

Thematics and Intellectual Content: The XVth Triennial Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association
in Leiden

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Marko Juvan,

"Thematics and Intellectual Content: The XVth Triennial Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association in Leiden"

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Abstract: Marko Juvan's article, "Thematics and Intellectual Content: The XVth Triennial Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association in Leiden," offers an in-depth view of the intellectual structure and atmosphere of the Congress. The author describes both in detail and in an overview the thematics of the Congress, *Literature as Cultural Memory*, and explicates the intellectual content of a good number of important panels and papers presented at the Congress. The article represents in a concise manner the current situation of the discipline of Comparative Literature in an international context.

Marko JUVAN

Thematics and Intellectual Content: The XVth Triennial Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association in Leiden

Leiden University and the City of Leiden welcomed the XVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (ICLA/AILC) 16-22 August 1997. As determined and voted by the ICLA/AILC General Assembly at the XIVth Congress at the University of Alberta in Edmonton in 1994, the event was organised by Theo D'Haen of the Graduate School for Literary Studies at Leiden University. The participation of comparatists from all over the world resulted in six hundred selected contributions. The Congress comprised eight main sections (Nation Building, The Colonizer and the Colonized, The Conscience of Humankind, Gendered Memories, Genres, Methods, Translation, and Intercultural Studies), nine workshops (Systemic and Empirical Approaches to Literature and Culture, Recycling, Continuity and Theories of Cultural Memory, The Visual Memory of Literature, Diaspora as Postcolonial Literatures, Images of the West in the Literature of the Far East, and Travel Writing), many Round Table discussions, meetings of the ICLA/AILC executive, committees, and plenary lectures.

The extent and variety of such large conferences as those of the ICLA/AILC are hard to follow. To some people they signify the vitality and expansion of the discipline of Comparative Literature, while others perceive the disappearance of its tradition and a crisis of its identity. Yet to others, however, it gave the feeling that the difference between a more active comparative elite, cohesively organized in various ICLA/AILC committees, and an atomized and more passive majority membership is reproduced in this way. The President of the Association, Gerald Gillespie (Stanford) devoted his Round Table to these problems, and Henry H.H. Remak (Bloomington), the doyen of Comparative Literature, expressed the opinion that the influence of modernisms in literary studies since the 1960s has gradually dissipated Comparative Literature into other social sciences and threatens its standards -- the knowledge of foreign languages and of the entire complexity, form, and content of world literature. According to Remak, Comparative Literature should again be "reduced" to what is traditionally fundamental to it. After Remak's proposal of such a conservative therapy, the subject areas and tasks of Comparative Literature, according to its contemporary interdisciplinary complexity, were more realistically determined by Douwe W. Fokkema (Utrecht), who suggested that Comparative literature should be the study of the social and geographical dissemination of literary texts, conventions, and reading and readership (which relates it to sociology), the procedures of understanding and post-processing of such texts (here it is related to cognitive science), and the position and role of literary communication in various social and cultural environments (here it is connected with cultural studies). Fokkema's proposals clearly echoed tenets of the systemic and empirical approach to literature and culture (see below). In opposition to Remak, David Damrosch (Columbia) spoke in favor of practical solutions to the problem. He believed that more people should attend congresses, but in a polycentrist and interdisciplinary spirit, they should form smaller, international working groups which would devote their time to short-term projects in the periods between larger scale events.

The main theme of the Leiden congress, *Literature as Cultural Memory*, may seem trendy -- as criticized by Jonathan Culler (Cornell), for example. Nevertheless, the study of cultural memory reveals important moves in the development of Comparative Literature and, of course, in understanding literature itself. Owing to the influence of a new historicism, feminism, discourse theory, psychoanalysis, post-colonial theories, and other post-structuralist frameworks, Comparative Literature understands literature not so much as an autonomous area, permeated almost exclusively with aesthetic-artistic, spiritual values, and content but rather, it views literature as human expression which, in addition to the recognition of its specific nature (fictional, poetic) is intertwined with networks of culture, society, their institutions, languages, ideologies, and struggles for and against domination. It is pervaded with tensions between the past and the present, the central and marginal, the established and the forbidden, the documentary and the fictitious, the public and the suppressed. The theme of the Congress indicates that it is devoted to those features of literature which, with other means of expression (e.g., ritual, myth, art, film, history), establish and preserve an identity, a dominant tradition of a certain culture or society, influences its changes, its monolithic or pluralistic

features, and "external political" relations with other communities and cultures.

