

SOME REMARKS ON THE CONCEPT OF WORLD LITERATURE FROM GOETHE TO ĎURIŠIN*

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Written on the occasion of J.W. Goethe's 250th
and D. Ďurišin's 70th birthday

The aim of this paper is to point out the most important aspects of the theory of World Literature beginning with J.W. Goethe in 1827 and ending with D. Ďurišin in 1992. The stress is placed on the literary and historical conception of World Literature.

1

One of the recent theoreticians of World Literature Horst Steinmetz in his book *Literatur und Geschichte: 4 Versuche*, starts its fourth and last chapter entitled "Weltliteratur: Umriß eines literaturgeschichtlichen Konzepts" with Goethe's considerations on this "literary and historical phenomenon",¹ which became a target of many musings and in the last ten years and even two decades, remained the most problematic concept of Comparative and General Literature. In the "First Circular and Call for Papers" for the XVIth Congress of ICLA/AILC, Pretoria, 13-19 August, 2000, this term even, for obvious reasons, is even put in between inverted commas.² Just like another of Goethe's concepts, that of the *Ewig Weiblichen* (Eternal Feminine), due to its allusive nature and the "heterogeneity of his notes",³ up to our times it remained tempting and provoking more understanding and explanation.

* This paper was read at the meeting of Italian and Slovak comparatists working on the project entitled: "Ideas on World Literature of the Closing Millennium", Institute of World Literature, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, September 23, 1999.

¹ München, Iudicium Verlag 1988, p. 103.

² ICLA Bulletin, 18, 1998-1999, 1, p. 15.

³ STEINMETZ, H.: loc. cit.

Steinmetz's essay ends with a short quotation from Ďurišin's book *Vergleichende Literaturforschung* from 1972, the first of the theoretical works which made him well-known in the realm of the theory of Comparative Literature.⁴ Shortly before this time, Ďurišin started to ponder over the World Literature as the highest category (as he says) within the theoretical and practical framework of literature. Steinmetz was right when he, although agreeing with Ďurišin, remarked that the concept of the Slovak theoretician was not "more precisely elaborated".⁵ He quoted the following assertion by Ďurišin:

"Under the concept of 'World Literature' we cannot see only a survey (*Zusammenfassung*) of the national literatures from the synchronic or diachronic point of view, also not the survey of the best achievements of the individual literatures, but an *ensemble* of the literary creations ordered in their historico- typological mutual relations."⁶

Later Ďurišin, from time to time, elaborated on this problem, and in 1984, he wrote that this concept "has an important, if not perhaps the primary role to play in literary comparatistics (his term for Comparative Literature in English, M.G.), including as it does those literary phenomena which indicate mutual relationships (within the realm of the interliterary contacts, M.G.) and affinities (within the realm of the interliterary typological field, M.G.) and are thus in a definite way conditioned in their genetic and typological development".⁷

One year after publishing Steinmetz's book under review, Ďurišin's monograph *Theory of Interliterary Process*, appeared in its English version. Here his theory of literary comparatistics was presented in a new shape to the interested readers. World Literature was also mentioned and briefly analysed. Here he claims that this concept or category "is not guided by the *principle of evaluative selection*, but includes all the *literary phenomena* which are *mutually linked together and correlated*. Since their main feature is the literary-historical conditioning of phenomena, we speak of the literary-historical conception. Its structure is directly dependent on the results of research on the interliterary process and represents the outcome of this research."⁸ Like many other works of Ďurišin, published in the 1980s and later, these two last books remained unknown to Steinmetz and many other Western scholars.

Even for the scholar of Ďurišin's theoretical genius, remained the concept (or category) of World Literature a hard nut to crack. For the whole thirty years between 1967 when he published his first theoretical book *Problémy literárnej komparatistiky* (*Problems of Literary Comparatistics*),⁹ up to his death in 1997, he pondered over

⁴ Berlin, Akademik-Verlag. The book was reprinted in 1976.

⁵ STEIMETZ, H.: op. cit., p. 141.

⁶ Cf. loc.cit. and ĎURIŠIN, D.: *Vergleichende Literaturforschung*, p. 48.

⁷ ĎURIŠIN, D.: *Theory of Literary Comparatistics*. Bratislava, Veda 1984, p. 82.

