A delayed intellectual system change

A lack of reading competence in school children and the closing of public libraries. How is the culture of reading doing in Europe? A look at Hungary, a country whose publishers and book trade in general are among the oldest in the European literature scene. *By László L. Simon*

Around 40 percent of Hungarians read at least one book a year. The tendency is clearly falling. During the communist regime and immediately after the Wall came down 60 to 65 percent of Hungarians were still reading books. At the turn of the century it was still about 50 percent.

Declining reading figures aren't particular to Hungary. The printed word is losing significance worldwide; the electronic medium has more and more say in peoples' everyday lives. Changing systems of values and a flood of choice on the liberalised media market exacerbate the difficulties faced by the traditional book. Comparative European studies show Hungary midfield when it comes to book consumption. Library attendance alone shows Hungary below the European average. The ownership of books on the other hand tells a different story: Hungarians have more than the average number of books in collections at home.

Financial cuts made under the government of Ferenc Gyurcsány, who was in power as Prime Minister for almost five years until April 2009, were particularly felt by public educational institutions such as libraries, museums and centres of culture. As a consequence, libraries had to let staff go, cancel spending on new items and limit opening times. Summer 2009 saw more compulsory holidays being enforced in large public organisations; the Hungarian National Library to name but one. Other public libraries are to follow.

In this country, the cultural scene is facing ever worsening problems. These demand national solutions particularly as it is mostly the government itself which caused them: past government coalitions have left the upkeep and fostering of national culture in the hands of the Hungari-

an society. The state has retreated further and further.

The economic crisis alone isn't to blame. Incompetence on the part of the politicians supposed to be in charge and their cultural ignorance also play a role. At the same time, the gap between haves and have-nots in this country is visibly increasing so that fewer and fewer people are in a position to afford access to culture. Government funds are often distributed unfairly by various administrative and funding channels. The bulk of the money flows into Budapest and other larger cities so that the rural population is at a considerable disadvantage.

State retreat

While the state retreats, no one is putting forward alternatives. Cultural sponsoring and the necessary government framework still aren't developed enough in Hungary. Cultural institutes are therefore drying up even more, the culture scene is deteriorating and ever fewer numbers of people are interested in culture. This is also one of the reasons why fewer and fewer people in Hungary read.

The consequences of the receding culture of reading can be seen in the results of PISA studies of the last few years: in reading ability and text comprehension, fifteen-year-old pupils in Hungary haven't performed especially well; out of the countries studied, they are in the lowest third.

As well, even literature is increasingly subject to Zeitgeist; it offers no world statements and is less and less instrumental in moral and intellectual education. Books are no longer primary sources of information. A consequence thereof: two decades after the fall of the Iron Curtain, there is still a dearth of great works of literature that delve into the repercussions of communism or even help make sense of the post-socialist, wildly capitalist world.

It doesn't have to be this way, as revealed in other middle and east-European post-communist countries. They have literary masterpieces that contribute to the understanding of the recent past and to a new national identity.

This doesn't mean that contemporary Hungarian literature isn't rich in good works. Authors mostly comply with the overall expectation that a book has to amuse. It should come as no surprise therefore that Imre Kertész only made the list of five bestselling writers after receiving the Nobel Prize and not with his award-winning *Fatelessness*. In 2003 his book *Liquidation* sold 30,000 copies while the first and third positions on the bestseller list were taken by László L. Lőrincz, who publishes under an English-name pseudonym, with *Siva Dances Again* (140,000 copies) and *The Werewolves in the Castle* (70,000 copies).

In 2004 the same author made first and second place with new books while Kertész didn't even make the top five. At

Two decades after the fall of the Iron Curtain, there is still a dearth of great works of literature that delve into the repercussions of communism or even help make sense of the post-socialist, wildly capitalist world.

least Miklós Vámos managed to achieve top five status, the only example here of quality Hungarian writing.

The facts show that Hungarian writers who have achieved fame in the West aren't among the most-read writers at home while those exceptionally good writers much-read in Hungary apparently barely make a name for themselves abroad. This is not only explained by a lack of interest on the part of foreign agents but also by a lack of engagement on the part of Hungarian cultural institutions. New books are at the mercy of market forces alone and the goodwill of the media.

Works by foreign authors are taking up more and more shelf-space in bookstores. More than half the titles last year were foreign and made up 75 percent of sales. While the book market may be decreasing overall, the market share of Hungarian authors is shrinking disproportionately. The same can be said of the purchase of classical literature.

Contemporary works now make up more than three-quarters of literature currently published. Quality literature is being elbowed out by new bestsellers and non-fiction. After the system changeover in 1989, interest in authors from overseas jumped, namely in the work of writers of bestsellers and thrillers by Danielle Steel, Robin Cook und Steven King.

It may be that quality contemporary literature used to be read mostly by those with a higher education; this doesn't mean the percentage of intellectual readers has increased although many more young people have enrolled at universities in the last twenty years. Like in many other countries in recent years, those books that appeal to younger readers such as Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* and JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series were very successful; they had sales of over 200,000 copies a year.

Just three companies in charge

Although the Hungarian book trade and its publishers are among Europe's oldest dealers in literature, the market today is controlled by multinational companies. The big bookstores, the retail chains and huge warehouses are owned by just three companies. These companies also took over the old publishing houses that were already famous from the times of socialism. This led to difficulties for smaller, independent publishing houses that didn't have their own channels of business. They struggle today with a shortage of capital and are at great risk in the market.

The large companies control which books are sent to small bookshops. These are therefore at the mercy of the wholesalers. Multinational companies only speculate on achieving the highest possible profit, and so they don't send those books that are selling well to the smaller shops but sell them themselves. Books they consider not so profitable are passed onto the retailers. Since these books are mostly quality literature, bookstores can't bring them to the public's attention as they lack marketing. This is why small shops don't manage to sell their books.

So distorted has the market structure become that cultural publicity in Hungary is at risk.

So distorted has the market structure become that cultural publicity in Hungary is at risk. Important books don't reach the shops and their target readership learns nothing of their existence.

The government is allowing the cultural sector to dry up through a dearth of funding. One backlash in art and some media sectors is a kind of hostility towards the elite. This is no neo-Marxist tendency but rather disappointment with the new political elite which since the fall of dictatorship has only partly renewed itself. As the reputation of politics suffers and with it acceptance by the present political class; it is understandable that the political elite struggles with problems of legitimacy.

Voices ever louder and more hostile towards the elite give backing to politically radical groups while post-communist circles exploit this phenomenon for their own interests and in close cooperation with journalists and intellectuals.

Thus, twenty years after the fall of the dictatorship in Hungary, it is still impossible to speak of a stable, societal system of values in which institutions self-regulate, self-control or self-create as befits civil society.

The writer János Sebeők speaks of a delayed intellectual system change. In his view: "Literature today is still, psychologically, a political phenomenon while painting is an artistic one. Literature is still seen as the simulated stage for political conflicts."

Translation: Lee Schäfer

László L. Simon, born in 1972, regularly publishes essays, studies and literary writing. He is editor of ***Kortárs***, a social science periodical and is curator of the Hungarian Mühely gallery. He was president of the Young Writers' Association between 1998 and 2004 and has been the Secretary of the Hungarian Writers' Association since 2004.

The long shadow of Socrates

Today's authors are on the trail of Cervantes and Rabelais trying to rediscover the roots of the European novel and find that spirit of humour and irony which allows the expression of multiple truths. This is the only way for the continent to once more become a fertile ground for culture.

By Stefano Zangrando

None of the numerous debates about 'European roots' have seriously dealt with that form of literature which emerged at the same time as modern Europe: the novel. Perhaps this is because the novel is not considered serious enough to be the root of anything. Indeed, it stands there like a single tree, as suggested by the title of literary scholar Massimo Rizzante's fine essay, *L'albero* (Venice 2007). This tree has grown in that narrative field which once provided fertile ground for classical epic poetry and other literary precursors such as the Greek and Byzantine novel (although these narrative poems from the first and second centuries AD were not known by that name at the time), and various other epics and mediaeval romances. These last were known as 'romances' because they were written in the vernacular, the lingua romana, as opposed to the lingua latina of scholarly works. Despite its freedom of spirit, the modern novel belongs to a genre which most helps us understand European culture.

The origins of the novel can be found in the Renaissance, a time of major geographic and scientific discoveries which gave Europeans a radical new awareness of their own relative position in the world and the universe. The novel emerged from the outset as a comic, parodic response to the official culture of the time. In François Rabelais' *Gargantua und Pantagruel* (published in five volumes 1532-64), the narrator Alcofribas Nasier (an anagram of the author's name) climbs into the mouth of the protagonist, the young giant Pantagruel, and there he discovers a new world where teeth turn into mountains surrounded by meadows, woods and towns. There is even a village where the inhabitants earn money in their sleep and where those "who snore loudly" earn the highest wage.

In *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (1605–15), the nobleman Alonso Quijano, obsessed with mediaeval tales of chivalry, decides to rename himself Don Quixote de la Mancha and become a knight-errant and defender of widows, orphans and the poor. "As, little-by-little, God was relinquishing his task of controlling the universe and his world order, of distinguishing good from evil and endowing everything with meaning, Don Quixote rode out from his house and no longer recognised the world. The absence of the Supreme Judge left the world in a state of fearsome ambiguity: the single Divine Truth decomposed into myriad relative and human truths. And so began the modern era, and with it the novel which is its mirror and paradigm."

So wrote Milan Kundera in the first part of his book *The Art of the Novel* (1986). Among all contemporary novelists, Kundera is the one who has spoken up most strongly for a theoretical understanding of the novel, which he argues should be considered a true art form in itself, not just one literary genre among others. This is made necessary by the novel's particular view of the world: an ironic, critical, unpoetic view, which is conscious of the ontological ambiguity and ineluctable materiality of all things human.

The wisdom of uncertainty

In his Jerusalem address of 1985 (reproduced in the above-mentioned book), Kundera refers to another episode from *Gargantua und Pantagruel.* In the third volume, Pantagruel's loyal friend Panurg is tormented by the question of whether or not he should get married. He considers the question from every possible angle, consulting countless experts and scholars, but in the end he still has no idea what to do.

What lesson can we learn from such a state of indecision, which is similar in many ways to the ambiguous truths which Don Quixote projected onto his ideal of chivalry? According to Kundera, the lesson lies in the "wisdom of uncertainty" which teaches us to face up to "a welter of relative, contradictory truths" in literature, as in life. This is a wisdom which is the opposite of Descartes' ego cogitans: "The wisdom of the novel can be distinguished from the wisdom of philosophy. The novel is born not of the theoretical spirit but of the spirit of humour."

If this is the case, then the spirit of the modern novel is far-removed from the heroics of the mediaeval romances or from the submission to God's will which characterises the enamoured protagonists of the Greek or Byzantine novels – and their authors. But if the tree that is the modern novel really belongs in the same narrative field as its precursors, then we must look elsewhere for the prototype for its "spirit of humour."

Developing one of Friedrich Schlegel's ideas, Ortega y Gasset finds this prototype in the affinity between Cervantes' style and that of Plato's *Symposium* and the ancient myths. He discusses this in his *Meditations on Don Quixote* (1914). At the end of the *Symposium*, Aristodemos, awoken by

The modern novel belongs to a genre which most helps us understand European culture.

the cock's crow, observes that the previous evening's guests were still sleeping or had already left, with the exception of the tragedian Agathon, the comic playwright Aristophanes and Socrates, who was talking to them. Aristodemos was too sleepy to remember all the details, but he says that "Socrates was forcing them to agree that it was possible for the same man to know how to write both comedy and tragedy, and that the skilled tragedian can also write comedy." But after the drinking session and late-night discussions, Aristophanes and Agathon were no longer able to follow Socrates' train of thought, and one after the other dropped off to sleep. It is only many centuries later that Socrates' evocation of "tragicomic poets" is embodied in the shape of Shakespeare and Cervantes. But if Shakespeare's bequest is like a mighty river flowing between strong banks through the last four hundred years of European culture, how should we describe what Kundera calls "the depreciated legacy of Cervantes"?

In his Jerusalem address the Czech writer explains: "Europe has failed, in that it has never understood that most European of all art forms, the novel. It has never understood its spirit, its vast insights and discoveries, nor its historical autonomy." Kundera is referring to how the novel's critical viewpoint has gone unrecognised in the face of those ideological and scientific truths which have formed modern European culture by presuming to offer 'perfect' knowledge. All too often they have ignored the beauty and tragicomedy of human imperfection. But since the time of this speech, a radical change has swept across Europe and the rest of the world, a change almost as radical as the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

1989 saw the breakdown of the totalitarian regime in which Kundera had grown up and from which he fled. It gave way to an ideology which masked itself in that freedom from ideology that was typical of neoliberalism, and whose influence on individual lives and freedom of thought was just as real as that of 20th century totalitarianism. The fact that it was not connected to any obvious political power only made it harder to detect and thus more difficult to combat.

The Czech novelist's insight was confirmed at the beginning of this period in our history by Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie due to his alleged blasphemy in the novel *The Satanic Verses*. It also confirmed the sad fate of the "spirit of the novel" in a world where a single absolute truth leaves no room for uncertainty and ambiguity. Europe was blind to one of its most valuable cultural assets and found itself in the grip of a very different ideology, yet over the next two decades the spirit of the novel has proved itself to be the best way to demonstrate resistance and establish a critical cultural conscience. This conscience originated in Europe and spread around the world – during the se-

Europe has failed, in that it has never understood that most European of all art forms, the novel. It has never understood its spirit, its vast insights and discoveries, nor its historical autonomy.

Milan Kundera

cond half of the 20th century the novel found its most fertile ground outside of Europe. It is embodied in the character of the Australian writer Elizabeth Costello in John M Coetzee's 2003 novel of the same name. This character first appears in Coetzee's marvelous essay *The Lives of Animals* (1999). Her ability to put herself in the position of another creature, whether human or animal, brings to mind that affectionate, humorous irony which allowed the first modern novelists to understand all truths. This short work about human cruelty towards animals – a basic element of the modern conscience – also bears a resemblance to Plato's dialogues: Elizabeth's own truth is always balanced out by that of her audience, so no-one can feel a sense of discrimination. In the first chapter of the novel *Elizabeth Costello*, for which Coetzee won the Nobel Prize, the narrator (Elizabeth's son) tells the woman he has just spent the night with: "I think you are baffled – even if you won't admit it – by the mystery of the divine in the human. You know there is something special about my mother, it draws you to her. Yet when you meet her, she turns out to be just an ordinary old woman. You can't square the two." But does the bafflement of this woman, who is herself a child of those ideological and scientific truths, not mirror Elizabeth Costello's inability to recognise that same daimon which possessed Socrates?

Contemporary authors such as Kundera, Coetzee, Rushdie, Roberto Bolaño, Dubravka Ugrešić, Ingo Schulze or Zadie Smith have learned from Rabelais and Cervantes how the novel can confront the changes which have swept through Europe and the rest of the world over the last few decades. The glaring shortcomings inherent in this change have led to the current economic crisis: unprecedented waves of migration, an ever-broadening gap between rich and poor, new forms of poverty, the dangerous rekindling of racism, media manipulation of human lives and a performance-oriented culture which is racing out of control, engendering a throw-away mentality with no regard for the past or the future.

An ambivalent carnival

In 1946, just after the Second World War had put an end to modern Europe, José Ortega y Gasset gave a speech about the theatre in which he said: "Continuity is the fruitful coexistence or, if you like, the parallel existence of past and future, and it is our only chance not to be reactionary. Man himself is continuity, but if he breaks this continuity (and depending on how much he breaks it), he temporarily ceases to be human, he renounces himself and becomes alter, someone else. This means that he has changed and the country has changed. We then have to ensure that these changes are halted, that Man can become himself again and, to use a wonderful word that only exists in our own language – *ensimismarse* (to become absorbed) – that he can succeed in finding his true self."

This pluralistic, contradictory, ambivalent carnival which is today's Europe can of course not be compared to post-war Spain. But isn't it true that our continent is being

crushed by "consumer totalitarianism," threatened by the new populism and led astray by sentimental retrospection and glorification of its own suffering? In this way are we not losing that living sense of continuity? And is the lack of understanding of "that most European of all art forms, the novel," as Kundera lamented in 1985, not a sign of this loss?

At the end of the *Symposium*, Agathon and Aristophanes fall asleep at daybreak; it is only when we cross the threshhold of modernity that Socrates' tragicomic poets come to life in the shape of the first great European writers. Today their legacy depends on our ability to be vigilant and not fall asleep when faced with the inevitable ambiguity of a new day in our globalised world. And we will certainly be made stronger if we once again discover and appreciate the roots of the European novel, if we once more find the wisdom of uncertainty and spirit of humour which allows that ironic expression of multiple truths which will revitalise Europe and the rest of the world. Only in this way is it possible for us to be truly ourselves and to rediscover our cultural fertility.

Translation: Gill McKay

Stefano Zangrando, born in Bolzano (South Tirol) in 1973, is an author, literary critic and translator. He is co-founder of the International Novel Seminars (SIR) at the University of Trento and is editor of the cultural magazine ***Sud***.

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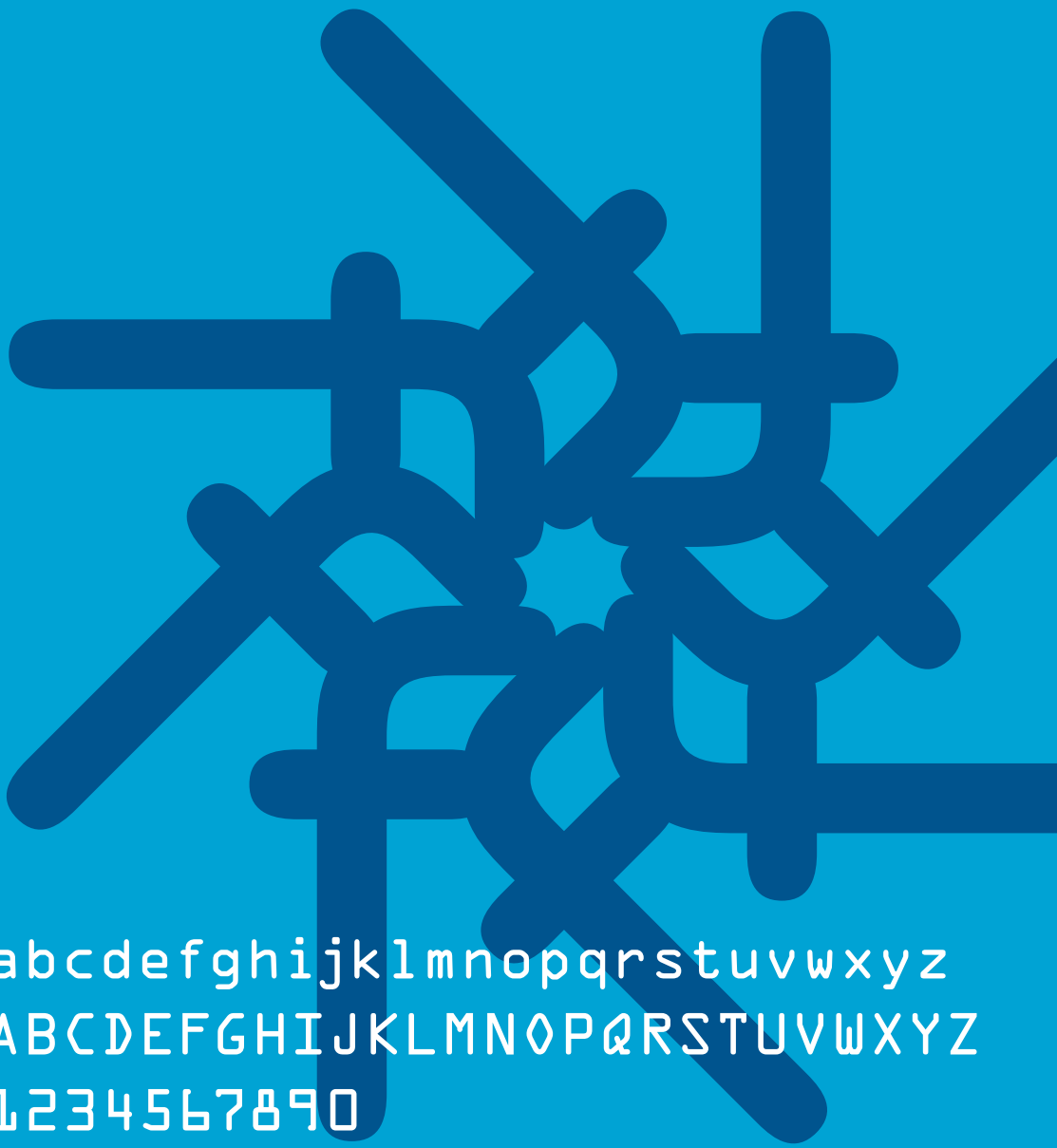

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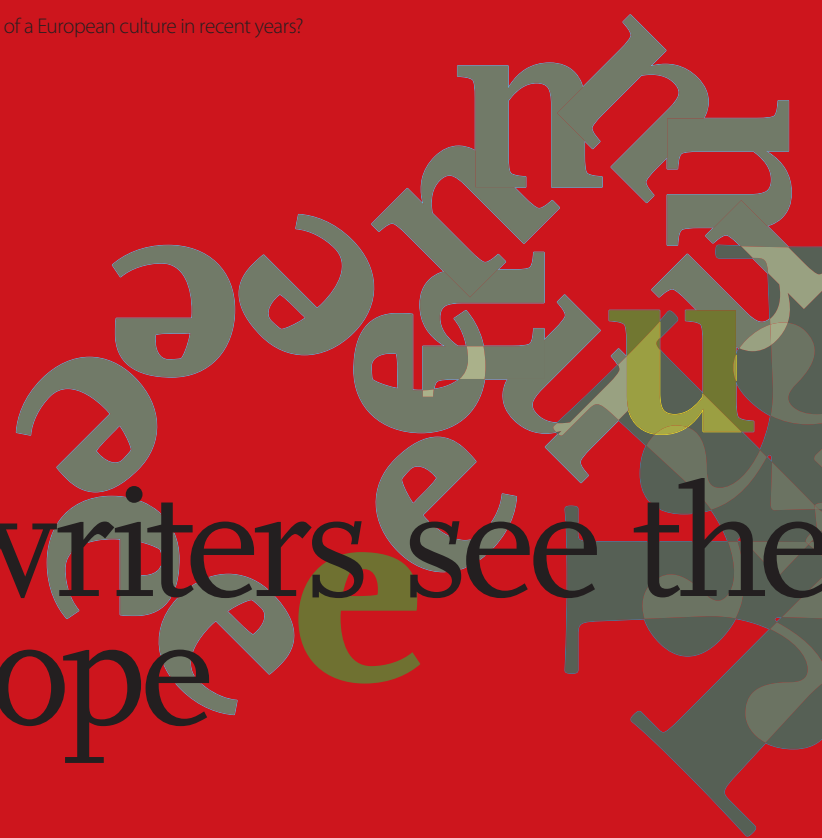
PROGRES
EUROPE?

Europe cannot take on the responsibilities of its writers, but Europe's writers could feel more responsible towards Europe. From the point of view of literature, how do writers view the role of culture in Europe? How do they define what European culture is, what makes culture European beyond national cultures? Can literature take on the strategic task of helping Europe to develop a sense of community? Can culture provide Europe with a soul? What have been the advances and the setbacks in the development of a European culture in recent years?



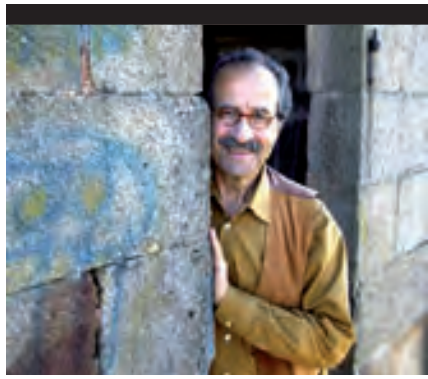
How writers see the
in Europe

SS

role of culture

A mediator between cultures Europe is historically, culturally and politically interwoven with its neighbouring regions and thus perfectly poised to occupy the role of mediator. The thoughts of an author born where Palestinians, Kurds, Circassians, Afghans, Greeks, Yugoslavs and Lebanese all lived cheek by jowl and how he himself became a mediator between two worlds.

By Rafik Schami



Why do I write what I write and why do I write as I do? Perhaps because I am a mediator between worlds. What is understood by "between worlds" is the position you find yourself in when flying from continent to continent, conference to conference and culture to culture. As I am actually more a ground creature myself, who never flies, my raison d'être is similar to that of a link connecting the parts that make up the whole even if these are quite different from each other; just as an eye or ear is. One could also just as easily describe such a link as a bridge that connects the opposing banks of a river by touching both sides and belonging to neither one of them.

Belonging to different worlds hasn't required any effort on my part, going by my life story, it's simply in the stars. I was born as a Roman Catholic. My parents were from the Aramaic mountain village of Malula, 60 kilometres north of Damascus and a three -hours walk from Lebanon. The French had drawn up the borders willy-nilly during the 1920s so that an aunt on my mother's side and uncle on my father's side became Lebanese while we remained Syrians.

At the end of the lane I was born in was the very part of the city walls where the apostle Paul, alias Saul, made his escape. A chapel stands there today, as unadorned and indestructible as was Paul's language.