Ever since Socrates and Plato, discussions on memory can hardly avoid metaphor, spatial (wax tablets, writing, engraving, palimpsest, trace, book, library, pantheon) or temporal (awakening, flash of wit) (see, for example, A. Assmann and D. Harth, eds., *Zur Metaphorik der Erinnerung* and *Mnemosyne: Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991). Thus, a projection of notions from the psychology of an individual to the area of the collective (collective memory, consciousness, etc.) would have seemed justified in spite of some critical remarks towards the theme of the Congress (e.g., Hendrik Birus [München], Will van Peer [München]). However, the notion of cultural (collective) memory does not necessarily mean metaphysical spiritualization. Ever since its introduction in the 1920s by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (*Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, 1925), it has been directed primarily toward social frames (schemes), which either obviously or covertly dictate to an individual, who remains the real bearer of memory, what is valuable and even necessary to remember, and how, in which sense-related, ideological, and ethical connections, and what can or has to be forgotten, erased from an individual's cognitive-evaluative and active relationship to the world. Cultural memory, therefore, enables an individual's acculturation, the construction of their identity in the discourse (knowledge, values, ideologemes, phantasms) of a certain community. Our memory recalls personal experience through social frames. It also contains pictures, themes, ideas, and values which originate from others, and from tradition. Assmann, for example has explained in his book the difference between directly communicated memory (experience is exchanged by simultaneous generations, so we also "remember" what happened a century ago) and "cultural memory" in a narrower sense. This extends over a much longer period, since it constantly revises old schemes of knowledge and experience for various social classes in history. Cultural memory is thus based on socially organised mnemonics, institutions, and media (see also A. Assmann and T. Hölscher, eds., *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988; Renate Lachmann, *Gedächtnis und Literatur. Intertextualität in der russischen Moderne*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990).

Literature belongs among these, with its institutions, from criticism and philology through theatre, magazines, libraries, and museums to education at all levels. This insight into social and cultural settings and the role of literature has expanded from the 1980s onward. It encompassed the semiotics of the late Yuriy Lotman (e.g., "semiosphere" in his *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), for example, and it was one of the bases for new historicism, various theories of discourse analysis, post-Marxist literary studies, and post-colonial studies. It is taken into account also by one of the more recent paradigms in literary and culture studies and represented by several papers in detail in the first workshop of the approach at an ICLA/AILC Congress (chaired by Steven Tötösy [Alberta]), namely the systemic and empirical approach to literature and culture, based mainly on the work of Siegfried J. Schmidt (previously Siegen, now Münster; for a recent manual of the approach, see Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Iren Sywenky, eds., *The Systemic and Empirical Approach to Literature and Culture as Theory and Application*

<<http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/library/seal97.html>>, Edmonton: Research Institute for Comparative Literature, U of Alberta and Siegen: Institute for Empirical Literature and Media Research, Siegen U, 1997; see also most contributions in H. Hendrix, J. Kloek, S. Levie, and W. van Peer, eds., *The Search for a New Alphabet: Literary Studies in a Changing World*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1996; and see G. Altmann and W.A. Koch, eds., *Systems: New Paradigms for the Human Sciences*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998). Among several other aspects with reference to the memory theme of the Congress, this theoretical framework and methodology involves a critique of traditional and cybernetic notions of memory as a storage of images or meanings, which can be spatially determined, waiting to be recalled into our consciousness. It is based on the recognition of a decentralized, multi-ranging foundation of "spirit" in neuron networks and on the epistemology of radical constructivism (for constructivism, see, for example, Riegler's *Radical Constructivism* web site

<<http://www.univie.ac.at/cognition/constructivism/>>). Meanings or categories (including time) are merely a construction of organisms; they adjust according to their natural and social environment and in it examine the suitability and success of their constructions (e.g. memories, opinions, comprehension, notions, desires) (see for example, Siegfried J. Schmidt, "Gedächtnis - Erzählen -

Identität" in A. Assmann and D. Harth, eds., *Mnemosyne: Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991).