⁸ ĎURIŠIN, D.: *Theory of Interliterary Process*. Bratislava, Veda 1989, p. 152 (underlined by me, M.G.).

⁹ Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied 1967.

this question, although in reality he wrote about it very little in comparison with other weighty issues of comparative literary theory. Another question he was always speaking or writing about – interliterariness – was often, but never systematically analysed by him. When once I asked him about the last, he answered: “All that is concerned with interliterary process is a part of interliterariness.” I never asked him about the World Literature, since I suspected that he would have some difficulties if he would have tried to answer clearly. As his friend I dare to say that World Literature was for him awe-inspiring, it was the highest goal of all his theoretical musings, although he never wrote a full-lengthy study about it. All those who know his work and read Slovak or Serbo-Croat may contradict and say that one of his book was entitled *Čo je svetová literatúra?* (*What is World Literature?*),¹⁰ and another one, more popular was called *Svetová literatúra perom a dlátom* (*World Literature With Pen and Chisel*),¹¹ prepared together with Slovak sculptor Ludwik Korkoš. Both are the fruit of the first half of the 1990s and it is possible to say that the first one was his latest book made independently, not in the collaboration with an international team of researchers.

I have to say that the title of the book *What is World Literature?* is misleading. At least from the end of the 1980s it was Ďurišin's ambition to write such a book. In summer 1991 he told me that the book was ready. I personally was disappointed not by the book, which repeated and corrected much from his earlier writings (too much repetition is a flaw of Ďurišin's otherwise outstanding works), but by its title. In reality out of 212 pages of the monograph, only 85 (something more than 1/3) are concerned directly with the World Literature, and all other with other different concepts or categories of Comparative Literature or the interliterary process.

2

Among many contributions written on the subject of World Literature in the last twenty years, I find the essay *Weltliteratur* from the *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*¹² by Erwin Koppen the most interesting and stimulating. Koppen's essay, like the above-mentioned books by Steinmetz and Ďurišin on the theory of interliterary process, was published in 1988. At its start it maintains that World Literature like “most of the concepts and categories of literary scholarship” avoids “the binding definition or exact content”.¹³ Haskell M. Block was right, at the beginning of the post-World War II Renaissance of Comparative Literature when he declared in front of the participants of the *Conference on the Teaching of World Literature*, University of Wisconsin, April 24-25, 1959, later often quoted

¹⁰ Bratislava, Obzor 1992.

¹¹ Bratislava, Institute of World Literature 1993.

¹² Band 4. Berlin, de Gruyter 1988, pp. 815-827.

¹³ Ibid., p. 815.

words: "...I believe that most of us would agree that 'World Literature' is not a happy term."¹⁴ Forty years after Block I have to confess the same. But on the other hand, I believe that something like World Literature really exists, although it is beyond the reach of the two words which are not really able to manifest its content and range. It is necessary to go behind its "sign form" and try to define (the verb "try" should be stressed here) its approximate (if not wholly its appropriate) meaning within the broadest framework of the literary facts of *litterarum universarum*. It is, of course, not an easy task, and it could not be solved by one theoretician, or one group, and probably not within a short period, when we have in mind the knowledge and research equipment at our disposal at this time.

There are various different conceptions of World Literature which differ from author to author. Koppen mentions three of them, which are certainly most typical: 1/ a selection of the most important and in general most valuable works of the literatures of the whole world and all times, 2/ the sum total of all these literatures, and 3/ its use in Goethean meaning, that is, World Literature as "the denomination of a literature with international correlations".¹⁵

Đurišin's view is very similar in the two first points, although he changes their sequence. The first selective conception is in Đurišin's scheme the second one, and the second additive in Koppen is in Đurišin's the first one. The third is different, or otherwise understood, as cited above. Later in the monograph *What is World Literature?* he analyses this "literary and historical conception" in more detail. We shall speak about it later in this essay.