Had I been born to a woman just seven metres away from my parents' place, I would have been a Jewish kid because our house bordered the houses in the Jewish lane to the west. On the other hand, had I been born to a woman 14 metres away, I would have been Armenian through and through as a small community of Armenians, who were given refuge in Damascus after the terrible massacre of 1915/16, lived in our lane. If I'd been born to another woman some twelve metres away from our house, then I'd have been Druze; fourteen metres to the south and I'd have been Roman Orthodox.

If yet another woman twenty-four metres away from our house had been my mother then I'd have belonged to the Sunni Muslim majority. Chance would have it however that I was to be child of the very woman

who is actually my mother. I have tried to be brief as the list of ethnic groups in our neighbourhood and whose son I might have been is considerably longer. Palestinians, Kurds, Circassians, Afghans, Greeks, Yugoslavs and Lebanese all lived cheek by jowl and all had different religions.

It is each and every detail of my life in Syria and later too in Germany that lets me understand both sides. Just the little, obscure detail that I belong to the Aramaic minority along with the modest fact that Aramaic is, on the family tree so to speak, a kind of 'aunt' to Hebrew and Arabic, might throw some light on why it has always been paramount in my opinion to reconcile both groups of people – Jews and Arabs, Palestinians and Israelis.

And now to the term "mediator." Whatever else the word may mean, one usually associates the term with any activity that, according to the dictionary, "reaches agreement between two opponents: contributes 'something' to bring about armistice between two warring factions."

Geography is much less the issue than coming to realise that aggressive acts, like war, never solve problems but bring about new ones. This century-old conflict has certainly been weighing heavily on my heart and is felt in the pit of my stomach. Yet every war, the Falklands included, makes me sad and angry about the primitive state of humanity. This war between Jews and Arabs with it's global repercussions is one of the most dangerous of modern times. Left on their own, these two groups of people can no longer remove themselves from the vicious circle they've gotten themselves into. External help is required. Help only bears fruit however when a bridge of mediation spans the two shores. The helper must stick to the bridge and not leave it since stepping onto this or that side will only blind him or her to the other and thus, consciously or unconsciously, give war instead a helping hand.

If I'd been born to another woman some twelve metres away from our house then I'd have been Druze; fourteen metres to the south and I'd have been Roman Orthodox.

Peace between two groups of people cannot be parcelled out here or there but must be given to both in equal portions. It won't suddenly come into being with a sensational flourish but must be hammered out, tenaciously. Setbacks can crop up any time along the way. So many complications are involved that it would be a grave mistake to leave such an issue as peace in the hands of the Americans whose foreign policy has long struck fear into hearts the world over. I see a great opportunity for Europe here. Europe is a direct neighbour and has already proven to be a level-headed mediator in Eastern Europe.

It is worth actively standing up for the legitimate objective of peace and for the absolute right of all groups in the Middle East to a peaceful life, as the future of our own children and the future of Europe will be tied in with this peace too. What I am interested in though, as an occupational hazard, is a different kind of war, the war of words. This kind of war is waged by fanatics. While the ideology they spout sometimes borders on the ridiculous, you hardly feel like laughing when you consider the consequences.

Arab fundamentalists claim in all seri-

ousness that God only understands Arabic. Not that it's their idea. They copied it from repressed, simple-minded Jews who once claimed that Yahweh, similarly simple-minded, only understood Hebrew.

Now, one could feel sorry for both groups of people, Jews and Arabs, and forgive them such proclamations. Both are like my own people, the Aramaic: ancient. Our triumphs burst from legends and fill tales while our defeats are alas true stories.

And what of our Catholic fundamentalists, what do they do? They want to address God in Latin again.

Well, my own ancestors, the Christian Aramaic were among the very first Christians and they remain Christian up to today after almost two thousand years. I feel somewhat their ambassador and observer here in Europe. Since arriving in Europe, Jesus' teachings have been put through some strange and at times macabre transformations.

Instead of perhaps tackling more pressing problems, the Vatican fires up the old debate about the Latin Mass and joins the ranks of aforementioned Jewish and Muslim fundamentalists. As if God only understood Latin. I can partly understand what the Pope is saying without being understanding. As a ruler, he must maintain his power. He wishes to discipline and lead his herd. And yet I still don't understand how German authors today can be so ultra reactionary as to loudly declare that God should once again be addressed in Latin. God not only understands the 6,000 and more languages of the earth but he understands the gurgling of babies, the tongues of animals, the whispers of water and songs of the wind.

It doesn't really matter if they be Jewish, Muslim or Christian; all fundamentalists insult God when they make him out to be simple-minded. Strangely enough, if God did only speak and understand one language he would end up a warrior. Which of course He isn't; that is what those fanatics who abuse His Name in the killing of others are. Not that I should advise the Pope at all on this matter; perhaps he or his followers will understand after the number of Catholics has declined even more radically. I should however advise German authors who take God to be Latin-speaking to leave God in peace. They should write their own novels and essays in Latin. I would be all for it. The German language I love so much would be spared a rather big yawn.

I see a great opportunity for Europe here. Europe is a direct neighbour and has already proven to be a level-headed mediator in Eastern Europe.

War of words

How fortunate for us therefore that state and church are separate institutions in Germany. A consequence thereof is that such demands on the German language have proven unsuccessful. Not so in the Arab world. Fundamentalists and dictators there are constantly waging war and their first victim is the language itself.

The Arabic language and written word have taken up a great deal of my attention the last four years, as my new novel *Das Geheimnis des Kalligrafen* (The Calligrapher's Secret) testifies. Apart from love and murder, it is about a lovely language that is threatened in written word and in essence. Calligraphy was a hobby of mine, even many

decades after my three-year apprenticeship to an old master.

Then, as a result of my life story perhaps, the subject of language kept coming back to me time and again. Aramaic is my mother tongue and the language of my childhood was Arabic. Due to the fact that France used to be the colonial power, my first foreign language was French and due to territorial world affairs my second foreign language was English. I have been writing in German and have felt most at home doing so for 36 years now.

This goes to explain how I kept getting the chance to compare languages. Studying economics and natural science also opened my eyes to major gaps and weaknesses in the Arabic language. At some point this became my central theme and I began to look into it much more.

Where do these weaknesses come from and why have the Arabic language and its written form never been reformed? Around 300 million people speak Arabic and 1.5 billion people have, to varying degrees, contact with the written word in Arabic through Islam.

Yet during the more than twelve centuries since the final version of the Koran was written down, no reforms have been made. This is because fundamentalists declared the language to be holy and because no Arab nations have separate institutions for religion and state. As long as this is the case, would-be reformers will only get their fingers burned. Politicians in Arab nations are backward, military dictators who show the least desire or courage to reform anything.

I feel somewhat
their ambassador and observer
here in Europe.

Their sole interest is focused on consolidating their clan's power, which their wealth permits. The fact remains that, like all languages, the Arabic language is an invention of the people. Reform needn't even have anything to do with the Koran but only touch on those additions and reforms the day-to-day language necessitates.

The Arabic language is greatly lacking in modern vocabulary and modern letters that would allow these new words to be written down. As it doesn't have the letters W, P, E or O, languages based on the Roman alphabet cannot be written down properly. An Arab wanting to write the sentence, "Pablo Picasso first lived in Bateau Lavoir in Montmartre in Paris," is going to find it tough going. It just isn't possible today to write an article on chemistry, maths, physics, economics, medicine, pharmacology, geology or philosophy amongst others, without fattening up the article with the Latin-language words in brackets. Nuances of Spanish and Chinese and the soft consonants of the Persian language can't be written either.

A constant stream of Arab, clan-like dictatorships lasting for more than half a century have not only made a backward region out of the Arabian world but have also maimed their own people and destroyed their own language. Any form of reasonable development or liberating notion is anathema to them. Worse still, as if absolute dictatorship wasn't harmful enough, is their intimate connection with oil. The combined result is utter cultural breakdown which is dazzlingly glossed over.

Wretchedness carries a mobile phone, drives the most expensive limousine and to top it all, claims to be civilised. An Arab is essentially more backward today than his ninth or eleventh century ancestors.

Dictatorship wages a war of words

against it's own people and against it's own language. The dearth of freedom destroys and occupies whole areas of language and cordons others off by declaring them forbidden zones. It isn't so unusual for a poem to cause brutal imprisonment. This is dictatorship's way of maiming language. What springs to my mind here is the image of a prisoner having been kept on a distant island in absolute isolation who suddenly finds him or herself in the middle of a modern metropolis. There is no other way to describe how the Arabic language faces today's issues. Yet thoughts themselves are made up of words. Arab thinking hasn't been spared the awful devastation the language has suffered. It comes to me as no surprise that the number of patents registered for around 300 million Arab people is around zero. The number of books printed annually in all of Arabia per one million Arabs is 35. Moreover, a good number of them are religious books. This is a cultural catastrophe. (Compare: the number of books printed annually, per one million citizens in Germany, is 700.) In censoring and remaining hostile to the very nature of the book, the authorities are not only harming upcoming generations, who are turning into modern-day illiterates more and more each day, but they harm too the position of the Arabic language in the world.

It is only a matter of time before non-Arab nations follow the example of Atatürk and break away from the Arabic alphabet as he did in 1928. Atatürk managed to abolish Arabian type in the Turkish language and replace it with Roman type in the shortest time.

That Arabic is a world language isn't a constant of nature but depends on how the Arabic language is spread. Considering the speed of things today, one decade of our time equals a century of earlier eras. If the Arabic language keeps on lagging behind the times then the gap between the standard demanded of a world language and the standard it actually has will keep on widening even further. Only when the language frees itself from the clutches of dictatorship and the fist of fundamentalism will it enjoy a well-earned place of honour among the languages of the world.

All extremists scorn death because, for whatever reasons, they have lost the will to live. They do not admit this but instead declare death to have a noble goal that can be summed up in one word: paradise. For some, the here-and-now version; for others, the paradise beyond. Whatever its form, on the road to paradise both factions erect a hell on earth.

Even Hegel is amusing

I wonder why I love laughter so. Why I appreciate Cervantes, Woody Allen and Gerhard Polt so very much. Who we choose is of course a matter of taste and I used to have a neighbour in Heidelberg who even found Hegel amusing.

Can it be perhaps that I love laughter because I see the irony of my own ancient Aramaic people, who once reigned over the whole of the Mediterranean, now living scattered over the whole world as a tiny, persecuted minority? And so when I hear the pompousness of some cultures that aren't really very old at all, I have to laugh. I'm quite sure there must have been dozens of equally pompous characters among some of my ancestors at the court of the powerful King Ashurbanipal. This king ruled over a mighty empire stretching from Egypt to what is present-day Turkey between 660 and 630 BC.

The number of books printed annually in all of Arabia per one million Arabs is 35, while in Germany the number is 700 books per million citizens.

He was well-read, loved to go lion-hunting and later turned into a little pile of chalky minerals until barbaric plant life did away with anything that was left of him.

What also makes me laugh is something curious about my life story and which can be summed up thus: coming from a minority as I do, you are constantly accompanied by the feeling that you are living at the edge of something. You get to see things – amusing snapshots – that those of a majority don't get to see because they are caught up in the hurly-burly at the middle of the maelstrom.

Perhaps laughter only tries to shake off the shadows. In an essay called *Lachen aus der Wunde* (Shrugging Off Hurt with Laughter), I refer to the satire of an Arabian writer. I discovered around the age of 15 or 16 that, as a passionate listener and budding storyteller, laughter can be a sophisticated way of smuggling something. You can sometimes hide more in a short joke than serious writers do in thick volumes. I have tried it out myself and figured that what works for me is something between cheerfulness and sadness, severity and tenderness, lies and truth. And also, somewhere between east and west.

Laughing away the hurt

I was struck dumb with amazement when I first arrived in the Germany, and needed a while before I could rediscover writing again. I learned German relatively quickly. You could not say that I have a great command the language; I simply love it. While I was still in awe of the modernity of society around me, I quickly came to understand that cheerful and exciting literature wasn't being taken seriously while, without question, a grumpy writer would always be taken seriously. This is one of German literature's greatest foibles today and is partly the reason why the opinion of German literature has diminished in world rankings.

Realising this made it no easier for me in the beginning though. I was in a tricky situation. Of course while you are writing you wonder how your literature will be received. One is always asked whether one thinks of the reader while writing. The answer is "no," in the sense that I'm not writing for anyone in particular; not for critics in the literary world and not for a particular or group of people either. On the other hand, I would be lying if I said yes, I was writing but no, it didn't interest me whether my book was read or not. What's to be done?

So that I won't be held up as a hero, let me share something about how I made the most important decision in my writing career.

Exile isn't just tough, it gives you courage too. Exile opens not just doors but wounds. Exile requires loads of work but offers with both hands equally. In other words, I would never have become the author I am today had I not come to Germany. Here, I could enjoy freedom and democracy; they still fascinate me today. Here I was, all at once, free of the grip of my clan, as well as from the blackmailing of aunts, uncles and godparents, 16 secret services, an army of state bureaucrats, various prisons and of material need. Here, the expression "Seven in one blow" can be applied with typical German

understatement. I still had to pay the price of my liberation though and it wasn't cheap. I wouldn't be allowed to enter the loveliest city in the world any more, not even to bury my mother. What else was left to fear?

Encouraged by the courage of exile I decided to write in German. I also decided to write not as if I lived in Germany or as if I knew that the duller one writes, the better chances one has of being taken seriously in the literary world.

That has all changed now; it has become fashionable to call yourself a storyteller and critics now appreciate reading something exciting too. Back in the 1980s, when I was just starting out on my literary journey, some authors won praise from the critics because, in all seriousness, they'd managed to write whole novels without actually telling any sort of story.

So I wrote fairytales, stories, satire and novels. I was greeted initially by an impenetrable wall of silence. Walls always have cracks somewhere if one can only discover them to bring down the wall. In my case, the solution presented itself thus: walls of silence are brought down with sound. The solution in the legend of Jericho was an oriental one. I didn't have the notes of the biblical music on me to bring down the walls. I did however discover that Germans are good listeners if someone has a story to tell. So I began to travel the country and tell my stories. Being the good taxpayer I have kept a record of all my storytelling evenings; by the time I got to number 1200 however, I lost count. That was in 1992.

I don't travel so much these days; I only visit one hundred towns per novel. Back in the beginning I had five listeners per storytelling, whereby one naturally wonders – after a seven-hour drive in a VW Beetle from Heidelberg to Hannover – if it was truly worth it. Yet I delighted the few people present with my stories just as if I had intended turning them into ambassadors of a new literature. And the best ambassadors they did become. Even after 30 years, I might still find three generations of one family at my readings.

Two convictions energised me then and still do today. First that without readers or listeners, literature just isn't literature. An audience gives the storyteller their most worthy possession: time. Since this can't ever be replaced I try to make the loss as imperceptible as possible.

Second, the incredible pleasure of turning adults into attentive children again through storytelling also energises me. To experience such happiness first-hand warms one's heart and leaves me at a loss for words except perhaps to say that it tastes somewhat like ice-cream, luxury chocolates or pistachios! Yet whoever wishes to achieve something in my line of work must have the patience of a camel, the bravery of a lioness and the deep breath of a blue whale. I've overheard pejorative comments which accompany success. They range from more harmless ones such as "storyteller uncle" because I take children seriously to "women's darling" because as men are brought up all rough-edged, 70 percent of today's readers are women. All classified as harmless jibes.

It becomes more life-threatening when you are called a "traitor," particularly when

Yet whoever wishes to achieve something in my line of work must have the patience of a camel, the bravery of a lioness and the deep breath of a blue whale.

it comes from the Arab world and from people who don't read and don't understand criticism. Yet frankly, I have never cared about what others said or didn't say. I could look back with the tremendous satisfaction at having cleared such hurdles with the help of my audience.

Someone who I, and my literature, have been very good friends with for many years once told me that she always looks upon my stories as Trojan horses. I felt caught out. She'd seen through me. No wonder. She gets through more books in a year than probably anyone. She makes books what they are.

Another friend of mine, a writer and painter, said after reading my novel *The Dark Side of Love*, that "if just one Syrian general reads this novel, you won't get amnesty but life imprisonment." She was referring to the many attempts, which have so far been in vain, of friends of mine to get me amnesty to visit Syria. Since my mother's death, I no longer want an amnesty. This particular colleague knows my books really well; she is the first person to read all my work. She's my wife.

Yet I still managed to believe that both women had only worked out the ruse of the false bottom because both of them are clever and well-read. I was soon to find out however that people less clever, people who are hardly the reading type and who are influential enemies had seen through me. Upon which they declared irreconcilable war on me.

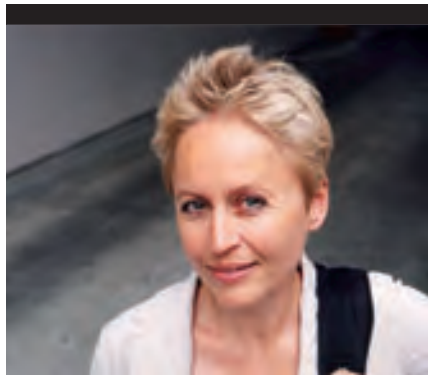
No author enjoys quite as much hostility on the part of dictatorships and their court poets as I do. Didn't the Nazis show sharper perception towards books than the humanists? And didn't they barbarically burn books that were ridiculed in humanistic circles? After a time I came to the understanding that words just aren't suitable for building Trojan horses. It may be that for a time they are as transparent as glass and masters of disguise when aided and abetted by laughter's little tricks. Yet sooner or later anyone can discover the message of literature. If after repeated and careful reading, a story reveals no secrets then it has none to reveal.

My latest novel is not political. It is entitled *Das Geheimnis des Kalligrafen* (The Calligrapher's Secret) and takes place between 1954 and 1958. It is really only about the love of a calligrapher and of the secret that will be his ruin. I specifically chose the only lengthy phase of democracy in my country out of the wish, for once, to write a novel free of politics. The longest period of freedom that my country has had lasted from spring 1954 until the union with Egypt in February 1958. It was a time of parliamentary democracy, several political parties and newspapers. Not one single person sat in prison because of their opinion. It was a wonderful time.

Translation: Lee Schäfer

Rafik Schami was born in Damascus in 1946 and has lived in Germany since 1971. He is one of the most successful German-language authors today. His books have been translated into 22 languages.

Old but not necessarily clever Not infrequently, one comes across the metaphor of the family for Europe: widely dispersed, mostly absent, but nevertheless related. That is a euphemism. Europe is not a family but a political programme. 'Culture' does not 'just happen' there and will at best allow itself to be organised as a figment of the imagination. After all, we do not even want to start thinking about the endless volumes of Brussels bureaucracy. *By Ulrike Draesner*



You cannot get rid of it, even though it is impossible to get hold of. From the outside, from the distance of another continent, you can see it: Europe, the small, tattered extremity, the end of Asia via Africa. If you are sitting in the middle of it, on the other hand, on the edge of Europe (because it has edges everywhere), you do not know what or where it is. Within just a short time, often only a few kilometres or miles away, there is a change in the colours, the light, the landscape, the language, the people. Compared to 50 or 30 years ago, money and goods have become assimilated, for sure. And yet I can smell the borders where there are rivers, mountains and the sea, and I can feel it at the airport in the long queue marked EU.

The fact that the question of Europe keeps cropping up is symptomatic. And yet it is an open secret: this Europe does not exist. It was invented a long time ago, then forgotten again, and once more vigorously revitalised after the Second World War. It is useful; it has also stood the test of time throughout the financial crisis which began in the autumn of 2008. Economically and financially, Europe possesses strength; the economic sphere is densely filled.

The next definition framework is 'politics.' Here, Europe is rather soft, somewhat lethargic, fragmented and hesitant. People perform on the political stage and yet, once there, do not really know who they are or could be. The extent to which fiction and reality deviate from one another can be seen in, among other things, the negotiations for the Lisbon Treaty.

This is followed by 'culture.' And this is where it becomes really bad. Here, Europe is in a quagmire or at least extremely boggy terrain. The former Eastern Bloc is clamouring most strongly for "more of that." They are small(er), new, inquisitive. This is refreshing, and sometimes it is a pain in the neck; stirring below ground are the special pots of money that give birth to projects.

This throws up an ambivalent keyword. Europe means money. You scarcely need to leave the continent before this becomes abundantly clear: in Europe there is little poverty. The luxury of a pleasant climate.

Minimal flooding. Relative safety from earthquakes. Europe, a continent without any real slums and without any megacities of misery.

For me, European culture primarily means being aware of precisely that. So, for example, looking over from Africa across those 14 kilometres of sea between Tangiers and Gibraltar. Seeing how far that is, and how near. But how small the boats are that engage in their journey from the coast of Morocco, secretly and facing unknown dangers.

Second, Europe is very white. This is quickly forgotten, although it constantly plays a part in our history.

And Europe is two things, old and new. This can result in a cultural advantage: seeing things stereometrically. Europe represents palpable historicity. That is a cliché – and yet it is pivotal. Others too have history, of course. Europe represents a specific culture of remembrance. Even in the Bronze Age, Europe was archival.

With this in mind, I will begin again. It is not easy getting so close to the box-like structure of 'Europe,' which from the outside so successfully resembles a fortress, without sliding down its walls which have been polished to a nice sheen after decades of hard work. They glisten with statements and intentions.

As long as the world was flat, Europe was all here and now and a precursor of the coming salvation. Not for a long time has it been as small as it is today. Globalisation is still contributing to its compression. But in geographical terms too, as a continent, Europe has not really got properly out of the starting blocks and at best manages to be a sub-continent! So the term is all the more important: we need units and borders, neighbours and strangers to act as areas of projection. The Middle East for example, or the Far East. We need the 'others' in order to project our fears, to feel ourselves and, by way of inference so to speak, we also need an 'us.' Europe is a module or a building block in this people-mirror game and, if you like, also a 'symptom' of our reflective state, poled between inclusion and exclusion, us and you.

Stirring below ground are
the special pots of money that
give birth to projects.

Bricolage

Within the framework of this constellation it is clear to see why a 'cultural Europe' is constantly flagging. The symptom smiles, appreciative and superior. And rightly so: flawed thinking underlies the idea of a cultural Europe so long as this Europe is thought of in terms of the predominantly economic and political organisational unit of the same name. In this sense, 'cultural Europe' was only ever meant to exist in order to glamorise this political and economic unit behind a modest veil of culture. It is not uncommon to come across the metaphor of the family for Europe: widely dispersed, mostly absent, but nevertheless related. That is a euphemism. Europe is not a family but a political programme. Culture does not 'just happen' here and will at best allow itself to be organised as a figment of the imagination. Fortunately. Only our memory, both as a kind of archive as well as an active or contriving recollection, and our blend of our languages and their translations, will give us a hint of what it really constitutes.

Europe is a myth: a mixed bag, frequently conceived, movable and always questionable. National, state, cultural, historical and

linguistic registers frequently and noticeably overlap here. Europe only ever reveals itself bit by bit, as a patchwork, a mosaic, a memory function. Its cultural wealth is made up of its languages. Languages are archives of knowledge; treasure chests which, by way of their metaphors as well as their grammatical structures, tell us how we see the world, which images have been contrived, and how we feel. It becomes amusingly diverse when we consider the following sayings. The English jump from the frying pan into the fire (the Germans from the rain into the guttering), German speakers ask themselves whether they still have all their cups in the cupboard (in English: whether they have lost their marbles), the French sometimes have their derrières full of noodles (lots of luck) and for the Spanish, a sausage is occasionally a radish (could not care less!).

Europe: eight major linguistic families bunched tightly together. For centuries, Latin determined the exchange of information, and today, English is the lingua franca, with individual languages often being interwoven. The features of Danish, Romansh, Old Bavarian, etc. have their place, and in Finland they can live without the distinction between "he" and "she." Is it really possible to understand this when you have your Indo-Germanic linguistic head drawn down between your shoulders? You are simultaneously surprised and delighted: they have not died out yet! And you understand one thing: Europe is a hermeneutic being. A continent of non-implicit understanding.

It is self-evident that we should make an appeal to Brussels: we expect you to cultivate this diversity. Brussels dutifully calls back: of course, of course, and this is nice and not wrong, and not too short-sighted.

As a 7-year-old, I took a puzzle with me on my first big holiday to a European sea, the Adriatic, to a country in the middle of Europe that no longer exists. Pictures of a man with a big beard were hanging up in the shops, the country was not an expensive one, the water was blue. There was a curtain that really confused me because it was said to be made of iron. You could not see it anywhere but it was actually hanging in front of this country, and yet you could drive there. My jigsaw puzzle was coloured. On the right-hand side was the start of the Soviet Union. Only the small states caused me a few problems because they were too tiny for their names and fell so easily into the sand. Austria was purple, France was green.

The colours were neither symbolically nor nationally divided up between the countries but were chosen because of the greatest possible contrast to their neighbours. The reason for this was educational. And cleverer than one might think: despite their different colours, these states belonged together. Their difference united them. 'Cultural Europe' is a kind of large box filled with small items. Occasionally empty or spacious or in transit. The emptiness is the goods, and the lack of a European culture as a single unit is a benefit. It represents mobility. You can take things out of it and you can put things inside it. Cultural Europe is not a solid house; it is not even a house but a non-effective and non-rationalised room. It provides space for small things; whoever wants to can sit here, all alone on his mountain or his dyke, separate and unique.