According to the thematic outline of the Congress, various complex questions are implicit in the theme: which cultural phenomena are actually being preserved in, or through, or by literature? How, on the one hand, literature can be a foundation, even a means for constructing cultural (national, civilizational, racial, class, gender) identities, permanence and continuity, and on the other hand, a subversive force, a producer of incessant differences? Is it possible to equate cultural heritage -- which consists of everyday life styles, various monuments and documents -- with memory? Should in the latter be seen a more active, interested or unconsciously steered establishment of images of the past in which personal and social strategies, interpretative filters (especially narratives), various censorship mechanisms which accustom people to forgetting, suppression, falsification and transformation of lost time are involved? What of the difference between "a document" and "fiction" in narrative presentations of the past, or the "truth" in memory and the truth of memory?

Unfortunately, the Congress was not rounded up by a summarized and representative way at the plenary sessions. We heard Linda Hutcheon (Toronto) discussing the mixture of two opposing relationships in postmodernism as in two forms of memory: nostalgia and irony. Salah Stétié (Paris), with a paper on the geography and theology of travel and Naser Abu-Zaid (Leiden), discussing the image of the West in modern Egyptian narrative, presented their thoughts on the post-colonial world, intercultural relations, and the symbolic representation of otherness, themes which, according to the Congress' conception, should have been subjected to the main problem of memory. However, these aspects came in reality to dominate the intellectual debates of the Congress and despite this direction of the intellectual atmosphere, almost all the papers and sections more or less elaborately, and in different thematic and methodological contexts, treated literature as a repository of culture. For example, theories and methods of such investigations were dealt with in a workshop chaired by Ziva Ben Porat (Tel Aviv) and Will van Peer (München). It was the best attended, perhaps because of Jonathan Culler' participation. However, Culler's improvisation on deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and (multi)cultural memory was disappointing. Van Peer discussed two conceptions of cultural memory: history and heritage. Based on theories of systems, the social history of literature, and the history of thought, Vladimir Biti (Zagreb) presented aspects of periodization as the main literary technique with which we recognize, interpret, and segment the past. He disclosed institutionalized presuppositions, the hidden ideology of the historian building an image of the past. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák (Budapest and Bloomington) linked the concept of narrative time -- essential for the formation of collective memory and identity -- to a critical discussion of structuralist, phenomenological, existential, and hermeneutic notions of narrative and language (with Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Genette, Ricoeur, Jauß, and others). Ben Porat clearly and persuasively handled the dialectics of cultural memory and defamiliarization, a key notion in Russian Formalism. Memory is based on conventionalizing a representation with topoi, clichés, convictions, genres, etc., while defamiliarization means a unique change, a revitalizing of used, automatic images and forms. In the light of cognitive science, she reinterpreted both notions as the composition, decomposition, and modification of mental schema.

The debate on the theme of the Congress was also summed up in a workshop on method, chaired by Raymond Vervliet (Ghent). It was devoted to questions of what exactly the content of cultural memory may be; how and with which methods (hermeneutic, empirical-sociological, narrative, semiotic) we should describe various forms, genres, and discourses of a historical representation; the (re)construction of the past, where there is a similarity between fictional and non-fictional narrative, and what the institutional and media bases for the recycling of the past are. According to Martin Sexl (Innsbruck), the considerable and culturally and historically constitutive part of human knowledge and experience cannot be passed down from generation to generation by means of informational and conceptual language. Rather, (verbal) art is the medium for obtaining "implicit knowledge" (Michael Polányi) for a more holistic re-enacting of condensed, complexly experienced meanings. A similar role of the preserver of fundamental human existentials through history was ascribed to literature by Jola Skulj (Ljubljana), although with different arguments. Her starting point was Heidegger's thesis on art as a site for disclosing the truth of being. Literary art is historical not only as one of the phenomena that change with time, but also, in a deeper sense, as the grounds of the historicity of an individual's existence and its expression. Skulj elaborated Heidegger's thesis in light of Ricoeur's hermeneutics