Đurišin never devoted much attention to the problem of World Literature before Goethe, he did not mention any of Goethe's opinions on World Literature, not even that most famous in his conversation with Johann Eckermann on January 1827, pronouncing that national literature "is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World Literature is at hand, and every one must strive to hasten its approach".¹⁶ He quoted in the German version of *Vergleichende Literaturgeschichte* Marx' and Engels' instruction about World Literature in the modern capitalist society,¹⁷ but I suppose that it was a "must" demanded from him by the translator or the editors (internal reviewers) of the book which waited a long time for publication in the former GDR. It was about two years, according to Đurišin's communication to me. In the years 1960s and in the beginning of the 1970s, he was too busy with the problems connected with the formulation of the classification of the forms of the

¹⁴ BLOCK, H.M.: "The Objectives of the Conference." In: *The Teaching of World Literature*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press 1960, p. 3.

¹⁵ KOPPEN, E.: op. cit., p. 816.

¹⁶ GOETHE, J.W.: *Conversations with Eckermann*. In: HARDISON, Jr., O.B. (ed.): *Modern Continental Literary Criticism*. London, Peter Owen 1964, p. 48.

¹⁷ Cf. MARX, K., ENGELS, FR.: *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*. In: *Werke*. Band 4. Berlin 1964, p. 446 and ĐURIŠIN, D.: *Vergleichende Literaturforschung*, p. 39.

interliterary process, that is with genetic-contactual relationships and typological affinities. His first theoretical book from the year 1967, characterized by his teacher Mikuláš Bakoš as “structural comparatistics” and as a “not everyday book”,¹⁸ cost him much time and energy, and his later work *Sources and Systematics of Comparative Literature* from the year 1974 made him well-known among the English reading public.¹⁹ Especially “Three Sources of Structural Comparative Literature”, comprising the comparative heritage of A.N. Veselovsky’s historical poetics (the stimuli for writing this part came very probably from Professor Bakoš), then comparative stimuli in the Russian “Formalist” method, and last but not least, the structural roots of modern Comparative Literature where he originally pointed to the views of Prague structuralists, namely Jan Mukařovský, Felix Vodička, and also Bakoš, and their contribution, whether direct or mediated, to the structural theory of Comparative Literature. All this was important and appreciated in the West. The studies in this book were written mostly after August 21st, 1968. At that time, to propagate Structuralism in former Czechoslovakia needed a great amount of courage. The original Slovak version, slightly adapted, appeared in 1970, in the book *Z dejín a teórie literárnej komparistiky (From the History and Theory of Literary Comparatistics)*, pp. 11-139.²⁰ I may probably betray to my readers, that I was persuading the late Professor Ďurišin to publish the most interesting parts of this book in English translation after he dedicated a copy of it to me on February 26th, 1971.²¹

3

I was wondering why Ďurišin was always neglecting many well-known theoreticians of World Literature, beginning with Goethe and ending with Koppen, Steinmetz, or even Gerhard R. Kaiser, the last among them who wrote about him and prized him highly.²²

The Czech scholars Ivo Pospíšil and Miloš Zelenka,²³ Ďurišin’s collaborators from the end of his life, were the first who pointed out that according to their opinion, in defining the conception of World Literature, the Slovak *maestro* followed to a certain extent, Frank Wollman’s idea presented in 1959: “1. World Literature – lit-

¹⁸ BAKOŠ, M.: “Na cestu” (“Bon voyage”). In: *Problems of Literary Comparatistics*, p. 6.

¹⁹ Bratislava, Comenius University.

²⁰ Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied.

²¹ I met D. Ďurišin for the first time on the occasion of the VIth Congress of the AILC/ICLA in Bordeaux, Aug. 31-Sept. 5, 1970 and we became friends later.

²² KAISER, G.R.: *Einführung in die Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*. Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1980, pp. 48-50, 57, 183, 185 and 193.

²³ POSPÍŠIL, I. and ZELENKA, M.: “Pojem a koncepcie svetovej literatury” (“Concept and Conception of World Literature”). *Sborník prací Filosofické fakulty Brněnské university (Studia minora Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Brunensis)*, 42, 1995, p. 111.

eratures of the whole world and hence, history of World Literature as an ensemble of histories of literatures next to each other; 2. World Literature as an *ensemble* of the best created in the individual literatures, and hence, a systematic view upon all what has been created: this is called classical literature, or literature of the classics; 3. World Literature as the creations mutually related or similar to each other in different individual literatures: their mutual relationships may be explained due to their direct relations or the socio-political conditions.”²⁴