On the beach of Sidon

Within such an understood and blurred fictional image of 'Europe' that is constantly being kept in motion, the term 'European literature' will remain to a considerable extent fictitious. Unlike American or Chinese

Translation should be conceived of as a core European concept.

literature, such European literature cannot exist. There they speak or write one language. Thanks to its multitude of languages, on the other hand, 'European' means: the non-implicitness of understanding.

So translation is a core European concept. Time to take a closer look at this. It perhaps makes 'Europe' more difficult but also more interesting, that the core does not contain a thing but a process. Even the Greek myth of Europe deals with this: it tells, when read correctly, a story of translation. And it does so in three ways.

Europa, the daughter of the Phoenician king, was playing on the beach of Sidon (south of Beirut by the Mediterranean Sea, today the fourth largest city in Lebanon), when she found herself surrounded by a herd of bulls. Hermes was driving them and they were peaceful. One of them, completely white, stood out in particular by way of its beauty. This bull was pleased to see the girl, pointed his white horns towards her, she attached roses to him and climbed onto his back. Surreptitiously and quietly, the herd now moved towards the sea; by the time Europa realised this, it was too late. The bull surged into the waters as she cried out and waved about, clinging on tightly. Swiftly, the animal swam with her to Crete and there, as Zeus, assumed its divine guise once more. The master of Olympus had again successfully deceived his jealous wife, Hera. He bore three sons with Europa, and then he married the Oriental girl to the king of Crete, who adopted the children.

So he found himself an unknown woman in order to baptise himself – to understand himself. This act reflects how important the view of other people is of one's own tract of land, the small continent, which here too appears as a subsidiary of the great East. It is from this that the name originates.

Europa's 'translation' took place with stealth and force. But the bull and the girl clearly understood each other: after all, he explained to her who he was. And she, married to the king of Crete, then learned Greek.

So somebody had been displaced across the water and the name and language were taken with them. In German, the word 'translation' has a third meaning, and this too affects the core of a cultural Europe in the way that I want to imagine it: translation means the transformation of power in motion.

In actual fact, translation in a literal sense always symbolises a complex transfer, because naturally one never translates word for word or gesture for gesture. Instead one always transports the historical, cultural, linguistic and scientific scope of a language, its historical functional depth, its emotional values, its special characteristics. Often this is hardly, if at all, possible. The myth also tells the same story – for translation, you do not exactly have to be Zeus (although you might sometimes wish you were!) or a deceitful husband. But a certain amount of stealth, deceit and force are always involved in those transformations which imply understanding.

According to the myth of the same name, Europe bears within it a stranger, and for that reason this myth is something special: in terms of its name, it reflects Europe as a place of its marginality. And this should certainly be seen in a literal sense: a place of borders and the values with which they are attributed. For this reason too we should

finally conceive of translation as being a core European concept – and learn to appreciate it. The non-implicitness of understanding within the continent continues to mobilise Europe. Development of the specific European culture of writing and remembrance – yes, obsession – is extremely closely associated with this.

In the field of literature, national terms become amalgamated into individual units of recollection and meaning, the imaginary states of language recorded on a mental map in the heights and depths of listening and reading. Porous constructs full of gaps are the result: mixed entities with many tongues (an Englishman in Berlin writes a poem using German, Korean and Polish words), linguistic cracks (how do I say *mind*?), historical gaps (how to express the Middle High German word *aventiure*?) and hybrid minds (Handy).

In Europe, old and new appear simultaneously: literary forms such as the sonnet or the novel are European discoveries that conquered the European languages and cultural systems. They prompted translations and were conveyed by translations.

Every written text comes into this sphere. It is neither German nor English, etc., neither from today nor from yesterday, neither only recorded in writing nor solely verbal. One can think of it as being "a writing surface determined by Europe," whereby the actual writing surface from which a text comes will always continue to exist. Even spoken languages are interconnected above and beyond continental boundaries; and certainly the pictorial and mythical worlds, comics and technology, fashion, Microsoft, CNN and Rolling Stones. Where Europe is concerned, modesty is called for; it seems appropriate to see 'European' in terms of weights and presence, dominance and imperfections, and at the same time, to try to be aware of the gaps in one's own knowledge. This too is "marginality."

The promotion of good translation plays a key role. Literature is language and it is reliant on the translation dealing with and by means of language. Only by doing so can an element of unknown reality be transported into the reality of another part of Europe.

This means taking a step – even two if you like – back from the book market. Markets develop in terms of profit, size and penetration. We will have to intervene, promote and look more closely at what we really want to understand by European literature. Germany bathes in the glory of its title of "translation world champions." But here too, translations primarily come from the English, and translations are produced from translations instead of from the original script; here too, translators are paid less than their value and input deserve and translated manuscripts are hastily fed into the mills of book production. It is not as a writer but above all else as a reader that I wish to see 'Europe' filled with content, translator training being fostered, delight in the loosely furnished, always somewhat draughty box of multilingualism and in diverse identities, which live from the multitude of possible paths within it.

Today, Europe comprises 48 states and is anything but a blushing bride. As an outsider she moved in, and stayed. The bull be-

Literary forms such as the sonnet or the novel are European discoveries that conquered the European languages and cultural systems.

longs to the stock exchange but she – a bit of 'culture' (?) – waves the flag of imagery, translation and interpretation. The non-implicitness of understanding shines brightly, once it has been discovered.

No blushing bride

We can also perceive the term "European literature" in a second sense, namely in terms of its content. It is probably best if we do not even begin to consider the Brussels novel of bureaucracy; in actual fact, Europe is seldom a literary theme and it is almost always associated with topics of war. This applies, if only to a limited extent, to the novel *Zeno Cosini*, written by the Italian author Italo Svevo (published in 1923). When I read this novel, for the very first time I had a strong sense of European-ness, and naturally, I set off in search of reasons for this: first, there are the 'codes' that the novel refers to, such as Freud's psychoanalysis, an eminently European product. Second, there are the themes pertaining to the protagonists, their eating and love rituals, their conflicts and strategies. I recognised values and a lifestyle. All of a sudden, it was no longer important that the action took place in Italy; Svevo's narration ventured into the thick dewlap and grunting of the ox, which according to Gustave Flaubert, another European writer, makes up the vibrancy of a novel. And then I understood: my sense of European-ness was to be found in the humour of the book. Asian humour is so different from mine, I am not familiar with African humour, and I know about American humour but I seldom understand it. In European humour, however, the age of the half-continent becomes apparent. Cynicism, which can be mild; sarcasm, which never really takes itself seriously, and yes, slapstick, but in the comedy of Shakespeare. Not as farcical as Chaplin or as nervous as Woody Allen, but willing humour such as in Madame Bovary, which most people only notice the second time they read it.

Europe is rugged, slippery and old. It may well be necessary and worthwhile to translate this again. Europe is old but not necessarily clever, not so full of people (compared with some Asian or South American conurbations) but with material: knowledge, technology, archives.

As I understand it, for writers this means: using, activating, reaching beyond borders. It is only thanks to translations that we are able to profit from our diversity as well as the graduated historical density of the European region and its languages. This means:

- Reinforcing our collective memory. Access to texts of all kinds in translations.
- Good literary translations must be fostered, the market does not just produce them.
- The training of translators. This is an urgent necessity because there are always small publishing houses which would have books translated but are unable to find anybody capable of doing so. The result of this: the book is not translated, which leads to even fewer translators being trained because they believe that nobody would be interested in their work anyway, etc.
- The word culture has its roots in the field of agriculture; Europe too comes from this, the mythical bull suggests this, although it has long since superseded the ploughing oxen. And we should finally do this too: it is high time that Europe grew out of its agricultural infancy.
- Application of the double-strand principle: think big – and small. Promote the small and specific just as much

as the major projects, which can only exist thanks to the fusion of these two. In other words, also visualise a Europe of commonality, whose opportunities extend beyond those of its individual states. This is happening in the field of space travel.

And what shall we do with literature? Well, there is no excuse for a lack of an idea: we set up a major European library. A spectacular construction with a spectacular stock of materials. Electronic access for everyone. With a connected network of translators so that books and texts can also really be translated, sometimes even twice or three times, sure, so that we can hear poets in other European languages and read about their lives. And this way, we can celebrate the continent's marginality.

Translation: Richard Briggs

Ulrike Draesner, born in 1962, is a writer and essayist. Her works, which include novels, narratives, poems and essays, have been awarded numerous literature prizes, including, amongst others, the Hölderlin Award (2001) and the Literaturhäuser Prize (2002). Her most recently published books include ***Berührte Orte*** (Munich 2008), ***Schöne Frauen lesen*** (Munich 2007), ***Spiele*** (Munich 2005) and ***Hot Dogs*** (Munich 2004).

Revolver

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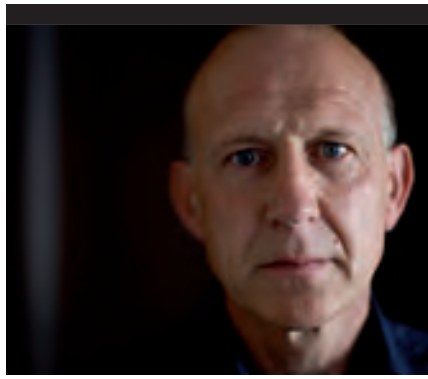
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

The sure path to fame It's always good to hear of another country's failings. If you read Thomas Bernhard or Elfriede Jelinek you are always left thinking, with a slight shudder, about how horrible Austria must be. The EU, however, is too amorphous and eclectic a concept for a reader to take pleasure from anything wrong that might occur there. No one is going to write a novel about it. *By Tim Parks*



Why does a young man or woman sit down to write a novel? Ambition pure and simple? Demons to exorcise? Love of language and narrative? A desire, perhaps, to seduce others as he himself has been seduced and enchanted by the writers he has read. Or a feeling that writing offers a way of engaging with the world without, as it were, getting your hands dirty. The highest authorities can be criticised, even God can be taken to task, but you are safe in your room, in front of your PC with the email in the background. And what's more people will admire you, your identity will be confirmed and intensified.

Is this young person thinking of Europe? It's unlikely. If he has a political axe to grind it will have to do with some great injustice. The reader will sympathise with his concern for the world's victims, his evocation of their sufferings. For all its corruption and obtuseness the European Community is not, as yet, a great perpetrator of evil and hence will not be on his mind. If the injustice is of a more personal nature, his target will be local, at most national.

Appealing to a larger tribunal

A young woman has been molested and her humiliation ignored by the police and courts. Understandably, she writes; she caricatures the British judiciary; writing is an appeal to a larger tribunal, and offers the opportunity to turn pain into money. Or a young man has been passed over for a post at the university, in favour of a professor's daughter. Understandably, he condemns Italian familism, the country's eternal flair for unfairness. And if these books are eventually read abroad, people will be happy

to think that Britain is not such a civilised country after all, that Italy is still its corrupt old self. It's always good to hear of another country's failings. Reading Bernhard or Jelinek one is always quite thrilled to think how awful Austria must be. Reading *Gomorrah* the French and Germans are pleased that Naples will never be as civilised as Marseilles or Munich. But alas, Europe is too amorphous, or too varied a concept, for a reader to get any pleasure from reading about injustice in the Community. No one is going to write a novel complaining that this terrible thing happened to me in Europe.

Why does the tenth or twelfth publisher approached agree to publish (albeit after imposing many 'improvements') the work of this young writer? Because it has commercial potential. Other reasons will be given, but this is the only one that matters.

Marketers and accountants

It is hard to find, certainly among British publishers today, an editor who is thinking first, or second, or even third, of 'literary achievement' whatever that might exactly be. Such editors have long since been removed from their positions and are now working freelance from home, reading and editing typescripts under the direction of wiser people with a proper training in marketing and accounting. Fortunately there are many subjects that do have this commercial potential, from child wizards to international conspiracies, romance of course, murder, mayhem, the plight of the ethnic minorities, pornography, and the scandal of injustice. These are all roads to fame.

Even before our young man's novel is published, there will be a scramble to sell foreign rights. Is this because the writer in Portugal or Ireland is eager that the people in Belgium or Greece or Slovenia should be reading his work? No. Even if the novel is a fascinating exposé of the culture and politics of a small European country, this does not mean that the writer is looking forward to an exchange with the cultures of other small, or large, European countries. Nor does he greatly care whether they understand his own. He wrote about his culture because this was his road to self expression. What matters now is that everybody reads his book. The modern writer is not an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a German, he is a sovereign individual and his audience is everybody. The translation he is most interested in is the translation into English, since that means not only the UK, but America, Canada, Australia, and the chance of a visibility that will lead to

Reading Gomorrah the French and Germans are pleased that Naples will never be as civilised as Marseilles or Munich.

other translations. He addresses himself not to his home country, not to Europe, but to the world.

Child wizards and conspiracies

This business of the writer writing for a global rather than a national audience is a crucial development. It has changed and will go on changing the function of literature. It means that the Portuguese or Greek writer may actually be careful not to go into too much detail about his own culture, and certainly not to write for readers who are initiates in that culture, since that would restrict his international readership. If one turns to a great writer of the 1940s and 50s like Hugo Claus, one is astonished at his naiveté in imagining that the international reader knows enough about Belgium to read his books. Contemporary novelists are more canny. You don't need to know a thing about Norway to read Per Petterson, nor will you learn anything about the country from him. Likewise for Gerbrand Bakker's Holland. Both these men are excellent international writers.

The new situation has consequences for translation, spelled out in Milan Kundera's near delirious *Texts Betrayed*. Translators must stop obeying the conventional authority of "good French or German or Italian." Instead their "supreme authority … should be the author's personal style." If the style is transgressive in Czech it must be similarly transgressive in French, German, Japanese, Cantonese. Such is Kundera's determination that the international reader be exposed to Kundera, and not to some Spanish or Italian metamorphosis, that this intelligent, hugely talented man forgets that style exists in relation to the language and culture it is written in, not in isolation; it can never be reproduced with absolute equivalence in another. Kundera speaks of "my translators" as of an enlightened group who have accepted his supreme authority and allowed their identities to be subsumed in his. It is embarrassing. Other translators write academic papers about the need for translators to "resist" their authors and express themselves through their translations. They too are hungry for recognition.

Ingenuous claims

What all this means for Europe is that any notion that its writers might promote a "dialogue between cultures" is ingenuous. There may be a great deal of exchange

Even if a novel is a fascinating exposé of the culture and politics of a small European country, this does not mean that the writer is looking forward to an exchange with the cultures of other small, or large, European countries.

between cultures and a book may or may not bring with it something authentic that the writer has said about his immediate world. But that is by the by. The important thing for the ambitious author is that his work be available everywhere. To achieve that goal he is willing to alter the content of the book and its style. Kazuo Ishiguru has spoken of the need to write an English that is easily translatable, the better to reach out to the whole world. Scandinavian writers have told me that they choose the names of their characters with foreign readers in mind. The national readership and the national impact of the book are less important; not in favour of Europe; in favour of the world. Or rather, in favour of the writer himself.

Italian or Spanish, even German writers clamour to be translated into English, their passport to international celebrity, but of course the vast majority of translations go the other way, from English into every other language. Where I live, in Italy, more than seventy percent of books published are translations and most of those are translated from English. In Milan, where I run a post-graduate degree course in translation, all students must study two languages, of which one must be English, and even if they prefer French or German or Spanish it is understood that most of their future work will be from English.

This is not, of course, because Europe looks to England with admiration but because America is still perceived to be the vanguard of cultural development in the world. So, not only is Europe too amorphous to be considered "the place where a story unfolds," but it is perceived, even by its inhabitants, to be old, or without the innovative energy, or simply the gutsy interest value of America. It would be futile to fret about this or to fight it. It may even be an advantage, in that it allows Europeans to pursue their lives and ends without suffering the spotlight that falls on all things American.

Inflated ideals

For the crucial thing to grasp here is that although the writer may yearn for the celebrity and wealth that can come through translation and international recognition, to achieve those goals is arguably the worst

thing that can happen to him, as a person and as a writer. Nothing will dilute and divert and falsify his work more than major international success and the ego-inflating anxieties of simultaneous publication in a dozen countries. Nothing deprives a national culture of the valuable input of its authors more than the lure of global celebrity. If writers don't necessarily go abroad, like Africa's talented football players, all the same, their minds are elsewhere.

What deeply matters to the writer, more than the success he yearns for, is the freedom to work, the liberty really to say what he wants to say, what needs to be said, now, at this moment, in Glasgow, in Bonn, in Dijon, not with an eye to sales in New York. This is where the European Community is vital. This is the only role it need concern itself with as far as its authors are concerned: liberty. Within the Community, the British, the Irish, the Italian, the Polish writer can feel free to speak, safe in the knowledge that it will be hard for his national culture to persecute him within the larger Community. This freedom is the greatest gift any government can give to its artists and the most powerful rebuke to countries who behave differently.

It's important to understand that I am not talking about economic freedom. It is not the business of the Community to be deciding that this or that writer should be subsidised while another is left to fend for himself. Such decisions will always be political, or worse still personal. To publish one's views today, or one's poems, or stories, or even novels, one need only open a blog. It costs nothing but energy and dedication. The back and forth of information, creativity, or simply words, is vertiginous.

Meantime, the traditional book market is becoming more and more a question of chain stores stocking a diminishing number of mediocre titles of perceived commercial potential. As a result, the truly innovative is increasingly local, fragmented, or finding its own peculiar area of distribution, at once regional and global, on the net. This may mean a less privileged lifestyle for the writer but it may also be hugely liberating, since what matters for the writer is to write the right thing for the people who can truly understand him.

Spare us togetherness

The letter that invites me to put together these reflections asks, "Can culture play a strategic role and contribute to a yet-to-be-attained feeling of European togetherness? Can it even create a European soul?" This is disquieting. Togetherness is something people feel when they are under attack or when they launch out into the wider world with a common cause. May we be spared all that. May we rather continue to bicker with each other and be suspicious of each other. May we never name a common religion in our constitution. May we never have a common 'defence policy.' May we never think of Europe as a 'bulwark' or a 'power block.'

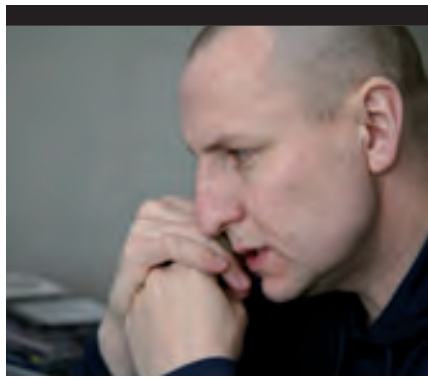
The genius of Europe is precisely that it is an organisation in which each country can set aside the delirium of national identity, not in order to substitute it with a larger, equally delirious, continental identity, but so as to allow each individual citizen to be national, European, or simply him or herself as he or she chooses.

Being human should be togetherness enough. As for a 'soul' I have still to find the dictionary that can tell me what this word means, but assuming there is such a thing, I can't imagine it will be hurried along by anyone's cultural strategy.

Tim Parks, born in 1954, studied in Cambridge and at Harvard. In 1981 he moved to Italy where he has since lived as a writer and translator. He has written eleven novels, among them ***Europe*** (1997), ***Cleaver*** (2006) and ***Dreams of Rivers and Seas*** (2008). His many translations form the Italian include works by Alberto Moravia and Italo Calvino. Among his non-fiction works, ***Translating Style*** analyses Italian translations of the English modernists. He has won a number of literary awards, including the Somerset Maugham Award.

I don't believe in Europe, I believe in culture

Lyricism will founder, just like the term Old Europe. This is the prophecy of the Lithuanian author Sigitas Parulskis. Is Europe merely a poetic topos, a metaphor, the meaning of which has long been lost and is now at risk of being forgotten? *By Sigitas Parulskis*



My laptop shows the wrong time – one hour early according to Lithuanian time. I lived in Berlin for two months during spring and my computer is still on German time. For me, this gap of one hour is both symbolic and ambiguous. In my novel *Three Seconds of Heaven*, I have included a time difference – a gap of three seconds in the life and consciousness of one human being, who served for two years in the Soviet Army. (A further coincidental analogy: I made a point of completing my military service in Germany.)

When somebody spends a long period of time in prison, exile or solitude, a gap opens up – a tear, that often goes unhealed for an entire lifetime. This is something of a drama, an existential and social drama. It is a tear that deprives people of the feeling for the here and now. This can affect an entire nation in the same way. For example, my people, the Lithuanians. Right up to the present day, this time difference of one hour is noticeable – in everyday life, education, the economy, politics and, undeniably, in our culture.

Lithuanians console themselves with the notion that Lithuania has been a part of European culture since the Christianisation of 1387. This is a notion that we have cared for and eaten out on. Essentially it is the truth but complex historical circumstances have exiled our small country into oblivion, to the very outer limits of European culture and politics.

For fifty years after the Second World War, our people were terribly injured and tormented. This left our culture in a state that can be described as perpetually schizophrenic. In reality, it was two cultures: Soviet, meaning the Russian, the foreign culture of the occupying power which was imposed on us from outside, and our own

Lithuanian culture. For Lithuanians, being European meant, and still means, playing catch up, a constant struggle to try and close the cursed gap, to bridge the damned void, and to develop the right feeling for European time, tradition and values.

I do not know where to begin with the question of the role of culture in Europe. It is something that confuses me. In my opinion, culture is the sole important factor in people's lives. If we understand it as the opposite of nature, the sum of the human race's material and spiritual values, then everything – weapons, and idiotic, aggressive ideologies that destroy millions of lives – is a product of culture. After all, war is not seen as a driving force of progress without good reason. And as Albert Schweitzer said, culture and progress are almost one and the same.

I would not know how to further refine the meaning of culture. One possibility could be the various manifestations of art – architecture, for example. But it is only culture that allows me to communicate with other people. I do not visit other countries to buy or sell anything, nor do I go with the aim of finding a wife or a religion. I go because of the culture, to be a part of it, to find it, to live with it. I am in no position to consider its meaning or lack of meaning because it is the base upon which I build my house, the palace of my existence: my world. In my opinion, the question of culture is similar to the question of whether it makes sense for people to have heads. I have the feeling that Joseph Guillotine would be firmly in my corner on that one.

Lithuanians console themselves with the notion that Lithuania has been a part of European culture since the Christianisation of 1387.

Osip Mandelstam, one of the most interesting Russian writers, defined the Acmeism movement as "a yearning for world culture." In Lithuania, this concept was prevalent. Artists had a genuinely heartfelt yearning for a world, or European, culture because this was something that, in terms of both quality and quantity, was in short supply indeed. For Lithuanians, the Iron Curtain was not just a convenient political metaphor but an unsavoury reality. Only works approved by the Politburo in Moscow, the censors and the KGB could pass through the Curtain.

Copyright etiquette

The main criteria for translating a large number of foreign books was the publication date. Books published before 1972 were preferred. In the Soviet Union, works published abroad before 1972 had a copyright limited to just 15 years. Books published after 1972 had a copyright of 25 years. In fact, it has only been since 1996, as the Lithuanians ratified the Bern agreement, that a copyright of 70 years has been in place. As a matter of fact, I wonder whether the Soviets abided by any rules of etiquette at all. Allow me to offer an example of this. I read Aravind Adiga's novel *White Tiger* in its original language shortly after it was awarded the Booker Prize. Twenty years ago, this would not have been possible.

Nevertheless, despite such sad and self-pitying statements, I must say that I do not

believe in Europe. I believe that a European culture, as an independent phenomena with specific rules and concrete objects and subjects, does not exist. European culture is a fictional end-station fabricated by bureaucrats and politicians. European culture is a piecing together of numerous national cultures, which themselves are losing their independent characteristics as they become more cosmopolitan.

In earlier times, European culture was grounded in ancient civilizations and mixed with Christian values, complete with traditions, symbols, themes, etc. However, I really could not say how it would be defined today, now that an increasing number of other religions, cultures and traditions have found their way into the European Union. An old dictionary of foreign words offers the following definition: "Caucasians, the white (Eurasian) race, one of three primary or large races that have expanded all over the world; features include light skin of different shades, glossy or curly soft hair, lush facial hair, thick body hair, narrow face, a narrow nose with straight, rather perpendicular nostrils, high root of the nose, and thin lips."

The atrophy of intellectual thought

This definition could not stand up to an explanation of today's Europeans. I mean, what else could this unhappy Europe or its culture be, aside from its population, the people? More and more, we serve up definitions and terms, projects and visions, all the while forgetting the most fundamental thing of all: these abstractions are simply an aide that should help us to live and communicate with each other, and to prevent us from killing one another. Europe, politics and even God are really nothing more than aides of this kind, to help people come to terms with terrible loneliness and the tragedy/comedy of fate.

I do not believe that writers can make fundamental differences because nobody listens to them, which is probably for the best. A real author creates an unreal or ideal world that real people can only dream of. Of course, under special historical circumstances, writers, in a certain sense, articulate the will of the society they live in. In Soviet-occupied Lithuania, the people were always waiting for words of truth. The Sajudis Reform Movement in 1987/88 showed us just how much authority an author can have when the people need nice, sharp, rhetorical words, strong comparisons or shocking images.