and his conception of narrative identity (narration as a necessary medium which forms the past, in relation to it, just like the subject itself); she based her findings on Spanos's existential criticism of deconstruction and on Bakhtin's dialogism (see also her paper, "Comparative Literature and Cultural Identity: A Bakhtinian Proposal" in S. Tötösy de Zepetnek and M.V. Dimic, with I. Sywenky, eds., *Comparative Literature Now: Theories and Practice / La Littérature comparée à l'heure actuelle. Théories et réalisations* <<http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/library/champion.html>>, Paris: Champion, 1999) which emphasizes historical non-repeatability, and the non-finalized nature and indivisibility of the logosphere. Monika Schmitz-Emans (Bochum) also discussed the contemporary conception of narratology in connection with history as a story, popular especially since the writings of Hayden White. Novelists with their fictional world, just like historians who swear by objective documents, sources and facts, depend on the creative and synthetic power of the imagination. Thus, historiography could even be regarded as a sub-system of literature; literature, after all, excels in disclosing and thematizing itself as something poetic, narrative, together with questions concerning history and historiography (e.g., Musil, Nigro, Eco, etc.). Literature is also responsible for the historical and political representation of the past, since influential models of narrating the "facts" and models of historical "reality" are formed in its fictional words.

Further to the thematics of the Congress, Bart Keunen (Ghent) and Christiane Leiteritz (Bochum) actualized two traditional disciplines which, after the decline of formalist and structuralist treatments of form and signifiers and the revival of interest in problems of content, have become again relevant (see, for example, F. Trommler, ed., *Thematics Reconsidered*, Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995; C. Bremond, J. Landy, and T. Pavel, eds., *Thematics: New Approaches*, New York: SUNY P, 1995). According to Keunen, thematic research in literary studies connected with cultural studies and literary sociology enables a description of cultural presuppositions inscribed in the themes of literary works. Leiteritz believes that it is possible to achieve such foundations of literary texts and their frameworks for the formation of social identities through the history of concepts (an otherwise well-established philosophical and scientific approach). It could be used for the analysis of literary effects and their historical semantics. Implicit knowledge, disclosing the truth of being, themes, and concepts belong to the structure of the content of literary memory. The content of private and public memory is also formed by stereotypes, topoi, allegories of memory itself (images of a library, Pantheon or Elysium, for example), ideologemes, schemes, intertextual links, literary kinds (from narrative to lyrical *Erinnerung*) and genres (from diaries and memoirs to chronicles and historical novels). For literature, with its genres and as one of the media, becoming "a repository of values of high culture" (Takayuki Yokota-Murakami), is assured by mnemonic techniques, the textual and institutional foundations of a literary and cultural canon: "national" or "world" literature, Western civilization, etc. Philosophical and theoretical debates on canons in the 1980s and 1990s were encouraged by the post-modernist thwarting of uniformity, continuity, the one-way historical development in literature, while on the social and political level they were inflamed by changes in university literature curricula. They were triggered by the pressure of being politically correct or the rise of criticism of Western, capitalist, bourgeois, white or male hegemony (see, for example, J. Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993; J. Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea*, London: Athlone, 1991). A number of participants became involved in such debates in the methodological section, among them, Paul Cornea (Bucharest), Ronald Soetaert (Ghent), and Guy van Belle (Ghent). On the basis of empirical methods developed by Robert Escarpit, Pierre Bourdieu, Siegfried J. Schmidt, and Kees van Rees, Cornea discussed the conflicting, pyramidal structure of the canon as a corpus of representative authors, preserved in an encyclopedic knowledge of a community and a culture (see also H. van Gorp, A. Masschelein, D. de Geest, and K. Geldof, eds. *The Study of Literature and Culture: Systems and Fields* Special Issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 24.1 [1997]). An almost super-historical consensus has been valid for quite some time for the "superstars" of the canon (Homer, Sophocles, Dante, etc.), while the selection of other, considerably important writers from the past and the promotion of contemporary authors are causing much more controversy. The intermediary area and the pedestal of a canon are therefore changeable, temporary, and unstructured. The contributions by Soetaert and van Belle was also based on empirical research, although dedicated to the field of pedagogy. According to them, the opening up of the traditional

(national and Eurocentric) literary canon and the deconstruction of its ideological assumptions on the basis of multiculturalism should lead to a global revision of literature curricula. Further, a key role in new teaching practices could be played by a new, electronic medium: hypertext. By using it we would be able to raise awareness of "contact zones" (Marie Louise Pratt) referring to social spaces where unequal, powerful and weak cultures (elite and popular, textual and audio-visual, colonial and colonized) meet. Thus, we would be able to show how literary texts are placed within an intertextual network, thereby confronting different cultures and literacies. Hypertext links between heterogeneous pieces of information therefore creates opportunities for a new and more pluralist kind of cultural memory.