It is probably necessary to stress that Ďurišin did not mention F. Wollman in this connection, although he acknowledged his debt and the debt of Slovak literary scholarship to this great representative of Czech Comparative Literature.²⁵ For the researcher in the theory of Comparative Literature and in Ďurišin’s contribution to it is noteworthy to say that in relation to the World Literature, Ďurišin in his musings did not mention or ponder over Fritz Strich, Alexander H. Hohlfeld, H.J. Schrimpf, Manfred Naumann, György M. Vajda (the last were his good friends), Victor Lange, Peter Weber, Hendrik Birus (who all wrote about Goethe’s concept of World Literature). The same goes for the post-Goethe theory, like the works by Louis B. Betz, Arturo Farinelli, Robert J. Clements and Horst Rüdiger. He did not pay any attention to the most important representatives of the world literary canon(s), probably because he did not believe that great literary works as such, form the essence of World Literature. Here it is possible to mention the opinions of Johannes Scherr, Ferdinand Brunetière, Eduard Engel, Hermann Hesse, and those who wrote about this problem in relation to the phenomenon called the *Nobel Prize*, for instance, E. Koppen, Willy Haas, Dragan Nedeljković and others.²⁶ Ďurišin followed even the Soviet literary scholarship only to some extent, most of all Irina G. Neupokoyeva and her book *Istoriya vseмирnoi literatury. Problemy sistemnogo i sravnitel’nogo analiza* (*A History of World Literature. Problems of Systemic and Comparative Analysis*).²⁷ Especially the first chapter of this book entitled: “Vseмирnaya istoriya i vseмирnaya literatura” (“World History and World Literature”) was a target of his attention. At the start of his book *What is World Literature?*, Ďurišin presented his review of Neupokoyeva’s book, pp. 51-53, mentioning one after another (just as Neupokoyeva has done): Janos Hankiss, E. Laaths, Eduard von Tunk, R. Lavalette and Albert Guérard, as representatives more of the histories of literatures of the world than of World Literature.²⁸ This shortcoming was an outcome of the scarcity of information, but also of language barriers.

²⁴ WOLLMAN, Fr.: “Srovnávací metoda v literární vědě” (“Comparative Method in Literary Scholarship”), *Slovanské štúdie II* (*Slavic Studies II*). Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied 1959, p. 21.

²⁵ ĎURIŠIN, D.: *Sources and Systematics of Comparative Literature*, p. 92.

²⁶ The views of all these are analysed in Koppen’s essay.

²⁷ Moscow, Nauka 1976.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 52-56 and *What is World Literature?*, pp. 17- 18.

Đurišin tried to make up for his narrow vista in relation to the theories of World Literature, either by his theoretical abilities, or by shifting the emphasis to two realms of the interliterary process: interliterary communities²⁹ and interliterary centrism.³⁰ Đurišin acknowledges the validity of all three conceptions of World Literature. From the diagram No. 1 of *What is literature?*,³¹ we may see that they are on the same level, the first two connected with interliterary communities or centrism, and the last one with literary historicism, which may be realized outside of the supra-national or supra-ethnic literary development. In the last view he very probably follows the assertion of Frank Wollman who claimed already in 1936 that “the national literatures do not flow into the World Literature *in toto*, but as single creations, literary constructions, and only in their structural relations. In this way only the international web of literary affinities is created, which we call Comparative Literature. And this (World Literature, M.G.) is being unveiled often with difficulties and with unceasing correction of errors.”³² Wollman stressed the importance of the third conception and he pointed out that only this is immediately connected with the comparative study of literature.³³ Đurišin’s opinion is more liberal, and even where the first, that is additive conception concerned, he explains its purpose and justification, namely for the literary and historical practice necessary for the compilation of the histories of the literature of the world. The second, evaluative, literary and critical conception, encompassing the leading literary great men of letters, their work, has also its *raison d’être*. It is most useful for those who are working in the field of editing, publishing and education. For the first additive conception, the best example Đurišin sees in the Soviet *Istoriya vseмирnoi literatury* (*A History of World Literature*),³⁴ in 9 vols., and for the second evaluative, he finds a typical specimen in *A világirodalom története* (*A History of World Literature*) by Antal Szerb from 1957³⁵ and in *Světová literatura 1-4* (*World Literature in Four Volumes*),³⁶ ed. by J.O. Fischer, which appeared in 1984-1987. It is a pity that he did not devote more attention to the first one which is very probably one of the most important works of its kind in the world literary historiography with its excellent contribution, but also weak points.