As the time came for Lithuania to deal with its fate, the poetry of demonstrations and barricades faded very quickly. As politicians, businessmen and bankers took the initiative the role of the author became marginal. I do not believe that their influence is any greater or less in countries with a long democratic tradition. Art and politics should not be mixed, they have different origins.

Culture supports our human nature. That means sensitivity, sympathy and making sacrifices for others, for somebody who is weaker, more fragile or simply different than us in some way and is nevertheless a person, just like us. OK, pop culture has dedicated itself to entertainment, which is

not necessarily a bad thing.

Nevertheless, according to British author John Fowles (whose work I adore), this superiority of entertainment culture has become so powerful that serious culture pales in comparison. This restricts a person's opportunity to oppose a handful of cunning, educated cynics who refer to themselves as politicians and businessmen. More and more people have stopped reading books and this leads to a wasting away of intellectual capacity.

Deceiving the well-read

Personally, I view culture through the window of literature. In other words, my access code to the world of culture is the written word. And for this reason, I agree with Joseph Brodsky, who once said a well-read person is not easy to deceive. A well-read person is not easy to manipulate, something that politicians and businessmen often try to do, out of pure egoism.

Over the past few years, I have travelled extensively through Europe. Up north, to Trondheim in Norway, and as far south as Rhodes in Greece. I have visited Poland, Italy, Slovenia, Germany, France and Israel. My books have been translated into eight European languages. But despite all of this, I still could not say exactly what Europe is. I often feel the desire to say, in the style of Louis XIV: Europe – that is I. Because if I cannot describe myself as a European then who can I? What kind of education does this person need, what origins, what opinions? I generally return from travels in Europe with the same peculiar, ambivalent feeling: if a product of culture or art cannot be turned into a marketable good then it leaves a rather strange feeling behind. And cultural events with no stars or those described as intimate, small, etc, do not really appear to be happening. They are aimed at a limited audience and come across as a little old fashioned, demotivating and slightly tragic. Art needs to be sold well, people ought to like it. If it is only done for the tastes of a select few it is destined to be a flop – that is the law of the markets, elementary and merciless. When I see a handful of writers who take turns reciting their work to one another, with hardly any audience, I am overcome with a sense of repugnance. What is the point? Why bother with prose or poetry that is only of interest to writers and publishers? This is an awful thought. Should we view this handful of writers in the same light as we would a small sect of early Christians? As apostles who will bring good news to the masses? No, this will not work. Verse will perish just like the notion of Old Europe.

When I see a handful of writers who take turns reciting their work to one another, with hardly any audience, I am overcome with a sense of repugnance.

Ah ha! Maybe I've finally found the right comparison: the notion of "Europe" is probably no more than a poetic motif, a metaphor that has almost lost its age-old meaning and has now fallen into oblivion.

P.S.

But later, after I have returned from my journey – usually not right away, but a month or even a year afterwards – I suddenly remember something. Something small,

a story somebody told me or a specific detail of the landscape and I feel more human. When I know how people live in a certain country then it is difficult for me to feel any contempt towards them, to envy them, to speak ill of them or to act as if they do not exist. And I think that this is exactly the point of cultural connection – sensing the inner life of your fellow human being. Realising that it is similar to what you yourself feel, what you live for and toil for, what you regret and what makes you happy. Your fellow human being is a reflection of yourself and it doesn't matter where he lives, a thousand kilometres away or next door. We are capable of this without Europe (whatever on earth that might be) but without culture, without art, we are not.

Translation: Jason Humphreys

Sigitas Parulskis, born in 1965, lives in Vilnius. He published his first volume of poetry in 1990, and in 1991 won the Zigmas Gele Award for the best literary debut of the year. Parulskis' first novel ***Three Seconds of Heaven***, wherein he draws upon his experiences as a member of a Soviet paratrooper division based near Cottbus, was judged the best book of the year and given the Lithuanian Writer's Guild prize in 2002. In 2004, Parulskis was awarded the National Prize in literature. His writings have been translated into eleven languages, and ***Three Seconds of Heaven*** is currently being made into a film.

Meta

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The fermenting belly of the old continent

Is Europe nothing more than a financial and economical organism devoid of a soul of any form? The EU will not survive if it limits itself to economic dimensions. The continent, which has torn itself apart over centuries of conflict with hostile empires, is also home to enormous opportunities. What can culture achieve?

By Antonio Moresco

What's cooking in the pits of Europe's stomach? What changes are set to take place in the digestive tract of our continent over the coming years? After all, we should not only be interested in what happens in Europe's head, but also what goes on in its belly. You get the impression that something immense is stirring before our eyes – something unexpected, something that is yet to fully reveal itself, something that has not yet taken form.

There are currently so many things fermenting in Europe's belly – both positive and negative – that it is impossible to say what the continent will look like in the future. Not just in one hundred years, but in twenty. We have a multitude of geo-political changes on our plate: migrations, cultural identities, and differing religious communities, some which are adverse to others and some which overlap. We have insecurities, fear and antagonism. Furthermore, there are geo-political changes that are arguably exaggerated by people, who use these as a tool of self-empowerment, to maintain separate religious and political identities, and to fan the flames of conflict.

It is an eternal rush forwards and sudden breaking of political and religious powers, a circulation of dynamics and restoration, greed and a lack of courage, subordination, corruption, vanity and economic monopolies. A battle of criminal structures which have come to be integral components of both the European and the global economy.

It is a constant erosion of democratic mechanisms. A game, rigged from the start and swayed by economic might and media influence, from demagogy and populism. What is taking place is a reprogramming of minds and of the individual cognitive abilities. And in the midst of this vast information overload the ability to judge what

is really happening and to make decisions is lost.

We are also witnessing the rise of new orders, new structures, commitments and synergies. A single currency. More and more new countries piling into the community. New, great and irretrievable opportunities opening across Europe – the continent which has torn itself apart over centuries and millennia in fratricidal wars and the conflict of hostile empires. The continent that was until yesterday divided, trapped in two opposite blocs. Nations, which in their glory days controlled the continent and were colonial powers, must now learn to live together. And now add to this the multi-faceted, dramatic and creative world of Eastern Europe. The people of these countries have forced entry into this common space with their people power, their intelligence and their staking of claims.

What is to become of these diverse and opposing dynamic powers? This melee and these hopes will surely not be able to coexist while we scrape together the dregs of past ideologies and good intentions of national, ethnic and religious identities. Or while we limit ourselves to economic dimensions, and mutate the whole continent into a solely financial and economical organism, an organism that is devoid of nerves, anaemic, soulless and therefore certain to disintegrate and explode in the near future.

In order to achieve the miracle of another world – a dream of the men and women who live on this small, overpopulated, overheated and exhausted planet – we require entirely new projections and much broader horizons. Everything must be reconsidered and reinvented, and in a dynamic manner that is proportionate to the European and global situation in which we find ourselves. Sleeping giants, lying dormant within the continent, must be liberated.

What is taking place is a reprogramming of minds. And in the midst of this vast information overload, the ability to judge what is really happening is lost.

Fractals and frictions

Europe is not an island. It is geographically connected to the enormity of Asia and is the smallest of the Earth's six continents, including the white abyss of Antarctica. It is the only continent whose landmass is completely within the northern hemisphere. Europe is like a giant set of foothills, a fractal. Forty thousand years ago, the first people who came from Africa and West Asia arrived at this raft, shortly before the sudden disappearance of the Neanderthals. Since then, Europe has experienced centuries and millennia of violent disruptions, genocides and wars. Nations have emerged while entire populations have massacred one another. Dynastic structures were formed, economic and political revolutions rocked the continent, new societal classes originated with their own ideologies, which were depicted as universal and ultimate truths. The previous century bore witness to two world wars and their excessive levels of cruelty and delusion, monstrous damage, slaughter and the Holocaust.

In the same way that Ancient Greece, with its thousand islands and the Aegean

Sea, was a melting pot of people, cultures and empires, Europe represented a fusion of people, of nations, of languages and cultures, and of small and large empires. As an Italian, with a surname seeped in Spanish and Jewish origins, I myself carry the imprint of a history of migration, persecution, Diaspora, and the struggle for freedom and survival.

Now, at last, the embryo of this old and new political continent exists, a result of a prophetic dream of many Europeans amid the ruins of 1940s Europe. These dreamers knew how to look ahead – sometimes even when, like Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, the founding fathers of the EU, they were sitting in the darkness of a prison – and they had a vision for Europe's future. "The years on that island," says Spinelli, remembering his time on Ventotene, where he and Rossi were incarcerated during the fascist era, "are still with me to this day with an abundance that only these moments and places can obtain, in which this mysterious event is taking place – that which Christians refer to as being the chosen one. I realized that, until this moment, I was like a foetus in the making, in anticipation of being born, and that in these years and in this place, I was born once again."

At that time it was essential for survival to negotiate the suicidal stalemate of the ideologies that we became entangled in, the forces and powers that led us to war and to find a way out to a larger space, a broader horizon for Europe. Today, Europe must reinvent itself and follow a new path, one cut from a larger cloth and with a global perspective. This applies to the whole of Europe, just as it previously did for the continent's individual nations.

We are part of an experiment, an experiment that is yet to be tested on our continent, a dynamic aggregate that is not constituted by aggressive and powerful states that dissolve another country's borders or annex a new people. Rather, this experiment is conducted by mutual consent.

This experiment has the potential to have both an exemplary and ground-breaking effect. People, tribes, ethnic groups of various ancestries, who live within the state but of whom some may come from countries previously exposed to colonial law in the last century. Countries who, over time, have fought against one another are now intertwined in a epochal and altogether new geopolitical situation, one which resembles the last embrace between two boxers who are neither able to throw punches at one another nor let the other go.

At the same time, there are always new challenges and threats. Large empires are emerging or re-emerging in the Orient, while others perhaps find themselves in decline due to their blindness and greed, those who learnt nothing from the ancient lesson of the toad, who wanted to be as big as the sun and gorged himself until he burst. It is of vital importance then that this experiment succeeds. Europe has the potential to play a new role in a global context.

At the moment of acceleration the old ghosts reappear. And, as always, Europe

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and the world are ready to resurrect the old hallucinations and to create new ones: our responsibility is huge. Europe is presently a bottleneck, an infinitely small one. It is a passage that we need to widen, not only for our sake, but for the sake of the rest of the world.

It is not enough to merely oppose all of the dangerous ideas that are constantly reborn throughout Europe and the world. By doing so we are effectively taking a mirror-image attitude that only serves to give these ideas eternal life. We need to come up with new and better ideas. This Europe, whose fingers have already been burnt by the failures of previous recipes, can become the cauldron within which these new ideas are formed.

Stranded without hope

In order to see this passage, this bottleneck, this thing like a projection that provides us with a sense of this Babel of languages, nations and identities, we have to change our perspective. We must shift the focus, broaden the horizons of the people who cling to this continent, a raft floating on the liquid mass of a small planet – a planet that came into being four billion years ago in the paunch of the cosmos. And a planet whose imminent collapse in the next century has already been foreseen by eminent scientists, unless this greedy and insane life form is able to come to discourse and find a new path.

What will happen when Europe's already fragile structures come under pressure from the migration of large masses of people who, thanks to changes in the climate, the environment and the growing scarcity of resources, are stranded without hope? The time has come when all of these identities, characteristics and resources must exceed themselves to form a larger identity. This cannot be an egalitarian minimisation; it has to be a duplication of powers. The future of not only Europe but also the rest of the world depends on this. There is no more time to lose. The first embryos need to be created from continental and global structures in a way in which they have previously not existed and in accordance to what is happening around us.

I recently read a story in the newspaper that left a great impression on me. Two archaeologists have found a pair of skeletons from the Neolithic period near the city of Mantua, my place of birth. It is almost certain these are the remains of a man and a woman. They were found with both legs intertwined, with their arms around each other's shoulders, and their heads facing one another, as if about to kiss. From their complete denture it is clear that they were young, little more than a boy and a girl buried in a tender embrace that has lasted for six thousand years.

A European embrace that comes from a long time ago, pre-dating the Middle Ages, Rome, Byzantium, Charlemagne, the courageous Nordic people, the Vikings and the Normans, the Slavs, the Celts, and the people of Islam. They are from a time that we have somewhat arrogantly labelled "Pre- and Early History." Contrary to what we have learnt from history books, the men and women of Europe began to suffer and

dream long before the first empires appeared.

Who were these two lovers? And what is the reason for their unusual burial? Was it an act of love or a violent death? A human sacrifice or a couple caught by surprise , like historical lovers Paolo and Francesca? Or is it Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde, Eugen Onegin and Tatjana, the Master and the Margarita? In our eyes, who should they have been? How are we to understand them? The story has exploded. The lovers of Mantua have become the lovers of Europe. We all originate from that embrace. It is up to us to say who they are and who we, in the near future, will become.

As an author I am well aware how the strength of the written word, the tattoo of words on paper, the breath and the power of words has been degraded in our time. Nevertheless, for me, literature is not a paltry thing that has arisen from huge machines that move from a restricted horizon and in a short space of time, where everything is being levelled and invalidated, a time where there is no more tension, nothing that could evoke restlessness, loss of control or thoughts. For me, this thing that is – foolishly and broadly – called literature remains, at least potentially, an apparition, an invasion, an invention, a prototype and an explosion. It can also act as a passageway, as the eye of a needle.

Those authors who prove themselves worthy of this label are not footmen of the Zeitgeist or of profitable ideas. They are neither entertainers nor servants, merely there to distract us for a short time or to separate us from our death, nor are they harmless, edifying figures. They have never been the only voice, the only passageway, the only bottleneck through which so many would later flow – even during the time when the spaces were too small, and the word remained an underground terrain, uncontrollable, inflexible and contradictory.

The authors and the artists are destroyers and builders, explorers and thinkers, agents of disorder, prophets and dreamers. Therefore I would like to say something about Europe's authors and artists, its thinkers and scientists, and their apparitions and inventions.

At this point I want to try to imagine how all of these characters would gather on the streets of this northern continent, in the middle of the night where nobody can see them, and how they will attempt to be born and reborn. The first thing to note is that they move in packs, a great stream of men and women traipsing through the night. My goodness, how many there are! Here and there I manage to recognise a face: the blind poet who has peered into the genetic cauldron of life in times of war and of humanity without peace, and sang of bravery without hope; the other person, hooded, and with a hooked nose, who journeyed to the afterlife and who showed us the world there, which we all have in front of our eyes, and in which we live; then Shakespeare, barbaric and gentle, who told us the story of the young European lovers from Verona and of the bloody madness out of which the

As an author I am well aware how the strength of the written word, its breath and its power, has been degraded in our time.

empires emerge.

There are our thinkers and scientists, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin, who taught us patience and infiniteness; Spinoza, lost in his thoughts, who taught us the cheery bravery of meek and fiery people; Leopardi and Hölderlin, with their despair and their thirst. The proud, radical and gentle heroines from the pages of Russian novels, with their monumental disasters; the great dreams and the great literature, the gentle and ferocious European female authors such as Emily Brontë and Virginia Woolf; the melancholic Mephistopheles, seducer and educator; the young Julien Sorel, with his betrayed youth in the clutches of desire and the world; the rough, bold and moving Balzac, who showed us how societies and worlds are created and destroyed.

Somebody else has fallen in step with the others – a skinny and decrepit figure, but one who nonetheless proudly displays his presence. It is Pinocchio, who taught us a difficult art, and one we so desperately need at this moment: metamorphism. Alongside him there is a human insect named Gregor Samsa, with a rotten apple protruding from his back.

Raskolnikov is also there, complete with his isolation and his axe. And there are the meteors, Büchner and Rimbaud, who taught us inflexibility and emotion, rebellion, tenderness and contempt. Then comes Héloise and Käthchen von Heilbronn, who showed us loving foresight; and Pushkin, who taught us elegance in the face of death; and Dostoevsky, who made pain his subject matter. The characters from Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, standing in a row, so boldly and fabulously evoked, and in the midst of this a young girl, dressed in white, with her hen, upon which the light of the world is concentrated.

The naked body of Michealangelo's David and the enigmatic Mona Lisa, who is walking along with loose and windswept hair next to her brave marble husband. There is a deafening silence in the air, penetrated only by a light music in the air. What is this music and where is it coming from? It is coming from the founders of the psychological realms of music, those torn from the innermost fabric of the ringing material in the atmosphere of another sounding configuration of the cosmos.

And there are many more. It is impossible to count them all. We are also there, amongst the crowds. And ahead of us always, atop his shaky and gangly horse, Don Quixote, Europe's greatest knight, our leader.

Translation: Jason Humphreys

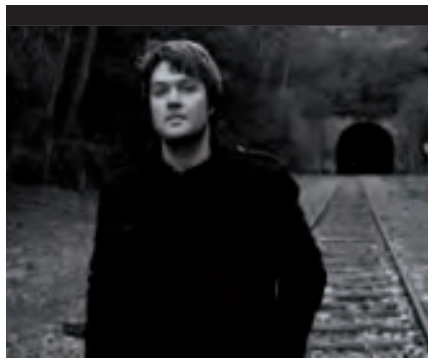
Antonio Moresco was born in Mantua in 1947 and lives in Milan. He has published a number of novels and essays and is widely acknowledged as a pioneer of modern Italian literature.


IL GAZZETTINO
Gorbaciov butta giù la cortina

Dance on a tightrope

The challenges that Europe has to face in relation to language are often technical and quite mundane, such as rates at which translators and interpreters should be paid. But where else in the world can an author draw on so much cultural variety, where a Franz Kafka enriches Goethe's German through Czech and Yiddish, and where the writer becomes the nomad and the immigrant of his own language.

By Alban Lefranc



One of the main dangers when faced with the task of speaking about Europe is the reversion to pacifying and uncontentious banalities. Without fail, at least within polite society, we all agree on the following: yes, the foreign is worth discovering; yes, translating is a good thing; yes, peace among the people in our part of the world is an extraordinary accomplishment, and so on. However, these important principles become implanted in one's head without anything being done at all to act on them concretely. In order not to fall into the same trap, I would like to try to refer to a number of interesting incidents from my fragmentary and controvertible experiences as a translator (from German into French) and as a French native speaking writer (who has written other books about German personalities).

The language of translation

I would like to begin with an incident that in view of the difficulty of formulating (concrete) action for and general discourse about Europe is extremely enlightening and symptomatic. I was invited to the Maison de l'Europe in Paris to lead a round of discussions with the important Austrian writer Werner Kofler and his no less important translator Bernard Banoun, who was awarded the Prix de Nerval for his work. The topic of our discussions was Europe. Because we did not have anything generally to say about Europe or were not in a position to speak much about it, the three of us spoke about the peculiarities of Austrian literature, accusations of provincialism that Elfriede Jelinek had to deal with, the influence of Thomas Bernhard, and so on.

We spoke to one another in German and I translated for the audience into French. Our conversation was neither academic nor hard

to understand, it was much more about real-life experiences of linguistic togetherness and European issues. However, the director of the Maison de l'Europe stepped onto the podium to interrupt us and insisted we stick to the topic: Europe! In his eyes, Bernhard, Jelinek and Kofler were not "European" enough. Then he impressed upon us a famous saying of Umberto Eco: "Translation is the language of Europe."

Without wanting to stoop to polemic, I am of the opinion that we are dealing here with a good example of the dangers of motherhood statements that plague the debate about Europe. The challenges that Europe has to face all too often are technical and actually quite mundane in nature and relate to translating and interpreting, as well as to pay rates for translators and interpreters.

> *"We are a sign, meaninglessly painless*
> *and we have almost lost the language*
> *in the foreign."*
>
> *Hölderlin, Mnemosyne*

There is something quite comforting about translations generally or the importance of foreign literature but it is actually the case that very few authors are accepted outside of their own linguistic regions. The literature business continues to organise itself around its own national authors. (One exception is American literature, which is quite deservedly the focus of much attention.)

One must always remember the important role of the translator. As a writer of French novels, who has been translated into German (by Katja Roloff), and as a French translator of the German author Peter Weiss, I have more than often seen that the name of the translator in reviews or book presentations will not be mentioned once. The delicate transfer of words and ideas from one language into another, the many painstaking hours spent with authors or native speakers considering whether to use this or that idiomatic expression, all of this work is seen as a vague, anonymous service and is all too often not recognised. The belief in a transparency of language, the sweet ideology of a "tout communicationell," the idea of some sort of ubiquitous communication is much more widespread than one realises.

The author as diva

In February 2007 a dispute arose in Germany during which a number of columnists harshly criticised a claim for better pay being made by hard-pressed translators. They were derided as divas. It is startling to discover that a translation of 1800 characters on a normal German page will be paid worse than a translation of around 300 characters of a shorter French page. One should also realise that a translator mostly practices several careers at once. He or she acts as an agent for an author whom he or she would like to translate, and is often trying to convince an editor who doesn't know the language of the author to become interested in the writing of someone who's hardly known.

(I speak here not of Michel Houellebecq or Amélie Nothomb, but of important authors such as Christian Prigent or Régis Jauffret, to name just two, who are completely unknown in Germany.) Of course the same applies for very good German authors who are unknown in France.

The same translator who translated a press kit for a book that was to be translated also produced a twelve-page test translation of the book, without any guarantee that all this work would lead to something concrete. My wish is that in the debate about translating the simple but fundamental questions will never be forgotten. These are questions of proper payment, as well as the recognition of the person (even if it only involves naming the translator in a review) and the work of the translator. The way that we French relate to Dostoevsky or Döblin is based on translations that have recently undergone a major revision and have given us back the impenetrability and strangeness of these authors. They have been freed from the course of French syntax, which the first translators were determined to retain at all cost.

At this point the work of André Markowicz must be acknowledged for the rediscovery of Russian novelists. When asked about his status as a star translator he answered: "At least I was successful in one thing: that attention is paid to translation, that one realises that the book is translated. In theatre there is normally no reference to the fact that the piece was translated. For the first time a translator is seen as the author. And that is good."

Syntactical line of attack

Olivier Le Lay's new translation of Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has only recently made possible a comprehensive rediscovery of this novel that was drastically cut by a quarter in the first translation and was smoothed over in the extreme. We experience a moment of shock at the discovery of a completely different book that we'd known for a long time under the same name. A new syntactical line and new perceptions were hidden in the text. We became aware of our fragile hold on the world. Indeed, our perception of the world and of life feeds off what we learn from great works in world literature.

The danger of translation comes from wanting to make a text French in the sense of shaping it to our form. That's why Olivier Le Lay says he's happy to be told that the translation is quite noticeable during reading. Why should a translator try to lose the foreignness of a text when it is this aspect that we are searching for?

It is this relationship to the foreign that I want to describe, this loss of the implicit-

Why should a translator try to lose the foreignness of a text when it is this aspect that we are searching for?

ness of language, this kind of bodily realisation that language is never a given, that it will be relentlessly undermined by misunderstandings and resistance. I have lived almost seven years in Germany with only short breaks in France. Like many others I have experienced that foreign feeling of being in-between – of course, much less drastically than Hölderlin's use of the term – such that after some months, no matter how well one masters the language, it always remains a foreign language. Suddenly, one finds oneself dealing with a French mixed with German (many Germanisms are beginning to replace my native tongue) and a German peppered with French. One finds – and this is an especially painful experience for a translator – that in French one begins to lose one's natural feeling for language (whatever you hold that to be) with regard to the syntax and even the vocabulary – the difference between Imparfait and Passé Simple or the use of prepositions, just to name two points.

Kafka the nomad

You also have the feeling that you are losing your connection to contemporary expressions in your mother tongue, to its various transformations, to its incessant regenerations. Every time I return to Paris I am confronted with many new sayings. But this feeling of being in-between can also teach us to "dance on the tightrope," as Deleuze and Guattari call it in their book about Kafka (*Für eine kleine Literatur*).

The two philosophers impress upon us the need to look deeper into language, to become nomads and immigrants of our own language, to become minorities, just like Kafka, who enriched Goethe's German through Czech and Yiddish. He refined the German language, freeing it from the incrustations and clichés that had impoverished it at the beginning of the century in Prague.

In another way the books of Bernard Lamarche Vadel (*Vétérineres*, *Sa vie son œuvre*) are impressive examples of a transfer of German into French, that affect a quite peculiar, 'unusable' but extremely beautiful and disconcerting language. It is as if Thomas Bernhard crept into the classical French of the moralists of the Grand Siècle.

A further aspect of this hybridisation consists of choosing topics that allow a reconstruction of a national history that is not that of the author. The theme of my first three novels (the German title translates as *Attacks: Fassbinder, Vesper, Nico. Three Novels,* translated from the French by Katja Roloff) is the rebuilding of Germany in the 1960s and 70s, essentiality from Fassbin-

der, Bernhard Vesper and the Red Army Fraction through to the singer Nico. I have never dared to see myself as an historian or a specialist of such sensitive and problematic terrain, rather I have projected my own biographical tensions into it. I have tried to imagine a possible Baader and Fassbinder, who are just as credible and probable as the historical characters, from the viewpoint of a Frenchman who absorbed the film collages of a Godard as well as the poetry of an Apollinaire, and who was no less fascinated by the boxing technique of a Mohammed Ali. I created this from historical, artistic and sporting material, foreign material, and in this way approached German history.

The fact that genres and influences can be mixed up is something that Malcolm Lowry gives admirable expression to in the preface of his novel *Under the Volcano*. He says: "It can be considered a type of symphony or as a kind of opera – or even as a western. I wanted to make Jazz, a poem, a chanson, a tragedy, a comedy, a farce and more out of it. (…) It is a prophecy, a political warning, a cryptogram, a crazy film, a slogan on a wall."