The titles of the Congress sections, workshops, and round tables and their thematic division emphasized a pluralist and multicultural conception of cultural memory. There were discussions on women's memory, memories of the New World, Africa, Asia, Europe, Central and East Central Europe, Latin America, various other regions, and African Americans. Repeating the Tokyo (1991) and Edmonton (1994) congresses, the Leiden Congress too showed interest in and hospitality to post-colonial theory and in addition to many papers in the general sections, there were several workshops and round tables on the topic. Global history, which recapitulates and strings together memories of unique, diverse cultural spaces turns out to be a totalising, "colonial narrative" (Chenxi Tang, New York) or a uni-directional development of dominant cultures and literatures, while colonized literatures came later and were eclectic. A new, de-centralized understanding of historicity as a pluralism of open, multicultural stories, was also strongly marked in presentations and at the debates. In this context, Damrosch suggested that when Comparative Literature began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it was conceptualized as a counterbalance to nationalism or provincialism in national philologies, although its "cosmopolitanism" has until recently been imbued by a Eurocentric view. Eurocentrism is actually hidden in the conception of world literature. According to Eduardo F. Coutinho (Rio de Janeiro), a cohesive and unanimous, historiographic discourse was characteristic of traditional Comparative Literature. However, as several instances will demonstrate here, the Eurocentric perception of hegemony is more image and perception than reality. In this context, Jüri Talvet (Tartu) demonstrated with Lotman in the case of Estonian literature that it is the peripheral, intermediate "border zones" that accumulate the political, ideological and cultural tensions of intercultural dialogue. Their "explosions" may also cause qualitative historical leaps. Further, Coutinho and Ersu Ding (Beijing) commented on changes in Comparative Literature since the 1970s by referring to its reception of the colonial and post-colonial paradigm and the re-evaluation of the marginal and hybrid. For example, the American Comparative Literature Association's Bernheimer Report, facing the realization that ideology in Comparative Literature as a social practice is unavoidable, proposed that the discipline be extended to topical, cultural problems and to the enlargement to new, multicultural contexts of the Euro-American perspective (see C. Bernheimer, ed., *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995; see also S. Tötösy de Zepetnek and S. Gunew, eds., *Postcolonial Literatures: Theory and Practice* Special Issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 22.3-4 [1995]). And Comparative Literature, also at this Congress, is increasingly paying attention to thus far neglected, marginal literatures and cultures, from the Canary Islands and Pomerania to Estonia and Slovenia. Further, Coutinho also stressed the danger of the conception of multiculturalism becoming an alibi for ghettoization and segregation and warned that post-colonial theory may be turned into manipulation. The danger of how post-colonial theory may be manipulated in political and ideological terms could be seen in the paper of Tomislav Longinovic (Wisconsin-Madison) discussing the disintegration of Yugoslavia. His use of post-colonial concepts in a polemic against Western underrating of the East/South of Europe (the "Balkans") and his critique of the Slovene mimicry of the West proved to be -- at least in my opinion -- merely a superficial rhetorical disguise based on a clichéd political pamphlet circulated in Slovenia, which, for Longinovic, was the major cause of atrocities in the recent wars of the former Yugoslavia. In other words, Longinovic's use of post-colonial concepts appeared to be, at least in my opinion, superficial argumentation that was, in fact, political (the pamphlet against Slovenia) and a reproduction of the Serbian notion that Slovenia was the major cause for the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. Longinovic's analysis simplified and misrepresented the so-called "separatism" and "Europeanization" of Slovenia and ignored the specific political context of the

question: the use of "Eurocentrist" concepts of democracy in Slovenia was primarily a strategy of resistance to hegemonic processes begun by Milosevic in Serbia. Fortunately, Milan V. Dimic (Alberta) interceded in the debate with a sober historical reference: the dilemma between autochthonism and Europe-ism -- with its implicit context of democracy -- is and has been known to other Slavic nations, especially Serbs and Russians since at least the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Colonialism, therefore, is a concept concerned not only with "exotic" cultures -- from a Eurocentric point of view -- and it does not analyze only levers of Orientalism and various strategies of post-colonial rebellion against imperialism and its symbolic heritage (e.g., the carnivalization and parody of the Western canon in Rushdie's novels and the creation of its own Orientalism in new Chinese cinema, for example). Instead, the colonial and post-colonial paradigm can be meaningfully applied in the analysis and interpretation of European problems as well.