²⁹ The most important result of this project, see in a compendium mentioned in the next under note No. 44.

³⁰ The results of this project, see in the text mentioned under notes Nos. 45 and 46.

³¹ *What is World Literature?*, p. 40.

³² WOLLMAN, FR.: *K metodologii srovnávací slovesnosti slovanské* (*To the Methodology of Slavic Comparative Literature*). Brno 1936, p. 23.

³³ WOLLMAN, FR.: “Comparative Method in Literary Scholarship”, p. 21.

³⁴ Moscow, Nauka 1983-.

³⁵ ĐURIŠIN, D.: *What is World Literature?*, pp. 34-35.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 35 and 50-51.

Đurišin does not bring any example illustrating or implementing the demands of the third literary and historical conception. I have always thought that the impressive work of Soviet scholars from the Gorky Institute of World Literature, Moscow, and their colleagues, was a *chef d'oeuvre*, at least partly, of this kind. This work, in reality compiled in the 1960s and corrected, or polished up during the 1970s, and after long discussions (Neupokoyeva's book is a *Kronzeuge* of this time and of these debates), in some parts reached the niveau of the achievement, worthy of the demands put on the work(s) of literary and historical conception, but in some parts remained nothing more than the history of national (individual) literatures without any (or only negligible) connections with the other literatures of the world. Certainly it is possible to observe this phenomenon in the first and in the second volume of this compendium: the short introductions by N.I. Konrad³⁷ and two longer epilogues by P.A. Grintser³⁸ from the first volume with its consciousness of the existence of the interliterary process, are very different from the introduction to the literatures of East and South-East Asia by L.Z. Eidlin³⁹ where the impact of Chinese literature on Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese literatures is stressed, but the impact of Sanskrit literature upon the Chinese is completely neglected. A short chapter on the Buddhist translated literature in the section devoted to the analysis of Chinese literature in the 4th-6th centuries was a short and inadequate excursus to this extremely important question of impact-response in Sino-Indian literary relations.⁴⁰

4

Đurišin was probably right when in 1992 and earlier did not believe in the possibility of writing a "full-value" history of World Literature from the literary and historical perspective. He asserts quite clearly and unambiguously that a "full-value" history of World Literature, written on the basis of the above mentioned summarizing method, **in its full sense, cannot be spoken of even today** (stressed by Đurišin).⁴¹ What does Đurišin understand under this summarizing method? According to him the literary and historical conception is not only the real quintessence of World Literature, but it also fulfils the function of the "unifier, amalgamator, synthesizer"⁴² of the additive and

³⁷ KONRAD, N.I.: "Vvedenie. Mesto pervogo toma v 'Istorii vseмирnoi literatury'" ("Introduction to the 1st Volume of 'A History of World Literature'"). *A History of World Literature*. Vol. 1, pp. 14-22.

³⁸ GRINTSER, P.A.: "Mirovaya literatura na rubezhe novoi ery" ("World Literature at the Beginning of New Era"), *ibid.*, pp. 516-529 and "Zaklyuchenie" ("Epilogue"), *ibid.*, pp. 530-533.

³⁹ EIDLIN, L.Z.: "Literaturny Vostochnoi i Yugovostochnoi Azii. Vvedenie" ("Literature of East and South-East Asia. An Introduction"). *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 90-96.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

⁴¹ *What is World Literature*, p. 51.

⁴² *Loc. cit.*

evaluative conceptions. All experiments in writing the real history of World Literature are only a *pium desiderium*, or “unimplemented desire”⁴³ of interliterary thought. Interliterary and historical practice in this realm of literary historiography is far behind the declarations and postulates of the theoreticians of Comparative Literature.