It is these cross-connections, these peculiar historical, linguistic and generic transcriptions that might one day make up the distinguishing features of European literature – indeed, which are already a component of it – and it is the translator who will make this happen.

Translation: Chris Robertson

Alban Lefranc, born in 1975, lives as author and translator in Paris. He is the co-publisher of the German-French literature magazine, La mer gelée. His latest novel, "Vous n'étiez pas là," was published at the beginning of 2009.

Fraktur

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A useful kit Culture can be a touristic-educational gift that offers a bit of history, a bit of folklore, a line or two of verse. It can simply serve as a marketing product or as an identification kit. What is clear, however, is this: the word 'culture' fits perfectly into the dictionary of the EU's administrative jargon but it is also the case that the words most commonly used from this dictionary are also the shadiest. *By Dubravka Ugresic*

Zeus, the father of all gods, is smiling benevolently as he watches his favourite, Europa, at work. She can't be said to have betrayed his expectations. He had none. When he left her, he gave her two gifts that any woman would love to have: a spear that never missed its mark, and expensive jewellery.

After she used her admirer as the speediest possible means of transportation to more favourable and appealing climes, after her erotic fling with the horned beast to whom she bore her sons, Europa, satisfied and sated, married a local guy, Asterion. Poor Asterion had nothing more in his CV than his marriage to Zeus's mistress and the adoption of her three fatherless sons. With her natural talent for handling herself equally well with gods, animals and men, and with a small but tidy sum of capital left to her to allay any subsequent moral damage, Europa continued living the so-called full life. That first journey on Zeus's back stirred in her a yen for geography, so she went on exploring new lands and continents. Some she colonised, and then granted them independence; she seduced many of them and then dismissed them. So it was that she augmented her wealth. Many were the things she invented. She placed notions such as democracy, humanism, art, literature and philosophy under her absolute copyright. She was aggressive, too, she waged wars and honed the art of annihilation. Several decades ago she committed the most vast and terrible crime in the history of mankind, murdering some six million of her Jews, which by no means prevents her from playing the role of moral arbiter whenever the occasion arises.

Today Europa, like a good and wise mistress, is busy uniting her lands, although she failed a recent unification test flat-out. She who did nothing to prevent the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and ensuing war now

flaunts phrases such as "post-national units" and "post-national constellations." She, who never so much as blinked an eye at the disappearance of the "Yugoslavs," for example (this was an ethnically indifferent, 'mixed' minority living in the former Yugoslavia that was actually larger in number than the more nationally conscious Slovenes), is now demanding rigorous respect for the rights of minorities as a key requisite for joining its ranks.

Precisely because of this, perhaps, one of the key ideological cornerstones of European unification today is culture. Just as each little town in the former Communist countries had its Culture Centre, so the large map of European integration is crisscrossed by virtual and real 'culture centres.' Culture can be a tourist-instructional gift packet offering a smattering of history, a touch of folklore, a line or two of verse; culture can serve as an identity help-kit; as a shadowy point of self-respect and mutual regard; as a blank surface onto which meaning may be inscribed and read. Culture may be understood as a way of life, whether of Berbers or barbers as Terry Eagleton notes with wit, as the progression of cultural history from Seneca to Seinfeld, as the antithesis of barbarism, as a symbol of romanticism, as a form of manipulation and superiority, as a marketing ploy, or as a synonym for national identity. The word culture fits neatly into the vocabulary of the administrative EU newspeak. Because in that vocabulary the most frequent words are also the shadiest, such as fluidity, mobility, fusion...

Today Europa, like a good and wise mistress, is busy uniting her lands, although she failed a recent unification test flat-out.

In the context of the new Europa, culture should be traditional, national, and cosmopolitan, all, of course, in reasonable measure and balanced proportion. Culture should promote local colour, yet remain open; culture should open borders, yet reinforce stereotypes. Tourists end their visit to Holland by purchasing a little pair of wooden clogs, a small windmill and a tulip bulb, despite the fact that the tulip was a fabrication of the Turkish floral imagination, and wooden clogs are footwear worn by peasant populations in all the muddy northern European countries, and there are windmills spinning in *Don Quixote*. All this will not shake the resolve of the visitor to bring something back from their trip that is genuinely Dutch. The souvenir vendors are glad to oblige. They know full well that whoever tries to make the market of stereotypes less stereotypical ends up bankrupt.

Culture, therefore is a representation of something. And art is a representation of something. In that most pedestrian of conceptual fusions, culture is tied to the broadly understood notion of "art." As far as art is concerned, in her rich cultural history, Europa came up with patronage, a fertile partnership of art and money, which gave birth to the Golden Age and the European cultural canon. Europa further explored the joining of art and ideology, bringing us periods when, as Walter Benjamin put it, "Fascism aestheticised politics" and when "Communism politicised art." Europa explored various aesthetic ages, artistic concepts and periods; she tested long periods of elitist high culture, then a time of "mechani-

cal reproduction" and of stripping the aura of art from art, only to find herself in the end in a tangle of concepts, but also in a fierce, chaotic dynamic of dissolution in which a number of things mingle: democratisation of art and the rule of the market domination of a mass culture – most of it American – and the consequent geo-politisation of culture, shoulder to shoulder with the remnants of traditionalistic cultural concepts and their re-politisation. Amid this morass are Europa's needs. She treats culture as her principle ideological glue, to rearticulate and reshape herself.

Paid Europa enthusiasts

At first glance there seems to be no cause for concern. A brief stroll around the internet will demonstrate that Europa is nicely networked today with hundreds of highways, roads and byways, funds and foundations, umbrella organisations, NGO networks, cultural services and virtual offices, whose sole task is to enable the flow of cultural traffic. Countless cultural managers, officers, mediators are busily facilitating the traffic of culture and cultural cooperation. These people are salaried European enthusiasts, they are nationalists, post-nationalists and internationalists, they are cosmopolites and globalists, they are European and regional nationalists, they are spokespeople for European local colour and differences but also for European unification, in a word, they are professionals with multiple identities, people with several heads on a single body. European current and future cultural life exists in this dynamic, in the rich network of united European cultural bureaucrats and "workers," producers of culture, artists, writers.

Though literature has long since lost its primacy, relinquishing pre-eminence to the more appealing media, its life is still being dictated by these same givens. The contemporary European writer, particularly the Eastie, is the product of a confused cultural dynamic. He, too, is one body with many heads, and he does what he can to position himself to keep up with the changes. He discreetly attempts to retain the traditional role of the "soul of his people." In West European countries this writing function has long since been de-politicised, it is not extinct so much as available on demand. In the newly joining East European countries, which have not yet succeeded in expunging their "liberating" nationalism, the writer as the "soul of the people" has his hands full. The model, therefore, has not lost its appeal. For the "soul" of one nation best communicates with the "soul" of another nation. It is much harder to communicate with a "soul" that has no borders and no permanent address, isn't it? Under the old conditions, our Lithuanian or Slovenian writer, defending the autonomy of the "literary arts," declined, in some cases, to represent his (Communist) people. Today he is prepared to assume that role again. For his (post-Communist) people? Because he has changed his attitude toward literature? No. Because of the rules of artistic supply and demand. Because the European literary marketplace cannot survive an inundation of fifty Lithuanian writers (just as the Lithuanian marketplace can't sustain more than two Dutch writers, for example), and

so only one or two will be welcome.

This select two will be the "household names" of Lithuanian literature. Hence our Eastie (and Westie) and the European oriented "souls" who crave affirmation on the European market, and the "globalistic souls" who would sell their European affirmation tomorrow for a more profitable American reception. The emergence from the paradise of the national literature, where a writer is always treated as a "representative" and "an artist with words," implies a further nod to market democracy.

Writers from Slovakia to Slovenia, who have been surrounded until now by short-sighted colleagues with comfortable waistlines, are being faced with the market. On that market they are going to be running headlong into David Beckham, among others, who recently was given the British Book Award, because the book, with his name on it, brought the publishing industry a pile of money. That is why our Estonian, if he is a market optimist, will have to figure into his literary life regular visits to the fitness club. The competition is fierce, unfair and traumatic. True, the European cultural bureaucracy, at least in this transitional period, is allowing a delay in facing the brutal realities of the marketplace, which still holds literary-national identities in high regard and promotes their exchange. These bureaucrats take their cut for that, as any agent would. And the readers push their own agenda. They would like to get a quick handle on things and read a little something Estonian.

In the newly joining East European countries the writer as the "soul of the people" has his hands full.

What about those who have no national identity? With the cosmopolitan, intellectual proletariat, or with the spokespeople for a European identity, a European melting pot which would erase state borders, national and ethnic divisions and would be legally regulated by handing people a European passport and the status of a European citizen? People like that will have to wait. The only thing they can entrust their utopian hope to is the movement of major capital, although this may sound like a paradox. In the future, instead of nation and state, the new "identity maker" may be a powerful corporation, and in that case it could happen that the logic of money does away altogether with state borders and identities. If this should happen, Serbia will be re-named "Ikea," and its inhabitants will be Ikeans, while Slovenia will be re-named Siemens, and its inhabitants will be the Siemensites. Imagine a leader of a small European state sending a message to his people: "If you do not behave well, I will sell you to Bill Gates."

A nation of Ikeans

Life itself seems to be moving quietly in that direction. The East will not be moving westward with the acceptance of ten new members, as every anxious West European chauvinist has feared, but instead the West will be moving eastward. I know nothing of the avenues of major capital, but I do know that the Croatian coast has been sold off for a song, that the Bulgarian city of Varna is full of the averagely solvent English, Dutch, Belgians and Germans, the ones who were slow on the ball buying apartments in Du-

brovnik, Prague or Budapest, so now they are snapping up what's left. It is entirely possible that these small, numerous and invisible migrants no one pays attention to, these small-time owners of Croatian, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Romanian residential property will determine the future of Europe, even the future of European culture. Why not? If nothing else, they know that life in the freshly incorporated countries of Europe will be cheaper and more fun than life in the expensive West European urban ghettoes. Aside from that, there is that damned "identity" stuff for export: from the amusingly oversized Bulgarian kebabs to the cosmic singing of Bulgarian women.

As far as the reception of new members is concerned, I am thrilled to contemplate the French struggling to get their mouths around Lithuanian names and the Germans polishing their Latvian. I am also delighted that the Lithuanians – who are always boasting of the fact that Vilnius is the geographic centre of Europe and that the mother of Pope John Paul the Second was Lithuanian – will now have to tone down their enthusiasm for their own national charms as they enter the European Union. I am also pleased that as they enter the EU, the Estonians will have to edit out those verbose passages in their tourist guides describing knapweed as a purely Estonian blossom, flourishing on Estonian soil for a thousand years. As we know so well, national identity is a matter of time-consuming, intelligent marketing. As I said: the national symbol of Holland is the tulip, formerly a Turkish flower.

And what about literature? Will it come out of this interaction changed? It will. I assume that in the process of their adaptation, Slovak, Lithuanian and Latvian writers will donate the occasional book to the existing heap of tomes on people who suffered under Communism. In Belgrade, as I write this, belated souvenir vendors are selling little busts of Tito (30 Euros a piece). "These are for the foreigners, they like to take something Communist home with them," say the street sellers!

There will be attempts to sell similar souvenirs, but they will quickly vanish. The topography that had been lost in literature will, I assume, return. In Croatian novels in the late 19th century and early 20th, for instance (and much the same is true for the Czech, Hungarian and other literatures), intellectual literary heroes travelled back and forth to Vienna, Prague and Budapest, speaking in German or Hungarian, and books were printed without a footnote that would translate all the foreign-language references into Croatian. The topography will get richer. The themes of exile, passports and visas will gradually vanish from the Eastie's thematic repertoire, as will the division in the European world of "ours" and "theirs." But from the perspective of the negligible number of Westies interested in the European East, that superior-imperial component is also on its way out. It would, of course, be interesting if European writers were to take a good look at one another and write something about this. But the enthusiasm around unification and the code of political correctness might not allow them to. And the market will give incentive to lighter, younger literary themes.

In closing, while we are on the subject of the literary enlargement of Europe and

literary geopolitics, it is worth revisiting the words of Miroslav Krleža from several decades ago: "What does one solitary book mean in today's world, no matter how deserving it may be of publication? Less than a droplet of water in the Amazon River. Four hundred years ago when Erasmus published his book in two hundred copies, this was an event for the European elite from Cambridge and Paris to Florence, while today, among the hundred-odd book fairs where hundreds of thousands of new books appear, how can a single, lost, solitary book be noticed? Great masters, who turn books into lucrative merchandise, the sovereigns of the metropoli of literature and art, govern the literary marketplace, taste and aesthetic criteria, and without the thunder of their propaganda thousands and thousands of books would disappear into a totally nameless silence. I do not mean to suggest that literary successes are manufactured by the press and advertisements, any more than fuss in the press can predict the winners of a horse race, but I hold it to be indisputable that a hypothetical re-assessment of literary values today would give a different picture of the condition of the European book than the press of metropolitan centres does in its advertising. The structural value of the average or the whole of literary production would assume different proportions. Perhaps this would not essentially change today's criteria, but it certainly would multiply the gallery of loud names coming from those countries, which are cut off from the literary metropoli by the barrier of their unknown languages. At least cartographically the boundaries of good books would be broadened." (Predrag Matvejević, *Razgovori s Miroslavom Krležom*, 1969).

Krleža's lament stands firm even today, several decades later. As far as a just distribution in literature is concerned, we will have to bide our time. Literature is in the realm of geopolitics. There are great literatures carrying the enjoyable burden of universalist values, while small literatures are expected to carry in their bundle their local, regional, ethnic, ideological and other specifics. Many foreigners (people who were tied to the territory by their work or some other interest) during the recent war in the ex-Yugoslavia boasted to me that they had read books by Ivo Andrić and Miroslav Krleža. "Why?" I asked. "To understand better the Balkan frame of mind," they answered.

If I were to suggest to a German that I was reading Gunther Grass to better understand the "German spirit," or if I were to tell an American that with the help of Philip Roth I was penetrating into the inner American mindset, I believe they would be disturbed and shaken. Grass and Roth are great writers, not writers of tourist-spiritual guides. The periphery and the centre, however, do not receive, nor have they ever received, even-handed treatment, and that is why the books of Krleža and Andrić for many will remain no more than literary guides to the Balkans.

Similar differences in treatment exist between literature and women's literature. Whi-

In Croatian novels in the late 19th century and early 20th, intellectual literary heroes travelled back and forth to Vienna, Prague and Budapest, speaking in German or Hungarian.

le literature gladly bears the burden of universalist values, women's literature wrestles with narrow, inborn specifics. When women write about sex, for instance, theirs is treated as a female perspective, while when men write about sex, their perspective is perceived as universal. Although every writer is "a personality," "a self," in the practice of literary theory, literary history and sociology, women writers are invariably "treated" in formations, in groups of two, three or four, especially if they come from small countries. Two Bulgarian women writers, three East European women writers, and so on. Gender-oriented female literary critics are seldom of much help. It turns out that a sisterly concern for the status of writing women has contributed to promotion of women writers, but also to keeping the sisters ghettoised, with the one difference that the ghetto has become more visible and loud. The long awaited right to create one's own self-definition in terms of gender, ethnicity and race ultimately, in most cases, becomes a nightmare and a punishment.

Affairs on the world literary map are, in fact, a bit more complex than that. They cannot be explained away by binary relations between the periphery and the centre, between big and little literatures, or zones of influence and domination among the nation-, race- and gender-marked literary texts. It is enough to dwell on the gargantuan literary production of China for our optimism to deflate about the rise of value of the Lithuanian, Croatian and Estonian shares on the European literary marketplace. Our understanding of the complexity of relations in the world "literary republic" will surely be helped more by the economic and political perspective and discourse (such as employed by Pascale Casanova in her book The World Republic of Letters), notions such as "literary capital," "the economics of literature," "the verbal marketplace," "the world market of intellectual goods," "invisible wars," "immaterial wealth," "literary policy," than by the more traditional literary concepts.

So, fellow writers, let us rise to the challenges of capital and – physics! Because the only ones who rely today on metaphysics, as an alibi for what they do, are criminals.

Dubravka Ugresic was born in 1949 in Croatia. She taught literature at the University of Zagreb until 1993. Then she had to emigrate for political reasons. She has worked as a lecturer at various American and European universities, and has received numerous prizes for her writing, including the 1995 European Essay Prize Charles Veillon. One of her recent works, published in English, is: ***Baba Yaga Laid an Egg*** (2009)

Localizer

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Like colleagues, at least For centuries, the peoples of east and south-eastern Europe have lived a rather lowly existence, pushed into a corner of the continent time and again. Literature provides the opportunity to explore the many faces of their everyday lives. Because reading lets us into someone else's mind, inviting us to settle down and make ourselves comfortable in between the writer's thoughts. *By Andrea Grill*

First of all, please forgive me for talking about my own book. It may seem like I'm blowing my own trumpet - especially since I'm discussing my latest work. Self-promotion is sometimes unavoidable. But when I was asked for my opinion on the impact of foreign-language literature on inter-cultural relationships and progress in Europe, it was more a case of wanting to focus on something I know a great deal about. The quest to really 'know' about a topic is always fraught with risk. But I think an author can more or less safely claim to know his or her own book pretty well.

My third book was being discussed in Albanian newspapers before people in Austria even really noticed it has been published. How can that be? The novel is in German and was released by an Austrian publisher. The Albanian reviewers had obviously not even read it. But they had figured out the gist of the story, and even renamed the protagonist. His name is Galip. They call him Dalip. And they praise the book. The book they haven't read. But why? Why so much interest in a story that barely anyone in Albania can even understand? Not even the journalists who write about it?

Aleko Likaj writes in an article: "Stories like this where Albanians play a leading role in the works of European authors are becoming increasingly commonplace. This encourages us, and above all it makes us feel better – like colleagues, at least."

Like colleagues, at least! I had not expected that. I didn't think the mere existence of my protagonist could make somebody feel better. As the author of the story up for discussion, I am both pleased and concerned. Have you ever been glad to learn that the main character in a book is German, English, French, Italian, Austrian, Portuguese or Swiss? And as a German, English, French, Italian, Austrian, Portuguese or Swiss per-

son have you ever felt proud to hear that a fellow countryman or woman plays a part in a novel you can't even understand? I have to say, I can't ever remember encountering an Austrian in a novel and being particularly proud. I don't recall being especially happy to read about someone from my own country. I think we only get excited about things that appear out of the ordinary to us. Not about normal things. But perhaps we should learn to. Because something that is ordinary to us, is extraordinary for someone else.

Like colleagues ... The first in a series of questions that precluded the request to write this essay was: What role can literature play in European relations? The answer can be summed up in a single sentence: Literature provides an opportunity to explore the many faces of normality that people who speak a different language and who live in a different region experience. Of course, there are other ways to do this, too: a movie or TV show, a painting, a trip to the country in question. But these all lack the blank spaces that are unique to literature. The gaps between the words which allow the reader to interpret this very different reality in his or her own very personal way, to truly take it on board. Reading lets us into someone else's mind, inviting us to settle down and make ourselves comfortable in between the writer's thoughts.

As Albanian poet Luljeta Lleshanaku writes in her poem *Yellow Books*, "He who devours books, devours himself, piece by piece." The poem is about the importance of once forbidden books. Books that were hidden away and read secretly. Or books that were kept hidden because owning them was something special. The poet can hardly remember anything about the content of them, only the act of hiding them. But a book, a frozen moment in time, remains one of the few real truths. Even an unread work is true and important and bears witness to a different reality, outside the communist regime, an alternative reality that embraces all books. An unread book symbolises hope and its very presence makes a mark on the minds of its potential readers.

Have you ever been glad
to learn that the main character
in a book is German, English,
French, Italian, Austrian,
Portuguese or Swiss?

Bound for eternity

Now Luljeta is holding my book in her hand. She thinks it is well made, praises its paper, its cover. My books stand out, as if they have been bound to last forever or for a short eternity at least. Albanian books begin to come apart after being thumbed through ten times. They appear temporary, embody the short term. And perhaps they are more honest than our hard-bound tomes. In another poem, Lieshanaku writes: "She makes mistakes like a child, she has a beautiful voice./ She breathes lightly, like a lizard resting on tiles warmed by the sun/ like a blade of grass/ like an unbuttoned shirt." She wants to have my book. She compliments me on it. Even though she cannot read it. "Above all, she helps us feel better."

In *Gott rückwärts und seine Geliebte*, a novel by Albanian author Visa Zhiti, a friend of the protagonist is Austrian, a photographer from Vienna. Did I feel better because of

this? Was I surprised to encounter someone from Vienna in the work of a writer who had only visited the city once? Not for one moment. I wasn't surprised. I found it quite normal. Of course, people from Vienna can play a central role in a work of literature. Albanians – and I'm using them as an example because I know them but there are of course, countless other potential protagonists who I don't know – are absent. It's as if they didn't exist. Literature is sometimes an excellent reflection of politics. Albania is almost entirely surrounded by Europe. Even the cash machines in neighboring Montenegro issue euro bills. But not in Tirana. Cash machines in Tirana issue ... yes, exactly, who knows what the bank notes are called? They're called Lekë. Albania has its own currency. And nobody knows what it pays for.

Of course it is mostly easier to write about oneself than to write about others. Easier to put oneself in one's own position (if one is not already in it) than in someone else's shoes. In 1988, Austrian author Karl-Markus Gauß wrote in his work *Tinte ist bitter*: "Alongside the classical western European, grandiose, historical Europe lives a second Europe. The modest, peripheral Europe of the east and south east peoples, pushed into a corner and suppressed time and again." In this case, the author was only Austrian in so far as he was born there and spoke German as his native language. Which part of Europe, which little-known population would he have not written about?

It turns out his remark was a prophecy. It's 21 years later and the sentence could have been written today. Gauß continues: "These are people who are predestined to live outside European walls, forming a kind of glacis against Ottoman and Mongolian dangers and all other threats, whether political or military." They are certainly not predestined from a higher authority, such as God's grace. You could say that it just turned out that way. And you could also say that Europe's richer countries wanted it that way.

Visa Zhiti's hero ends up in Vienna after his journey through Europe, a journey he makes backwards. It's the turn of the millennium. And what does he do in Vienna at the turn of the millennium? He commits suicide. The author later explained to me that he had his protagonist die in Vienna, a place he loves, as an honor to the city.

My main character doesn't kill himself. He returns to Albania, alive and well after spending a while in Austria. A country that, in the early nineties, seems shiny and golden, a land of plenty. But in time, it turns out to be nothing but a giant sausage stall. A place he even has to defend, once he gains his Austrian citizenship, from external dangers that allegedly come from across the same border he illegally crossed years earlier (see Gauß's prediction above). Instead of committing suicide in Vienna, he returns to Tirana.

For the first time, I've noticed the reversed order of my *Tränenlachen* and Zhiti's *Gott rückwärts und seine Geliebte*. Both novels are about finding a way into an EU country and about love. In one of the works, the journey leads to Vienna and death in the Danube and in the other, it leads back to Tirana.

A second question that this essay aims to answer is: should we take a greater interest in

our neighbors' writers to learn more about their countries? Yes.

Further questions: What characterises European culture? Can it contribute toward a European sense of togetherness that is still not felt on the continent?

Steam on the skin

I find the first question rather strange. Because on the one hand I don't miss any sense of togetherness. Quite the contrary: if you have ever been to California and driven through Death Valley, the hottest place on earth, and if you have ever gotten out of your car there for five minutes with steam coming off your skin to take a photo, and met someone just as burning hot who asks you to take a photo of him, and he turns out to be from Europe – then you've experienced a sense of togetherness. However, feeling something is one thing, actually defining what this feeling is, is something quite different.

I'll quote Karl-Markus Gauß again but this time I would like to replace the words Central Europe with Europe: "Central Europe is not a lost continent, as it is often so thoughtlessly portrayed but largely undiscovered. It is not a lost home land that one once had but the beginnings of a cultural identity, of a diverse identity."

We like defining ourselves by nationalities and for Europeans that is even more absurd than for Americans or Australians. But there is hardly a country in Europe that has the same borders and boundaries it did 100 years ago. Countless people have changed nationality in the last 20 years without even relocating. They live in the same house in the same street, yet suddenly they have become someone else. This is what happened to Macedonian writer Salajdin Salihu. He grew up as a Yugoslavian. Now he is a Macedonian. He writes in Albanian. Because, yes, Albanian is one of the languages spoken in Macedonia.

It's simple, said Abel. The state he was born in and then left behind almost ten years ago has now been divided into three to five new states. And none of these three to five states feel they should give someone like him citizenship.

This is another European protagonist. His name is Abel and he was created by Hungarian author Terézia Mora. She writes in German. Her debut novel was called *Alle Tage*. Incidentally, but most definitely not coincidently, this is also the title of a poem by Ingeborg Bachmann. The first line reads: "The war is no longer explained /merely continued. The unthinkable has become a day-to-day normality."

Well, she claimed – in fact, she promised – that she would only talk about her own book, about something she knows a lot about. And what is she doing? She's quoting others left right and centre. Yes, you're right. I've noticed it too – and I like it. I like the way the different voices are gradually making themselves heard. "A spark of rebellion," is what Gauß called it, "not a confession candle for conservatism." I would add: not a confession candle for communism.

