

Beyond the Bounds: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Literary Theory

Review of *Příspěvky k mezinárodní teorii literatury*
edited by Jaroslav Kovář (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2012)

The common ground of fifteen scholarly articles published in *Příspěvky k mezinárodní teorii literatury* (Contributions to International Literary Theory) is shared through varied treatment of issues concerning contemporary literary theory. The ambition of the present collection of scholarly articles to manifest its truly international character is indubitable: the contributors are researchers from the Czech Republic (affiliated to Masaryk University), Germany, the Slovak Republic and the United States whose interests in the theory of literature are rooted in British, Czech, German, Romance and Slavonic Studies or in literary comparatistics. Moreover, the essays themselves, written in Czech, English, German and Slovak, elaborate on diverse topics that clearly aim to broaden readers' horizons and to move them beyond the bounds of any particular specialization, theoretical view, time period or narrow scope of one specific national literature. Thus, the readers become absorbed in the diversity of the literary and theoretical landscape through which they are guided. Due to the limited space available in the present review, the papers written either in Czech or English will be analysed in more detail. For the above reason, equally scientific and insightful contributions in German and Slovak will not be discussed, such as the study on ancient Greek and Latin prose by Daša Bartoňková, on literary history by Achim Geisenhanslüke, on Christa Wolf's prose set in the classical period, yet discussing contemporary issues by Jaroslav Kovář, or the study on poetics in a contemporary literary context by Tibor Žilka as well as the study on historical themes in radio plays for adolescents by Marta Žilková.

Zuzana Fonioková elaborates on the concept of the unreliable narrator in an article that takes the reader back to the year 1961, when the concept in question was defined by Wayne Booth. After introducing Booth's definition of the unreliable narrator and other related terms, such as the implied author, Fonioková introduces Seymour Chatman's understanding of the implied author which shifts from "the real author's 'second self'" to the reader "who creates the meaning of the text by reconstructing the intent of the text, the implied author".¹ Further development of these concepts is analysed through James Phelan's rhetorical approach, which builds on Booth's idea of authorial intention and which "conceives of literature as communication from the author to the reader".² As the author of the article suggests, the unreliability of the narration then results from the discrepancy between the implied author's message offered to the (ideal) reader and the narrator's claims. Ansgar Nünning's cognitive theory, related to Chatman's legacy, turns the attention to "the reader as the decisive factor in assigning unreliability to a narrator" and to two layers of the story: one presented directly by the narrator and the other "that the narrator tries to hide".³ The last theory analysed in the study is Tamar Yacobi's communicative model, which further manifests Zuzana Fonioková's

1 Zuzana Fonioková, "The Unreliable Narrator," in *Příspěvky k mezinárodní teorii literatury*, ed. Jaroslav Kovář (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2012), 28.

2 Fonioková, "The Unreliable Narrator," 29.

3 Fonioková, "The Unreliable Narrator," 32.

deep insight into narratological approaches, their diversity, possible deficiencies, similarities and contrasts.

Both papers by Bohumil Fořt are based on the legacy of the Prague Linguistic Circle. The first one, written in English, studies the concept of fictional worlds investigated by the members of the Prague School and concentrates on the importance of such research to Lubomír Doležel's final design of the theory of fictional worlds.

In her contribution Milada Franková focuses not only on the shifting development of the English terms for 'román' (novel/romance), the various interpretations of which diverge from their equivalents used in other European literatures, but also on their current perception. This highly informative study of the given concept is approached chronologically, tracing the transformation of this epic genre and contrasting a chivalric romance or courtly romance of the medieval period with the 18th century prose classified as a novel. Thus, considering the terminology the author explains that an English medieval romance such as *Roman de Brut* (1155) is terminologically much closer to the Spanish 'romancero' than to the French or Czech 'román' used in the title itself. To further document the complexity of the question of terminology, Milada Franková discusses the genre of the Gothic novel, which, according to some critics, should be rather labelled the 'Gothic romance' in the context of the 18th century because of its fantastic, which is to say dangerous dimension. When it comes to the 20th century distinction between a romance and a novel, the contrast between the fantasy and realism diminishes, with gothic elements not signalling a romance, but rather the adventure, with the hero and the love story defining the form. Further examples of magic realism, the campus novel or the popular romance suggest the fragile and shifting boundary between these two terms and their uneasy relation.