As is conspicuous from his own interliterary research, Ďurišin and his teams were interested mainly in the interliterary communities and interliterary centrism. The interliterary communities were on his and his teams programme from the half of the 1980s up to about 1993 when the last of the six volumes entitled *Communautés interlittéraires spécifiques*⁴⁴ appeared. The interliterary centrism became a part of his and his teams endeavours later and its first fruit *Medziliterárny centrismus stredoeurópskych literatúr (Interliterary Centrism of Central European Literatures)*⁴⁵ appeared undated in 1998. Another volume in French, Italian and Slovak version concerned with Mediterranean centrism appeared in 2000.⁴⁶

Ďurišin never tried to elaborate more consistently, and systematically, the categories or specific features of World Literature as a literary and historical concept. Even in the case of interliterary centrism, he more or less, with the exception of the geographical aspect, repeated that he wrote, quite convincingly, about the interliterary communities. His diagram on p. 172 in the book *What is World Literature?*, in relation to World Literature, is not clear enough and without necessary illustrations and proofs. Did the *maître* wait for another occasion, which, alas, was not given to him by Fate? Except for that, World Literature is allegedly closely connected with the interliterary communities and centrism? Did Ďurišin put aside Fr. Wollman’s conviction? I think that literary facts do not enter the World Literature through the national (individual, ethnic) literatures, or interliterary communities or centrism as such. These higher supranational and supraethnic entities are only the great sets of systemo-structural combinations which make it easier to study the interliterary process.

Dionýz Ďurišin in his last years made the same “mistake” as that he criticized among the leading theoreticians of AILC/ICLA.

He called it “certain waverings”.⁴⁷ It is enough to look at the diagram just mentioned and read more carefully the very short (one or a few words) characteristics

⁴³ Loc. cit.

⁴⁴ Bratislava, Veda 1987-1993.

⁴⁵ České Budějovice, Pedagogická fakulta Jihočeské university. Its French version was published in 1999.

⁴⁶ See its trilingual version in the volume: *Il Mediterraneo. Una rete interletteraria*. Ed. by D. Ďurišin and A. Gnisci. Rome, Bulzoni Editore 2000, 588 pp. In its Italian version the readers may find M. Gálík’s essay translated by Agostino Visco: “La ricezione dell’opera di Dionýz Ďurišin nello studio letterario occidentale”, pp. 215-223. Ďurišin’s reception in Central and East Europe, however, is not treated here.

⁴⁷ Cf. ĎURIŠIN, D.: “Nad IX. kongresom AILC v Innsbrucku” (“On the IXth Congress of the AILC in Innsbruck”), *Slavica Slovaca*, 15, 1980, 2, p. 181.

of different aspects of World Literature. World Literature is according to this diagram conditioned: linguistically by the polylingual systems and monolingual systems, administratively (within the political systems) by the plurinational literary systems, and ideologically by polyliterary systems; then by its differentiatedness, by their colonial and postcolonial status, etc. It seems that all these characteristics (and those not mentioned here) are product only of his preliminary meditations which have not much to do with those interliterary relations or affinities, he spoke about in his earlier deliberations. In his another diagram on p. 194, Đurišin completely omitted all these characteristics and about the very World Literature as the implementation of the literary and historical conception, he did not say a word! Of course, he was fully conscious of that he wrote about it before. On pp. 52-56 Đurišin pondered over the different missions of the integrational, differential and complementary functions in the interliterary process within the World Literature.⁴⁸ The most important for him will be the first one. Whether it is true or not is difficult to say, since he does not try to prove it. He postulates the necessity of forming the methodology of the study of World Literature, but he himself admits that all that he asserts has only a hypothetical character.⁴⁹

5

In my contribution to the 12th Congress of the AILC/ICLA, Edmonton 1994, in the short exposition concerned with World Literature I said the following: "World Literature is a *summa litterarum universarum* not in their overall quantity but in their mutual relationships and affinities within the systemo- structural reality of the interliterary process. This interliterariness is uniting all other kinds mentioned above (in all realms of the interliterary process, of interliterary relations and affinities, and in interliterary communities, M.G.), but on the highest possible level, owing to its deeper, broader and mutual contextuality. This does not mean that all interliterariness in the dimensions of World Literature is most worthy from axiological point of view. It means only that specific literary facts went through all the interliterary filters mentioned above. This interliterariness depends on the measure of the knowledge of the interliterary facts and processes and therefore it is much more variable within the flux of time and space than those in subordinated spheres of the interliterary process."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *What is World Literature?*, p. 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁰ GÁLIK, M.: "Comparative Literature as a Concept of Interliterariness and Interliterary Process". In: Tötösy de Zepetnek, S. and Dimić, M.V. with Sywenky, I. (eds.): *Comparative Literature Now. Theories and Practice*. Selected Papers of the XIVth Congress of AILC/ICLA, Edmonton, 1994. Paris, Honoré Champion 1999, p. 102.