Recently, I was in Berlin. In Hamburg Station in the German capital, there is a mu-

Even in
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seum of the present. Museum of the present – is that not a contradiction in terms? When I was there, there was an exhibition called The Murder of Crows. It was in a gigantic hall with a wooden floor, red foldable chairs with black speakers on them. In the museum shop, I came across a postcard, a group photo of a variety of men, artists, I assume. I didn't buy it, so I don't have it now to check if my memory serves me correctly. They're posing in front of the museum and underneath is a sentence along the lines of: "I'm glad that nothing has happened today, apart from my getting up, eating breakfast and then going to bed again later." The museum is located in close proximity to a bridge that served as a border between East and West Berlin between 1961 and 1989. The person who spoke that sentence was someone for whom nothing happening was totally out of the ordinary. Someone who knows that this everyday situation is constantly under threat. And he thinks he could lose it any second, as quick as a flash, everything he knows could turn into the extreme.

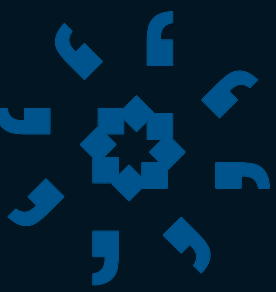
Over half of all published translations at the moment originate from English. Translations from Albanian to Lithuanian are rare. This can and will change. But until then, the unread book perhaps represents the European feeling of togetherness. It exits, it has to exist. It is very close, hardly a few hundred kilometers away. People open it, are impressed by the printing. The letters, despite being familiar (the majority of Europe, including Albania, uses the Roman alphabet) seem to swim around in front of our eyes. Europe is aware of all these unread books. Knowing that one of our fellow countrymen or women is the hero of a novel written in a different language is our sense of togetherness.

I will leave the last words to Salajdin Salihi, I couldn't have said it better myself: "Poets come too late. They are natives of tomorrow. Usually, they're in a hurry, these proud cardinal birds. They come across like children and play with toys they've created themselves. Poets come too late. And never know if they've arrived."

Translation: Anna Gentle

Andrea Grill studied biology, Italian, Spanish and linguistics in Salzburg, Thessaloniki and Tirana. She spent a number of years living in Cagliari on Sardinia. In 2003, she gained her PhD at the University of Amsterdam for her thesis on Sardinian butterflies. In addition to her scientific work, Andrea writes literary texts and translates from Albanian. In 2007, she entered for the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in Klagenfurt. Publications: ***Endemism in Sardinia***, ***Amsterdam*** 2003, ***Der gelbe Onkel***, Salzburg 2005, ***Zweischritt***, Salzburg 2007, ***Tränenlachen***, Salzburg 2008.

Scala



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The anti-Europe

What do you think of when you hear the word 'Balkans'? Do you imagine idyllic Adriatic beaches and tasty foods? Or do you think of blood, suffering and the threat of war? The borders blur in the mind and the south-east of the continent remains outside.

By Slavenka Drakulic

I must admit that I don't like the name the Balkans. But you might rightly ask: how is it possible that I don't like this name? Aren't names neutral and, in a sense, also innocent because it all depends on how we use them, and in what context? Or is the name the Balkans more like a kind of supermarket where different people walk around with a shopping basket, filling it with meanings already displayed on the shelves? What reasons could I have to get emotional about this particular name? After all, the name of a geographic region is not a person to be liked or not.

But I could answer that I do have a reason, a valid reason for this antipathy: I witnessed this name, the Balkans, being transformed into the verb to balkanize – and I, together with so many others, suffered the consequences of this metamorphosis. Here I don't want to discuss how we could have prevented this from happening – that would be a stupid post-festum lamentation – but how this verb could become just a noun again.

We have all heard or read about the balkanization of the Soviet Union. Often I also spot titles in newspapers like "The Balkanization of Kenya" or "Washington promotes Bolivia's balkanization." Just recently, reading a book by Ryszard Kapuscinski about Africa, I ran into the following sentence: "The African is well versed in this geography of intertribal friendships and hatreds, no less critical than those existing today in the Balkans."

Synonymous with division

If you go onto Google, you will find 277,000 entries for balkanization, and Wikipedia will explain to you that balkanization is: "a geopolitical term originally used to describe the process of fragmentation or division of a region or state into smaller re-

gions or states that are often hostile or non-cooperative with each other (…) The term has arisen from the conflicts in the 20th century Balkans. The first balkanization was embodied in the Balkan Wars, and the term was reaffirmed in the Yugoslav wars. The term is also used to describe other forms of disintegration (…) In January 2007, regarding a rise in support for Scottish independence, Gordon Brown talked of the "Balkanization of Britain."

The definition in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary adds that balkanization is a transitive verb, whose synonyms are to "divide" and "compartmentalize." Needless to say, this is a notorious word and because of the verb, the noun – or name – has a specific meaning too: it is not only a name any more, it is not innocent.

What Europe is not

Going back to my metaphor of a supermarket, what you find today in that shopping basket depends, of course, on where you are shopping. If you happen to be doing your shopping in, say, Vienna or in some other place in the "West" or "Europe" (and there are other supermarkets loaded with meanings almost to the point of bursting!) your understanding is, to put it very simply, that the Balkans is what Europe is not. Never mind geography, the frontier is somewhere in the mind more than in the landscape itself. For contemporary people, it is most likely in their memory in the form of television images from the recent wars.

The frontier is somewhere in the mind more than in the landscape itself.

If you close your eyes for a moment and say the Balkans, what comes to your mind are probably images of refugees, women with head scarves crying, the ruins of Vukovar, dead bodies, more dead bodies, Christianne Amanpour of CNN reporting from some site of tragedy and destruction. Then, perhaps you might remember the numbers (over 7,000 Muslim men executed in Srebrenica, 60,000 women raped, 200,000 dead in Bosnia, 10,000 children wounded and so on). Or, if you don't remember numbers, you probably still remember faces, especially that of a skeleton-like young man behind the barbed wire fence of a Serbian concentration camp in Omarska, Bosnia. Or the faces of war criminals like Ratko Mladic, a mop-headed Radoslav Karadzic or Slobodan Milosevic. What comes to my mind, however, is a pullover, a white handmade pullover with red splotches. It belongs to the father of a little girl who was killed by shrapnel. As her father held her tiny body, her blood soaked into his pullover which he was still wearing shortly afterwards, when the CNN camera filmed him.

More than just a name

How could you blame a person for remembering all that when hearing the name the Balkans? Some of you will probably also remember the extraordinary blue color of the Adriatic sea or the fine food, or the beach with small white pebbles there, the beach you visited with your parents back in the 1960s when everything was different. But I am afraid that the idea of the Balkans as non-Europe has already become strongly

re-established in the collective mind since you last visited that idyllic place.

The Balkans is far from being merely a name. Maria Todorova's book *Imagining the Balkans* has made people even more aware of the "imaginary geography" we are dealing with here, to use Edward Said's expression.

Mythology rules history

To refresh our memory, Todorova points out that the Balkans is an old name (the Turkish name for the Stara Planina mountain in Bulgaria) but a rather new expression, dating from the end of the 19th century. Then, in a kind of "literary colonization," the Balkans slowly became a dark, dangerous but also exotic place. This happened thanks to various Western writers, from Bram Stoker and Karl May to Rebecca West and Agatha Christie, I might add, all the way to the postwar memoires of politicians like David Owen and Richard Holbrooke or the "travel" books of Robert Kaplan and Peter Handke.

The Balkans became a space where mythology rules history, inhabited by wild and exotic people to whom blood and belonging are the most important values, where conflicts and religious wars are forever looming overhead in this space of insecurity.

Of course, as a consequence, people inhabiting this space-name-verb-image-symbol-landscape became prisoners of the negative connotations themselves. They (we) do not like to belong there and therefore we try to get out of where we don't want to belong. Looking at it from what one would consider an inside view of the Balkans, it looks different: "The Balkans – that's the others!" as Rastko Mocnik, a Slovene sociologist, expressed it in his ingenious paraphrase. And consequently, each of us, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs and so on, look further East for the Balkans as this symbolic/imaginary border moves from Vienna's Landstrasse to Trieste and Ljubljana, then to Zagreb and Sarajevo and then to Belgrade and even more southeast to Pristina. No border in this world is so flexible because it is not so much a border as a perception.

Brawl in the Balkan bar

Todorova's analysis of the history of negative images of the Balkans is very interesting (by the way, she names me as one of those writers who exploits the negative

image, using it as a transitive verb instead of a noun – and I admit I did). However, I myself remember how that change took place during the last decade. Although, as we have already heard, the transformation of the name did not start in 1991. It started with the Balkan wars and with Gavrilo Princip's assassination of Franz Ferdinand and, a generation later, with the Second World War and then with Yugoslavia falling apart. In the Yugoslavia of those days, the expression "the Balkans" was not so much in use and if it was, not exclusively in a negative way. It was used to define someone's primitive behaviour, as when a husband beats his wife. The Croatian writer Miroslav Krleza's famous expression for politics as a "balkanska krčma" – i.e. a Balkan pub where, once the light is switched off, the fighting starts – was the other way we used it. But for young people there was also Johnny Stulic's popular song *Balkane moj* (My Balkans) from the mid-eighties, and it did not incorporate any of those "old" pejorative meanings.

However, we cannot dismiss this whole negative imagery because it is not only imaginary; the latest wars really re-affirmed this mental landscape as a place of horror and divisions. Moreover, new borders have been drawn and they are indeed not only symbolic but real, painted with the bright red colour of blood.

The whole story of the Balkans as the name-turned-verb is even more painful to me personally as a writer because real wars were preceded by "the war of words." In this way I witnessed the harm words can do. No war happens just like that; it takes propaganda and a long psychological preparation before the killing can start. It is usually people in culture, education and the media, such as writers, teachers, artists and, of course, journalists, who are entrusted with such a task by the regime. This should remind us that culture and its representatives are not necessarily or by definition a positive force in society – let us not forget that Radovan Karadžić was a poet and Dobrica Ćosić a writer

Every time I give a reading or a speech in the West and in spite of the fact that so many years have passed, and so many texts in the newspapers have been written, television programmes presented and books published, perhaps a thousand of them – I get the same question: how and why did the war in Yugoslavia start? Indeed, why did such a prosperous country, free from Soviet-type communism and out of reach of Moscow, collapse in such a bloody, brutal war? My favourite and very laconic answer is: our country collapsed because of Italian shoes! Because we were able to travel abroad and from time to time shop for what we could not find at home, we believed that we were free. We did not bother to develop any kind

Let us not forget that Radovan Karadžić was a poet and Dobrica Ćosić a writer.

of democratic political alternative and that vacuum, after the collapse of Communism, was later filled by nationalism.

After all these years (seventeen since the beginning of the last wars and thirteen since they ended) during which one whole generation had time to grow up, not only in the Balkans but in the West too, what do they know today? What does this young generation in the West know about the Balkans, except for the clichés? Here I have a problem with Western Europeans.

A shield of memories

After so many years, I suspect that people here do not want to understand how it all happened. It is too complicated, they usually say. At first I thought it was only laziness that prevented them from finally learning a few historic facts. But after being asked the same question time and again, I changed my mind. Now I think these terrible television images from the wars in the Balkans, are a very efficient excuse for not understanding; we, people from there, and our wars cannot be understood at all, simply because we are so very different; in fact, these images and memories serve as a kind of shield. If the Europeans were to say they understood these frightening events, it would mean we were all the same, or at least similar. But it is safer to reject such a possibility and keep a necessary, healthy distance from such neighbours (remembering that the Balkans is what Europe is not).

As if the West were a pristine territory, unblemished by the touch of evil ... as if, for example, European national states or revolutions had not been born in blood … as if Auschwitz had not taken place ... Yes, but – one might argue – at least it was more elegant! No blood there, no knives, no slaughter, no visible brutality. Images of emaciated dead bodies? They are perhaps not forgotten but just pushed back deeper into the memory, there has to be some space left for the latest horrors, such as Baghdad or Abu Ghraib.

Beyond the horror quota

After all, one can take in just so much; there must be a horror-quota, a point after which violence means nothing any more. Which makes me think about how long it took for the Germans to get rid of the image of being genocidal butchers, people prone to obey any order. That constituted for a very long period of time the idea of the German character to all of us, including me. Such a historical perspective makes me hopeful: these thirteen years from the end of the war in the Balkans is not so much time, is it?

On the other hand, if, after almost nine decades, the name "The Balkans" boils down to the meaning of a transitory verb, how long will it then take to reverse that? Can this name still be cleaned and polished? Can we make it shine again as a personal

noun? The question is, how do we do that? First, I think we – and now I mean us from former Yugoslavia – should admit that indeed, we contributed to the revival of the "balkanization," because the verb to "balkanize" was re-established with our help. We, not foreigners, fought the wars against each other. And to admit it would be the beginning of a change, of cleaning and polishing. One does it with words and images, with culture, art and the media, of course, in exactly the same way the negative image was created!

However, in the process of transformation of Communist societies into democracies, culture and the arts are clearly losers. While money from the state budget is constantly on the decline, there is no developed system of private sponsorship either. Rather, big private local firms invest in sports! What is worse is that public interest in culture and the arts is declining as well. The struggle for survival in cowboy-capitalism leaves no time or energy or money for culture: for example, the average income in former communist countries in the Balkans is a few hundred Euros (200-700) per month. At the same time, the price of a book is as high as in the West, if not even higher.

In the domain of mass media, we are experiencing a strong competition between public and commercial interests. Newspapers are turning into money-making machines, which means that public space is shrinking and space for culture is disappearing. There is no money in culture unless it is willing to serve as propaganda; now no longer a political one, it is called advertising. It seems that, so far, what we gained with the new political and economic regime in the cultural sphere is freedom. But what can one do with freedom without money?

Clearly, culture exposed to the market means its marginalisation. But culture is too important to be exposed only to the market. The importance of culture/arts is that it represents capital, i.e. culture produces "symbolic capital" which has the power of social inclusion and of spreading values. By culture here I mean people who produce cultural artefacts today: performances, videos, books, exhibitions, movies, music, theatre.

Culture for export

The paradox of culture and the arts – because of the comparatively small quantity of money invested therein – is that it is the best export and it creates a notable presence for the country or region within the wider community. It also creates a certain balance because even a small country can contribute a lot: for example, not long ago when the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra had a concert in Vienna, Franz Morak, the former Austrian State Secretary said: "This is the biggest success of Croatian foreign policy in the last ten years."

Art and culture
are the cheapest and quickest
route to Europe.

By presenting and perceiving a country through culture and art you get a different and differentiated picture, undermining the image that usually reduces the countries in the region to the same common denominator. Culture can give a country instant visibility, recognition, and offer a perception of an attractive, open, interesting and culturally rich space. But the best thing about it is that through such a presentation of culture and the arts everybody can gain. The country in question can gain in that because small countries fear for their national identity, culture and art, in affirming that identity on the wider scene, work against that fear of being lost in the EU and against the anxiety of globalisation.

Art and culture are, if you will, practical political tools for achieving positive effects on both the external and the internal level. They are the cheapest and quickest route to Europe.

The survivors of Europe

I think that we in the Balkans must ask ourselves another important question. What could be our contribution to the EU, to the future home of us all? Usually when we are asked such a question, we are silent for a while, somehow embarrassed because we are not posing it to ourselves! But then, quickly, (improvisation is believed to be one of our strong points!) we come up with a "witty" answer: to survive! We will teach you how to survive against all the odds! Not really thinking that to you such knowledge might be superficial. Yet, we can't admit this to ourselves.

Our life under communism was all about survival, and realising that nobody needs that knowledge now would make us feel even more of a burden. Our life would look wasted somehow. Yet the answer seems obvious to me. There are two things we could contribute: one is culture and art production and the other are young, educated people endowed with wit, intelligence and curiosity.

If there is no culture, the economy and politics alone will not work, not in the long run. The EU needs a glue and it can come only from another sphere, from the sphere to which every country, however small and politically controversial it may be, can contribute as well.

Although it does not seem very obvious – but it is visible in more than one way – people are still looking for something more than just money. At least in Europe. And so, to conclude: if, indeed, the Balkans is returning to Europe, it should be returning in the form of a noun and not as a verb.

Translation: Richard Briggs

Slavenka Drakulic Is one of the most widely known Croatian writers. Her works of fiction and non-fiction have been translated into many languages. These include ***They Would Never Hurt a Fly – War Criminals on Trial in The Hague*** (2005) and the novel ***Frida's Bed*** (2008). She lives in Vienna and Istria.

Kultur der Angst Ausgerechnet Schriftsteller und Journalisten, Regisseure und Philosophen spielten eine unrühmliche Rolle, als im ehemaligen Jugoslawien das Rad der Geschichte zurückgedreht wurde. Heute sind in diesem Teil Europas die Schrecken der Vergangenheit noch immer wach. Die Menschen sorgen sich um die Zukunft. Literatur, Film und der intellektuelle Austausch können diesen Zustand nur beschreiben. Ein Bericht über eine Reise nach Kosovo. *Von Beqë Cufaj*

Meine Fahrt beginnt Mitte Juni. Hätte ich das Flugzeug genommen, wäre sie nach zweieinhalb Stunden überstanden gewesen. Aber diesmal habe ich beschlossen, nicht zu fliegen. Und so nehme ich die lange Reise auf dem Landweg von Deutschland über Österreich, Ungarn und Serbien nach Kosovo gerne in Kauf.

Der Zug nach Budapest unterscheidet sich von anderen Zügen auf dem Münchner Hauptbahnhof. Er hat nur zwei Waggons, die von dunkler Farbe sind. Vor den Waggons wartet ein Schaffner, der nicht nur die Fahrkarten der Reisenden zu sehen wünscht, sondern auch ihre Pässe verlangt, ehe er jedem das Abteil zuweist, in dem er die Reise zurückzulegen hat. Der Schaffner ist ein Ungar. Er trägt einen Schnurrbart und sein Deutsch ist so gemächlich wie seine Muttersprache. Ich überreiche ihm Fahrkarte und Pass und bestelle zwei Bier, für die ich ihm das Doppelte des Preises bezahle. Das ist kein Zeichen übertriebener Großzügigkeit meinerseits, sondern hat praktische Gründe. Ich verfüge noch über einen der blauen Reisepässe, wie sie in Ex-Jugoslawien ausgestellt wurden, und darin befinden sich eine Menge von Visa und Stempeln aller möglicher Schengen- und Nichtschengenstaaten. Ein solcher Pass ist eigentlich schon unbrauchbar, denn die ganzen Einträge animieren Grenzpolizisten, vor allem ungarische, zu langen Befragungen, bei denen man sich manchmal vorkommt wie ein ordinärer Verbrecher.

Der Schaffner versteht meine Trinkgeldbotschaft, was mich außerordentlich beruhigt.

Ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln

Das Coupé teile ich mir mit einem koreanischen Touristen. Die Verständigung erfolgt auf Englisch. Er ist in meinem Alter, stammt aus Seoul und befindet sich auf einer Europareise. Wir unterhalten uns über unseren Kontinent, und ich stelle fest, dass der Koreaner über Europa redet, wie wir ge-

I live in Germany, I am not German. And I completely ignore the second part of the question that refers to the European in me. "You are a European though, right?" he asks me, this time without enquiring after my eating preferences and the reason for my trip.

This reassures me and I settle into my journey, with the help of a beer and a Milan Kundera book that I have been meaning to re-read for a long time (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*). Travelling overnight from Munich to Budapest, you find yourself waking up in a different world. In the world you left behind everything is in its right place and there are clear rules. Here, everything appears depressive, tired and uncertain.

Even the Hungarian conductor's expression has changed since we left Munich. He returns our passports and pours coffee without asking how we had slept. Only after I have drunk my coffee am I ready to begin another conversation. I warn my Korean companion about the crooks and shady characters in Budapest, and I am not referring to pickpockets but taxi drivers and the hotel reception staff. These people always make sure that you end up somewhere where they have a relation. For instance, the taxi driver will take you to the hotel where his nephew works on the reception. This same nephew will then recommend a lovely – most probably Chinese – restaurant that happens to belong to his cousin. And the very same cousin will point you in the direction of a quaint place to get a cup of coffee after dinner, no doubt owned by a good friend. As a tourist in Hungary, it is nearly impossible to avoid being caught up in this web of relations. My Korean friend gave me a look to say he understood. I hope, for his sake, that he did.

The train then arrived in Keleti and, before both feet had reached the platform, we were set upon by dozens of taxi drivers, and old women carrying signs adorned with peculiar English messages, such as Hotel for fast free. In contrast to the day before our train looked rather handsome among the others in the station. In the throng of the crowd I was separated from my Korean friend before I had the chance to say goodbye.

Hungary has changed a lot. It is arguably a typical central European city, an admixture of the globalisation of today and a hangover of the past. As a citizen of one of these countries (Tito's former Yugoslavia), I cannot hide my envy. As Hungary and similar countries were managing to break free from their communist shackles at the end of the 1980s, Tito's state was the wealthiest and most liberal in the old communist bloc. Not only that, but cities like Budapest paled in comparison to Skopje, Pristina, Belgrad, Zagreb, Sarajevo und Ljubljana.

However, thanks to nationalistic politics, our people saw the wheels of history being reversed. This was promoted by the Serbian nationalist elite – authors, journalists, artistic directors, philosophers – who enabled the nationalistic apparatchik Slobodan Milosevic to come to power.

Within a decade, spanning the abolishment of autonomy in Kosovo in 1989 and the end of the Kosovo war in 1999, seven

new states and many more new borders came into being. At the same time, the fall of the former Yugoslavia triggered one of the bloodiest chapters in modern history.

I think that there traces of the past stuck somewhere in my memories and emotions. My last experience with the Serbian police was sometime in the mid-1990s, when I was a student. Along with three fellow students, I was left beaten and bloodied on the streets. The reason: we had "illegally" continued studying after being expelled from state-owned lecture theatres. After this I left the country and only had to see Serbian police in photos and on the television. However, I carry with me a sense of trepidation about my next encounter with a blue uniform.

Albanians on the advance

I had agreed to travel together with a German friend from Budapest, through Serbia to Kosovo. And as we departed in the early morning, he tried his best to talk the fear out of me. Everything is OK, he said. Many things have changed in Serbia, including the police. As we approach the Serbian border I try to calm myself with the thought that a certain amount of fear is natural – especially for an Albanian from Kosovo and especially here, with everything that has happened.

The early hour means there is not a lot of traffic at the border between Hungary and Vojvodina, and it is not long before we are at the red and white barriers. A policeman in a small cabin with grubby windows takes the passports from my German friend. I look on from the passenger seat as he scribbles something down, and how thoroughly he studies the non-German passport with the Albanian-sounding name.

Nevertheless, he asks no questions. He just informs my German companion that to enter the country he needs to pay a fee for the car, and a few moments later we find ourselves in Vojvodina, Serbia's wealthiest province. The flat green countryside we drove through was shrouded in a light fog and the bleak sky mirrored my mood. I couldn't help wonder what was waiting for us.

We were moving at a steady pace and were confident of reaching Belgrade in good time. The streets on the outskirts were quiet. However, the closer we got to the city centre, the slower our journey became. Eventually we were at a standstill and the traffic jam grew to worse than anything I had seen at rush hour in Germany. My friend grew restless. He had often travelled this route on his way to Kosovo or Macedonia but this was worse than anything he had experienced. So there we were, stuck in Belgrade. In Serbian, the name Belgrade translates as "white city" but in reality it is grey, unbearably grey.

I make a joke to lighten the mood. I suggest that the city's inhabitants have gotten word there is a Kosovo-Albanian on the advance and they have closed all entries into the city. In the meantime we remain at a complete standstill. It is strange: I have a lot of friends and acquaintances in Bel-

At the end of the 1980s, Tito's state was the wealthiest and most liberal of all in the former Communist Bloc.

grade but I can't bring myself to pick up the phone and give one of them a call. The fact is, I feel like an outsider here.

So much so that when my friend tends to his private business, I stroll through the café terraces, read Serbian newspapers and leaf through Kundera. This city still bears the mark of its bloody past. The skeletons of high-storey buildings destroyed by NATO bombs are deliberately left alone to stand as monuments of hatred. Here, the past is commemorated, but at the same time we are not prepared to deal with it. The answer is nowhere to be seen.

Later on, we are invited to a Chinese restaurant. As a matter of fact, the restaurant itself is not particularly Chinese but the cook who prepares the dishes for the many customers is. At a cost of around eight euros the elaborate Chinese menu on offer is almost beyond the means of Belgrade's inhabitants.

After lunch we set off for Kosovo. The motorway beyond Belgrade is only sparsely populated, a direct consequence of the extortionate motorway fees. The road cuts through the middle of Serbia. We chose not to take the conventional route via Niš and Prokuplje. Instead, and perhaps without due consideration, we opted to drive from Niš to Leskovac, and then from there on to Kosovo, via Medveda.