It is in this wider context that Steven Tötösy defined Central and East Central Europe since the Second World War as an area of *in-between peripherality*, exposed to the literary, cultural, social, political, and economic influences of two centres of domination: Western Europe (Germany, France) and the Soviet empire (see chapter four of his *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, <<http://www.rodopi.nl>>, 1998). In an interesting paper, using Tötösy's framework, Roumiana Deltcheva (Alberta) dissected culture and literature of the post-Communist situation in this region as post-colonial. Further, one of the workshops at the congress was dedicated to the problematics of East Central Europe and several presentations were offered about a planned volume within the ICLA/AILC project -- with several volumes already published -- of *Comparative History of Literature in European Languages*, entitled *East Central Europe: Cultural Junctures and Disjunctures in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. The project is organized by Marcel Cornis-Pope (Virginia Commonwealth), Wladimir Kryszynski (Montréal), John Neubauer (Amsterdam), Mihai Spariousoiu (Georgia), Margaret Higonnet (Connecticut), and Svetlana Slapsak (Ljubljana). Thematically, the planned volume will be an attempt to deal with the designation, "East Central Europe" -- with regard to its mix of political, cultural, and historical criteria, an external view and self-referentiality often inclined to mythology -- and it will point to the problem of defining and analyzing this region and its cultures and literatures. I should like to point out, however, that since the early 1980s in Slovenia we can follow a rich discussion -- literary, cultural, historical, and theoretical -- of the problems concerning Central Europe, with a sizable international response. From the viewpoint of this discourse, it is surprising that the organizers of the above mentioned volume did not include German-language literatures of the Berlin-Vienna axis or northern Italian regions while, on the other hand, they included Istanbul among cultural focal points (although Tötösy includes, in his framework, Germany and the former East Germany). Surely, the claim by Calin-Andrei Mihailescu (Western Ontario), based on Nietzsche, that (East) Central Europe cannot be defined yet has history, is a valid proposition, however controversial. Culturally and politically, the region has been defined from the outside and during historical divisions of great spheres of interest; the notion, however -- at least since Miroslav Krleža in his *Banket v Blitvi* (1939) -- also drew on intuitive and metaphorical self-descriptions in literature and criticism. According to Kryszynski (Montréal), Central European literatures referred to and are linked with European traditions, but at the same time they confine themselves to their own dialects, characterized by philosophical, rhapsodic, and meditative poetry, catastrophism, humor and irony, existential discourse, the novel as meta-discourse of a novel, cultural memory, marked by the baroque, Biedermeier, the precedence of music, dystopia and the experience of historical monstrosity and its totalitarianisms.

After post-modernist theories of nation and narration (Homi K. Bhabha) or the "imagined community" (see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983), in Comparative Literature neither cultural nor national identity are believed to be something fundamental. Rather, they are a construction, open to constant problems and restoration (see, for example, Manfred Beller, ed., *L'Immagine dell'altro a l'identità nazionale. Metodi di ricerca letteraria*. Special issue of *Il Confronto Letterario* 24 [1996]). Accordingly, these were the basic hypotheses in a further section of the Congress, one on "nation building" (chaired by Rien T. Segers [Groningen]). Segers argued that culture is a collective programming of the spirit, a construct produced at the junction of the manipulative appropriation and narrative structuring of the past, foreign images of "us" and "our" images of ourselves and of others. According to Segers, a nation and

nation state are not merely a product of surviving nationalism. Even after the current conflicts in the processes of nation building -- post-colonial and the post-Soviet-empire-making of new nation states - - and globalization --international and intercontinental integration -- the nation state will remain a framework for ensuring human rights. Segers' rationalist nationalism originates from the experiences of the Western European integration processes (see, for example, Rien T. Segers, ed., *Culture, Identity, Europe* Special Issue of *SPIEL: Siegener Periodicum zur Internationalen Empirischen Literaturwissenschaft* 14.1 [1995]).