This "net of interliterariness",⁵¹ presenting an immense set of relations and affinities within more than four millennia and about 130 different "great" and "small" literatures⁵² of the world, sounds very nice, but how to make out of it a rational target of the research? If there are some 18,000 works analysed in *Kindlers Literatur-Lexikon*, how is it possible to show those which deserve it, in their mutual relations and affinities?⁵³ The "real ideal"⁵⁴ which Pospíšil and Zelenka observe in Ďurišin's literary and historical concept of World Literature, is more an utopia than a plausible scholarly project. Even R. Wellek, shortly before his death wrote after reading of Ďurišin's *What is World Literature?*: "I did receive the book of Ďurišin, which, on the whole, I agree with wholeheartedly. I would only feel that Ďurišin is too optimistic when he believes that the comparative view can be extended in practice to Oriental and finally to any kind of literature. I agree with him in theory, but assure him that in American conditions, asking for an excellent knowledge of French and German is a realizable ideal, while Oriental languages could be asked only of recent immigrants and certainly the natives of that country."⁵⁵

As an European Orientalist I cannot wholly agree with Wellek's opinions. There are some Euro-American Orientalists, without being the immigrants, for example, Viktor M. Zhirmunsky, Nikolai I. Konrad, Étiemble, Earl Miner, Douwe Fokkema, Albert Gérard, just to name a few, who were able to bridge over the transcontinental distances, both temporal and spatial, although each of them within a limited framework. World Literature can be studied only partially in the present stage of research. Mainly small research units with the experts overbridging different literary continents and interliterary communities may try to do it, if they are equipped with a "minimum of agreement"⁵⁶ on methodology and specific aims in their research programmes. Certainly these should be definite sets of literary facts from different individual literatures, interliterary communities, within the diachronic and synchronic frameworks, and, what is most important, the overall interliterary process which is always impermanent, in constant flux. In the time when comparative or historical poetics is not enough studied and especially Oriental poetics is *terra incognita*, we have to be careful even over the choice of the target of the research. It would be meaningless to try to follow the development of European literary

⁵¹ POSPIŠIL, I. and ZELENKA, M.: op. cit., p. 111.

⁵² Cf. RÜDIGER, H.: "'Literatur' und 'Weltliteratur' in der modernen Komparatistik". In: SCHAEFER, A. (ed.): *Weltliteratur und Volksliteratur*. München, Verlag C.H. Beck 1972, pp. 48-49.

⁵³ Loc. cit. In *Kindlers Neues Literatur Lexikon* from the year 1988 about 19,000 literary works are analysed.

⁵⁴ POSPIŠIL, I. and ZELENKA, M.: op. cit., p. 111.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 111-112.

⁵⁶ Cf. D. Fokkema's letter addressed to the participants of the VIIIth Congress of AILC/ICLA, Budapest 1976, and published in *Neohelicon* (Budapest), 5, 1977, 1, pp. 283-284.

trends in relation to the traditional Oriental literatures, if they did not exist there. The same could be said about research into the Faustian motif in the creative literatures of the Far East.⁵⁷ Something different is a motif of Alexander the Great, which produced many, and some outstanding works, both in the East and West.⁵⁸ Much more attention should be devoted to the study of the transcontinental comparative poetics than has been up to now. We should follow the way of Earl Miner in his book *Comparative Poetics. An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature*.⁵⁹ World Literature is not mentioned in the book, but what it is about, is much that makes the topic of World Literature, as expressed in drama, lyric and narrative (epic), when shown in their mutual relations or affinities. This book, probably the greatest among the East-West Comparative Literature in this decade, shows how much collaboration is necessary for writing such great work. Miner's advisers consisted of a team of specialists from the field of Greek and Italian studies, Sinology, Indology and Japanology. There could be even more done in this field, if more material coming from the Bible and Egyptian and Near Eastern materials would be considered and evaluated in this "non-everyday" book. A big temptation for comparative literary studies within the framework of World Literature is to present great authors and great books. One should be careful here: according to Horst Rüdiger "every attempt to build a world literary canon is damned to failure".⁶⁰ E. Koppen recommends for those interested in the study of World literature a more complex tasks: "history and theory of literary translation, interliterary influence, interliterary reception, intermediaries (*transmetteurs*), and international literary trends."⁶¹