Night falls slowly on the Serbian province as we pass through small towns and villages that look even more godforsaken than in the light of day. Serbia has the impression of a dark cave with broken, rundown and depressed people. "Nothing is worse for a population than this kind of depression," I say. My German companion agrees. We drive through the dark, barely-lit streets of Leskovac. The route then becomes more isolated still. We travel uphill for some distance and half an hour later arrive at the border crossing at Medveda. We are stopped by four policeman, armed to the teeth. They are the kind of rough Serbian policemen who have been doing their "work" in Kosovo over the years. They take an age thumbing through our passports and my friend wonders how it is possible that a border which, according to Serbia, does not exist, can be so rigorously controlled.

One of the policemen informs us that we need to hurry if we want to cross today. The KFOR troops on the other side will be closing their border at 8pm – in a half an hour. Nevertheless, his fellow police officers take a conspicuously long time with our passports, telling us that they need to check them against real-time information. "That is impossible," reckons my friend, "I am certain there is neither computer nor telephone in this hut. They are just trying to delay us." The whole charade lasts fifty minutes, with the consequence that the two KFOR soldiers on the other side kindly inform us that we need to turn around and go back to Serbia. It is after 8pm.

It infuriates me to be back in this black hole. My German companion does his best to calm me down: "Let them have this little victory. So they have taken a few hours from you today. Ten years ago they could have taken your life."

We drive back to Niš and then on to Merdare via Kuršumlija. Three unnecessary hours. But the border formalities are

handled quickly. My native land is bathed in light. The roads are all tarmac, the neon signs on the petrol stations and shops give you the impression of being in another world. We have left the Serbian darkness behind us, for today and forever.

The country we enter is not the same as it was before the NATO advance ten years ago. It is no longer the country that existed before independence, declared in 2008. At that time, shortly after the war, three quarters of the villages in Kosovo were demolished, half of the cities looted and razed. The entire economic, political and cultural infrastructure of a country of two million people was in ruins. What still remains, however, is the clay that characterises the entire Balkan region. But aside from that, everything has changed since the KFOR peace missions began – the people, streets, houses, shops. The hectic and the nervousness of two years ago has disappeared.

Freshly-sealed bitumen roads, signs in two, or even three, languages, traffic lights, and earnest local policemen all paint a rather unfamiliar picture. The new police force comprises Albanians, Serbs and other minorities, and includes men and woman (a sensation for the Balkans). Since the creation of the Albanian police, clad in their light blue uniforms, the international "Coca-Cola Police" have no longer had to deal with the monitoring of traffic or with everyday crimes. To combat corruption, fines are no longer paid on the spot. Instead, the police often confiscate the offender's driving license until payment is made.

To date, the new, provisional Kosovan ID card is accepted in 23 states. The KFOR soldiers are still there of course but only as shadows in the background.

The lethargy of public life in the Pristina of the past is now nowhere to be seen. Instead of wasting the whole day skulking in cafés, people go to meet friends, for a coffee and a chat, before returning to their businesses. A friend of mine is convinced that, in terms of enthusiasm for their work and an inherent desire to become homeowners, the Kosovans have become like the Germans. And although he has never been to Germany and does not know the people, he is correct in noticing the underlying change that has taken place. In the past, people complained about the pain suffered and mourned the non-existent independence. Today, people are doing their jobs and nothing scares them more than the idea of the foreigners leaving Kosovo. From the estimated 40 percent of people who are employed in Kosovo today around 25 percent work for either international establishments such as KFOR, EULEX and the OECD, or for the various non-governmental organisations.

Gradually I begin to acclimatise. But I still cannot help feeling that I no longer really belong. That I am not a part of this new reality, which you could call the beginning of the beginning of normalisation.

And why shouldn't I be a little disappointed about the very meagre results of the process of reconciliation and dealing with the past? This is something that I have discussed over the years with colleagues –

In Serbian, the name Belgrade translates as 'white city' but in reality it is grey, unbearably grey.

Serbians, Croatians, Bosnians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Slovenians and also Albanians – at conferences, seminars, readings and in writing. The majority of these events took place in Europe and now appear to have been largely in vain.

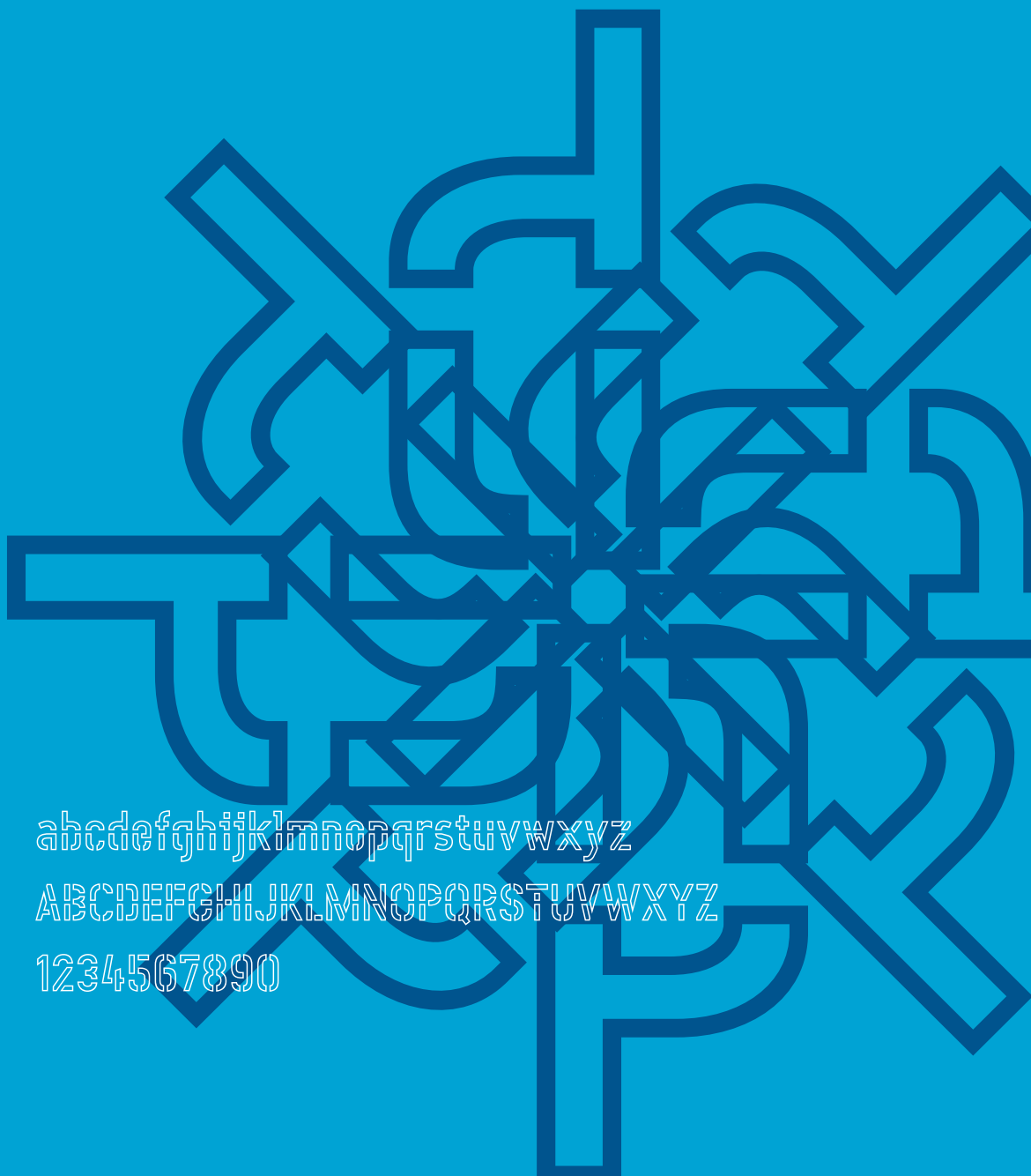
The still-unhappy human faces in Serbia and Kosovo, scarred by the past, do not suggest a fast recovery. And not because there is a danger of further war but because economic concerns and fears for the future render coexistence fragile. In such cases, culture, literature, film and intellectual exchange only allow us to describe the situation. This fear is always noticeable where the ashen-faced hold sway, from the border to the passersby on the street. That is just the way it is. Nothing more, nothing less.

I decide to take the plane back to Germany, my second home.

Translation: Jason Humphreys

Beqë Cufaj was born in 1970 and is a writer. He lives in Germany and Kosovo. ***Strange Country's Brightness*** is the English translation of one of his recent works.

Offline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Poles apart? For decades, the conflict in Northern Ireland cast its shadow over the daily lives of the people. Europe was hardly anything more than a distant dream. The peace agreement in Northern Ireland brought a sense of normality and a degree of prosperity to the region. And this in turn brought working migrants from other parts of Europe to Northern Ireland. It is thanks to them that the people of Northern Ireland have moved a little bit closer to the European continent. *By Glenn Patterson*

I am not sure if you could call it political folklore exactly, but the Irish novelist Colm Tóibín tells a very interesting story. (Sorry, the Irish novelist Colm Tóibín tells many very interesting stories. This one, however, to the best of my knowledge has not yet appeared in one of his very interesting books.) On Sunday January 30, 1972 – Bloody Sunday as it came to be known – British soldiers shot and killed fourteen unarmed civilians at a Civil Rights march in Derry, Northern Ireland's second city. Three days later a crowd of more than twenty thousand marched on the British Embassy in Dublin's Merrion Square. Violence broke out; petrol bombs were thrown. An attempt was made to blow the embassy doors off their hinges. At the height of the protest Union Jacks were hung from the front of the building and set alight. The embassy was burnt to the ground.

That night – that historical moment – says Colm Tóibín, who was there, was pivotal, not just for him as an individual, but for all of Southern Irish society. There were only two options: you either followed through on the logic of the flames – threw yourself heart and soul into the conflagration that was raging across the border – or you let the embassy fire be an end point. Like the vast majority, Tóibín chose the latter option. In the aftermath of February 2, 1972, the Republic of Ireland, 'the South' in every day speech, in the title of Colm Tóibín's own first novel (although it is partly set in Spain), the South turned its back on the North and in the same metaphoric motion turned its face towards Europe.

Provincial insularity

In January 1973 the Republic of Ireland joined the Common Market, as it was then. Northern Ireland, as an "administrative re-

gion of the United Kingdom," to give it its correct title, joined at the same time. But while the South embraced Europe enthusiastically, the North continued to find less productive things to do with its arms. Northern Ireland, in fact, entered into a period of intense parochialism in which the sense of belonging was often to an area of a few square miles – sometimes considerably less. Belfast was so comprehensively divided that many people left "their area" only to work, assuming, that is, they had work to leave for. The borders between these sectarian cantons were marked with flags and wall murals and, of course, with graffiti. One of the most common slogans in loyalist, or Protestant, working class parts of town was "No Pope Here," a reminder that in the very distant past the conflict that was consuming so much of our energy and economy – so many of our citizens' lives – had been part of a wider European religious war.

When in October 1978 Cardinal Karol Jozef Wojtyla was named Pope John Paul the Second, the graffiti changed, in what passes with us for humour, to "No Pole Here." It was less a threat than a statement of fact. Even given the conditions prevailing in their own country in 1978, few Poles in their right minds would surely have dreamt of relocating to Belfast. Looking back almost thirty years at film footage of that time the city does have the air of a police state, where 'police' could be extended to cover those paramilitary organisations who held sway in loyalist and republican districts and who had their own very crude way of silencing oppositional voices: tape across the mouth, a hood over the head and a bullet in the nape of the neck.

Northern Ireland is famously a place where you cannot walk down a street without bumping into a poet, or at least cannot walk into a bar without bumping into one.

Northern Ireland is famously a place where you cannot walk down a street without bumping into a poet, or at least cannot walk into a bar without bumping into one. Nothing any poet has written, however, comes as close to capturing the mood of those years for me as the words of a group of young men barely out of their teens: Belfast punk band Stiff Little Fingers, whose debut album, released four months after the No Pole Here graffiti started to appear, contained a song called simply *Here We Are Nowhere*. It went: "Here we are nowhere, nowhere left to go. Here we are nowhere, nowhere left to go." Or as a friend of mine at the time used to say, "Here we are floating in the Atlantic Ocean two-thirds of the way to the North Pole and we have the cheek to complain about the weather." Nowhere or near the North Pole, certainly we could not have felt further removed from the rest of Europe. We didn't even seem to be made of the same stuff. What sticks in my memory most from my teenage years seeing news reports from Strasbourg and Brussels was the amount of glass in the buildings. In Belfast the window had given way to the security grille, the slit. Not only did we not feel part of Europe, we were in danger of losing sight of it entirely.

In the opening pages of his magnificent history of Europe, the British historian Norman Davies has a neat interpretation of the myth of Europa. Europa, if you remember

your Ovid, was the mother of Minos, who while paddling in the surf of her native Phoenicia, that is to say today's southern Lebanon, encountered Zeus, in the guise of a snow-white bull. Europa allowed herself to be talked into clambering on to Zeus's back, whereupon the god whisked her across the waves to Crete. "Zeus," Davies writes, "was surely transferring the fruits of the older Asian civilizations of the east to the new island colonies of the Aegean… At the dawn of European history, the known world lay to the east. The unknown waited in the west."

This is a reversal of almost all subsequent European history in which the 'centre' moved ever more steadily west (although sadly stopping well short of us in Belfast) and in which the east was increasingly characterised as a threat, wherever the east was deemed to begin at any given moment: the Bosporus Strait or the Brandenburg Gate. For the ultimate example of this westward drift I would suggest you look no further than Disneyland Paris. The Disney Corporation spent much time and money trying to locate the exact centre of Europe – deciding finally that it lay thirteen miles southeast of Paris – only to find that in the course of the park's construction, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the break-up of Yugoslavia, history itself had shifted on its axis.

And of course all the uncertainty and anxiety about the eastern boundary arises precisely because, as Norman Davies again points out, Europe is not strictly speaking a continent at all – is not, to use the cognate English term, 'self-contained' – but is merely a peninsula, an outcrop of the world's greatest landmass.

And I am reminded here of another mighty literary figure, Albert Camus, whose work was a godsend to many of us in our Northern Irish nowhere of the late 1970s. Writing during the closing months of the Second World War, which of course like most of the twentieth century's biggest threats to Europe did not come from the east at all, Camus addresses the same question of definition. In the second of his *Letters to a German Friend* he talks about the "idea of Europe" as opposed to the "coloured spot [the Nazis have] annexed on temporary maps." Europe's real frontiers, he goes on with admirable imprecision, are "the genius of a few and the heart of all its inhabitants."

I first read Albert Camus at school. I first read Norman Davies in the late summer of 2000, on my return to Belfast from the Literature Express, a project originating in Berlin, which took one hundred and six writers on a seven-week odyssey from Lisbon to Berlin itself, via Spain, France, Belgium, northern Germany, the Baltic states, Russia, Belarus and Poland. And I had chosen Davies's Europe out of the many hundreds of books on the subject in part because I knew he was an authority on Poland, the country which, after my month and a half on the Literature Express, I decided I most needed to find out about.

Poland then was still in the middle of protracted negotiations over its application to join European Union: was still for the moment east. On one early detour into Mal-

Europe is not a continent at all – is not 'self-contained' but is merely a peninsula, an outcrop of the world's greatest landmass.

bork on our way to Kaliningrad from Hanover, the Literature Express had had to sit for an hour on a bridge across the Oder while entry papers were checked. By some extraordinary coincidence a thunderstorm broke at almost the exact moment that the border guards gave us the signal to proceed: the resultant rain mistier than an Iron Curtain, but atmospherically every bit as effective. Two days later as we crawled into Kaliningrad after another border shakedown, a Croatian writer observed, "The time machine is working: we have gone from the Seventies to the Fifties."

A functional time machine

I laughed along with him, though in truth I already felt myself smitten by the country we were leaving behind. More than smitten: over the months that followed I became evangelical about Poland, talking about it with the zeal of the convert to whoever would listen. Without understanding Polish history there was no understanding European history and of course without understanding European history there was no breaking away finally from the politics of the past, no freedom you might say from folklore. I was so fond of Poland I kept pinned to the notice board above my desk the fine I had received in Warsaw for jaywalking in my distracted state. (The fine I had received and had left the country without paying: there is a limit even to my distraction.)

A little under four years later, on May 1, 2004, Poland was finally admitted to the European Union and, the year after that, direct flights began between Belfast and Warsaw: direct and, more to the point, cheap.

And, since I have, however glancingly, just invoked the first half of the title of this article, let me in similar fashion now invoke the second: one of the greatest populist measures of recent decades has surely been the deregulation of the airline industry. Set aside for a moment the potentially disastrous environmental impact of all those short-haul flights; set aside for a moment, too, the cram-them-in approach to customer service; nothing has done more to encourage European integration than the budget airlines. Actually if they were to re-brand the European Union as the Easyjet Union and offer mini-weekend-break membership I am certain that Britain would be transformed overnight into a nation of EU enthusiasts.

I am being facetious, of course, but there is a more serious underlying point.

Europe was always seen as something we in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland could opt into. Add to this the fact that Northern Ireland, like the rest of the island, has always been a net exporter of people and you will appreciate something of the shock that was experienced when it became clear that the European traffic was two-way, that there were people – quite large numbers of people in fact – who were opting into living in our curious European outpost: Portuguese, Lithuanian, Latvian, and above all Poles. In less than three years the Polish population of Northern Ireland has gone from round about zero to more than thirty thousand, or to something close to two per cent of the population. More people now have Polish as a first language than have Irish, but then again more people

have Cantonese than have Irish.

Even before the recent immigration boom, Belfast was acquiring the unenviable reputation of being the racist capital of Europe. The Northern Irish peace process has brought a rapid increase in house prices – more rapid actually than the peace process itself. Rents too have been pushed up so that many of the new immigrants have been obliged to look for accommodation in 'hard-to-let' (and therefore cheap) parts of town. In the case of the Poles in particular this has sometimes had the effect of upsetting the religious or sectarian balance: Poland is a predominantly Catholic country; the hardest-to-let areas in Belfast tend to be working class Protestant areas. There have been innumerable incidents: windows broken, threats made, even houses set on fire. It makes not a blind bit of difference of course to the person on the receiving end of it, but it has not always been immediately clear whether a particular attack is an example of new-style xenophobia, or old-style religious bigotry.

A while ago I witnessed something of this confusion myself. My wife is from Cork in the Republic of Ireland: the People's Republic of Cork as some of its citizens like to refer to it. Earlier this year my wife's family came to visit us in Belfast: parents, brother, sister, their spouses and children. Not so many years ago this might have been cause for concern: southern Irish cars have very distinctive number plates. People from Cork in particular have very distinctive accents. The part of Belfast we live in has a distinctively Ulster British hue: red, white and blue flags on the lampposts, red, white and blue paint on the walls. This being 2007, however, we all walked out to a neighbourhood restaurant on the Saturday evening and walked back, a little more unsteadily, a few hours later. My wife's brother and her sister's husband – the least unsteady of us all – had got quite far ahead of the rest of us when they suddenly found themselves confronted by a group of youths who had overheard them talking.

"Fuck away off back where you came from, you Polish bastards," the youths said. My brothers-in-law were almost too astonished to be intimidated (the fear as always came much, much later). "Polish?" they said when we had caught up with them and the youths had melted away. "They thought these were Polish accents?" Well "thought" is probably too reasoned a word, but there would appear to have been an automatic identification of something that sounded clearly 'other' with the new object of suspicion – recent EU immigrants – rather than with the old 'folkloric' enemy south of the Irish border.

This incident occurred about fifty metres from the headquarters of the avowedly populist Democratic Unionist Party, founded and led by the Reverend Ian Paisley, who was once, infamously, ejected from the European Parliament for interrupting an address by Pope John Paul II with shouts of 'antichrist'. ("No Pole In Strasbourg" either, obviously.)

Ian Paisley was also the founder and long-time leader of the Free Presbyterian Church whose website not so very long ago carried the headline "Threat to Protestant Ulster" above a story alleging that priests were helping immigrants get their names

on to the Northern Ireland electoral register. Of course as citizens of the European Union the immigrants have every right to be on the register, but it is their Catholicism not, primarily, their nationality that the website is alarmed by. Whether explicitly or implicitly, however, the suggestion is made again that immigration could 'tip the balance' of local politics.

Against this it is important to add that there have been attempts by Protestant community activists (often a euphemism for 'former paramilitaries') to reduce racist attacks. In one instance, in the town of Lisburn, residents have been reminded that Polish pilots played a vital role during the Battle of Britain, though quite what the implications of this are for any Germans hoping to immigrate to Northern Ireland is anyone's guess. In words not often associated with Northern Ireland in recent years, the scheme has been praised as a model of toleration and integration.

And there have been other encouraging signs of late. The last decade in Northern Ireland has seen a transformation of the police, from the Royal Ulster Constabulary – "the RUC dog of repression," in another famous song from that first Stiff Little Fingers album – to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The PSNI has what is referred to as a 50-50 recruitment policy, that is equal numbers of Catholics and Protestants, to redress historic under-representation of the former. Figures of early 2007 revealed that almost one thousand Poles then living in Northern Ireland applied to join. There has even been a special recruitment drive in Poland itself, prompting some to joke that in time the name will officially change again to the Polish Service of Northern Ireland. (Stranger things have happened: look at the dominance of the Irish in the New York police of the last century.)

I have been trying to use the place that I know best to illustrate a general point, a point that Albert Camus makes much, much more eloquently (again, sadly, only to be expected) in that second wartime *Letter to a German Friend* when he writes, "Europe will need to be re-established. It will always need to be re-established."

This is indubitably not, to Camus, a question of deciding where to draw the borderlines, between what is east, say, and what is west: what is 'us' and what is 'other.' It is rather something more akin to an internal renewal, a perpetual revision or re-imagining, which, in a curious way brings me back again to where I began, speculating on failures of imagination or punctuation.

Punctuation in English can also refer to one of the periods of rapid change that interrupt periods of stasis in the evolutionary theory of "punctuated equilibrium." I think it is safe to say that Europe – the European Union in particular – has experienced just such a punctuation in recent times. And there is more to come, with all the risks and all the opportunities that will bring.

In the final page of *Europe* written in

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1992, Norman Davies echoes Camus: "The European Union in the West and the successor states in the East," he writes, "must redefine their identities, their bounds, and their allegiances. Somehow, at least for a time, a new equilibrium may be found… Europe is not going to be fully united in the near future, but it has a chance to be less divided than for generations past. If fortune smiles, the physical and psychological barriers will be less brutal than at any time in living memory."

In 2007 elections were held in Northern Ireland. As expected the parties that emerged strongest were, in second place, Sinn Fein, led by Gerry Adams, and, in first place (despite the scaremongering of the Free Presbyterian website), the Reverend Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists. On the surface the election result indicated that the religious, some would say tribal, blocs in Northern Ireland were as far apart as ever, further apart perhaps than they had been when the whole sorry saga of what we call the 'Troubles' began. There were, however, some interesting pointers to a less divided future. The non-sectarian Alliance Party saw its vote rise for the first time in a decade. One of the party's candidates, Anna Lo, became the first member of the country's Chinese community to be elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Anna Lo herself believes that many in the Chinese community had never voted at all before.

The weekend after the election Stiff Little Fingers played in the Ulster Hall in the centre of Belfast, a month short of thirty years after they first formed. They played their debut album in its entirety. I wasn't there. But I'd like to think some of our new Polish neighbours were in amongst the ageing punks, singing along to "Here We Are Nowhere." We're still two-thirds of the way to the North Pole, but thanks in no small measure to the people from other parts of Europe – other parts of the world – who have chosen to make their home here we're somewhere a little bit different from where we used to be.

Glenn Patterson was born in Belfast in 1961. He is the author of numerous novels. His first, *Burning Our Own* (1988), was set in Northern Ireland in the late 1970s and won the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature. His most recent books are: *The Third Party* and *Once Upon a Hill: Love in Troubled Times* (2008).

Marten

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An intellectual bringer of sorrow

For many Estonians, Europe has always been an intellectual and spiritual home, even during the time of the Iron Curtain. The Republic of Estonia has been a member of the European Union for five years now, and some people living there belong to a bygone time, people who owe their upbringing and mentality to the Stalinist Soviet Union. Where is the spiritual home for this young generation?

By Eeva Park

"It's as if I was never there …" Ossip Mandelstam, who was sentenced to silence during the years of terror and later died in a prison camp near Vladivostok, remembers his trip to Italy during his student days at Heidelberg and the Sorbonne. Mandelstam was a Russian poet who, together with Ana Ahmatova, belonged to the Acmeist Guild of Poets at the beginning of the twentieth Century. When asked what Acmeism was, he answered "a yearning for world culture" and announced he would cut himself off from neither the living nor the dead, although that was exactly what the Soviet dictatorship demanded of intellectuals and ordinary citizens alike. State borders were closed. But a few weeks spent in Italy, the "land of yearning," (which today could certainly be described as a tourist trip), left the poet somewhat unsatisfied. For the writer, physical experience and the beauty of the Tuscan mountains was not important. Only European world culture was significant, a culture to which he felt a deep sense of belonging in an historic and literary sense.

In the centre of Europe, in countries such as Germany where one stumbles upon the crumbling remains of Roman walls built on ancient Germanic lands, nobody worries about the 'origins' of history. Here, it is difficult to understand just how much a people, who lived and grew far away from such a concentrated cultural landscape, yet nonetheless under its influence, need a shared human existence and spiritual homeland.

