

# The Book and the Economy of Cultural Spaces (Foreword)

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The book is the primary modern medium of literature, which connects cultural spaces. Books are not only physical conveyers of texts, but also artifacts and symbols with their own history, value, and semantic codes. Together with the imprinted fictional worlds of literature, they are the vehicles of an interactive development of cultural identities. Books constitute a memory archive of a given culture and are at the same time its virtual windows on the world. Therefore, books are essential for creative thinking, which enables a specific cultural space to actually reinterpret, evolve, and test possible futures. Since the times of prehistoric civilizations, the cultural transfer of manuscripts and books has constantly crossed linguistic, ethnic, geographical, national, and political borders. Book circulation, systematic library collecting and catalogues, analyses, comments, and creative reflections all shaped the history of ideas and literature. The symbolic and market exchange of literary representations and their transfer into localized geo-cultural codes revived the traditions of individual peoples and nations. Thus ever-changing regional, transnational, and inter-civilization networks were established, which allowed the expansion of literary ideas, mental spaces, textual structures, and institutional concepts and practices. The economy of book transfer, in which the logic of symbolic/cultural capital and that of market capital meet, enables discussion of concepts such as Goethe's world literature or international movements such as the Enlightenment and Modernism. Because of their economy, the book and literature are agents of cultural spaces; they materially and mentally create internal coherence and continuity as well as external, transnational integration. It appears that even today this role of literature is still being fulfilled as the book and library experience profound changes to their forms of existence and the economic logic of their social function due to the advent of digital and electronic media.

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In recent years, Slovenian comparative literature and literary studies in general have been increasingly aware of the significance of modern book research: the study of its history, transformations, and economic and social dimensions. The book medium often emerges as a determining agent

of the meaning, value, and ideological layers of literary texts. It modifies genre characteristics, style profiles, or cultural and spatial authenticity, and is one of those factors that balance the literary tradition and the development and relations between authors and audiences (together with the corresponding mediatory institutions). As a subject of collection, processing, systematization, and physical and mental transfers, the book is also an element that has established connections between local or national literatures; it has revived their repertoires and encouraged reconstruction of local value systems with constant inputs of otherness. All this has led to the development of extensive regional and world systems of literary circulation.

In Slovenia, book issues occupied the foreground from April 2010 to spring 2011, when Ljubljana became UNESCO's World Book Capital and hosted numerous events. A contribution to professional and academic meetings celebrating the book and its translation, production, existence, circulation, reception, and unclear future was also made by the Slovenian Comparative Literature Association, the Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies, and the European Network for Comparative Literary Studies (REELC/ENCLS). The international conference took place in November 2011 in Ljubljana and was called *The Book: An Economy of Cultural Spaces*. This conference was the first in the series of events REELC/ENCLS held in the period between its congresses. The articles and discussions from the conference are included in this thematic section of *Primerjalna književnost*. The featured articles of the members of the Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies are results of a project called *The "Slovenian" World Literature: Locating World Literature in a National Literary System*, led by Marko Juvan.

Many Slovenian and foreign experts have participated in the project and submitted articles on the relevance of the history of books and related media to modern, transnational comparative literature studies (and their reflections on the concept of "world literature"). The ambition was to cover a relatively wide timeframe (from the last centuries of the manuscript era and the beginnings of the Gutenberg epoch to the modern reading technologies of the twenty-first century) and a large territorial area (from the Iberian Peninsula to Estonia and from the Balkans and Central Europe to Great Britain); and to feature large (global) book markets as well as small, distinctly specific literary cultures; last but not least, our wish was to include empirically supported research on book history as well as quality theoretical and methodological considerations. The articles submitted suggested a variety of possible classifications, but in the end the chronological principle was chosen: this collection of articles begins with

the age of manuscripts and ends with uncertain projections indicated by the incredible pace of changes in the first decade of the third millennium.