6

Among those who believe in the existence of World Literature there are different opinions as to its rise and development. Koppen thinks that World Literature did not exist in the antiquity and not during the Middle Ages, and it started in the 18th century.⁶² Steinmetz and G.R. Kaiser are convinced that World Literature begins even later: in the 19th century.⁶³ Zoran Konstantinović on the other hand sees its

⁵⁷ HSIA, Adrian (ed.): *Zur Rezeption von Goethes "Faust" in Ostasien*, Bern, Peter Lang 1993.

⁵⁸ FRENZEL, E.: *Stoffe der Weltliteratur*: Stuttgart, Alfred Kröner Verlag 1976, pp. 29-32. Mostly German materials are analysed in W.Ch. SCHNEIDER: "Mit Alexander in den Orient". In: OSTERWOLD, T. and POLLIG, H. (eds.): *Exotische Welten. Europäische Phantasien*. Stuttgart. Edition Cantz 1987, pp. 230- 235, and French in: TALBOT, E.: *Essai sur la légende d'Alexandre le Grand dans les romans français du XIXe siècle*. Paris 1950.

⁵⁹ Princeton, Princeton University Press 1990.

⁶⁰ RÜDIGER, H.: op. cit., p. 52.

⁶¹ KOPPEN, E.: op. cit., p. 827.

⁶² Ibid., p. 817.

⁶³ STEINMETZ, H.: op. cit., pp. 110ff. and KAISER, G.R.: op. cit., pp. 11 and 15-24.

dawn before the “birth of the poetry from myth” and up to our times.⁶⁴ I agree with Konstantinović. If we consider the first known literatures of history, Sumerian, Egyptian, and Akkadian, and the last in our age counting about 130, or maybe even more, differentiated and less differentiated (great and small is maybe a justified, but rather harsh judgement for the times when intercultural communication and understanding is a condition for “to be or not to be”), we may imagine the differences in the degree of variety, complexity in the kind of interliterariness present in the concept of World Literature. Between the 3rd and 2nd millennia B.C. the cultural world was confined between the two ends of the Fertile Crescent, the towns of Ur in the East near the Persian Gulf, and the town of Memphis on the bank of the Nile. In the time of Alexander the Great it was the space between Sicily, the Indus and Pamir. In the times of the Silk Roads between Rome, Xi'an and the Indian ports. Now the cultural world is present on all five continents and even on the smallest islands of the globe.

World Literature provide the researchers with unimaginable numbers of different relationships and affinities within the interliterary processes, maybe even including so far unknown and never studied concrete relations between individual literatures of the world. Whether some hypothetical theses concerning the study of World Literature are well founded or not, we shall see in the future.

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I agree with my old friend Erwin Koppen that in spite of the difficulties and problems that World Literature as “not a happy term” presents, it is beyond question that we should stick to the World Literature “as ideal, utopia and finally a large- scale standard”.⁶⁵ Maybe, it will cease to be an utopia in the future.

In the book proceedings of the colloquium entitled *Weltliteratur heute*, Manfred Schmelling in his contribution “Ist Weltliteratur wünschenswert?”, seems not to oppose to Koppen’s idea, but he is not sure whether precisely in the era of globalization, multiculturalism and the allmighty media, World Literature will be able to stand up against the world literary “levelling processes”.⁶⁶ Schmelling does not answer his question and leaves his readers to find one.

⁶⁴ KONSTANTINović, Z.: *Weltliteratur, Strukturen, Modelle, Systeme*. Freiburg 1979.

⁶⁵ KOPPEN, E.: op. cit., p. 824.

⁶⁶ Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann 1995, pp. 161-175.