Not fit for dictatorships

I have begun with the greatest Russian poet because in him the essence of what it means to be European can be clearly and tragically seen. Dante, Ariosto, Petrarch,

Catullus, Ovid, Goethe, Bürger, Kleist, Hölderlin, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Villon and others not only saved Mandelstam, along with Pushkin, Brjussow, Derschawin and so many other stars of Russian literature, from the intellectual isolation of the years of terror – they determined the poet's fate. In other words: a truly European-minded person cannot be moulded to fit a dictatorship. Even under threat of terrible punishment, he cannot be turned into an Orwellian farmer, at least not as easily as someone who is not saturated with this culture. What inspired the European Mandelstam's poetry was, under the circumstances, nothing less than full blown opposition – a declaration of war against absolute power, while for himself there existed not the smallest ray of hope.

There was a time when wearing a European rather than a 'Lenin' hat would have tragic consequences for the wearer and his followers. In the early years of the Republic of Estonia, as the neighbouring Soviet Union's Great Purge claimed millions of victims, including its top authors, our own writers were filled with national pride. The motto, "We are Estonian but we will also become Europeans," is still widely known. It was used for only two decades and was silenced by the conspiracy of two dictators in the Molotow-Ribbentrop Pact.

I was born in the Soviet Republic of Estonia and grew up in a country forced to sacrifice its freedom to incoming tanks. A country welded to the Soviet Union and cut off from the rest of the world, above all from Europe. Although this land on the far side of the Iron Curtain always appeared unreachable the sound of the motto echoed in our minds. At least it did in my house. We attached an importance to world literature that undermined official ideology. Thanks to existing books and Estonian translators we were largely familiar with the European mentality.

A truly European-minded person cannot be moulded to fit a dictatorship.

Significantly for us, Stalin's rule – a time that stood not only for physical slaughter but also for intellectual death – was relatively short lived in Estonia. In Russia, however, where the suffering and psychological damage was far greater, historical facts were rewritten at State level or concealed. It could be said that in Soviet Estonia there was a strange yet definite time difference. In these totalitarian times of a controlled economy and concentration camp Communism, there were many people who, in terms of their principles, customs and mindset, belonged to Europe.

Soviet nostalgia

Today, after the restoration of independence, difference is now moving in the other direction. The Republic of Estonia has been a member of the European Union for five years now and some people living there belong to a bygone time, people who owe their upbringing and mentality to the Stalinist Soviet Union. There are not many but their persistent existence will not let the past rest undisturbed.

To believe that this is only a national problem is to simplify the issue. We have all suffered the same purgatory, where Europe-

an principles were banished and almost 50 years of Soviet rule has left its mark on all of us. The Führer cult and the surrender of western democracy led to a situation where, alongside the leader, everyone who had a position within the system was granted a position of power.

Everyone held onto their positions and enjoyed the authority; researchers, caretakers and institute directors alike. This hunger for power cannot be understood by those who have not lived under such a system. The nostalgia older people feel as they remember this time illuminates an all too human fact – youth appears, for some people at least, to be the best period of life. Particularly now, against the background of the global economic crisis, voices can be heard claiming the break from the Soviet Union was a tragic thing.

Our bygone motto, "We are Estonian but we will also become Europeans," has therefore taken on greater significance than ever before. In the wake of Bronze Night two years ago (which saw protests against the relocation of a Second World War memorial and the remains of Soviet soldiers to the Defence Forces Cemetery in Tallinn), I would reformulate the slogan: "We are Estonian, we are becoming Estonian, but altogether we are European!"

As a young writer, my youth and education in this small land on the shores of the Gulf of Finland were pervaded with existential tension and complexity, both visible and invisible. We were watched over constantly by soldiers and barbed wire. Under this censorship, authors learned to write between the lines, while readers bought their books with unprecedented passion (resulting in first editions of poetry volumes selling four thousand copies and novels, twenty thousand) in an attempt to crack the concealed code. The collective Estonian conscience even found forbidden messages hidden in children's poetry which the poets, as they later explained, had never intended.

Deceived by a facade

Amidst all these state bans and restrictions there were times when I looked with the heavy heart of a prisoner towards Europe and was shocked. I confess I wished the European intellectual elite were cleverer and more clear sighted. I wished that a few leading European intellectuals in choosing their worldview had not been so deceived by the facade of this clay colossus.

I understood deeply the enduring struggle that was emerging of talented individuals to create a better world order; understood that protests were and will be necessary, that human freedom and shared responsibility will always be lacking. Yet artists and writers who played an active role in Communism showed in my eyes that they not only welcomed the fate of Mandelstam, Ahmatova and many other unknown writers but that by possessing a small red Party handbook they intellectually supported it.

Really, what we experienced towards the end was as much blatant idiocy as atrocity. Nobody had believed in the ideology of the terror years or the dialectic of Communism for all that long. It was a mystery to us how

a group of powerful people who, thanks to a desperate lack of basic products, constantly barricading themselves in special shops, hospitals and villas and occasionally held farcical elections and conquered almost half of Europe, had managed to keep an intellectual hold over the remaining free parts of Europe for so many years.

I am not claiming that it would be possible or right to drag the theoretical and social theory of Communism before a court. However, a regime which perpetrated such acts of violence in the name of the Communist Party can, in my opinion, only be described as criminal when measured against European standards.

The sorrow of the newcomers

Returning to the question of interweaving European intellectual cultures, it appears that fusion is being slowed as the ancient, intellectually brilliant, big-hearted core of Europe is weighed down by the newcomers' sorrow. It seems that Europe is quite simply afraid: it partly cannot bear to, and partly does not want to, face the sorrowful story which confronts us from translations of small European languages.

However, perhaps this is exactly the question: what can we, the "intellectual bringers of sorrow," writers from small European communities, offer the saturated European market in place of these fearful songs of despair? The all important question, as publishers well know, is what sells and involves little economic risk.

The Second World War and its consequences are no longer an issue in Europe. For Eastern Europeans, for the Baltic states, the war ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall and so it appears that once again we are dealing with a time difference, one which the passing years do not alter.

For reasons beyond our control the totalitarianism of the pre-war period is still painfully near. It erupted during Bronze Night, bringing new visions of terror, and it seemed to us that if this could not be understood at a European level we would find it difficult to reach any kind of shared language.

Jaan Kross, Estonia's best-selling international author says, "In my own mind, I am far from creating concrete historical places of remembrance. Yet I would like to highlight a basic difference between D-Day in France and our own deportations: the French (and with them a large number of Europeans) have been allowed to remember this day for sixty years. And maybe that is their right. That is something for them to decide. But for a long time we were not allowed to publicly remember our day of deportation. For half a century after the largest deportations of 1941 and 1949, we were under Soviet rule which used all its instruments of persecution to stop us remembering this day … Now, when it is no longer a political crime to remember someone by laying flowers on an unmarked grave, now it is finally possible, I would like to decide for myself how long I think about my own

I wished that a few leading European intellectuals in choosing their worldview had not been so deceived by the facade of this clay colossus.

or my country's losses. Whether that lasts fifty, sixty or a hundred years. Even if a thousand years are not enough."

Like Kross, I too try hard not to create "concrete historical places of remembrance," because of and despite the fact I remember everything. My novel *A Trap in Infinity*, published in German in 2008, talks about present day issues, linking them with Kross, who spent eight years in a prison camp together with Mandelstam. For both of them, freedom was not something to be separated from people.

While writing the conclusion of this essay I asked my daughter, currently studying genetics at university in Singapore, whether she feels European in the world. She answered yes straight away. Europe is home for young educated Estonians. Later, however, she added that in conversations with people of her own age about history and politics, she notices again and again how little people know and want to know about us as Estonians, and, because of that, how far we still are from achieving a European identity.

Nevertheless, an artist's way of seeing the world is an instrument and a tool, just like a hammer in the hand of a sculptor. And so there is no other and no better way to create a shared European identity than through dialogue inspired by literature. In the words of Milan Kundera, "The existence of literary works is only meaningful as long as they throw light upon undiscovered aspects of human existence." How intensive this dialogue is will depend on how much emotional interest is shown in these peoples and countries which were, for a time, erased from the map of Europe.

Translation: Kathryn Wells

Eeva Park began her literary career in 1983 as a poet, dedicating herself soon after to prose writing. In particular her novel ***Lõks lõpmatuses***, published in 2003 (English translation: A Trap in Infinity, 2008) was a sensation. It is a thriller which describes the dark side of the Estonian economic boom with its street children, moral neglect and daily brutality.

When land and sea converse

Literature provides us with a key for interpreting, grappling and discerning the narrative of self and of the Other in Europe's provincial history. Some notes from Portugal on redefining the study of culture for Europe's universities.

By Isabel Capeloa Gil

To speak of European culture from the location where "the sea ends and land begins" can only be a cosmopolitan undertaking. The phrasing belongs to José Saramago's opening line in the novel *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* (1984) and critically addresses Portugal's maritime past. Yet, either due to Portugal's peripheral borderline position, or because the sea, and not the land, is indeed our horizon, the sense of global belonging that the *etymon kosmopolitês* carries is more than a loaded word from the vocabulary of political correctness. Beyond the past imperialist claims, the wide border of the sea has made cosmopolitan dialogue a daily practice.

A privileged location to observe the tensions between the earth-bound narratives of locality and the liquid logic of globality is the classroom or moving further up, the university seminar and the staff meeting where academic programmes are thought, drafted and accredited. It is from this standpoint that I will endeavour a brief discussion of the challenges of a cosmopolitan project for the postgraduate Study of Culture and Literature in Europe, bridging difference, overcoming reductive identity and yet revealing in its diversity the possibilities of new European narratives.

The claims I make are clearly provincial, situated, from the standpoint of a Portuguese semi-peripheral European identity. I speak as a female academic with training in German Literature, working under the shadow of the continent's last imperial and colonial nation, from the standpoint of a diasporic country recycled as an immigrant haven in the last decades. For those like me who share an identity in transit, internationalisation is not a trend; it is an essential condition and cosmopolitanism an ongoing negotiation. Yet, far from invoking the abstract, imperial cosmopolitanism of Enlightenment Europe, the suggestion is now to provincialise the cosmopolitan frame of mind, to historicise it and approach it from a situated point of view, for as sociologist Ulrich Beck rightly claimed: "Cosmopolitanism without provincialism is empty. Provincialism without cosmopolitanism is blind."

A provincial cosmopolitanism is thus positioned against two master narratives of the study of culture: the first is that of culture as the national expression of identity, in Norbert

Elias' sense of the word; the second is that of the study of culture as a European abstract privilege hegemonically disseminated from North to South amongst lesser cultured peoples. We do indeed live at a time when reality itself has become cosmopolitan. On the one hand, the *vita cosmopolita* pervades a modernity inhabited by the fluid mobility of people and events that own the flow, the so-called diaspora of hope, but on the other it also has a darker side, that Arjun Appadurai has identified as the diaspora of terror of those who do not partake of the fluid cosmopolis, but whose lives are nevertheless deeply impacted by the former movement. These diasporas converge in the seminar room, bringing with them diverse narratives and values.

The clash over the cultural rights, over the right to diverse narrations has become the catchword for new symbolical and real wars, making clear that a homogeneous perspective exercised from the European centre has lost relevance. Hence Camões may be a strange companion for a disgruntled African migrant, but is he really? Culture is indeed a loaded word – with a long and lasting tradition of power – and one of the most semantically complex in both Latin and German language families. Although as recent conflicts show the cultural is one of the complex surfaces across which power struggles are exercised, it can also certainly be the place where resolution and dialogue are achieved. Stripped of his imperial clothes, Camões may then be a source for the understanding of cultural contact, of hardship and struggle and of the challenges of the Other. This shift may then be provided by the study of culture, as a metadiscipline, that does not grow from rigid scientific disciplinarity but is instead problem oriented, based on a democratic understanding of common humanity, and therefore well placed as the programme of a cosmopolitan epistemology that may help understand the complexity of change in the academia, and in the world.

Teaching and studying culture in Europe and from Europe within the framework of a cosmopolitan epistemology must therefore take into account the following three ideas:

1. New narrative of singularity

The study of culture and the study of humanities in general was marked for a long time with the brand of national identity. As a trained Germanist, I do recall that not so long ago the study of German was still inspired by the model of Jakob Grimm's *Wissenschaft vom Deutschen*. Based on a purely linguistic-philological model, the study of a foreign culture, in Portugal, in the 1980s, as in most places in the European academia, was a philological exercise that enhanced the particularity of the Other before the eccentricity of the foreign student. To study the other culture was a process, akin to what Norbert Elias described in *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (On the Civilisational Process). It was a strategy of distinction, of enhancing difference between peoples i.e. nations, and of building limits. The non-German national learning the foreign culture was/is an eccentric subject, not only theoretically displaced from this science that forever eludes him/her due to an essential forfeiture, but he/she are also institutionally displaced to the borders of the mainstream discipline, into a kind of *Auslandsgermanistik*, German Studies for its Others.

However, whilst the study of German or English drew on the discourse of identity to stress the civilisational prowess of those traditions, which also by comparison enhanced the student's own powerful narrative of identity, the case was quite different when it came to representing our farther Southern neighbours: the Moroccans, the Africans. Whilst in the study of German or English the pedagogical strategy would address a difference structured by a

primordial communal belonging, the study of any African culture would oftentimes, and certainly before the rise of postcolonial studies, uphold a narrative of distinction to justify cultural and political domination. The task was about narrating difference in order to assert hegemony. In this geographical dissymmetry Derrida's assertion in *De l'autre cap* that all cultures are originally colonial comes to mind as a tentative explanatory model.

Then again if the discourse of culture, based on the narrative of identity, presupposes a representation of the Other that is already an act of misrepresentation and colonial appropriation, the fact is that this generalising contention needs to be 'provincialised,' historicised, situated within the historical conditions of Europe.

Nevertheless, denouncing the narrative of identity and exclusion, that in certain radical claims of cultural power has privileged the discourse of belonging to that of reciprocity in a multicultural context, does by no means imply that the study of identity should be abolished altogether as far as Culture Studies are concerned. Rather, I would suggest that a new meaning of identity and its transformation into a new 'singularity' is in order. The narrative of singularity would hence focus on transition instead of permanence, allowing for revision, self-criticism and thus peaceful resolution. In the seminar room of post-national Europe the narrative of culture as singularity has a pivotal testing space, as the new paradigm for those who can only conceive themselves as part of Another.

There can be no European culture if these countries are reduced to identity. We need variety in unity.

T. S. Eliot, Some Notes Towards the Definition of Culture (1946)

2. Provincialising the European curriculum

After the Bologna process research training in European universities is no longer a task to be performed for a majority of national or even European students. Programmes such as Erasmus Mundus, the Alfa or the Atlantis Programmes directed towards enhancing Euro-American research networks and other international actions, struggle to make the European research space more competitive for students from across the Schengen divide. Arguably this trend has affected the disciplinary nationalism of the humanities stronger than any other field, because their academic history is often connected with the rise and legitimation of the modern European nation state disguised under the narrative of universalism.

Recognising the study of European culture as a provincial endeavour builds on four major ideas. The first is the recognition of the universal and rational tradition of the European academy as a situated response to the challenges of history from a particular location of the world, faced with the trials of the complexity of knowledge. It is a regional response with world claims. Although new trends such as postcolonial studies and gender studies have challenged the paradigm, hence fostering awareness of Europe's provincialism, it is important to do away with the drive to embody the Other's voice. Instead of speaking for others, let us have the humility of speaking simply for ourselves.

The second notion is the acceptance of other epistemologies, from the South or the East, and the ability to embrace its alienness in a dialogical singularity. The third idea is that the awareness of the situated and provincial character of humanistic universalism may foster a sense of common fragility and vulnerability as the basis for a diverse understanding of culture. Without politically correct concerns about the respect for minorities colliding with the rights of majorities, such as women, the universal will not

be simply imposed, but claimed as a situated response to the fragility of bare life.

The last issue is the creation of a provincial curriculum, i.e. a curriculum that does not strive to speak for everyone, but that, situated over the rim of the North/South border, acknowledges the European university as a situated response to the complex modernity we inhabit. It is a response that cannot strive to be global in scope but that may become a model in its ability to create the conditions for a broad dialogue amongst the regional diversities of its members. Provincial, yet cosmopolitan, in the sense of recognising the Other's narrative and longing to share it, this would be the project for an understanding of European culture beyond old reified narratives of identity.

3. Rooted Cosmopolitanism

The revised cosmopolitanism that the students of culture share in Europe may build from the teachings of the old provincial 18th century tradition of an essential humanity and enlarge the privileged flow with the awareness of the commonality of being. And literature is indeed the key to this revision of cosmopolitanism as a surface where the right to narration of European diversity may be exercised. In the hybrid ambivalence of modernity's "alien nations," as Homi Bhabha claims, it is across narration that models of belonging, of a new dialogical singularity are tested and enacted. The narrative right is what allows underrepresented groups to rise to the symbolic. This narrative of displacement and belonging makes up what Homi Bhabha termed "vernacular cosmopolitanism," impacting globalisation from below, through representation and education.

The last impact of internationalisation in the study of culture thus comes precisely via the vernacular narrative of literature, as the ultimate recognition of social diversity and also of strife, negotiated across the democratic space of the page. Whether by means of its manufacture of humanism, as Edward Said claimed, or rooted cosmopolitanism in Kwame Appiah's words, literature is a key means for interpreting, grappling and discerning the narrative of self and Other in Europe's provincial history.

In the conditions of our late modernity, the study of culture is by nature, mission and function international. I suggest that the study of culture allows us to perceive, as Hannah Arendt claimed, that the Other may also be right as it forces us to rethink identity and address the dialogical singularity that brings together researcher/teacher and student across the national cultural divide. Then again, culture and the literary text as its narrative counterpart empower a cosmopolitanism of hope with the tools of democratic humanistic criticism. Europe's burdened past, but also its glorious ability to reconcile, afford European learning institutions with an unparalleled status. An informed and critical study of Europe based on the awareness of its singular cosmopolitanism is not only the key to a competitive European Higher Education Space in the area of the Humanities, but as well a marker of a renewed disciplinarity that has overcome the national borders and will truly work for an understanding of Europe's transcultural ecology of knowledge, so that it may be the continent where the land and the sea converse and not where they collide.

Isabel Capeloa Gil is a professor of literature and cultural studies at the Catholic University of Portugal, Lisbon. She has published widely on cultural theory, gender difference, dance and literature. She has worked as a guest professor in other European universities, as well as in the USA and Brazil. She is an Honorary Fellow at the University of London's School of Advanced Study.

So near and yet so far Since Malta entered the EU only two Maltese literary works have been translated into another European language. A deplorable state of affairs or merely the result of an island mentality? Malta has resigned itself to remaining on the outside and yet, simultaneously, it acts as if it's at the centre of things.
By Immanuel Mifsud

On March 2, 2003, on the eve of Malta's EU national referendum, the left wing weekly *It-Torca*, ran a special feature on the literature page, in which a number of Maltese writers, some of whom had had a very active role in the literary revolution of the 1960s, took a solemn oath of loyalty to the Motherland.

In this document, this group of writers stated that they wanted to safeguard the independence of the country, won in 1964, the full political freedoms of 1979 and the country's culture, traditions and identity which their forefathers had bravely achieved through hard work and a love of their country. The document ended with a solemn statement that the will of the signatories was to see the country governed solely by the Maltese and not by some foreign rulers. Alongside this solemn oath, some of the most patriotic romantic hymns to the Motherland were published, some of which were written around seventy years before. Mostly the hymns dealt with the cultural revolution of the 1960s.

Now another little story. In 2005, one of Malta's leading publishers, which publishes the daily and Sunday *Times* (both papers claim the highest readership on the Maltese islands), abandoned a publication of short stories one week before its launch on the grounds that the stories were too frank and open about certain subjects still considered taboo in Malta, such as incest, male prostitution and the underworld. It should be noted that the *Times* was at the forefront of the YES movement during the EU campaign, forecasting amongst other things a European cultural heritage for Malta once full membership was acquired.

These two stories illustrate in my view the immediate contradictory view that Malta has adopted towards the new Europe, proving, to a certain extent, the main thesis submitted by Jon P Mitchell. The contradiction becomes sharper when one considers that historically various Maltese authors, writing in different epochs, upheld

Europe as a reference point not only for their work but also for their philosophy and their political outlook.

Malta, despite very strong Arab cultural influences, mostly evident in its language, had, for a long time, considered itself primarily a European country. Having said that, it is very clear that the meaning of Europe has been left unclear, both by the Europhile writers and the politicians who, to a great extent, are the opinion makers on the island.

Europe with Arab influence

This is not surprising when one considers that this vagueness is shared by many fellow Europeans who find great difficulty in defining the concept of 'a European identity.' This of course leads one to suspect that such a concept has been concocted by politicians striving to create a political superpower. In a period when even Europe's geography is being questioned, when the boundaries of the continent have become somewhat blurred, the concept of an identity becomes a very elusive business.

This is all the more the case with a country that lies at the very periphery of the political and geographical reality we call Europe, as Etienne Balibar notes. Malta is, in my view, failing to take the plunge needed to start considering itself as one of the others, and, instead, is sticking to her status as the European land down under.

The dominant discourse shaping the European culture and identity paradigm shortly after the enlargement seems to feature the divide between the Old West and the New East, more than anything else, and since Malta belongs to none of these blocs, the outcome is that it has resigned itself to remaining absent while pretending to be right there.

Since joining the EU, there have been very few cultural initiatives to promote Maltese arts, with the plastic arts and music being two possible exceptions. Literature has not fared very well in being 'transported' to mainland Europe. Since 2004 there have been only two Maltese works published in another European country: a poetry collection by myself (published in Cork celebrating the city's status as culture capital city of Europe in 2005) and a play script by Clare Azzopardi (published in Paris in 2008). A poetry collection by Adrian Grima is due to be published soon in a bilingual (Maltese-English) edition in Ireland (National Arts Council of Ireland). Apart from these singular publications there have been sporadic initiatives of publications in literary E-zines, literary journals or compilations published by the EU or other entities following some literature festivals for which Maltese writers are regularly invited to participate. Considering the amount of translated works being published, these numbers are very meagre.

The hurdle of translation

For some reason, the Culture 2000 translation programme has not enticed Maltese publishers to take the lead in transporting their published work abroad. In fact, no Maltese publishing house has so far been involved in any such project. As

a general manager of one leading publishing house in Malta publicly stated, the translation programme launched by the EU is financially attractive to translators but much less so to the writers themselves and their publishers.

Admittedly translation is a major hurdle, given that the Maltese language is spoken and written by just 400,000 people and is not considered a major European language albeit one of the official languages of the European Union. The recent setting up of the International Association of Maltese Linguistics (2007), presided over by Thomas Stolz and based at the University of Bremen, was a very encouraging step, although, yet again, this association is not in any way related to literature.

Malta still lacks the necessary literature organisations which would work to have Maltese literature translated and then transported and promoted in Europe. For example, there is neither a literature information centre, nor a House of Literature. The Academy of Maltese has declared itself to be disinterested in assisting translations of Maltese literary works despite the original intention of promoting Maltese language and literature, as stated at the launch of the Academy in 1920.

The National Book Council, appointed by the Government, works on a part-time basis and although it has stated it intends setting up a programme for translation, it lacks the necessary funds to launch the projects it has on its agenda. Clearly, literature does not have the same standing the other arts have in the island's cultural field. While the Malta Council of Culture and the Arts has regularly assisted in the financing of writers to allow them to travel to literary commitments in Europe, unlike Arts Councils in other European countries, it has no programme for translation. For the 2009 edition of the annual International Arts Festival, literature was totally excluded from the Council's programme. Malta does not, as yet, have a cultural policy although in July 2009 the Minister for Education and Culture, Dolores Cristina, announced that a cultural policy document will be launched for consultation "in the coming weeks."

Admittedly translation is a major hurdle, given that the Maltese language is spoken and written by just 400,000 people.

An insular mentality

Previous administrations have repeatedly expressed their intention of setting up translation programmes, but, again, nothing has ever been put into practice. Another recent joint statement from the Minister of Culture and the Arts and the Minister of Finance, Tonio Fenech, announcing that the government was launching a Maltese Arts Fund with 330,000 euros, mentions various government financial assistance but nowhere is literature or translation quoted.

Maltese writers have to work against this rather gloomy background, taking it for granted that they will not be backed in any official manner. Although, as some may argue, all this boils down to lack of financial resources, it is also the case that there needs to be a thorough rethinking of

what European membership is all about.

If the insular mentality expressed by the older writers I referred to in the opening of this article pervades, and if Maltese literature, particularly that of the younger generation, is looked upon suspiciously – as my other story at the beginning demonstrates – then the inertia shown towards transporting literature will prevail.

Failing to appreciate the importance of literary translations proves, in my view, to be the real and toughest hurdle in making Malta visible in the European literary scene. Mother Europe remains somewhere out there: so near, and yet so far; so part of us, and yet so alien.

Translation: Lee Schäfer

I**mmanuel Mifsud,** born in Malta in 1967, writes poetry, prose and children's books. He began to write poetry when he was 16 and founded the literary group Versati. His short story collection, ***Strange Stories*** (2002), won the national literature prize. His recent publications include: ***km*** (2005), ***Confidential Reports*** (2005), ***Happy Weekend*** (2006), ***Poland Pictures*** (2007), ***Stories Which Should Not Have Been Written*** (2008).

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