More pessimistic perspectives were shown in papers by participants who, in post-communist states, experienced demythization, the marginalization of writers, former dissidents, and the commercialization of literary production, as well as an increase in populist nationalisms and their mythologies in retrograde literary forms (frequently reminiscent of socialist realism). Not only among small peoples who have been politically oppressed over long periods like the Estonians, the Southern Slavs, Slovaks, or Poles, or with great, historical nations understood as late comers (Italians and Germans), but even traditional nation states such as France, literature was -- especially in the Romantic period -- more or less serving nation building. With the cultivation and standardization of a unified literary language, fictional stories, folklore, the mythographic and the pseudo-historical creation of a common, continuous, recent and distant past, with "discovering" old sources, literature stores memories and produces cultural patterns which form and confirm national identity. As such it justifies the existence of a nation state or aspirations to it. Aesthetic language intertwined with the discourse of institutions dedicated to the study of literature, including theatre. The latter issue was excellently illuminated by Jeep T. Leerssen (Amsterdam), who made a typological and comparative analysis of the philological recuperation of national epics, a willingness to link modern, artistic literature to folklore traditions and an inclination to the retrospective creation of continuities. In philological research, and the publishing and functioning of supposedly original source corpuses of "national literature" (e.g., *Kalevala*, *Mabinogion*, *Barzaz Breizh*, *Hildebrandslied*, *Kraljedvorski rokopis*), scientific punctiliousness was often mixed with mystification and literary creativity. This situation was analyzed and discussed by Darko Dolinar (Ljubljana), who outlined the role of the national ideology in the development of literary studies in Slovenia since the beginning of the nineteenth century and by Marko Juvan (Ljubljana) who discussed the process of nationalizing literature, that is, the formation of a national literary canon in Slovene poetry from the Enlightenment to post-Romanticism. The utopian projection and formation of a "Slovenised" literary system has been intertwined with the successful establishment of a unified Slovene literary language. The travestic use of images of Parnassus and Elysium, these *topoi* in the European cultural memory, was one of the self-regulatory strategies acquired by Slovene writers to mark the distinction between their own discourse and the norms of the "classics" and a competitive comparison with other modern national literatures in order to achieve integration into the canon of world literature.

Characteristic of new directions in Comparative Literature -- equally prevalent at this Congress -- are ethical engagement and the theoretically thought-out interference in topical cultural and political problems and debates, e.g., the social role of literary studies and the university, changes to literature curricula in secondary schools and at university, concealed forms of racism and sexism, the cultural background to the crisis in the Middle East or the return of Hong Kong to China, the reasons for the war in Bosnia and for post-communist psycho-pathology, and the problematics of political correctness. The temptations of cognitive and ethical relativism and post-modernist deconstructive pragmatism have to be defeated for something like this to happen, as was evident with Mary Grabar's (Athens, Georgia) presentation. Based on Karl Popper's critical rationalism, she rejected the belief that rationality is an expression of hegemonism and every language is nothing more than a means to reach certain objectives and effects ("the hermeneutics of propaganda"). The problematics of "the Conscience of Humankind" was discussed in a section chaired by Elrud Ibsch (Vrije). The mechanisms of cultural memory have to encounter unbearable, traumatic experiences, produced by the history of genocides, totalitarian violence, from Stalinist Gulags to the Nazi Holocaust and concentration camps, the Cultural Revolution in China, post-war communist political processes, to Argentinean mass disappearances and ethnic cleansing in the disintegrating Yugoslavia. Literature is on the one hand language, the only thing that can still show what is unspeakable and unbearable, either by aiming at documentary truth or autobiography, or by evoking the inexpressible by metaphor, symbolism,

grotesque inventions, humor, and irony. On the other hand, literature, when politically abused or read, is not without responsibility for such violence. George L. Scheper (Baltimore), for example, defended the daring thesis that a recipe for ethnic cleansing can already be found in Petar Petrovic Njegos's 1847 *Gorski vijenac*.