In the introduction to his article “Cultural Circulation and the Book: Literature, Knowledge, Space, and Economy (An Introduction)” Marko Juvan outlines the conceptual field of the thematic issue and theoretically and historically reveals the ties between the book, literature, culture, space, and economy. César Domínguez’s article “Circulation in Premodern World Literature: Historical Context, Agency, and Physicality” poses questions about the circulation of manuscripts and about the existence of world literature before the invention of the printing press. The beginnings of the printing revolution are the main topic of David Šporer’s text, titled “Renaissance Poetry in Print and the Role of Marin Držić.” He discusses the flowering of poetry printing in Dubrovnik during the Renaissance and examines the wider context of the Renaissance in Croatia. Marijana Hameršak writes about an interesting topic of “forgotten” book history. “How Did Fairytales Become a Genre of Croatian Children’s Literature?” in an article about the rich publishing tradition of fairytales, which were not regarded as suitable for preservation in the apparatus of national historical memory in the second half of the nineteenth century. An exactly reverse process is described in Dragos Jipa’s discussion “The Literary Canon in the Publishing Apparatus: The Book Series ‘Les Grands Ecrivains Français’ (1887–1913).” The discussion focuses on the canonization of texts written by “important” national authors. This process is characteristic of the time when the first critical editions of collected works appeared, both in Slovenia and abroad.

In his text “The Bestseller as the Black Box of Distant Reading: The Case of Sherlock Holmes,” Jernej Habjan draws an example from the first generation of detective stories and identifies the problems of Moretti’s literary-historical “distant reading” of texts from world literature. In addition to this, he comments on Moretti’s explanations of the genre’s successful development. Alenka Koron raises the issue of world literature reception and provides an analysis of a private library owned by the Slovene modernist Lojze Kovačič. Marijan Dovič traces the history of the Slovenian (literary) book from the end of the eighteenth century to today. In his discussion “Economics and Ideologies of Slovenian Literary Mediation,” the main emphasis is placed on the book’s most evident economic, political, and ideological constraints. Maja Breznik’s topic of interest is the situation of cultural (or literary) production during the last cycle of economic globalization. She describes this in her article “The Double Role of the Writer as Worker and Rentier,” in which she focuses on the author’s position between the global and the local, Slovenian context.

Tiina Aunin's study "The Book as an Object of the Shared Understanding of Media Changes" and Jola Škulj's discussion "A Challenging Game of Books and the Free Interplay of Cultural Transfer," both setting off with the experience of a small literature (Estonian and Slovenian respectively), mostly commit to theoretical reflections on the book medium in general and its future transformations in the light of Bakhtin's and Lotman's perspectives. Alexis Weedon's article "The Book as a Dynamic System for the Commodification of Ideas and Cultural Expressions" suggests a new definition of the book; it should be understood as a precious and effective system for transferring ideas and cultural practices.

The inevitability of the redefinition of the book concept is one of the main themes of the discussion in the last few articles. They mostly discuss the transformations of the book as a medium and the future of reading literature—and of reading in general. In "Understanding a Book: A Few Digressions on Forms and Meanings," Miha Kovač analyses the differences between reading digital and print media and discusses how the change of medium to some extent changes the meanings that emerge during the reading process. Aleš Vaupotič's article "The Book and the World Wide Web" discusses the effects of internet communication on the book and its role of the message deliverer. His analysis of Teo Spiller's "sonnetoid" web projects and online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* shows which aspects of the book have evolved or changed considerably under new circumstances. The concluding article was written by Anna Notaro. In "The Many Futures of the Book" she focuses on the numerous changes to the book medium in the new era. Special emphasis is placed on wireless connectivity, which may yet play an important role in the transformational process of the mediatory sector and the transformation of relations between authors and readers.

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It seems that the paradigmatic shift currently underway is so vast in scope that it is impossible to clearly comprehend and evaluate the situation at present. The book is not only a "material conveyer," but also an "information instrument" or a "dynamic system." It is almost certain that these influential and profound changes will have an impact on "the book." At the moment, these changes are most evident in the mediatory sector (and publishing), but they may also significantly affect the basic cultural patterns established through the centuries of print domination. Perhaps not only the recent concepts of author (and authorial rights), reader, and mediation have been brought into question; the changes may reach the

very core of the future subjectivity of “digital” humankind. In this sense, humanist studies, especially comparative literary studies, which has always been attached to the book, book culture, and its reflection, cannot just stand by; it is obliged to confront these problems, consider them, and enter into an active dialogue with the processes taking place at the present time. With the intention of enabling Slovene experts and their guests to participate in global discussions on these topics, their articles are presented in the current issue of *Primerjalna književnost* in English.