

FOREWORD

*Poetry and thought
are precisely
the most opposed to death
because they are its most faithful witnesses*

(Roberto Juarroz, *Vertical Poetry* X/19, trans. Mary Crow)

We have been witnessing a paradoxical state of the verbal art for some time now. Its production is still increasing dramatically. However, literary works are becoming easy prey for commodification. One feels that the transcendental aura of artistic imagination has gone. Topics connected with literature are no longer as attractive in the intellectual field as they used to be. After having enjoyed systemic autonomy for about two centuries, the verbal art nowadays finds itself marginalized. It is, then, no surprise that the very “essence” of literature has become a matter of vigorous theoretical revisions and critical scrutiny: quite essential questions are also being raised about literature’s interconnection with other discursive practices. Currently, it is cultural studies that is rather prone to these sorts of radical considerations about the arts.

Custodians of the canon – such as George Steiner and Harold Bloom, for instance – feel compelled to defend the sacredness of literature against the profanity of its critics. However, they seem to rely on misleading strategies. One of these is to foreground the apparent dichotomy between theory and literature. They consider mutual animosity between art and theory to plainly be a historical fact of present culture. They continue to blame academics that, presumably, give theory preference over literary works of art. Theory is accused of becoming self-sufficient and losing touch with referential grounds in literary texts (this reproach is a belated echo of criticizing literature for its anti-mimetic idiosyncrasies).

We are convinced, however, that theory and literature have been evolving on the same historic trajectory ever since the very emergence of their existence as disciplines. In the 18th and 19th centuries, reflecting literature

theoretically or historically was an activity that paralleled, encouraged, and backed the establishment of the esthetic autonomy of the literary field. The meta-language of theory opened a dialogue with poetic discourse as early as the birth of Romanticism. The exchange of ideas, images, concepts, and forms soon produced many textual hybrids. In these, the language of metaphors, symbols, allegories, imagination, and narration intertwined with the discourse of philosophic and religious speculation, esthetic argument, and coining of new concepts (e.g., Friedrich Schlegel's fragments).

From then onwards, in addition to the fragment, manifold modalities of imaginative literature's coexistence with forms of theoretical reasoning evolved. Many fiction writers and poets played the roles of theoreticians, critics, philosophers, and writers of artistic programs and manifestos. Theory, in turn, has expanded its field of the "sayable" by drawing on sources of the poetic (e.g., Nietzsche, Bataille, Barthes, Kristeva, and Derrida). Literary genres, on the other hand, were inspired by and responded to theoretical concepts in their own way, through their proper codes; see, for example, allegory, intellectual lyric poetry, maxim, aphorism, narrated philosophy, essayist novel and fictional essays, letters or diaries, prose poems, conceptualism, programs, manifestos, and combinatorics. Moreover, literature has become self-conscious and mutated into its own theory, which developed specific techniques and rhetorical devices; see, for example, self-referential literature, meta-fiction, and meta-poetry.

The third international colloquium of comparative literature on 8 and 9 September 2005 – organized by the Slovene Comparative Literature Association together with the Slovene Writers' Association and others as part of the 20th "Vilenica" International Festival of Literature – was dedicated to reflection on these topics. The colloquium titled "Hybridizing Theory and Literature: On the Dialogue between Theory and Literature" (see the report by Matjaž Zaplotnik in *Primerjalna književnost* 28.2 [2005]: 181–188) attempted to transpose the nature of the chosen topic into the form of a symposium. Reflection on literary-theoretical hybrids, in which literary and theoretical discourses meet, clash, and intertwine, was cast in dialogues between literary scholars and writers. The participants in the colloquium – Luca Bevilacqua, Erika Greber, Milan Jesih, Alenka Jovanovski, Marko Juvan, Jelka Kernev Štrajn, Lado Kralj, Vanesa Matajč, Boris A. Novak, Vid Snoj, Stephanos Stephanides, Marko Uršič, and Ivan Verč – have thoroughly adapted and supplemented their contributions for publication in this special issue of *Primerjalna književnost*, and both editors succeeded in inviting two additional authors from abroad that could not take part in last year's event in Lipica (Madeleine Kasten and Metka Zupančič).

After the introductory and historical outline of the subject matter of the colloquium and four reflections on relations between thought and poetry by writers (three of them happen to be simultaneously philosophers or theoreticians), there follow articles that shed light on characteristic historical stages of dialogue or cross-sections between literature and philosophy or theory (from Antiquity through the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Post-Romanticism to Modernism and Post-Modernism). The collection

winds up with a topical reflection on the ethics of literary and scientific expression.