Jiří Kudrnáč spotlights the development and the definition of the term decadence in the Czech literature and studies the concept in articles from the first half of the 1890s written by such literary personages as F. V. Krejčí, T. G. Masaryk, A. Procházka, F. X. Šalda, J. Voborník, J. Vorel and J. Vrchlický. The author analyzes their approaches and definitions and suggests that the concept of decadence was widely accepted in Czech circles at that time. Yet in the early 20th century the changing attitudes to this literary discourse prevailed, making the debates of the 1890s apparently inexistent on the fin de siècle literary canvas. According to Jiří Kudrnáč, as early as in the first decade of the 20th century the concept of decadence had been revised and later modified/codified by Arne Novák. The odium so much associated with the reception of decadence is being replaced by the return to the 1890s articles.

In his essay about the relation between the literary centre and periphery, Petr Kyloušek spices up the collection by studying the formerly peripheral position of French-Canadian literature, the process of de-periferization and of establishing its own literary centre. The author claims that French-Canadian literature is the only literature written in French that succeeded in the emancipation from its European centre and he further explains the religious, political and economic reasons for the past peripheral complexity, multiplicity and uniqueness of Lower Canada and its French speaking inhabitants. The difficult process of the de-periferization of French-Canadian literature is put into the historical, political, social and national context of the 19th century and reflects the complicated, even paradoxical relationship with France. The concluding part of this article explicates how the gradual emancipation from France and the process of Americanisation established a new centre (Quebec literature), surrounded by its own literary periphery.

Ivo Pospíšil contributed two papers to the collection, one focused on two theoretical discourses, the other on axiological concepts in literary history. The first

study elaborates on two contemporary thinkers, Alexej Grjakalov and Galin Tihanov. Galin Tihanov, the professor of Comparative Literatures, wrote his opus magnum on Mikhail Bakhtin and George Lukács. Alexej Grjakalov, the Russian philosopher, literary scholar, aesthetician and prose writer, seems to be influenced by the French discourse of "écriture." In his work, philosophy, aesthetics and belles letters intermingle and are part of both his scientific texts as well as of his fiction. Pospíšil claims that new reading of old concepts, their correlation and the formation of wider contexts constitute the main result of the studied approaches.

In his article about dialogism and the theory of games, Peter Steiner explicates that dialogism may be understood as a new epistemological principle and puts it into a 20th century historical context. Steiner introduces Ernest Gellner's proposition that European thinking was inspired by two opposing theories - individualistic and collectivistic, and he further studies Mikhail Bakhtin's approach and game theory that can be used to elucidate the differences and discrepancies of the new epistemological principle of dialogism.

In her well-structured study, Martina Vránová aims to delineate hypertextuality as a subterm in the wide field of intertextuality theory. She further explains why digital hypertextuality needs to be distinguished from print hypertextuality, then she moves to particular elements of print hypertextuality and defines such terms as hypertext (a later, non-original text primarily building on one major pre-text), hypotext (the major, privileged pre-text which is built on, imitated and transformed by the hypertext) and grafted text (another, less important subcategory of a pre-text "appended" to the body of the hypertext").⁴ The author re-examines and builds on Gérard Genette's theory of hypertextuality and refuses the exclusively binary relationship between hypertext and hypotext that does not consider another possible subcategory of pre-texts, such as the above mentioned grafted text. The last point of this insightful analysis is the investigation of the communicative aspect, as all these categories do not remain isolated.

From the analysed contributions considered above, it is obvious that an international, interdisciplinary approach to current questions of literary theory moves the reader beyond the bounds of one particular approach. Without any doubt, such a perspective reflects today's literary and theoretical canvas, which abounds in diversity. Nevertheless, because of the four different languages used in the collection, accessibility to all the studies is limited. For this reason, the articles could have been provided with English abstracts, which would further enhance the international character of the collection. The inclusion of a list of cited works after each article could have made the collection more reader-friendly. Some of the articles lack this list, forcing the inquiring reader to retrieve bibliographical information from the footnotes.

Petra Smažilová
University of Pardubice

4 Martina Vránová, "Hypertext, Hypotext, Grafted Text: A Practical Approach to Print Hypertextuality in the Process of Literary Analysis," in *Příspěvky k mezinárodní teorii literatury*, ed. Jaroslav Kovář (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2012), 144.