All forms of identity, including gender and sexual, are effects of complex processes of psycho-social locations in cultural production, in signifying structures, private and public meanings. All these are also created in and restored by literary texts. This argument was advanced by Renée C. Hoogland (Amsterdam). The writing and reading of literature, therefore, forms, represents, and reforms notions of women and men, their position and role. This section -- chaired by Helga Geyer (Amsterdam) -- was devoted to discussions on the construction of gender identities in different cultural locations and traditions, on the specificities of women's language and their realities, on women's literary views of history, homo-eroticism, the co-existence of feminist and masculinist criticisms of patriarchy, the post-colonial female subject, and the literary presentation of sexuality.

That literary genres, "sacred" texts, myths, tales, fairy tales, stories, utopias, anecdotes, travel journals, historical epics and novels, lyrical writing, historical and bourgeois drama, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, pastiches, children's literature, etc., are repositories of cultural memories was the theme of the section chaired by Hendrik van Gorp (Leuven). The theme was discussed, among others, in terms of comparative research of school compositions written by children from various countries, conducted by Milena Blazic (Ljubljana). Further papers presented discussions about genres as playing an important role in processes of cultural memory. New genres emerge primarily as an attempt to provide answers to key social and cultural questions of time and setting. In their further development, these genres preserve their dialogic placement in a historical situation (culture, society) and face it with an altered understanding by readers, critics, and writers. This formation of cultural memory in genres, and of genres in cultural memory was demonstrated in a contribution by Matias Martinez (München) on the poetry of nature.

In conclusion, the Leiden Congress of the ICLA/AILC on Cultural Memory managed to deal with a fair portion of problems related to how writing, reading, and the understanding of literature -- located in specific social and historical circumstances and in a dialogue with other mediums of communication -- contribute to the formation, (trans)formation, permeation, and exchange of cultural identities. The intellectual contents of the Congress demonstrated that literary scholarship is becoming increasingly aware of its ethical and social responsibility toward its own discourse and that it is concerned with "proper use" and the wider relevance of the knowledge accumulated in it. Comparative Literature today serves as a critical study of its former archetypal hierarchy between a dominant (Eurocentric and Euro-American) model and a marginal, belated, weaker, derivative influence. More than ever before, Comparative Literature is opening up to "small" and "marginal" literatures and cultures. In this context, the responsibility of comparatists who live and work in such cultures is in need of recognition. Concurrently, comparatists from the margins -- be that East Central and South Europe, the Asian subcontinent, South America, Africa, etc. -- have an opportunity to actively intervene in international expert communication propagating their views, theoretical concepts, and direct experiences of problems arising in their immediate environments. The challenge of Goethe's *Weltliteratur* now lies in the concept of active participation, of mutual and polycentric international and intercultural communication amongst literary works, writers, aestheticians, literary theoreticians and historians, translators, and readers.

At the Association's General Assembly, the members of the ICLA/AILC voted on the location of the next Congress in 2000. After three years of discussion and competition and after the Executive's careful consideration of the three proposals (Venice, Beijing, and Pretoria) the membership voted by a small margin in favor of Pretoria, much to the disappointment of the runner-up, Beijing. It is hoped that the Congress in Pretoria will be the scene of further developments in the discipline of Comparative Literature, demonstrating its strengths, vitality, and *élan* similarly to the Leiden Congress. The General Assembly thanked Gerald Gillespie, the Association's president from 1994 to 1997, for his dedication and work and honored him as its newest Honorary President. As well, appreciation and thanks were offered to the Organizer of the Leiden Congress, Theo D'haen. For 1997-2000, the General Assembly elected Jean Bessière (Paris) as the next ICLA/AILC president (for the newly elected members of the Executive and other functions of the association see the ICLA/AILC

<<http://www.byu.edu/~icla/>> website).

Note: The above article is an updated version of Marko Juvan, "Pregledi. O literaturi kot kulturnem spominu. Ob 15. kongresu Mednarodne zveze za primerjalno književnost (ICLA/AILC) v Leidnu," *Primerjalna književnost* 20.2 (1997): 67-82 and "Literature as Cultural Memory: A Report on the XVth Triennial Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (Leiden University, August 1997)," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 24.4 (1997): 1089-1101.

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