Marko Juvan theoretically, historically, and typologically situates theoretical-literary hybrids – as emblematic forms of modernity – into a wider field of dialogue and friction between thought and poetry; he concludes by shedding light on the post-modern literarization of theory and theorization of literature. The poet and theoretician **Stephanos Stephanides** introduces the notion of a delinquent poet that destroys institutionalized hegemonies and hence enables both poetry and theory to think through the gap. The philosopher and writer **Marko Uršič**, in a dispute with deconstructions of Platonism, emphasizes that “myths” and dialogues (as eminently poetic forms) are constitutive for his philosophy in an interweaving of *logos* and *mythos* and that literary attitudes are likewise relevant for contemporary philosophical thought. Poetry’s poetics and the immanent logic of his writing, in particular the relationship between a textual Subject and the author, as well as mysterious mechanisms of choice and the interlacing of words, are shown in a short essay by the poet, playwright, and translator **Milan Jesih**. The poet and literary scholar **Boris A. Novak** fights against the strangulation of literature by contemporary theory. He also pays tribute to the modern classic Valéry, who resuscitated the ancient Greek perception of poetry and poetics. Contributions by literary historians follow. **Vid Snoj** extracts spiritual-historical differences between two uses of “literary” dialogue in philosophical-theoretical discourse as he compares Plato’s *Symposium* and Schlegel’s *Dialogue on Poetry*. **Madeleine Kasten** reads Voltaire’s philosophical fable *A Man with Forty Silver Coins* as an allegorical thematization/actualization/embodiment of the Enlightenment, understood as an open historical project. **Jelka Kernev Štrajnc** investigates a spiritual genesis of Schlegel’s romantic fragment as an eminent theoretical-literary hybrid, comparing it with modernist fragmentary writing: the fragment is an allegorical structure that evokes an absent or impossible totality at the level of genre as well. Romantic philosophy of the absolute and the role of self-reflection and self-consciousness for the constitution of modern subjectivity support **Alenka Jovanovski’s** standpoint in her interpretation of Novalis’ *Hymns to the Night*: that putting forward any hierarchical relation between theoretical thought and poetic imagination is wrong. Likewise, **Vanesa Matajnc** concludes that theory and literature are increasingly interconnected for the sake of the self-perception of the Subject and because of the subjectivization of discourse and historical consciousness. **Erika Greber** reads the novel *Zoo or Letters not about Love* by the formalist literary theoretician Shklovsky as an early case of “critifiction,” in which literary theory, precisely as established by Russian Formalism, mixes in a hybrid and meta-fictional way with structures of the modernist novel in letters. Just the opposite and a somewhat later case, when structures and themes of critical writing on art inhabit an unusual environment of semi-literary prose and fiction of writers’ diaries in Slovenia between the two world wars, is presented by **Lado Kralj**. Michaux is one of the most radical rebels among writers against literature as such. His work, which

Luca Bevilacqua designates as “anti-literature,” is a mix of prose, poetry, confession, and theory. As such, it eludes the prerequisites of a genre. Perhaps the most explicit and even unavoidable hybridity of identities and writing emerges in the life and work of the postcolonial writer Cixous; **Metka Zupančič** follows the interlacing of poetic prose and theatre with contemporary psychoanalysis and feminism in her writings. At the end of this literary and scholarly story about crossbreeds of thought and literature there should be a “moral.” However, the contribution by **Ivan Verč** on ethics and its translation into the language of literature is something else: he introduces fresh aspects into contemporary discussions on the ethics of literature and art by putting forward the thesis that an ethical deed in literature outlines the contours of a clash with the limits of language, which the “hard core” literary studies of the 20th century succeeded in describing in its own way.

Because this publication not only contributes to the development of the Slovene humanities and their terminology, but at the same time also address the international scholarly community, all the articles are printed first in Slovene and later again in English and French.

Finally – and forgive us for not mentioning all the names – we would like to thank the authors for their exchange of views as well as the translators for their demanding work. Our gratitude should also be expressed to the proofreaders: Donald F. Reindl (English) and Marie-Hélène Estéoule-Exel (French) for their efficient and precise work. Likewise, we are greatly obliged to Alenka Maček for her careful editing of the publication, as well as to Seta Knop for her UDC classification. We also thank the Slovene Writers Association for their cooperation in organizing the colloquium, and the Ministry of Culture and the ARRS for making it possible to hold this colloquium and publish the papers presented.

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